

# YISHUN JUNIOR COLLEGE PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION 2015

## LITERATURE IN ENGLISH HIGHER 2

9748/03

Paper 3 The Individual and Society in Literature

Thursday August 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 texts (e.g. use of post-its, tape flags or paper clips) is not permitted.



### READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

Write your name and CTG 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, hand in each of your three answers **separately**.

All questions in this paper carry equal marks.

This document consists of **6** printed pages and **1** blank page.

## SECTION A

Answer one question in this section.

1

**Either (a)** The following passage is from Susan Gaspell's 'The Verge' (1989). The play is about a scientist, Claire, who awaits the blossoming of a flower that she has created, named The Breath of Life.

Write a critical appreciation of the passage, paying particular attention to the struggles faced by the individual in society.

Claire: We'll get something later. I want to talk to you. [*but she does not—laughs*] Absurd that I should feel bashful with you. Why am I so awkward with words when I go to talk to you?

Tom: The words know they're not needed.

Claire: No, they're not needed. There's something underneath—an open way—down 5 below the way that words can go. [*rather desperately*] It is there, isn't it? Oh, yes, it is there.

Claire: Then why do we never—go it?

Tom: If we went it, it would not be there.

Claire: Is that true? How terrible, if that is true. 10

Tom: Not terrible, wonderful—that it should—of itself—be there.

Claire: [*with the simplicity that can say anything*] I want to go it, Tom, I'm lonely up on top here. Is it that I have more faith than you, or is it only that I'm greedier? You see, you don't know [*her reckless laugh*] what you're missing. You don't know how I could love you. 15

Tom: Don't, Claire; that isn't—how it is—between you and me.

Claire: But why can't it be—every way—between you and me?

Tom: Because we'd lose—the open way. [*the quality of his denial shows how strong is his feeling for her*] With anyone else—not with you.

Claire: But you are the only one I want. The only one—all of me wants. 20

Tom: I know; but that's the way it is.

Claire: You're cruel.

Tom: Oh, Claire, I'm trying so hard to—save it for us. Isn't it our beauty and our safeguard that underneath our separate lives, no matter where we may be, with what other, there is this open way between us? That's so much more 25 than anything we could bring to being.

Claire: Perhaps. But—it's different with me. I'm not—all spirit.

Tom: [*his hand on her*] Dear!

Claire: No, don't touch me—since [*moving*] you're going away to-morrow? [*he nods*] For—always? [*his head just moves assent*] India is just another country. But 30 there are undiscovered countries.

Tom: Yes, but we are so feeble we have to reach our country through the actual country lying nearest. Don't you do that yourself, Claire? Reach your country through the plants' country?

Claire: My country? You mean—outside? 35

Tom: No, I don't think it that way.

Claire: Oh, yes, you do.

Tom: Your country is the inside, Claire. The innermost. You are disturbed because you lie too close upon the heart of life.

Claire: *[restlessly]* I don't know; you can think it one way—or another. No way says it, 40  
Chris: and that's good—at least it's not shut up in saying. *[she is looking at her enclosing hand, as if something is shut up there]*

Tom: But also, you know, things may be freed by expression. Come from the unrealized into the fabric of life.

Claire: Yes, but why does the fabric of life have to—freeze into its pattern? It should 45  
*[doing it with her hands]* flow, *[then turning like an unsatisfied child to him]* But I wanted to talk to you.

Tom: You are talking to me. Tell me about your flower that never was before—your Breath of Life.

Claire: I'll know to-morrow. You'll not go until I know? 50  
Tom: I'll try to stay.

Claire: It seems to me, if it has—then I have, integrity in—*[smiles, it is as if the smile lets her say it]* otherness. I don't want to die on the edge!

Tom: Not you!

Claire: Many do. It's what makes them too smug in allness—those dead things on 55  
the edge, died, distorted—trying to get through. Oh—don't think I don't see—The Edge Vine! *[a pause, then swiftly]* Do you know what I mean? Or do you think I'm just a fool, or crazy?

Tom: I think I know what you mean, and you know I don't think you are a fool, or 60  
crazy.

Claire: Stabbed to awareness—no matter where it takes you, isn't that more than a safe place to stay? *[telling him very simply despite the pattern of pain in her voice]* Anguish may be a thread—making patterns that haven't been. A thread—blue and burning.

Tom: *[to take her from what even he fears for her]* But you were telling me about 65  
the flower you breathed to life. What is your Breath of Life?

Claire: *[an instant playing]* It's a secret. A secret?—it's a trick. Distilled from the most fragile flowers there are. It's only air—pausing—playing; except, far in, one stab of red, its quivering heart—that asks a question. But here's the trick—I bred the air-form to strength. The strength shut up behind us I've sent—far 70  
out. *[troubled]* I'll know tomorrow. And I have another gift for Breath of Life; some day—though days of work lie in between—some day I'll give it reminiscence. Fragrance that is—no one thing in here but—reminiscent. *[silence, she raises wet eyes]* We need the haunting beauty from the life we've left. I need that, *[he takes her hands and breathes her name]* Let me 75  
reach my country with you. I'm not a plant. After all, they don't—accept me. Who does—accept me? Will you?

- Or (b) The following passage is from John Banville's novel 'The Book of Evidence' (1989). The book is narrated by Freddie Montgomery, a 38-year-old scientist, who murders a servant girl during an attempt to steal a painting from a neighbour.

Write a critical appreciation of the passage, relating its themes and style to the topic of the individual and society.

I used to believe, like everyone else, that I was determining the course of my own life, according to my own decisions, but gradually, as I accumulated more and more past to look back on, I realised that I had done the things I did because I could do no other. Please, do not imagine, my lord, I hasten to say it, do not imagine that you detect here the insinuation of an apologia, or even of a defence. I wish to claim full responsibility for my actions – after all, they are the only things I can call my own – and I declare in advance that I shall accept without demur the verdict of the court. I am merely asking, with all respect, whether it is feasible to hold on to the principle of moral culpability once the notion of free will has been abandoned. It is, I grant you, a tricky one, the sort of thing we love to discuss in here of an evening, over our cocoa and fags, when time hangs heavy. 5 10

As I have said, I did not always think of my life as a prison in which all actions are determined according to a random pattern thrown down by an unknown and insensate authority. Indeed, when I was young I saw myself as a masterbuilder who would one day assemble a marvellous edifice around myself, a kind of grand pavilion, airy and light, which contain me utterly and yet wherein I would be free. Look, they would say, distinguishing this eminence from afar, look how sound it is, how solid; it's him all right, yes, no doubt about it, the man himself. Meantime, however, unhoused, I felt at once exposed and invisible. How shall I describe it, this sense of myself as something without weight, without moorings, a floating phantom? Other people seem to have a density, a thereness, which I lacked. Among them, these big, carefree creatures, I was like a child among adults. I watched them, wide-eyed, wondering at their calm assurance in the face of a baffling and preposterous world. Don't mistake me, I was no wilting lily, I laughed and whooped and boasted with the best of them – only inside, in that grim, shadowed gallery I call my heart, I still uneasily, with a hand to my mouth, silent, envious, uncertain. They understood matters, or accepted them, at least. They knew what they thought about things, they had opinions. They took the broad view, as if they did not realise that everything is infinitely divisible. They talked of cause and effect as if they believed it possible to isolate an event and hold it up to scrutiny in a pure, timeless, space, outside the mad swirl of things. They would speak of whole peoples as if they were speaking of a single individual, while to speak even of an individual with any show of certainty seemed to me foolhardy. Oh, they knew no bounds. 15 20 25 30

And as if people in the outside world were not enough, I had inside me too an exemplar of my own, a kind of invigilator, from whom I must hide my lack of conviction. For instance, if I was reading, an argument in some book or other, 35

and agreeing with it enthusiastically, and then I discovered at the end that I had misunderstood entirely what the writer had said, had in fact got the whole thing arse-ways, I would be compelled at once to execute a somersault, quick as a flash, and tell myself, I mean my other self, that stern interior sergeant, there 40 what was being said was true, that I had never really thought otherwise, and, even if I had, that showed an open mind that I should be able to switch back and forth between opinions without even noticing it. Then I would mop up my brow, clear my throat, straighten my shoulders and pass on delicately, in stifled dismay. But why the past tense? Has anything changed? Only that the watcher from inside has stepped forth and taken over, while the puzzled outsider cowers 45 within.

Does the court realise, I wonder, what this confession is costing me?

**SECTION B**

**Answer one question in this section, using two texts that you have studied.  
The texts used in this section cannot be used in Section C.**

**2**

**Either a)** “It is not enough to be an upright man, we must be seen to be one.”

Compare the ways in which **two** texts you have studied deal with the tension between the individual’s reputation and social perception.

**Or     b)** With reference to **two** texts, discuss how the themes of knowledge and power depict the individual and society.

## SECTION C

**Answer one question in this section, using one text that you have studied.  
The text used in this section cannot be used in Section B.**

Philip Larkin: *Collected Poems*

**3**

**Either (a)** “Something is pushing them  
To the side of their own lives.” (*Afternoons*)

Examine Larkin’s poetic presentation of the voices of the disempowered in his social setting. You should refer to at least **two** poems from your selection.

**Or (b)** Discuss Larkin’s presentation of deception and how it shapes the individual and society in his poetry. You should refer to at least **two** poems from your selection.

Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

**4**

**Either (a)** Discuss the ways in which the social environment of Elysian Fields is presented as a broken world.

**Or (b)** Discuss the presentation of money and its significance to the individual and society in *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

William Shakespeare: *Othello*

**5**

**Either (a)** Examine the view that *Othello* is a tragedy of both the individual and society.

**Or (b)** Discuss the significance of alienation in the play, relating your response to the concerns of the individual and society.

**End of Paper**