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Content

BRITISH LITERATURE

Question Paper–June-2024 (Solved)	1-3
Question Paper–December-2023 (Solved)	1-2
Question Paper–June-2023 (Solved)	1-2
Question Paper–December-2022 (Solved)	1-2
Question Paper–Exam Held in March-2022 (Solved)	1-3
Sample Question Paper–1 (Solved)	1
Sample Question Paper–2 (Solved)	1

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
1.	<i>Macbeth</i> : An Introduction	1
2.	<i>Macbeth</i> : Part-I	13
3.	<i>Macbeth</i> : Part-II	22
4.	<i>Macbeth</i> : Critical Responses	31
5.	<i>The Novel in Britain</i> : An Introduction	41
6.	Thomas Hardy's Life and Writings	51
7.	<i>Far From the Madding Crowd</i> : Summary and Analysis	60
8.	<i>Far From the Madding Crowd</i> : Critical Analysis	69
9.	George Bernard Shaw: An Introduction	80
10.	<i>Arms and the Man</i> : Summary and Analysis-I	90

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
11.	<i>Arms and the Man</i> : Summary and Analysis-II	99
12.	<i>Arms and the Man</i> : Themes and Concerns	109
13.	The Victorian Age	118
14.	“Morte D’Arthur” : Reading the Text	128
15.	Text and Analysis of “Morte D’Arthur”	135
16.	“Morte D’ Arthur”: Themes and Symbols	143



**Sample Preview
of the
Solved
Sample Question
Papers**

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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2024

(Solved)

BRITISH LITERATURE

B.E.G.C-133

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: All questions are compulsory.

Q. 1. Explain any four of the following passages with reference to the context:

(a) "Life s but a walking shadow,
a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour
upon the stage
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
signifying nothing."

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from *Macbeth* written by William Shakespeare.

Explanation: In this soliloquy *Macbeth* articulates his disappointment. After the ardent pursuit of his ambition to become king he arrives at a conclusion – life has become a burden, tedious and heading for only one destination: death. He sees, almost for the first time, that life is very short, like a candle, and that all the passion we may feel for anything, including a burning compulsion to occupy the throne, is just a lot of meaningless noise.

We become very passionate in the pursuit of the things we want out of life and then we die. It's like actors in the theatre, artificially living out the lives of human beings on the stage, with all their passion and then, when the curtain comes down, they just go home and think nothing about their character's anguish. That character, with all his or her ambition, desire, obsessions, lies dead as the actor just goes home and has supper. The candle represents human life. *Macbeth* calls it a brief candle, meaning a short candle that only burns briefly. It burns down and the flame goes out. And then it is completely dark. Life is really very short and in the context of that great darkness around it, it is inconsequential. The burning ambition to become king is meaningless in the context of that vast stretch of black night beyond human life.

(b) "Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand ?
Come, let me clutch thee :
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not fatal vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight ?"

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from *Macbeth* written by William Shakespeare.

Explanation: It was totally silent. And pitch black. It was now or never. Macbeth stared into the darkness. And as he looked it seemed that a dagger hung there. He closed his eyes and opened them again. It was still there. He peered. It didn't waver. Was it really a dagger? Its handle towards his hand?

He tried to clutch it. His hand went right through it: it was still there and yet he couldn't feel it. Was it only a dagger of the mind, a false creation of a fevered brain?

He could still see it as he drew his own, real, dagger: it was pointing the way to Duncan's room. He knew he was seeing things and yet it was so real. And now there was blood on it, which hadn't been there before.

It was ridiculous. There was no such thing. He knew it was the violence in his mind that was coming out in the form of a bloody dagger.

His mind was filled with images of fear and horror and he stood there, overwhelmed by them, until a bell rang and brought him back to the business in hand. 'I go, and it is done: the bell invites me.' He began walking. 'Don't hear it, Duncan; for it's a knell that summons you to heaven or to hell.'

(c) "He did it like an operatic tenor—a regular handsome fellow, with flashing eyes and lovely moustache, shouting a war-cry and charging like Don Quixote at the windmills. We nearly burst with laughter at him;....."

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from 'Arms and the Man' by George Bernard Shaw'.

Explanation: He says Sergius's misguided attack would have been suicidal; the only reason the Bulgarian side won the battle was that by mistake, the Serbs were sent the wrong cartridges. Don Quixote, the central figure of the Spanish classic *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, is a famous example of a man who, under the influence of tales of chivalry, imagines that he is an adventurous knight and fights imaginary battles.

By referring to one of the most famous episodes in this classic, where Don Quixote charges at windmills, thinking they are giants, he presents Sergius in a truly ridiculous light. As the Act ends, Raina seems to be developing an attachment towards the Swiss soldier. When she returns with her mother, they find the soldier fast asleep. Catherine tries to shake him awake, but Raina stops her saying "Don't, mamma: The poor dear is worn out. Let him sleep."

(d) "Ah miserable and unkind, untrue
Unknightly, traitor-hearted ! Woe is me !
Authority forgets a dying king,
Laid widow d of the power in his eye
That bow d the will."

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from *Morte d'Arthur* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

Explanation: First, a poem frames "Morte d'Arthur," entitled "The Epic." The speaker says he is gathered at the home of Francis Allen on Christmas Eve. Also there are the parson, Holmes; the poet, Everard Hall; and the host. They gather around the wassail-bowl (hot mulled cider) and discuss how the honor seems gone from Christmas. The speaker is tired from his day of ice-skating and falling, and he dozes off, waking to the parson lamenting the general lack of faith throughout the world. Francis jokes and says he holds faith in Everard, and Everard responds by saying he has faith in the cider. The speaker asks Everard what became of his great gift of poetry that was so evident in college, and Francis says that Everard had been working on twelve books about King Arthur but threw them into the fire. It seems that Everard thought "nothing new was said" and the books were mere "Homeric echoes, nothing-worth." Francis says he has saved one book from the fire. The speaker's ears prick up, and he remembers the talent of his friend. After some urging, the poet begins to read.

The noise of battle goes on all day. All of the men of the Round Table have fallen in Lyonesse. King Arthur has also been wounded, and his last knight, Sir Bedivere, brings him to a chapel near the field in the "barren land." The King speaks to Bedivere about the severing of the company of knights, the men he loved,

and how they will never talk again of lordly deeds in Camelot. He tells Bedivere to take his sword Excalibur, which he had received from a white arm clothed in samite reaching up from the waters of the lake, and fling it back into the middle of the water. Bedivere is to watch what happened and then return.

Bedivere hesitates at leaving his lord, but obeys him. He passes by the place of the tombs of ancient men illuminated by moonlight and draws near the lake. He unsheathes Excalibur and gazes long at the sparkling, jeweled hilt. He finds he cannot throw it in the water and hides it in the waterflags about the marge. When he returns Arthur asks him if he performed the mission and what he saw. Bedivere replies, "I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,/And the wild water lapping on the crag." Arthur is angry because he knows Bedivere did not do what he asked. He tells him that he has betrayed his nature and his name and that he must go back and try again.

(e) "The old order changeth,
Yielding place to new,
And God fulfils himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should
Corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me ?"

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from *The Passing of Arthur* written by Tennyson.

Explanation: The line occurs in the poem 'The Passing of Arthur' by Tennyson and is indicative of a note of optimism. Nothing in life or in nature is ever constant. Change is the law of life. Nothing remains static in the dynamic world. In nature we see growth, development and decay. Seasons change. In fact our very life would be impossibility without this all pervading law of change or motion. History of mankind is also a history of ceaseless change. Nothing remains constant, no matter how grand it had been. But a new world always rises again like the phoenix and is as captivating as the old world.

The lines occur in *The Passing of Arthur* a poem by Tennyson. The last knight, Amyas, of the Court of King Arthur, throws the sword of the king in the lake. A hand appears, takes the sword by the hilt and disappears. Then a barge comes out and Amyas places the wounded king in it. Amyas is dejected and grieved at the passing away of his master. But Arthur gives him cheer. As the king is preparing to go, the first rays of the sun gild the tops of the trees.

Sample Preview of The Chapter

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BRITISH LITERATURE



Macbeth : An Introduction

INTRODUCTION

Humanism and Machiavellian were among the thoughts and ideas that shaped the English dramas towards the closing years of the sixteenth century when Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was written. Secondly, experimentations and innovations were the trends. In this chapter, we will study these aspects, the Elizabethan period and sources of the play *Macbeth*.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

THE ELIZABETHAN WORLD

Renaissance refers to a rebirth of Classical Greek and Latin literature in England. This movement started in the latter half of the sixteenth century and continued up to the early seventeenth century. Scholars divide Renaissance into early, middle-high and late Renaissance.

In the sixteenth century, the changes due to this reawakening led to a reorientation of the relation between man and the world he lived. A relook at the classics helped writers posit a new idea of man who was at the centre of the scheme of things. Writers responded creatively through various mediums to interpret the position of man in the universe.

A main factor was the development in scientific ideas, a shift from the Ptolemaic idea of the universe to that of Copernicus, which brought in modern outlook. Copernicus was to prove that the Sun was the centre of the universe and the Earth was only a planet revolving around the Sun. This astronomical change had a major impact on the way in which man was perceived. Besides, the wisdom of the classics had a major impact in the Elizabethan period.

Other major changes were in the authority. King Henry VIII challenged the authority of the Church. The

king wanted to divorce his wife Catharine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn which was not allowed under Catholicism. That was a defiance against the authority of the Pope of Rome and the Church. This led the establishment of Protestant faith, also called the period of Reformation. Later a move to restore the powers of the Church through Counter-Reformation followed. It caused a split in the church.

When Elizabeth came to power, she struggled to establish her sovereignty as she had to contend with dissatisfaction among the Catholics. Under her rule, England saw various levels of social mobility. At the religious level, the Anglican settlement tried to create peace among the religious factions. She managed to keep the Protestant spirit alive through the settlement.

In the economic aspect, England was changing into a world of mercantile capital. The traders and merchants gained both mobility and power with money. Shakespeare belonged to this world. Boris, Ford had the opinion that the most of Elizabeth's five-million subjects were living in country and their prosperity depended on foreign trade. The rise of merchant capital had an impact on all the main events of the reign which included the long duel with Spain, ranging from Ireland to the Indies; the raids on Spanish treasure and the sudden expansion of English trade to touch all four of the known continents. The feudal world of England was churning. The nobility was becoming economically weak and the other social groups especially the ones who were trading were gaining power.

The consolidation of power by Elizabeth were shown in the works of literature like Sidney's *Arcadia* (1580) and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590). Elizabeth consolidated her reign with the defeat of the Spanish forces with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588.

2 / NEERAJ : BRITISH LITERATURE

England saw a new ferment with the influx of renaissance ideals, the displacement of earth from the centre and the renewed interest in man coupled with the economic changes in society. The gentry was connected to the court even as it started pursuing its own monetary interests. By the end of the sixteenth century, the gentry was much better placed and tried to buy estates and on a par with the nobility.

In the sphere of economics, traditional forms of trade and agriculture existed side-by-side with the newly emerging modes of capitalist enterprise. There were an unprecedented and often conflicting number of heterogeneous developments and activities. Robert Weiman calls it an age of social compromise and economic confusion. The growth in the market first for commodities, then for land and labour and finally for money happened due to the development of an extensive cloth industry serving overseas export markets, the extraordinary influx of gold and silver and the remarkable rise in prices.

The period of Elizabeth's reign was relatively stable and yet saw the changes at both social and economic structural levels. The merchants and traders gained gradual ascendancy. The conception of man in society and its representation in literature underwent change. The man became the centre of things in a more scientific environment. All these have been reflected in the writings of Shakespeare and other writers.

HUMANIST THOUGHT

Humanism can be understood in terms of actual human experience and history. Humanism restored to man the dignity of existence. Man was seen controlling his own destiny. In the Elizabethan period, humanism was one of the chief ideas that influenced the writings as well as the way people lived. Earlier man's relationship with God was a subject of artistic and literary depiction, but the renaissance with its scientific thrust looked at man in his own world.

Man became the centre of everything. Humanism saw man in terms of its relationships with the other people around. Arnold Kettle says the humanist tradition means an evolving outlook that developed with man's increasing knowledge and control of the world he lives in and hence of his own destinies. Shakespeare's plays infused the ideas humanism. According to V.G. Kiernan, Shakespeare was in search of fresh and living, instead of fossilized, connections. His quest was part of the all-round emancipation of the individual that was unfolding.

Elizabeth's rule was a period of stability, but it was not without its rebellious forces. The Northern rebellion of 1569 and the Essex rebellion of 1601 were the two very famous incidents the period witnessed. In the Northern rebellion, the Catholics felt sidelined in the court and rebelled against Elizabeth favouring Mary Queen of Scots. The Elizabethan Settlement was a median between the different faiths but was not acceptable to all. This was followed by other plots to remove Elizabeth. The next significant uprising was from within the court by the Earl of Essex. The Essex Rebellion was led by Sir Robert Devereux the Earl of Essex in 1601. He was spurned by Elizabeth after he failed to curb the Irish rebellion. According to A.L. Morton, the rebellion of the Earl of Essex happened after the Queen's refusal to renew the "monopoly" for the sale of "sweet wine", which was given to him for ten years. A group of people had resisted the monopolization in trade and put forth their own interests.

MACHIAVELLI'S *THE PRINCE* AND JAMES'S *BASILIKON DORON*

Niccollo Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1513) raises the question of how a ruler must preserve his power; whether the ruler should use cruelty to preserve his power or should the ruler be feared or loved. The answers to these questions reflect the changes setting in the Renaissance period in Italy and its influence in England. Thus, it presented a new discourse of politicking and its working in the state. The advent of the "usurper," a shift from the king as divinely ordained, happened. Machiavelli writes "on seizing a state, the usurper should make haste to inflict what injuries he must, at a stroke, that he may not have to renew them daily, but be enabled by their discontinuance to reassure men's minds and afterwards win them over by benefits. Whosoever, either through timidity or from following bad counsels, adopts a contrary course, must keep the sword always drawn and can put no trust in his subjects, who suffering from continued and constantly renewed severities, will never yield him their confidence." The "usurper" challenged the divine sanctity of the king.

Machiavelli suggests both the method of operation and the sustenance of rule for the usurper. In the context of England, the contesting claims and political unrest were a challenge to the monarch. This gets reflected in Shakespeare's plays. For example, *The Tragedy of King Richard II* shows these changes in the relation between the monarch and the society. On the question of whether

the monarch must be “feared or loved”, Machiavelli says “it is far safer to be feared than loved”.

King James’ *Basilikon Doron* (1599) also delves into ideas about the monarch, ‘good’ governance and his relationship to his subjects. The title is a “Greek phrase translated as ‘kingly gift’.” In it King James explains the difference between the “good king and a usurping tyrant.” The former is answerable to God and is “ordained for his people”, while the latter considers “his people to be ordained for him.” Honour for the good king meant a “due discharge of his calling,” but for the tyrant it rested in a realisation of his “ambitious pretences.” This was of course in contrast to Machiavelli’s ideas. The idea of a monarch and a “good” monarch was a contested one. It implied that change was happening in the way issues related to monarchy were perceived by the people. With the execution of Charles I and the establishment of Cromwellian republic are examples of the change.

DRAMA IN THE RENAISSANCE WORLD

Stage in the Elizabethan Period

In the Renaissance period, people in England watched bulls fighting, dogs baiting a bear, performances of acrobats and actors, one in inn yards and other informal structures. The audience stood close at hand and watched the performers. Thus, theatre evolved significantly. Starting from acrobatics and bear-baiting rings, entertainment space went to the round stage used by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The interaction was direct, exciting and engaging. People watched the shows with real blood and gore. The people also went to watch public executions. Theatre hinged on providing entertainment and a close interaction with the audience. Frye states some of his early theatrical experience would have been with courtyards of inns, where the actors would set-up their stage at one end and play to an audience collected on the yard and on the balconies. The permanent theatre buildings erected around Elizabethan London after 1576 preserved much of the feeling of these innyards, by their placing of stage, yard and galleries. Plays were also performed at the Inns of Courts. These were “a combination of law schools, professional societies and gentlemen’s clubs”. The structure of the inn yard when transformed to the formal stage of Shakespeare’s time made space for the gentry and nobility as it did for the commoners who stood in the pit. Shakespeare’s formal theatrical association was with Lord Chamberlain’s Company. It was patronised by Henry Carey, The Lord Chamberlain, hence the name. The theatre was owned by a group of

people and this included Shakespeare. Theatre was a popular form of entertainment and it also had a commercial side to it. People invested in the theatre and made profits. Theatres were rooted in the everyday life of the people.

The Globe theatre

This period had many theatres. Red Lion theatre was one of the oldest. Others included the Theatre, Rose Theatre and Swan Theatre. The Globe Theatre was built by Shakespeare and others in 1599 and it continued till 1613 when it was burnt down. The Swan Theatre, which had the capacity to accommodate 3000 people, had three tiers of galleries around the stage space. Audience had to pay extra money to sit in the galleries.

At the Swan theatre, a part of the stage was extended into the audience space called the apron stage. A part of this was covered that provided protection to the actors and space to designate parts like the heaven or even keep some kinds of equipment needed in the play. There was a trapdoor to indicate hell. The space in front of the stage was called the pit and had the cheapest tickets. The “groundlings” could stand and watch the play for a nominal amount. There was no roof over that space and they had to brave weather conditions. The galleries were protected by the roof. The gallery also had rooms for private viewing, which was called the *tarras*.

The two main groups of performing companies were The Admiral’s Men and Lord Chamberlain’s Men. The Admiral’s Men performed in the Rose and Lord Chamberlain’s Men in the Theatre. These were located in the areas where the brothels were also located. Later the Lord Chamberlain’s Men performed in the Globe theatre. After King James I came to power as the King of England, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men became the official group and were called King’s Men. In 1608, the private theatres like the Blackfriars theatre was bought by Shakespeare and other partners. It catered to the elite and could accommodate about 200-300 people.

DRAMA AND CENSORSHIP IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

Numerous Acts and statutes were passed to control the kind of plays that were staged during the Elizabethan period. This is because watching plays was a popular pastime for the people in the Elizabethan period. The plays made references to the existing structures of power and that was noted by the monarchy because of the popularity of the plays. For example, *Richard II*’s popularity disturbed Queen Elizabeth. William

4 / NEERAJ : BRITISH LITERATURE

Lambarde records about this in “His Notes of a Conversation with Queen Elizabeth I about *Richard II*. The tragedy was played 40 times in open streets and houses. A performance of *Richard II* was presented the day before the uprising by the Earl of Essex. The *Act of Common Council for the Regulation Of Theatrical performances in London* (December 6, 1574) was one such Act. This law banned staging of play, comedy, tragedy, interlude and public show in open places and restricted on dialogues. Violation of the law invited punishment. The church, which was a powerful space also framed the rules on which society rested and the theatre became an alternative space to contest those normative ideas.

In 1597, the Privy Council passed an order against the “disorders” committed in the playhouses. As per this decree, no play should be performed in London city and the playhouses also should be brought down. Stephen Gosson, a staunch critic of theatre, considered theatre as immoral in its import and suggested a movement away from theatre. Philip Stubbes called the performer as the devil’s partner. John Rainolds condemned the performance of female roles by men. Henry Crosse called plays as “scandalous and scurrilous”. Some others like Thomas Lodge who wrote *A Reply to Stephen Gosson’s School of Abuse, in Defence of Poetry, Music and Stage Plays* (1579) as a response to Gosson’s virulent attack on theatres stated: First therefore, if it be not tedious to Gosson to hearken to the learned, the reader shall perceive the antiquity of play-making, the inventors of comedies and therewithall the use and commodity of them. So that in the end I hope my labour shall be liked and the learned will sooner conceive his folly. In *An Apology for Actors* (1611), Thomas Heywood looked at “playing as an ornament of the city.” The debates and arguments around it continued. In 1642, the Puritan influence and a conservativeness that sought to hold this free flow of ideas led to the shutting down of theatres.

The monarchy, disturbed by playwriting and watching, passed Acts and Decrees to control and censor plays. The actor was equated with vagabonds. In 1572, the *Act For The Punishment Of Vagabonds, And For The Relief Of The Poor And Impotent* was passed and brought back in 1604. According to the Act, “fencers, bearwards, common players of interludes, and minstrels wandering abroad” were “adjudged, and deemed as rogues and vagabonds” and punished accordingly. According to *An Act To Restrain Abuses Of Players*, (1606), if any person committed profanity

against God or his name he shall have to pay ten pounds for every such offense. Theatres were also shut down due to plague. John Stow in *Survey of London* records that “between December 1592 and the following December, 11,000 people in London out of about 200,000 died owing to the plague”.

Peter Thomson also wrote in “Playhouses and Players in the time of Shakespeare” that, “It became an established custom to order the closing of the London theatres when registered deaths reached forty in any one week.” Germaine Greer too corroborates this. The playhouses were known to be unhealthy places, which is why they were the first institutions to be closed down in times of plague.

DATE OF THE PLAY

When Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* around 1606, King James I was the monarch. He was the first Scottish king to become the monarch of England. He faced rebellions and one was the failed rebellion of the Gunpowder Plot. *Macbeth* captures the tensions and contradictions that belong to the Jacobean age. Based on William Warner’s poem *A Continuance of Albion’s England* (1586) that mentions *Makbeth*, scholars say the play was written between 1599 and 1606. In 1605, a Latin playlet, Dr. Gwin’s *Tres Sibyllae* was written and performed for King James in Oxford. The title translated as “Three Sibyls” praised the King and recognised his royal connection to Banquo and established him as King of England and Scotland. The greetings of the three sibyls to King James in *Tres Sibyllae* were echoed in the witches’ predictions to Macbeth in Shakespeare’s play. English astrologist Simon Forman records in *Book of Plaies* how the play was performed on April 20, 1611 at the Globe. Forman’s record of the play is primarily a summary and differs from the Folio account of the play in 1623. Nostbakken says Shakespeare may have had a court performance in mind because the Scottish historical setting, the Banquo legend, the inclusion of witches and the debate about kinship indicate that.

SOURCES OF MACBETH

Macbeth is believed to have been based on Raphael Holinshed’s *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1587). Other historical documents that might have influenced the play are John Major’s *A History of Greater Britain* (1521) and George Buchanan’s *History of Scotland* (1582). Most researchers believe that Shakespeare relied primarily on Holinshed’s *Chronicles*. According to the history, *Macbeth* was the eighty-fifth king of Scotland and ruled from 1040 to