



VICTORIA JUNIOR COLLEGE, SINGAPORE

Higher 1

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**LITERATURE IN ENGLISH**

**8811/01**

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATIONS

Paper 1 Reading Literature

**September 2014**

**3 hours**

Additional Materials: Answer Paper

Set texts may be taken into the examination room. They may bear underlining or highlighting.

Any kind of folding or flagging of pages in text (e.g. use of post-its, tape flags or paper clips) is not permitted.

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**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

Write your class and name on all the work you hand in.

Write in dark blue or black pen on both sides of the paper.

Do not use staples, paper clips, highlighters, glue or correction fluid.

Answer **three** questions, one from each of Sections A, B and C.

You are reminded of the need for good English and clear presentation in your answers.

At the end of the examination, fasten the essays separately and label them accurately.

All questions in this paper carry equal marks.

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This document consists of **7** printed pages.

## Section A

1

- Either (a)** Write a critical commentary on the following poem by Vachel Lindsay, paying particular attention to the presentation of the speaker's feelings.

*The Eagle That Is Forgotten*

(John P. Altgeld, Governor of Illinois and my next-door neighbour, 1893-1897. Born December 30, 1847; died March 12, 1902.)

Sleep softly . . . eagle forgotten . . . under the stone.  
Time has its way with you there, and the clay has its own.

"We have buried him now," thought your foes, and in secret rejoiced.  
They made a brave show of their mourning, their hatred unvoiced.  
They had snarled at you, barked at you, foamed at you day after day, 5  
Now you were ended. They praised you . . . and laid you away.

The others that mourned you in silence and terror and truth,  
The widow bereft of her crust, and the boy without youth,  
The mocked and the scorned and the wounded, the lame and the poor,  
That should have remembered forever . . . remember no more. 10

Where are those lovers of yours, on what name do they call,  
The lost, that in armies wept over your funeral pall?  
They call on the names of a hundred high-valiant ones,  
A hundred white eagles have risen the sons of your sons,  
The zeal in their wings is a zeal that your dreaming began 15  
The valour that wore out your soul in the service of man.

Sleep softly . . . eagle forgotten . . . under the stone,  
Time has its way with you there and the clay has its own.  
Sleep on, O brave-hearted, O wise man that kindled the flame—  
To live in mankind is far more than to live in a name, 20  
To live in mankind, far, far more . . . than to live in a name.

- Or (b) Write a critical commentary on the following poem by Peter Porter, paying particular attention to the presentation of the speaker's perspective.

*Seahorses*

When we were children	
We would cheer to find a seahorse	
Among the wreck the breakers lifted	
On to the beach. Sometimes two or three were together,	
A team to pull a chariot of cuttle,	5
Or like a suicide wreathed in fine	
Sea ivy and bleached sea roses	
One stiff but apologetic in its trance.	
Sea horses were vikings;	
Somewhere they impassively	10
Launched on garrulous currents	
Seeking a far grave; wherever	
That was, they set their stallion	
Noses to it, ready to be garnered	
In the sea's time at the sea's pleasure.	15
If we wondered why we loved them	
We might have thought	
They were the only creatures which had to die	
Before we could see them –	
In this early rule of death we'd recognize	20
The armorial pride of head, the unbending	
Seriousness of small creatures,	
Credit them with the sea's rare love	
Which threw them to us in their beauty,	
Unlike the vast and pitiable whale	25
Which must be quickly buried for its smell.	

## Section B

GRAHAM SWIFT: *Waterland*

2

**Either (a)** "History breeds pessimism". How far do you think the novel reflects Lewis's comment?

**Or (b)** Write a critical commentary on the following passage, considering the portrayal of Dick, here and elsewhere in the novel.

Mary shouts across the water: 'Hello, Dick.'

Dick says nothing. Then, after a volume of river water which can never be calculated has slid between them: 'Hello.'

'Got many?'

'Ma-many?'

'Eels.'

5

A difficult point. Since Dick is being asked, by implication, to count. A testing process at the best of times. He can scurry to ten, stumble, with luck, to twenty. At the best of times eels twined together in the bottom of a sack don't make easy counting. And under those watching eyes...

10

So he nods. Gives a shrewd answer.

'S-some.'

Mary lifts her cheek from her knee.

'You see, if you've got any to spare ... My Dad's fond of eels. So am I. We eat fish every Friday, you know. If you could spare a couple? One big one would do.' She nuzzles her chin on her knees. 'Haven't you got a nice eel for me?'

15

Now Dick understands this, or thinks he understands it – because to understand is itself confusing. That is, he understands not only the simple substance of the request, but something profoundly, amazingly deeper. He understands that he, Dick, is being asked to offer her, Mary – yes, it's either Mary or a mirage – a Gift. This is something that no person (if we exclude the rituals of family birthdays when Dick – good with his hands – produced for his Mum such wonders as a money-box made from a cocoa tin) has ever sought of him before. A gift. A gift. Something of his own that another would value. And so momentous is this concept that he is rendered quite incapable of making it actual.

20

He sits on the river-bank, a twitching sack between his knees. The river flows, unblinking, by.

25

'Well, never mind,' Mary says at length, getting to her feet and brushing down her wartime curtain-fabric skirt. 'Another time maybe.' And then, perhaps with one of those narrow, knowing looks of hers, which even forty feet of river do not weaken: 'I can come again, can't I? You'll be here – on Friday, won't you?'

30

And this drops into Dick's scheme of things yet another monumental notion. For not only does it suggest that this creature on the far shore takes an interest in him and watches his movements (but then hasn't Dick watched hers?), it suggests something more astounding and unprecedented still, so astounding that in order to appreciate it, Dick has simultaneously to discover for himself previously unimagined mental territory.

35

It has the air of what other people call (though Dick's never heard the word) an assignation. It unveils that heady realm, known already to countless initiates (including young Tom), to which the password, when uttered in a certain breathy way, may be some such innocent phrase as 'Meet me ...', 'See you ...', 'I'll be there if ...'

It's something you can't get from motor-bikes.

40

'Ye-yes,' he says. 'He-here.'

She leaves, with a darting smile, before he can say more.

And there's something strange about her departure. She goes, but she doesn't go, exactly. There's something left behind. A feeling. A beautiful feeling. It lingers in the soft evening air. It lingers as Dick rides home, along the Hockwell road, on his back the sack of eels which are in no situation to be experiencing beautiful feelings. And it lingers that evening in the cottage (I observe but don't tell Mary), where Dick, with lashes working furiously, picks and pecks at his eel supper and Dad is driven to ask: 'What's up, Dick? What's the matter – not well?'

45

Now when did Dick ever lose his appetite or ever find anything exceptional in a May evening?

50

(Chapter 32)

## Section C

SAMUEL BECKETT: *Waiting For Godot*

3

**Either (a)** Discuss the use of the tragicomic in Beckett's portrayal of human existence.

**Or (b)** Write a critical commentary on the following passage, considering the ways in which Beckett presents routine here and elsewhere in the play.

VLADIMIR: [*Seeing LUCKY's hat.*] Well!

ESTRAGON: Farewell.

VLADIMIR: Lucky's hat. [*He goes towards it.*] I've been here an hour and never saw it. [*Very pleased.*] Fine!

ESTRAGON: You'll never see me again. 5

VLADIMIR: I knew it was the right place. Now our troubles are over. [*He picks up the hat, contemplates it, straightens it.*] Must have been a very fine hat. [*He puts it on in place of his own which he hands to ESTRAGON.*] Here.

ESTRAGON: What?

VLADIMIR: Hold that. 10

[*ESTRAGON takes Vladimir's hat. VLADIMIR adjusts LUCKY's hat on his head. ESTRAGON puts on VLADIMIR's hat in place of his own which he hands to VLADIMIR. VLADIMIR takes ESTRAGON's hat. ESTRAGON adjusts VLADIMIR's hat on his head. VLADIMIR puts on ESTRAGON's hat in place of LUCKY's which he hands to ESTRAGON. ESTRAGON takes LUCKY's hat. VLADIMIR adjusts ESTRAGON's hat on his head.* 15

[*ESTRAGON puts on LUCKY's hat in place of VLADIMIR's which he hands to VLADIMIR. VLADIMIR takes his hat. ESTRAGON adjusts LUCKY's hat on his head. VLADIMIR puts on his hat in place of ESTRAGON's which he hands to ESTRAGON. ESTRAGON takes his hat. VLADIMIR adjusts his hat on his head. ESTRAGON puts on his hat in place of LUCKY's which he hands to VLADIMIR. VLADIMIR takes LUCKY's hat. ESTRAGON adjusts his hat on his head. VLADIMIR puts on LUCKY's hat in place of his own which he hands to ESTRAGON. ESTRAGON takes VLADIMIR's hat.* 20

[*VLADIMIR adjusts LUCKY's hat on his head. ESTRAGON hands VLADIMIR's hat back to VLADIMIR who takes it and hands it back to ESTRAGON who takes it and hands it back to VLADIMIR who takes it and throws it down.* 25

How does it fit me?

ESTRAGON: How would I know? 30

VLADIMIR: No, but how do I look in it?

[*He turns his head coquettishly to and fro, minces like a mannequin.*]

ESTRAGON: Hideous.

VLADIMIR: Yes, but not more so than usual?

ESTRAGON: Neither more nor less. 35

VLADIMIR: Then I can keep it. Mine irked me. [*Pause.*] How shall I say? [*Pause.*] It itched me.

[*He takes off LUCKY's hat, peers into it, shakes it, knocks on the crown, puts it on again.*]

ESTRAGON: I'm going. 40

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR: Will you not play?

ESTRAGON: Play at what?

VLADIMIR: We could play at Pozzo and Lucky.

ESTRAGON: Never heard of it. 45

VLADIMIR: I'll do Lucky, you do Pozzo. [*He imitates LUCKY sagging under the weight of his baggage. ESTRAGON looks at him with stupefaction.*] Go on.

ESTRAGON: What am I to do?

VLADIMIR: Curse me!

ESTRAGON: [*After reflection.*] Naughty! 50

VLADIMIR: Stronger!

ESTRAGON: Gonococcus! Spirochaete!

[*VLADIMIR sways back and forth, doubled in two.*]

VLADIMIR: Tell me to think.

ESTRAGON: What? 55

VLADIMIR: Say, Think, pig!

ESTRAGON: Think, pig!

[*Silence.*]

VLADIMIR: I can't.

ESTRAGON: That's enough of that. 60

VLADIMIR: Tell me to dance.

ESTRAGON: I'm going.

VLADIMIR: Dance, hog! [*He writhes. Exit ESTRAGON left, precipitately.*] I can't! [*He looks up, misses ESTRAGON.*] Gogo! [*He moves wildly about the stage. Enter ESTRAGON left, panting. He hastens towards VLADIMIR, falls into his arms.*] There you are again at last! 65

ESTRAGON: I'm accursed!

**END OF PAPER**