



VICTORIA JUNIOR COLLEGE, SINGAPORE

Higher 1

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

8811/01

PRELIMINARY EXAMINATIONS

Paper 1 Reading Literature

September 2015

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 commentary on the following poem by Tony Hoagland, paying particular attention to the presentation of the speaker's relationship with his father.

Benevolence

When my father dies and comes back as a dog,
 I already know what his favorite sound will be:
 the soft, almost inaudible gasp
 as the rubber lips of the refrigerator door
 unstick, followed by that arctic

5

exhalation of cold air;
 then the cracking of the ice-cube tray above the sink
 and the quiet ching the cubes make
 when dropped into a glass.

Unable to pronounce the name of his favorite drink, or to express 10
 his preference for single malt,
 he will utter one sharp bark
 and point the wet black arrow of his nose
 imperatively up
 at the bottle on the shelf, 15

then seat himself before me,
 trembling, expectant, water pouring
 down the long pink dangle of his tongue
 as the memory of pleasure from his former life
 shakes him like a tail. 20

What I'll remember as I tower over him,
 holding a dripping, whiskey-flavored cube
 above his open mouth,
 relishing the power rushing through my veins
 the way it rushed through his, 25

what I'll remember as I stand there
 is the hundred clever tricks
 I taught myself to please him,
 and for how long I mistakenly believed
 that it was love he held concealed in his closed hand. 30

- Or (b) Write a critical commentary on the following poem by Robert Philips, paying particular attention to the presentation of the speaker's thoughts and emotions.

The Panic Bird

just flew inside my chest. Some
days it lights inside my brain,
but today it's in my bonehouse,
rattling ribs like a birdcage.

If I saw it coming, I'd fend it
off with machete or baseball bat. 5
Or grab its scrawny hackled neck,
wring it like a wet dishrag.

But it approaches from behind.
Too late I sense it at my back -- 10
carrion, garbage, excrement.
Once inside me it preens, roosts,

vulture on a public utility pole.
Next it flaps, it cries, it glares,
it rages, it struts, it thrusts 15
its clacking beak into my liver,

my guts, my heart, rips off strips.
I fill with black blood, black bile.
This may last minutes or days.
Then it lifts sickle-shaped wings, 20

rises, is gone, leaving a residue --
foul breath, droppings, molted midnight
feathers. And life continues.
And then I'm prey to panic again.

Section B

GRAHAM SWIFT: *Waterland*

2

Either (a) Write a critical essay on Graham Swift's presentation of time in the novel.

Or (b) Write a critical commentary on the following passage, paying particular attention to Swift's methods and concerns, here and elsewhere in the novel.

Now Dad, it is to be noted, while he clasped us so fervently in his arms, did not utter the word 'dead'. The word he used was 'gone'. And throughout the succeeding days, despite Doctor Bright's arrival to complete the death certificate, despite Mother's transference from bed to coffin and, with due accompanying ritual, to her grave, he never let pass his lips either the word 'dead' or the word 'death.'

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And while there is much to be commended in the use of that euphemism 'Gone' before two sons, one too young perhaps and the other too doltish to understand, there is also much to be questioned. For 'Gone', in such circumstances, is a far more elusive word. To little Tom, whose whole life might have been different if his father had told him what his infant heart was already braced to accept – that his own Mum was dead, no more, finished, extinct – this word 'Gone' carried the suggestion of some conscious, if perverse decision on his mother's part, as if she had not ceased absolutely to exist but was somewhere very far away, inaccessible, invisible, yet still there.

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'Gone', in other words, echoed with mystery. Whilst 'dead' is a blunt and natural phenomenon. 'Gone' – awesome and open-ended – required explanation. It made your infant history teacher's mind – which was getting on quite well with 'What' and 'How' first throb to the gong-beat of Whywhywhy. (And we know what that led to.) It made him set out, in ways of which he was scarcely conscious and over which he had scarcely any control, to find again, at least to revive in some new form (ah, bashful, yearning railway journeys ...) the image of his departed Mummy.

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And thus little Tom's reaction to his Mother's death, for all its protracted after-effects, was perhaps no different in essence from the crude response of his brother, which had it ever been voiced – amidst all his blinking bafflement – might have amounted to: 'Well, if she's gone, when is she coming back?'

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And as for Dad: had he used that word 'Gone' merely out of consideration for his children? For if he really believed himself that Mother was no more and not somewhere where communication, if ever so distant, were still possible, what was he doing making those repeated trips to the graveyard and standing there, with his lips moving *as if he were talking to someone*; and telling us, furthermore, about a far-off place called heaven?

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And so all three surviving occupants of the Atkinson Lock cottage were perhaps united in a common belief: that Mother who was dead wasn't really dead at all, that from some hidden vantage point she still watched over them and held the cottage under her protection.

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Ah, Fenland superstition. The dead are dead, aren't they? The past is done with, isn't it?

But sometimes there are ways of unlocking that sealed-up domain, of exposing to the corrosive air its secret contents. And Dick had a key.

35

(Chapter 38)

TURN OVER FOR SECTION C.

Section C

SAMUEL BECKETT: *Waiting For Godot*

3

- Either (a) "There is a silence of language and a language of silence (in Beckett's plays)." (Enoch Brater, 1995)

Discuss the significance of silence in your reading of *Waiting For Godot*, bearing in mind the comment above.

- Or (b) Write a critical commentary on the following passage, relating it to the portrayal of struggle here and elsewhere in the play.

Enter Vladimir agitatedly. He halts and looks long at the tree, then suddenly begins to move feverishly about the stage. He halts before the boots, picks one up, examines it, sniffs it, manifests disgust, puts it back carefully. Comes and goes. Halts extreme right and gazes into distance off, shading his eyes with his hand. Comes and goes. Halts extreme left, as before. Comes and goes. Halts suddenly and begins to sing 5
loudly.

VLADIMIR: A dog came in—

[Having begun too high he stops, clears his throat, resumes.]

A dog came in the kitchen

And stole a crust of bread.

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Then cook up with a ladle

And beat him till he was dead.

Then all the dogs came running

And dug the dog a tomb—

[He stops, broods, resumes.]

15

Then all the dogs came running

And dug the dog a tomb

And wrote upon the tombstone

For the eyes of dogs to come:

A dog came in the kitchen

20

And stole a crust of bread.

Then cook up with a ladle

And beat him till he was dead.

Then all the dogs came running

And dug the dog a tomb—

[He stops, broods, resumes.]

25

Then all the dogs came running

And dug the dog a tomb—

[He stops, broods. Softly.]

And dug the dog a tomb ...

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[He remains a moment silent and motionless, then begins to move feverishly about the stage. He halts before the tree, comes and goes, before the boots, comes and goes, halts extreme right, gazes into distance, extreme left, gazes into distance. Enter Estragon right, barefoot, head bowed. He slowly crosses the stage. Vladimir turns and sees him.]

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You again! *[Estragon halts but does not raise his head. Vladimir goes towards him.]* Come here till I embrace you.

ESTRAGON: Don't touch me!

[Vladimir holds back, pained.]

VLADIMIR: Do you want me to go away? *[Pause.]* Gogo! *[Pause. Vladimir observes him attentively.]* Did they beat you? *[Pause.]* Gogo! *[Estragon remains silent, head bowed.]* Where did you spend the night? 40

ESTRAGON: Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!

VLADIMIR: Did I ever leave you?

ESTRAGON: You let me go.

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VLADIMIR: Look at me. *[Estragon does not raise his head. Violently.]* Will you look at me!

[Estragon raises his head. They look long at each other, then suddenly embrace, clapping each other on the back. End of the embrace. Estragon, no longer supported, almost falls.]

50

ESTRAGON: What a day!

VLADIMIR: Who beat you? Tell me.

ESTRAGON: Another day done with.

VLADIMIR: Not yet.

ESTRAGON: For me it's over and done with, no matter what happens. *[Silence.]* I heard you singing. 55

VLADIMIR: That's right, I remember.

ESTRAGON: That finished me. I said to myself, He's all alone, he thinks I'm gone for ever, and he sings.

VLADIMIR: One is not master of one's moods. All day I've felt in great form. *[Pause.]* I didn't get up in the night, not once! 60

ESTRAGON: *[sadly]*. You see, you piss better when I'm not there.

VLADIMIR: I missed you . . . and at the same time I was happy. Isn't that a strange thing?

ESTRAGON: *[shocked.]* Happy? 65

VLADIMIR: Perhaps it's not quite the right word.

ESTRAGON: And now?

VLADIMIR: Now? . . . *[Joyous.]* There you are again . . . *[Indifferent.]* There we are again. . . *[Gloomy.]* There I am again.

Act 2

END OF PAPER

