



VICTORIA JUNIOR COLLEGE, SINGAPORE

Higher 2

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

9748/01

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.

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.

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

Section A

1

- Either (a)** Write a critical comparison of Michael Blumenthal's 'A Man Lost By a River' and Robert Frost's 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening', paying close attention to ways in which each poet presents the speaker's thoughts and feelings.

A *A Man Lost By a River*

There is a voice inside the body.

There is a voice and a music,
a throbbing, four-chambered pear
that wants to be heard, that sits
alone by the river with its mandolin 5
and its torn coat, and sings
for whomever will listen
a song that no one wants to hear.

But sometimes, lost,
on his way to somewhere significant, 10
a man in a long coat, carrying
a briefcase, wanders into the forest.

He hears the voice and the mandolin,
he sees the thrush and the dandelion,
and he feels the mist rise over the river. 15

And his life is never the same,
for this having been lost—
for having strayed from the path of his routine,
for no good reason.

B *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer 5
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake. 10
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep, 15
And miles to go before I sleep.

- Or (b) Write a critical comparison of 'West Wall' by W S Merwin and 'Ripening' by Wendell Berry, paying particular attention to ways in which language, style and form contribute to each poet's portrayal of love.

A *West Wall*

In the unmade light I can see the world
 as the leaves brighten I see the air
 the shadows melt and the apricots appear
 now that the branches vanish I see the apricots
 from a thousand trees ripening in the air
 they are ripening in the sun along the west wall
 apricots beyond number are ripening in the daylight. 5

Whatever was there
 I never saw those apricots swaying in the light
 I might have stood in orchards forever
 without beholding the day in the apricots
 or knowing the ripeness of the lucid air
 or touching the apricots in your skin
 or tasting in your mouth the sun in the apricots 10

B *Ripening*

The longer we are together
 the larger death grows around us.
 How many we know by now
 who are dead! We, who were young,
 now count the cost of having been. 5
 And yet as we know the dead
 we grow familiar with the world.
 We, who were young and loved each other
 ignorantly, now come to know
 each other in love, married
 by what we have done, as much
 as by what we intend. Our hair
 turns white with our ripening
 as though to fly away in some
 coming wind, bearing the seed
 of what we know. It was bitter to learn
 that we come to death as we come
 to love, bitter to face 15
 the just and solving welcome
 that death prepares. But that is bitter
 only to the ignorant, who pray
 it will not happen. Having come
 the bitter way to better prayer, we have
 the sweetness of ripening. How sweet
 to know you by the signs of this world! 20

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.'

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...

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?'

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.

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

'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?'

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.

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.

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

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

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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?

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(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.*

[*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. 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.*] 15

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