



VICTORIA JUNIOR COLLEGE, SINGAPORE

Higher 2

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

9748/01

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 comparison of R S Thomas's 'A Marriage' and Jo Shapcott's 'Lovebirds', paying close attention to ways in which each poet presents the speaker's thoughts and feelings.

A *A Marriage*

We met	
under a shower	
of bird-notes.	
Fifty years passed,	
love's moment	5
in a world in	
servitude to time.	
She was young;	
I kissed with my eyes	
closed and opened	10
them on her wrinkles.	
'Come,' said death,	
choosing her as his	
partner for	
the last dance, and she,	15
who in life	
had done everything	
with a bird's grace,	
opened her bill now	
for the shedding	20
of one sigh no	
heavier than a feather.	

B *Lovebirds*

So she moved into the hospital the last nine days
to tend him with little strokes and murmurs
as he sank into the sheets. Nurse
set out a low bed for her, night-times, next to his.
He nuzzled up to her as she brushed 5
away the multiplying cells with a sigh,
was glad as she ignored the many
effluents and the tang of death. The second
last morning of his life he opened
his eyes, saying, 'I can't wake up' 10
but wouldn't close them for his nap
until he was sure she was there.
Later he moved quietly to deeper sleep,
as Doctor said he would, still listening
to her twittering on and on until the last. 15

- Or (b) Write a critical comparison of 'Wild Geese' by Mary Oliver and 'The Peace of Wild Things' by Wendell Berry, paying particular attention to ways in which language, style and form contribute to each poet's concerns.

A *Wild Geese*

You do not have to be good.
 You do not have to walk on your knees
 for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
 You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.
 Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine. 5
 Meanwhile the world goes on.
 Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
 are moving across the landscapes,
 over the prairies and the deep trees,
 the mountains and the rivers. 10
 Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
 are heading home again.
 Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
 the world offers itself to your imagination,
 calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting – 15
 over and over announcing your place
 in the family of things.

B *The Peace of Wild Things*

When despair for the world grows in me
 and I wake in the night at the least sound
 in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
 I go and lie down where the wood drake
 rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds. 5
 I come into the peace of wild things
 who do not tax their lives with forethought
 of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
 And I feel above me the day-blind stars
 waiting with their light. For a time 10
 I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

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.'

5

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.

10

'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.

20

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?'

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?

25

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.

30

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)

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.

Then cook up with a ladle

And beat him till he was dead.

10

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

And stole a crust of bread.

Then cook up with a ladle

And beat him till he was dead.

20

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 ...

30

[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.]

35

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.

45

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

