Writing Unseen Commentaries: A Student Help Book

Writing Unseen Commentaries:
A Student Help Book
Teaching Copy, 2nd Edition

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The Purpose of this Book

It's designed to help you write good commentaries on short pieces of literature and writing of other kinds (loosely called 'non-literary).

You will have already had to do some writing about poems and prose extracts (possibly as part of a GCSE or IGCSE or MYP or Junior High course); but now you're following a more advanced English programme (GCE Advanced Level, International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement) and you're perhaps not quite sure what will be expected of you when you come to the final examination.

The exam is likely to include a section in which you are asked to discuss a piece of writing you have not seen before – an Unprepared or Unseen Commentary section (two of the three Free-Response Essays are the AP equivalent). You'll be presented with some poetry and a page or so of prose. (What's prose? Anything that's not poetry.) You'll be expected to comment on at least one passage in detail, with or without the help of guiding questions. That's a challenge, since you'll be working so much in the dark: you may well not have even heard of the writer. If the extract is from a narrative work (a novel or a play) you won't know, either, what's happened earlier in the story.

So some very special skills are involved; but as you'll see they're easy to develop at a basic level…then it's up to you to decide how far you want to refine them.

They aren't just writing skills. You will have to learn to read in a new way, and to notice new things *as* you read. That's the first thing this book will help you with. How to make notes is another. The writing will come later.

If your course covers two years, it doesn't matter if you're in its first or second year:

- If you're just setting out on it then working steadily through this book will help you develop your commentary skills gradually and effectively, and those skills will in turn be of enormous help as you study your main literature texts.

- If on the other hand your final exams are fast approaching there's still time to learn some new strategies for coping with the Commentary part of them. The important thing is that when you go into the exam room you should be confident that you can make at least a sound attempt at understanding, then writing about, a prose passage or poem you will be reading for the first time. You should feel positive about the prospect, in fact…this is one part of the exam where what you *know* is less important than what you can *do*.

To make the book easier to use it's broken up into manageable units separated by a wavy line:

Try to get through each unit at one sitting, or at least over the course of one day. That will help you hold the focus of the unit in your mind. Review each one (by skimming through it once more) before you begin the next one.

Feel free, of course, to draw your own wavy line whenever you've had enough for the moment…

But Don't Cheat

Your teacher will probably be using past exam papers to help you practise writing unseen commentaries. If he or she asks you to write about one of the passages we've analysed in detail in this book, don't think to yourself – 'Aha! I know where to find the answers!' Try to avoid reading what we've said here until you've done the initial work for yourself. Then you may find it helpful to check what you've written against what we've drawn attention to– but let your teacher know you've done that.

A Note for IB Higher Level Candidates

Don't move straight to the more advanced passages (Section Two): it's important that you work your way through Section One first, even though you may find you can do so quite quickly.

A Note for IB Language and Literature Candidates

The sections that **Language and Literature** candidates should work through are marked * on the Contents page.

A Note for Advanced Placement Candidates

The passages you are given in the AP exam will have single essay questions attached to them. You will find a separate list of typical questions (relating to the passages we have worked on) in Section Seven. The skills you have acquired or developed as you work through the book will be very relevant to what you are asked to do in the Free-Response part of the exam.

A Note for GCE Advanced Level Candidates

Different examining boards set different types of question. All of the passages in this book, however, and all of the work you will do on them, will help you strengthen your analytical and critical skills; but be sure to look closely at some past papers set by your own A Level board. That will help you narrow your focus and allow you to practise writing commentaries in the correct format.

Notes for Teachers

'Teaching commentary cannot be done overnight, not even in a month. It needs continual practice with a wide range of texts during the two years of the course. In the early stages it is a good idea to devote one lesson a week to commentary work' (IB Guide).

This new edition of *Writing Unseen Commentaries* has been expanded to include a wider range of literary text types, and has been revised in line with the recent changes in the **IB Language A programme**.

- Students working towards the **Literature** exam will find this second edition of the book even more useful than the first. Passages from more recent exams (both **Standard** and **Higher Level**) have been added, and the assessment criteria to which reference is made have been brought in line with those to be applied in examinations from 2013 onwards. (The resource will continue to be fully relevant, however, to the 2012 Literature exams.) In particular, there is much emphasis throughout on Author's Choice, a new and important element in the assessment criteria.

Additionally, all students will find the analytical framework offered in the resource invaluable in preparing for the IOC (Individual Oral Commentary).

- Students who have selected the **Language and Literature** option can be directed to the main body of the resource (Section One) which, although it concerns itself with ‘literary’ analysis, will give them the skills and terminology necessary to think and write effectively about all kinds of writing, including what is loosely called ‘non-literary’.

  Wholly new sections have also been added to the book, specific to the **Language and Literature** programme.

  The sections that **Language and Literature** candidates should work through are marked * on the Contents page.

Nomatter what particular course students are following, however (and that includes Advanced Placement, GCE A Level, and other national programmes), it is important to realise that close textual analysis, of the kind this book focusses on, underpins work in all areas of all literature study. The tools students will acquire as they work through the resource will be of great use to them as they read, even swiftly and widely, in preparation for the whole range of assessments they will face as their studies progress.

Writing Unseen Commentaries

<u>Introductory Passages</u>

Things People Do In Front Of Other People

Think of any human activity that involves an audience or spectators – say a soccer match. If we wanted to analyse the match (break it down into its parts) we could do so in different ways, depending on whether we were writing a newspaper report about it, trying to decide whether it had been worth watching, working out why one side rather than the other had won, using it as an illustration of what a 'good' game of soccer is like, and so on.

Here's one way of breaking such an activity down so that we can think about it in an organised way.

- Where and when did it take place? (*At what point in the season was the match played? Did the venue favour one side? What was the weather like? What had been written in the sporting press before the match?*) We could call that the ***Setting*** for the event.

- Who took part? (*The players, and the referee…and the spectators too if their behaviour had an impact on what was happening on the pitch*.) They are the people – ***Characters*** – involved.

- What happened? (*The story of the game, with as much detail as needed*.) That's the ***Action***.

- How did it all happen? (*An account of the way the game was played by each team*.) We might call that the ***Style*** of what we saw..

- What conclusions can we draw from all of the above? (*Can we now explain why the winners won? What did we learn from the match about what makes a winning side or a good game, or about football itself as a sport?*) These are the ***Ideas*** we take away with us at the end.

That may seem at first sight to be a rather clumsy framework…and sorry if you aren't at all interested in soccer. Try substituting a rock concert, a political meeting, an English lesson, a bank robbery…

Then try a novel or a play. That will take us closer to where we're going next – a short discussion about how we can analyse literature. We can then set about exploring ways of doing so effectively, particularly when the literature is chopped up into the small bits called 'Passages for Commentary'.

Novels and Plays – and Poems As Well

It's easy to see that novels and plays can be analysed under the same five headings. They tell stories after all, and stories involve action, which has to happen somewhere and usually includes people…and stories make us think.

What about ***Style***, however? You maybe felt that category didn't work too well for soccer etc. Well it works rather better for literature, since most stories are told in words; and language has a whole range of identifiable styles. (There are other kinds of style in literature: novels have a narrative style, and when you're studying plays you'll come across the phrase 'dramatic style', which refers to what makes a particular play distinctive as a piece of theatre.)

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Do all five headings work for poetry?

Narrative poetry presents no problem, since it tells stories (with characters, action and so on). What about ‘ordinary’ poems, however, like most of those you’ve studied so far in school? We’ll need to consider how far they can be said to have a setting, or characters, or an action – and that will vary from poem to poem.

The framework we’ve outlined above can be very useful to you when you come to write about a poem or a prose extract, or a short passage from a play. It can also be very helpful when you’re studying a whole work of literature, particularly when you’re preparing it for an exam…and it’s an excellent way of organising your notes.

So see (without looking back) if you can remember the five headings. Think about the soccer match…or the bank robbery. Here’s a start:

Se…
Ch…

There you are – you already have a valuable tool at your disposal. Now you need to practise using it.

How You Can Do That

We’ll look at some pieces of writing, both prose and poetry – and, later, writing from other genres – to see what part is played in them by each of the five elements we’ve identified (***SCASI*** may help you remember them, if you had trouble doing so a moment ago).

Section One contains five pairs of extracts – one prose passage and one poem in each case. The discussion on the passages in each pair focuses on one of the five ***SCASI*** elements. Other features of each passage are noted as well, so that by the time you’ve worked through the first pair, for instance, you will have a much clearer idea of how ***Setting*** can help a writer achieve his purpose, in both prose and poetry, but you’ll also have had some practice in picking out examples of the other four elements.

That may be enough for you, if you’re short of time because the exams are close, or English isn’t one of your ‘strong’ subjects, or you’re studying it at **Standard Level** rather than **Higher Level**. So you may feel ready to go straight on from there to the independent practice passages (Section Three).

If however you want to take things further you can work through Section Two (**Higher Level – Literature** passages). If you’re an A Level or Advanced Placement student you should certainly try those as well.

What’s the difference between **IB Standard Level** and **Higher Level** commentary questions? Not a great deal. **Higher Level** passages tend to be longer and more complex (so candidates are allowed more time to write about them); and you’ll often have to do some hard thinking to establish just what’s going on in each case; and they don’t have guiding questions; and **Higher Level** candidates are expected to pay more attention to that difficult thing ***Style***. But they’re generally unusual and powerful pieces of writing and you should find working with them interesting as well as challenging.

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If you've selected the **IB Language and Literature** rather than the **Literature** only course, you should work through the sections marked with an asterisk (*), which taken together go beyond what might be called 'pure literature' to what the IB documentation calls 'non-literary' writing of the kind you will be asked to analyse in Paper I of the final written exam.

If you're studying **A Level** or following an **Advanced Placement** course, you'll find that the literary passages we have chosen are very similar to those you'll meet in your own examination, and the skills you'll need to analyse them are just the same. The passages in Sections Three and Section Six come from a variety of sources, and we'll help you to relate them to your own exam.

To Get Us Started – a General Example

Let's begin by taking one passage and examining briefly how each of its five aspects (***Setting, Character, Action***…can you add the other two?) is reflected in its detail.

First Step: read the passage (on the next page). It's something of an adventure story. If you don't feel you've altogether understood it, read it again. It's quite normal to have to do that.

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PASSAGE 1

'Foreigners are not very popular here,' Mr Butler told me at breakfast. 'So I don't think you ought to go out alone.'

My heart sank. I hated to be dependent on other people. They would never want to do what I wanted to do. I began to feel imprisoned. I took up the moth-eaten balls and the old tennis racket which were lying in the hall, and went into the garden. *5*

I hit the balls fiercely against the stable doors until I was too hot and unhappy to go on. I sat brooding on the steps. I might have been in Sydenham for all I could see – a European villa and a line of poplars; yet outside lay a Chinese city which I was longing to explore.

After lunch I decided that I could stand it no longer. Mr Butler and Mr Roote were still deep in their morning's discussion, so I let myself quickly out of the back gate and walked along the sandy lane which led into the country. Mr Butler could not mind my walking in the country, I thought. *10*

Everything was still and silent, in an early-afternoon torpor. The only sound came from the stunted bushes which squeaked and grated linguistically as the wind passed through them. Pillars and scarves of dust and sand rose up from the ground, eddying and swirling themselves into flat sheets which hovered in the air. Harsh spears of grass stuck up through the sand. The soles of my shoes began to burn and I looked round vainly for some shady place. I enjoyed the dreamlike stillness and wanted to stay out for as long as possible. I thought that if I walked on I might find a place. The road led towards the hills. Across the sandy plain the city walls stood up like cliffs. Turrets and bastions were ruined cottages, crumbling into the sea. *15* *20*

I walked on, fixing my eyes on a black speck some way in front of me. I wondered if it could be a cat crouching in the middle of the road; or perhaps it was a dark boulder.

As I drew nearer, a haze of flies suddenly lifted, and I saw that the object was not black but pink. The loathsome flies hovered angrily above it, buzzing like dynamos. I bent my head down to see what it was. I stared at it stupidly until my numbed senses suddenly awoke again. Then I jumped back, my throat quite dry and my stomach churning. *25*

The thing was a human head. The nose and eyes had been eaten away and the black hair was caked and grey with dust. Odd white teeth stood up like ninepins in its dark, gaping mouth. Its cheeks and shrivelled lips were plastered black with dried blood, and I saw long coarse hairs growing out of its ears. *30*

Because it was so terrible, my eyes had to return to it whenever I looked away. I stared into its raw eye-sockets until waves of sickness spread over me. Then I ran. The whole plain and the bare hills had suddenly become tinged with horror.

I found myself between high banks. I would soon be coming to a village. There were signs of cultivation. When the first cur barked, I turned and ran back the way I had come. I did not know what to do. I would have to pass the head again. *35*

I tried to avoid it by making for the city walls across the pathless sand. My feet sank in, and my shoes became full and heavy. My only idea was to get back to the house.

Tall rank grass grew in the shadow of the wall. It was dry and sharp as knives. I pushed through it, looking up at the towering cliff for a gate or steps to climb. Nothing else seemed to be alive except the insects. I could only hear their buzzing and the slap of them when they hit the wall. *40*

There was no gate. I began to feel desperate. I ran towards a bastion, wondering if I could climb up to it in any way. I knew that I could not. *45*

Denton Welch, *Maiden Voyage* (1943)

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Second Step: Make brief notes in response to the following questions. After each set of questions you can look at the boxed section to see how well you have done (but don't be concerned if you seem at times to have failed miserably: you've just started the course, after all).

1. Setting

a) *4-5* What does the condition of the tennis balls and the tennis racquet tell us about the place the boy is staying in?

b) *8* Poplar trees are tall and thin and are usually planted in straight lines. How does that make them an appropriate choice (by the writer) as part of the scenery? (Sydenham is a London suburb.)

c) *41-42* What is there about the grass as described in these lines which adds to the boy's fear? Can you see a connection with *line 17*?

d) *43-44* What effect on the atmosphere of the passage does this second mention of insects have?

a) Young people used to stay there, but haven't done so for some time: the house is no longer set up for a young (and adventurous) visitor.
b) They represent the regimentation and European orderliness that the boy wants to escape from.
c) The grass is *'tall'* (maybe difficult to see over, and someone could be hiding in it) and *'rank'* (which can mean both wild and evil-smelling); it is growing in the *'shadow'* of the wall (and therefore darker than the sunlit countryside around); and the fact that it is *'sharp as knives'* makes it seem dangerous. It resists him, so that he has to push through it. The connection with *line 17* is in the phrase *'harsh spears of grass'* in that line.
d) It reminds us of the severed head, around which flies were also buzzing; it might suggest that the flies have pursued him here; and the fact that the insects are banging into the wall as if they want to get through it emphasises the fact that he too is trapped outside the city.

2. Character

a) *3-4 'I hated to be dependent on other people. They would never want to do what I wanted to do.'* Which of these two sentences reveals more about the boy's character?

b) *6-9* Which two words in this paragraph might lead us to describe the boy as spoilt?

c) *10-13* In the last sentence of this paragraph the boy tries to persuade himself that he is not doing anything wrong. Which word earlier in the paragraph shows that he does in fact know that he should not be going off by himself?

a) The second. The first one tells us how he likes to be thought of (as independent); the second one reveals that he really just prefers to get his own way.
b) *'fiercely'* and *'brooding'*. You could also argue that the phrase *'for all I could see'* is sarcastic.
c) *'quickly'*

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3. Action

a) What elements of conflict – things likely to force a development in the situation – are present in the opening four paragraphs *(lines 1-13)*?

b) *23-28* How does the writer build up suspense for the reader?

a) The boy is in an alien environment *'here'*, in China; but the *'European villa'* itself is unwelcoming; Mr Butler's attitude is restrictive; the boy is rebellious by nature; and in any case he badly wants to explore the area. Something's got to give!

b) It takes the boy some time to reach the *'black speck'* in the road. As he walks he speculates about what it might be. The *'haze'* of flies suggests that it may be something decaying. The flies rise and are now described as *'loathsome'*, and that word taken together with the pinkness of the object just revealed suggests that something horrible is lying there. Then in lines *27* and *28* the writer describes the boy's physical reaction, but he makes us wait until the next paragraph before telling us what it is that the boy has seen. The timing of all of that is carefully controlled.

4. Style

a) *14-18* What details in the writer's description of the landscape indicate that it has a life of its own, and that it is rather threatening?

b) *35* The phrase *'tinged with horror'* suggests that in the boy's eyes even the ……….of the scenery has changed.

c) *36-38* What is there about these sentences that emphasises the boy's panic?

a) The landscape is in a state of *'torpor'* (as if it feels sleepy); the bushes emit sounds like harsh human speech (they *'squeaked and grated linguistically'*); the dust and sand behave as if they can control their movements *('eddying and swirling* ***themselves*** *into flat sheets')*; and the grass is like *'spears'* which *'stuck up through the sand'* (also as if they were doing it of their own volition, as an act of aggression).

b) Colour

c) They're short, indicating the speed at which things are happening.

5. Ideas

Which of the following ideas underlie this piece of narrative?

- Adolescent rebelliousness
- Rationalisation (finding 'reasons' to support questionable behaviour)
- The gap between cultures
- The unexpectedness of things

All of them. We should possibly call them themes rather than ideas (we'll talk later about the difference between the two).

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If some of the details we've picked out under each of the headings have struck you as obvious – good! When you're writing a commentary you must be prepared to mention the straightforward things (straightforwardly) as well as the more subtle ones. Don't try to be *clever* until you've been *sound*.

Now we can repeat the process for a poem, in order to demonstrate that the ***1-5*** framework can be applied equally well to poetry. (If your experience with poetry up till now has not been good, let's hope it's about to get better. You may have a choice between a poetry and a prose passage, but you can't afford to say at this stage, 'I won't answer the poetry question.' You may have to.)

This section shouldn't take you much more than half an hour; but beware: the poem is not an easy one.

PASSAGE 2

Testing the Reality

I could count to a ragged 20 but no higher.
The flocking birds she taught me numbers by
so crammed church roof and belfry, cross and spire
their final taking off blacked Beeston's[1] sky.

5 There must have been 10,000 there or more.
They picketed piercingly the passing of each day
and shrilly hailed the first new light they saw
and hour after hour their numbers grew
till, on a Sunday morning, they all flew away
10 as suddenly as her 70 years would do.

The day that fledged her with the wings of night
made all her days flock to it, and as one
beyond all sight, all hearing, taste, smell, touch,
they soared away and, soaring, blocked the light
15 of what they steered their course by from her son,
the last soul still unhatched left in the clutch.

Tony Harrison, from *The School of Eloquence* (1978)

[1] Beeston: a city suburb in Northern England

1. Setting

a) Why do you think the poet has chosen this one building in Beeston, a church, as the setting for his poem?

b) What details in the poem take us beyond Beeston and into a wider setting?

c) How are we brought back to the narrower setting (the church) at the end of the poem?

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a) The poem is about life and death, and the church is seen here as a kind of platform (of faith) from which the birds soar into the sky and the poet's mother departs for what may be an after-life.

b) Reference to the cycle of night and day *(lines 6-7)*, and time passing *(lines 8-10*; see also *lines 11-12)*; and the phrase *'the light of what they steered their course by' (lines 14 and 15)* – the sun, or her religious belief. We thus learn that the poem is about 'bigger' things than the departure of a flock of birds, or even the death of a single person.

c) In the final line we are brought back to the poet as both a child and a man, standing alone in the church, which has been a kind of nest for the birds. (The similarity in sound – called assonance – between *'clutch'* and *'church'* emphasises the connection.)

2. Character

a) *1-2* How does the poet suggest the age of the poet when this first event (the flying away of the birds) occurred?

b) *14-16* What do we learn in these lines about the poet's feelings at the death of his mother?

a) He could count only to 20, and it was a *'ragged'* 20 at that, which suggests that he did it very unevenly and hesitantly. That puts him at about – what, four years old?

b) He feels alone, bereft, and condemned to ignorance because he is now shut off from the light of the sun (belief in God? knowledge of what comes after death?)

3. Action

a) Two events are described in the poem. How are they connected?

b) How much time separates the events?

a) The death of his mother has been (in the end) as sudden and complete as he remembers the departure of the birds being when he was a child. He imagines himself as an unhatched egg left behind when the rest of the flock depart for warmer weather.

b) We have to think that it is at least thirty years, if we consider the likely age of the poet's mother when he was a young child and her age when she died. So when she does die he remembers the earlier episode and sees the connection. (The way the poem is written brings the two things together as if they happen in quick succession. You could ask yourself whether that is effective or just confusing.)

4. Style

a) How does the poet convey the idea that the number of birds was very high?

b) *Lines 13* and *16* are connected by their rhyme. How does that emphasise the feelings you identified in your answer to ***2b***?

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a) They were *'flocking' (line 2)*, which in itself indicates large numbers. They *'crammed'* the church roof etc. as if there was no room for any more. Their noise was very loud. There were so many that he could only guess at their numbers *(line 5)*. And still those numbers grew *(line 8)*.

b) The poet remains alone in the *'clutch'* while all the others (his mother, the birds) have gone '*beyond… touch'*: the rhyme emphasises the idea that he has been left behind and feels desolate.

5. Ideas

Try to suggest in a short phrase of your own what the poem is 'about'.

Life and death? Loss through death? They're a bit vague – again we'd have to call them themes, or topics, rather than ideas. A more precise idea would be something like, 'How an early memory can take on greater significance when something happens to us later in life.' That's a long phrase, however!

When we break writing down into its parts it's easy to lose sight of the whole piece. Once you've taken the passage apart (and answered any questions you have been asked) it's always worth noting, in a sentence or two, what's special about it, overall, and what its final effect has been. You can do this as a conclusion to your commentary, even if you haven't been told to round off your responses in such a way. A suitable final note on this poem might be:

At the end of the poem we are left with the touching picture of a little boy watching a flock of birds fly away and, superimposed on that, the image of the same person in his later years remembering the death of his mother – like a photographic double exposure.

We'll ask you to perform a similar exercise with some of the other passages we shall be studying.

We can now move on to Section One, and the first set of paired passages. Each pair focuses on one of the five elements and discusses the concept itself (***Setting*** and so on) in much more detail.

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Section One: Foundation Passages (IB Standard Level)

Part 1: A Focus on Setting

Read the next passage carefully and work through the questions on ***Setting*** first of all.

PASSAGE 3 (A) – this passage is repeated later

Our house is high up on the Yorkshire coast, and close by the sea. We have got beautiful walks all round us, in every direction but one. That one I acknowledge to be a horrid walk. It leads, for a quarter of a mile, through a melancholy plantation of firs, and brings you out between low cliffs on the loneliest and ugliest little bay on all our coast.

5 The sand-hills here run down to the sea, and end in two spits of rock jutting out opposite each other, till you lose sight of them in the water. One is called the North Spit, and one the South. Between the two, shifting backwards and forwards at certain seasons of the year, lies the most horrible quicksand on the shores of Yorkshire. At the turn of the tide, something goes on in the unknown deeps below, which sets the whole face of the quicksand shivering and trembling in a *10* manner most remarkable to see, and which has given to it, among the people in our parts, the name of The Shivering Sand. A great bank, half a mile out, nigh the mouth of the bay, breaks the force of the main ocean coming in from the offing[1]. Winter and summer, when the tide flows over the quicksand, the sea seems to leave the waves behind it on the bank, and rolls its waters in smoothly with a heave, and covers the sand in silence. A lonesome and horrid retreat, I can tell you! No boat ever ventures *15* into this bay. No children from our fishing-village, called Cobb's Hole, ever come here to play. The very birds of the air, as it seems to me, give the Shivering Sand a wide berth. That a young woman, with dozens of nice walks to choose from, and company to go with her, if she only said 'Come!' should prefer this place, and should sit and work[2] or read in it, all alone, when it's her turn out, I grant you, passes belief. It's true, nevertheless, account for it as you may, that this was Rosanna *20* Spearman's favourite walk, except when she went once or twice to Cobb's Hole, to see the only friend she had in our neighbourhood, of whom more anon. It's also true that I was now setting out for this same place, to fetch the girl in to dinner, which brings us round happily to our former point, and starts us fair again on our way to the sands.

I saw no sign of the girl in the plantation. When I got out, through the sand-hills, onto the beach, *25* there she was in her little straw bonnet, and her plain grey cloak that she always wore to hide her deformed shoulder as much as might be – there she was, all alone, looking out on the quicksand and the sea.

She started when I came up with her, and turned her head away from me. Not looking me in the face being another of the proceedings which, as head of the servants, I never allow, on principle, to *30* pass without inquiry – I turned her round my way, and saw that she was crying. My bandanna handkerchief – one of six beauties given me by my lady – was handy in my pocket. I took it out, and I said to Rosanna, 'Come and sit down, my dear, on the slope of the beach along, with me. I'll dry your eyes. I'll dry your eyes for you first, and then I'll make so bold as to ask what you have been crying about.'

35 When you come to my age, you will find sitting down on the slope of a beach a much longer job than you think it now. By the time I was settled, Rosanna had dried her own eyes with a very inferior handkerchief to mine – cheap cambric. She looked very quiet, and very wretched; but she sat down by me like a good girl, when I told her. When you want to comfort a woman by the shortest way, take her on your knee. I thought of this golden rule. But there! Rosanna wasn't Nancy, and that's the truth *40* of it!

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'Now, tell me, my dear,' I said, what are you crying about?'

'About the years that are gone, Mr Betteredge,' says Rosanna quietly. 'My past life still comes back to me sometimes.'

'Come, come, my good girl,' I said, 'your past life is all sponged out. Why can't you forget it?'

45 She took me by one of the lappets[3] of my coat. I am a slovenly old man, and a good deal of my meat and drink gets splashed on my clothes. Sometimes one of the women, and sometimes another, cleans me of my grease. The day before, Rosanna had taken out a spot for me on the lappet of my coat, with a new composition, warranted to remove anything. The grease was gone, but there was a little dull place left on the nap of the cloth where the grease had been. The girl pointed to that place 50 and shook her head.

'The stain is taken off,' she said. 'But the place shows, Mr Betteredge – the place shows!'

Wilkie Collins, The Moonstone (1868)

[1] the offing: an offshore point
[2] work: do needlework or something similar
[3] lappets: lapels

1. Setting

Here's a bit of additional theory to begin with. The ***Setting*** of an event or story can be more than just 'the place where it happens' – the physical location. Here are some other types of setting:

- Historical setting (when it happens…and sometimes including g all the history that has gone before in that place)
- Social setting (how people live in that place and at that time)…
- Political setting (how society at large is organised and controlled)
- Philosophical setting (what ideas about life people in the community, or the writer, have)
- Moral setting (what the people of that time and place think of as 'right' and 'wrong')
- Economic setting (how the characters make a living, and what larger financial forces operate)

In this passage we can identify two or three prominent kinds of setting – physical, and social/economic (it's sometimes difficult to separate those two). Our questions will deal with each in turn...and then we'll look at the relationship between them, because that's very important here.

Physical Setting

The short opening paragraph establishes that this part of the coast, overall, is ……………………… but that the particular bay where this episode is going to take place is………………….

- Beautiful, romantic *('coast…sea…beautiful walks' 1-2)*
- Ugly, forbidding *('but one…That one…horrid…melancholy…low cliffs…ugliest little bay' 1-2)*

The writer thus quickly narrows his focus down to a part of the overall setting which will match the mood of the story he is telling.

List the other characteristics of the bay.

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It is

- a mysterious and treacherous place *('the most horrible quicksand…the unknown deeps…shivering and trembling…remarkable' 8-10)*
- a place where nothing is certain *('you lose sight of them…something goes on…seems to leave the waves behind' 6-13)*
- silent and isolated *('silence…lonesome…No boat…No children…The very birds of the air…berth' 14-16)*

Social and Economic Setting

What job does Rosanna Spearman have?

She is a servant in what seems to be a large household.

What else do we learn about her job or about the place where she does it?

- She works within a set schedule *('Her turn out' 18)* and the household is very structured (the storyteller has been sent to bring her in to dinner, and much is made of the fact that he is *'head of the servants' 29*).
- She therefore enjoys security of a sort; and her workplace seems friendly – the storyteller acts in a fatherly way towards her *(31-34)*, and he in his turn is well looked after by *'the women' (46).*

Can you see any connections between the two settings (physical and social)?

Probably not. It's the *contrast* between them which is in fact important:

The writer establishes a contradiction in the two settings and uses it to point up the puzzle of Rosanna's past: why does she frequently forsake the friendly place for the inhospitable one? Because, it seems, the gloomy and dangerous shoreline reminds her of, and allows her to dwell on, the previous unhappy events of her life.

That can lead us to another conclusion: that there are parallels between Rosanna's character and the bay as it is described. (Where a person chooses to spend his or her time can tell us something about them; so the physical setting of the piece is one key to an understanding of Rosanna and her situation.)

Can you list the parallels?

Bay	Rosanna
o *'melancholy' (3)* o undistinguished - *'low cliffs' (3)* o *'loneliest' (4)* o *'ugliest' (4)* o a source of mystery *–' unknown deeps' (19)*	o wears a plain grey cloak and mopes o undistinguished *– 'little straw bonnet' (25)* o *'all alone'* (twice *– 18,26*) o Rosanna is deformed o a source of mystery – her present behaviour *('account for it as you may', 19)* and her past

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You will have noticed just how much there is to say about ***Setting*** in this passage, and how it ties in with other things of interest (Rosanna's character). The setting of a story isn't just a flat backcloth on a stage, which covers the wall behind the actors and gives the audience something to look at when nothing much is happening. Characters interact with the setting; the setting can influence the action; the way the setting is described can be an important feature of the style; and a writer's ideas may centre more around the location of his story than around anything else.

Sometimes, also, a writer will give us a sense of a wider context, a more universal setting, one which may include us and from which he can draw down our attention to the events in hand. That's an important way in which a writer leads us into his story. Wilkie Collins, for instance, mentions the broad geography of *'the Yorkshire coast' (1)* and *'the shores of Yorkshire' (8)*. Can you find any other references in the passage to this 'wider context' (either physical or social) in which normal life goes on?

'*The people in our parts…our fishing village called Cobb's Hole…our neighbourhood…golden rule…a new composition, warranted to remove anything'.*

Guiding Questions

IB **Standard Level** assessment of students' ability to write about previously unseen passage of literature is now called 'Guided Literary Analysis', in acknowledgement of the fact that the passages selected for the Paper 1 written exam have two guiding questions attached to them. This means that you won't be simply let loose to write about anything which catches your eye. However, you should note the following from the Subject Guide for **Standard Level**:

> *'Students are required to address both questions in their answer. However, it is anticipated that students may also explore other relevant aspects beyond the guiding questions in order to achieve the higher marks.'*

That's why we are suggesting that you look at all aspects (within the SCASI structure) of a piece of writing as you work towards the exam.

Assessment within other examination courses also makes use of guiding questions…although some examiners there, too, will invite you to write about whatever else that interests you, when you've answered the questions.

Usually a guiding question will direct your attention to one of the principal features of the passage. In this case, for instance, one of the questions might well be:

> *What contribution does the detailed description of the story's setting make to our understanding of Rosanna's character and situation?*

You could answer that!

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If there are no guiding questions, of course, then you'll be free to select from all of the things you notice about a passage in order to show the examiner that you can read perceptively and make sound judgements about how a piece of writing works.

In either case you need lots of practice in spotting significant detail. Reading a passage in a systematic way (like the one we're suggesting) will help you do that. So here are some brief notes about the remaining four aspects of the passage from *The Moonstone* before we move on to consider how setting can work in a poem.

Character

According to Mr Betteredge, Rosanna Spearman could easily have had company on her walks, if she had so chosen, and this suggests that she has friends. Something else he says, however, contradicts that notion. What is it?

That she has only one friend in the neighbourhood *(lines 20-21)*. So the people she works with are not really close to her, it seems. This emphasises her isolation and adds to our interest in the one friend *'of whom more anon'*.

Action

Another thing we noted in our discussion, in Section One, of the passage's setting was the narrowing of focus on place at the beginning: the storyteller moves from the broad to the particular *('Yorkshire coast…sea… walks…That one')*. Can you find another example of narrowing of focus, this time on something other than place?

The writer narrows down the temporal (time) setting: he begins with an account of what is always the case (features of the landscape), moves to what is usually the case (Rosanna's habit of coming here alone) and then describes this single occasion.

Style

What, in the opening paragraph, makes the description intimate (personal)?

The writer's use of the first and second person (*'our…we …you'*).

Ideas

Life, like nature, can be both……………… and…………………….

Beautiful and ugly.

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There's a lot more to say about this passage of course. Part of the reason for that is that the passage is quite long, and quite closely textured (i.e. there's a lot of significant detail in it).

Well…that in turn is partly because it's an **IB Higher Level**, not a **Standard Level**, passage.

We aren't playing tricks on you. This piece of writing happens to be a particularly good illustration of how important ***Setting*** can be, and we chose it for that reason. It should also, however, reassure you that there's nothing to be afraid of in **Higher Level** passages, nor indeed in passages written a long time ago.

Because there's so much to note in the extract, we've discussed it again in **Section Two, Advanced Passages** (page 98).

Don't Lose Sight of the Wood

Even if you're tied down to narrow guiding questions, you need to stand back at some point and ask some rather larger ones about the passage. The examiner may in fact require you to do just that, may invite you for instance to 'Show how the writer works to control the reader's response.'

That will mean you have to gain some sense of what the writer is trying to do (within what may be his overall purpose in the whole book, e.g. 'tell a good story'). Another way of broadening your view would be to identify the passage's essential features – the things that make it special, or different from other pieces of writing, or particularly powerful so that it has affected you in some way. (You may well be asked to explain the impact the passage has had on you as a reader.)

So what has been really special about the pieces of writing we've looked at so far?

Maiden Voyage (page 4): The drama and intensity of the boy's experience, conveyed mainly through the passage's descriptive detail, as his feelings move from resentment through rebelliousness to fascination then horror and panic.

Testing the Reality (page 7): How by means of an extended comparison between two apparently different things, one of them described in strongly visual terms, the poet conveys the feeling of being 'left behind' when someone we love dies.

The Moonstone (page 10): How the writer communicates, through a perceptive and sympathetic narrator, a young woman's sense of being trapped in sorrow and guilt about something she has done earlier in her life.

You may have different ideas about the impact the passages have had on you. That's well and good.

Now it's time to look at another poem, in order to reinforce and develop some of the things we've said about ***Setting***.

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PASSAGE 4

My Father's Garden

On his way to the open hearth where white-hot steel
Boiled against the furnace walls in wait for his lance
To pierce the fireclay and set loose demons
And dragons in molten tons, blazing
5 Down to the huge satanic cauldrons,
Each day he would pass the scrapyard, his kind of garden.

In rusty rockeries of stoves and brake drums,
In grottoes of sewing machines and refrigerators,
He would pick flowers for us: small gears and cogwheels
10 With teeth like petals, with holes for anthers,
Long stalks of lead to be poured into tin soldiers,
Ball bearings as big as grapes to knock them down.

He was called a melter. He tried to keep his brain
From melting in those tiger-mouthed mills
15 Where the same steel reappeared over and over
To be reborn in the fire as something better
Or worse: cannons or cars, needles or girders,
Flagpoles, swords, or plowshares.

But it melted. His classical learning ran
20 Down and away from him, not burning bright.
His fingers culled a few cold scraps of Latin
And Greek, magna sine laude[1], for crosswords
And brought home lumps of tin and sewer grills
As if they were his ripe prize vegetables.

David Wagoner, *Landfall* (1991)

[1] magnum sine laude: without great praise – the opposite of 'magna cum laude' meaning 'with great praise', a term used to signify high academic honours.

1. Setting:

This time, instead of answering a set of questions:

1. Read the poem as many times as you need to in order to grasp its overall sense as well as the meaning of most of the individual lines, words and phrases.

2. Underline or highlight all the lines, words and phrases that suggest something about the poem's setting. You'll find it's a double setting, in fact – the place where the poet's father worked, and the scrapyard he stopped at on his way there each day. You may want to use different colours for the two different places.

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When you've noted those details of the setting for yourself, you'll be in a position to answer more general questions like the following:

a) What differences do you notice between the two places the poem describes?

b) What effect does each place have on the poet's father?

You'll find that if you answer both questions well you are in fact saying, indirectly, useful things about several of the poem's other important features – writing about the kind of man the poet's father is, explaining what happens in the poem, noting aspects of its style and even moving towards a conclusion as to what it is about. That's how fundamental setting can be, even in a poem.

a)

His father's place of work:

- probably a steel mill, or foundry
- holds powerful forces waiting to break free
- a hellish place *('demons', 'satanic')*
- dangerous (*'dragons'*, *'tyger'* – do you have any idea why it's spelt like that? *'Burning bright'* in *line 20* is a clue, if you know the poem by William Blake).
- a place of both destruction and creation (*lines 15-18*)

The scrapyard:

- a romantic and 'natural' place *('rockeries', 'grottoes', 'flowers', ' stalks', 'grapes', 'vegetables')* – made so by time and the elements *('rusty')*
- a place where the products of the foundry eventually end up *('stoves', 'brake drums', 'sewing machines', 'refrigerators', 'gears', 'cogwheels', 'ball bearings', 'sewer grills')*

b)

The place of work: His mind was harmed by the glare, the heat, the repetitive tasks (*'over and over'*) and the meaninglessness of it all *('reborn in the fire as something better or worse').*

The scrapyard: A kind of garden for him, where he stopped each day to find presents for his children. It was a place where he could use his imagination to see the beauty and the usefulness of discarded objects. It acted as an antidote to the horror of his work and was a source of pride – the things he brought home were like his *'prize vegetables'*.

We may, when we come to ***Ideas***, decide that this poem is about the ugliness of industrialisation; the power of the creative instinct; how beauty can be found in unlikely places; or the pathos of Man's struggle to retain some dignity in the harsh world he has created.

Whatever you decide the central idea of the poem is, you'll probably find that it's firmly based in the two places described. Once again, then, setting can be crucial to a piece of writing.

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Here are some questions and notes on the other aspects of the poem, to keep us in touch with the ***SCASI*** structure**.**

2. Character

What details in the poem suggest that the poet feels the following towards, or about, his father:

a) Admiration
b) Gratitude
c) Sorrow?

a) His father had power over the molten steel (it had to *'wait for his lance'*). He was imaginative and generous, and cared for his children. He struggled to keep his mind alive and to use what little education he had.
b) He gave his children not only ingenious presents but also an appreciation of the beauty to be found in unexpected places and things.
c) In the end he failed to achieve anything of note and may have died (if he *has* died) a rather sad death.

3. Action

Has the poet's father died? Lost his mind? Does it matter that we don't know for certain?

What is important is that the poet has lost him in one way or the other. The poem therefore is both a tribute to him and a lament at his passing (even if it's just passing into madness or senility). The quality and power of the feeling are more significant than its precise cause.

4. Style

Select one comparison from the poem and discuss its meaning and effect. Here's an example:

'Lumps of tin and sewer grills' like *'ripe prize vegetables'*

The things the poet's father brought home were different shapes and sizes, even colours, but they were all excellent in their own way (*'prize'*); they had all been brought home at just the right time (*'ripe'*); and all helped feed the children's imagination. The effect of the comparison is to show how proud the poet's father was of his gifts and to reveal more of what the poet feels towards *him* (admiration etc – or pity, perhaps?)

5. Ideas

Look back at the ideas of the poem as we listed them at the end of the section on ***Setting*** (page 17). Which of those ideas most closely matches your own understanding of what the poem is about? (There's no single right answer!)

In addition, think about these tricky questions:

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- Is there some irony in the fact that the objects the father brings home from the scrapyard are just the sort of things he has helped create (so unsatisfyingly) in the mill?

- Cannons and swords are among the things produced with steel from the mill. The poet when he was a boy played with tin soldiers made with lead from the scrapyard and used *'ball bearings as big as grapes to knock them down'*. What's the significance of that war imagery?

Your answers to those two questions may cause you to think again about what the poem is about – sorry to complicate things!

Don't Lose Sight of the Wood

What's special about this poem?

The poet's admiration for the way his father fought to keep his imagination and his mind (and his love for his children) alive despite the harrowing nature of his job – a struggle symbolised by the vividly contrasted steel mill and scrapyard.

A Note on the Side: Comparing two pieces of writing

You're likely to have noticed some similarities between this poem and *Testing the Reality* (page 7). If the examination you are preparing for (AP, for example, and some A Level exams) will require you to compare two pieces of writing on similar subjects, you could use these two poems as practice. If you think you will need help with that – it's quite a complex business – wait until we deal with some of the techniques in Section Four. (IB Literature students can ignore all of that.)

You'll find further ideas about, and practice on, ***Setting*** in **Section One Part 6: Further Foundation Passages** (page 57).

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Part 2: A Focus on Character

PASSAGE 5

'I don't think I will sign them.'

'Why not sign them? You can't really suppose that the property is your own. You could not even get it if you did think so.'

'I don't know how that may be; but I had rather not sign them. If I am to be married, I ought not
5 to sign anything except what he tells me.'

'He has no authority over you yet. I have authority over you. Marie, do not give more trouble. I am very much pressed for time. Let me call in Mr Croll.'

'No, papa,' she said.

Then came across his brow that look which had probably first induced Marie to declare that she
10 would endure to be 'cut to pieces', rather than to yield in this or that direction. The lower jaw squared itself, and the teeth became set, and the nostrils of his nose became extended, – and Marie began to prepare herself to be 'cut to pieces'. But he reminded himself that there was another game which he had proposed to play before he resorted to anger and violence. He would tell her how much depended on her compliance. Therefore he relaxed the frown, – as well as he
15 knew how, and softened his face towards her, and turned again to his work. 'I am sure, Marie, that you will not refuse to do this when I explain to you its importance to me. I must have that property for use in the city[1] tomorrow, or – I shall be ruined.' The statement was very short, but the manner in which he made it was not without effect.

'Oh!' shrieked his wife.

20 'It is true. These harpies have so beset me about the election that they have lowered the price of every stock in which I am concerned, and have brought the Mexican Railway so low that they cannot be sold at all. I don't like bringing my troubles home from the city; but on this occasion I cannot help it. The sum locked up here is very large, and I am compelled to use it. In point of fact it is necessary to save us from destruction.' This he said, very slowly and with the utmost
25 solemnity.

'But you told me just now you wanted it because I was going to be married,' rejoined Marie.

A liar has many points to his favour, – but he has this against him, that unless he devote more time to the management of his lies than life will generally allow, he cannot make them tally. Melmotte was thrown back for a moment, and almost felt that the time for violence had come.
30 He longed to be at her that he might shake the wickedness, and the folly, and the ingratitude out of her. But he once more condescended to argue and to explain. 'I think you misunderstood me, Marie. I meant you to understand that settlements must be made, and that of course I must get my own property back into my own hands before anything of that kind can be done. I tell you once more, my dear, that if you do not do as I bid you, so that I may use that property the first
35 thing tomorrow, we are all ruined. Everything will be gone.'

'This can't be gone,' said Marie, nodding her head at the papers.

'Marie, – do you wish to see me disgraced and ruined? I have done a great deal for you.'

'You turned away the only person I ever cared for,' said Marie.

'Marie, how can you be so wicked? Do as your papa bids you,' said Madame Melmotte.

40 'No!' said Melmotte. 'She does not care who is ruined, because we saved her from that reprobate.'

'She will sign them now,' said Madame Melmotte.

'No; – I will not sign them,' said Marie. 'If I am to be married to Lord Nidderdale as you all say, I am sure I ought to sign nothing without telling him. And if the property was once made to
45 be mine, I don't think I ought to give it up again because papa says that he is going to be ruined. I think that's a reason for not giving it up again.' Anthony Trollope, *The Way We Live Now, 1875*

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You might say that this passage is 'all about' character. The four guiding questions in the exam in which it was used all had to do with the people as individuals, the relationships among them, and the techniques used by the writer in presenting them.

Let's do something simple first.

Use a different coloured pen or highlighter for each of the three characters. Read the passage once more just to clarify what happens in it, then go through it again and underline or highlight any words, phrases or sentences which tell us something interesting about one of the three people in the extract; then do the same for each of the other two. (You may prefer to deal with all three characters at one reading.)

As you work through the passage, add brief notes in the margin to remind yourself of what it was you found interesting.

Here's the passage again, with underlining but no margin notes (try not to look at this until you've produced your own version). If we have underlined things that you overlooked, see if you can work out what they tell us.

Key: Marie Melmotte Madame Melmotte

(Do you see anything significant in the underline styles and colours we've chosen?)

'I don't think I will sign them.'
'Why not sign them? You can't really suppose that the property is your own. You could not even get it if you did think so.'
'I don't know how that may be; but I had rather not sign them. If I am to be married, I ought not
5 to sign anything except what he tells me.'
'He has no authority over you yet. I have authority over you. Marie, do not give more trouble. I am very much pressed for time. Let me call in Mr Croll.'
'No, papa,' she said.
Then came across his brow that look which had probably first induced Marie to declare that she
10 would endure to be 'cut to pieces', rather than to yield in this or that direction. The lower jaw squared itself, and the teeth became set, and the nostrils of his nose became extended, – and Marie began to prepare herself to be 'cut to pieces'. But he reminded himself that there was another game which he had proposed to play before he resorted to anger and violence. He would tell her how much depended on her compliance. Therefore he relaxed the frown, – as well as he
15 knew how, and softened his face towards her, and turned again to his work. 'I am sure, Marie, that you will not refuse to do this when I explain to you its importance to me. I must have that property for use in the city tomorrow, or – I shall be ruined.' The statement was very short, but the manner in which he made it was not without effect.
'Oh!' shrieked his wife.
20 'It is true. These harpies have so beset me about the election that they have lowered the price of every stock in which I am concerned, and have brought the Mexican Railway so low that they cannot be sold at all. I don't like bringing my troubles home from the city; but on this occasion I cannot help it. The sum locked up here is very large, and I am compelled to use it. In point of fact it is necessary to save us from destruction.' This he said, very slowly and with the utmost
25 solemnity.
'But you told me just now you wanted it because I was going to be married,' rejoined Marie.

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A liar has many points to his favour, – but he has this against him, that unless he devote more time to the management of his lies than life will generally allow, he cannot make them tally. Melmotte was thrown back for a moment, and almost felt that the time for violence had come.
30 He longed to be at her that he might shake the wickedness, and the folly, and the ingratitude out of her. But he once more condescended to argue and to explain. 'I think you misunderstood me, Marie. I meant you to understand that settlements must be made, and that of course I must get my own property back into my own hands before anything of that kind can be done. I tell you once more, my dear, that if you do not do as I bid you, so that I may use that property the first
35 thing tomorrow, we are all ruined. Everything will be gone.'

'This can't be gone,' said Marie, nodding her head at the papers.

'Marie, – do you wish to see me disgraced and ruined? I have done a great deal for you.'

'You turned away the only person I ever cared for,' said Marie.

'Marie, how can you be so wicked? Do as your papa bids you,' said Madame Melmotte.

40 'No!' said Melmotte. 'She does not care who is ruined, because we saved her from that reprobate.'

'She will sign them now,' said Madame Melmotte.

'No; – I will not sign them,' said Marie. 'If I am to be married to Lord Nidderdale as you all say, I am sure I ought to sign nothing without telling him. And if the property was once made to
45 be mine, I don't think I ought to give it up again because papa says that he is going to be ruined. I think that's a reason for not giving it up again.'

Notes on the underline style – not to be taken too seriously; but diagrams, colours and sketches can help you identify the interesting features in a piece of writing, particularly if you're a visual learner:

Marie: a straight, sharp, single blue line, representing her incisiveness
Melmotte: a loud, emphatic, double red line – his aggressiveness
Madame Melmotte: a broken, uncertain, slightly dotty line in an indistinct colour.

On the next page there's a representation of what your notes might look like, if you managed to say something about all of the underlined items.

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Cautious	'I don't think I will sign them.'	
	'Why not sign them? You can't really suppose that the property is your own. You could not even get it if you did think so.'	*Sarcastic*
Resentful	'I don't know how that may be; but I had rather not sign them. If I am to be married, I ought not to sign anything except what he tells me.'	
	'He has no authority over you yet. I have authority over you. Marie, do not give more trouble. I am very much pressed for time. Let me call in Mr Croll.'	*Domineering*
Defiant	'No, papa,' she said.	
Stubborn *Courageous*	Then came across his brow that look which had probably first induced Marie to declare that she would endure to be 'cut to pieces', rather than to yield in this or that direction. The lower jaw squared itself, and the teeth became set, and the nostrils of his nose became extended, – and Marie began to prepare herself to be 'cut to pieces'. But he reminded himself that there was another game which he had proposed to play before he resorted to anger and violence. He would tell her how much depended on her compliance. Therefore he relaxed the frown, – as well as he knew how, and softened his face towards her, and turned again to his work. 'I am sure, Marie, that you will not refuse to do this when I explain to you its importance to me. I must have that property for use in the city tomorrow, or – I shall be ruined.' The statement was very short, but the manner in which he made it was not without effect.	*Aggressive* *Scheming* *Dangerous* *Deceitful* *Dedicated to this task* *Self-dramatising*
Hysterical, slightly ridiculous	'Oh!' shrieked his wife.	
	'It is true. These harpies have so beset me about the election that they have lowered the price of every stock in which I am concerned, and have brought the Mexican Railway so low that they cannot be sold at all. I don't like bringing my troubles home from the city; but on this occasion I cannot help it. The sum locked up here is very large, and I am compelled to use it. In point of fact it is necessary to save us from destruction.' This he said, very slowly and with the utmost solemnity.	*'Protective'* *Manipulative*
Sharp, argumentative	'But you told me just now you wanted it because I was going to be married,' rejoined Marie.	
	A liar has many points to his favour, – but he has this against him, that unless he devote more time to the management of his lies than life will generally allow, he cannot make them tally. Melmotte was thrown back for a moment, and almost felt that the time for violence had come. He longed to be at her that he might shake the wickedness, and the folly, and the ingratitude out of her. But he once more condescended to argue and to explain. 'I think you misunderstood me, Marie. I meant you to understand that settlements must be made, and that of course I must get my own property back into my own hands before anything of that kind can be done. I tell you once more, my dear, that if you do not do as I bid you, so that I may use that property the first thing tomorrow, we are all ruined. Everything will be gone.'	*Dishonest* *Violent* *Patronising*
Incisive	'This can't be gone,' said Marie, nodding her head at the papers.	
	'Marie, – do you wish to see me disgraced and ruined? I have done a great deal for you.'	*Manipulative*
Resentful	'You turned away the only person I ever cared for,' said Marie.	
Subservient	'Marie, how can you be so wicked? Do as your papa bids you,' said Madame Melmotte.	
	'No!' said Melmotte. 'She does not care who is ruined, because we saved her from that reprobate.'	
Unrealistic	'She will sign them now,' said Madame Melmotte.	
Defiant/ Resentful *Logical*	'No; – I will not sign them,' said Marie. 'If I am to be married to Lord Nidderdale as you all say, I am sure I ought to sign nothing without telling him. And if the property was once made to be mine, I don't think I ought to give it up again because papa says that he is going to be ruined. I think that's a reason for not giving it up again.'	

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There's no reason why you shouldn't set out your notes in the exam in exactly the same way. If you are working from guiding questions you can colour-code the notes in response to each question, then write your answers from those coded notes.

Other Things to Note about Characters

Go beyond what kind of people they are. If you simply write about them as if they're 'real' then yes, you're paying the writer a compliment – his characters have convinced you. But the examiner will want to see that you can distinguish between literature and life, and write about characters as the creations of someone's imagination.

One was of doing so is to consider the techniques the writer has used to bring his characters alive for us. In the Anthony Trollope passage look at the use of dialogue (what the characters say and their style of speech). Here are some interesting phrases from that dialogue in addition to those we've already looked at:

line 1	*'I don't think'*
4	*'I had rather not'*
4	*'I am to be married'*
20	*'harpies'* (predatory monsters in Greek mythology)
23	*'compelled'*
26	*'But'*
33	*'my own…my own'*

Try to work out how each phrase adds just a little bit more to our understanding of the character who speaks it, and perhaps of his or her attitude towards another character. Then find some further examples from *line 34* onwards.

There's also the *way* they speak (rather than the content or style of what they say), as noted by the writer:

line 9	*'declare'*
18	*'The manner in which he made it'*
19	*'shrieked'*

Find one example of your own in *lines 24-25* and one in *line 26*.

Then there are the gestures and the way the characters move:

lines 10-11	*'the lower jaw squared itself'* etc

There's another example in *line 36…*

Sometimes the writer himself will take a more direct hand and say something blunt about one of his characters. If he does that we usually aren't meant to question it. You should be able to find a very good example in *line 27*.

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There are other clues about characters from…

- what they say:
  - *34* *'my dear'* – false endearment
  - *39* *'wicked'* – Mrs M's moral outrage: her way of life (as established by Melmotte) is threatened.
  - *45-46* *'I don't think…I think'* – she is developing a clear independence of mind.
  - *45* *'papa says'* – she doubts his account of things.
- how they say it:
  - *24-25* *'very slowly and with the utmost solemnity'* – he's trying to frighten her.
  - *26* *'rejoined'* – as if Marie is bouncing back at her father
- their movements:
  - *36* *'nodding her head at the papers'* – she is presenting her evidence, almost triumphantly.
- the writer's declaration:
  - *27* *'A liar'*

The list of writers' methods could continue: what about the characters' appearance? Their past history? The things other people say about them? (There's not much sign of any of those in this passage, however.)

It all adds up! And it has to add up in another sense: the characters must be consistent if we are to believe in them (unless of course inconsistency is one of their traits). That's much more important in a whole novel or play, naturally.

The Question of Relationships

None of the characters in this extract is particularly unusual or interesting in himself or herself (we ended up saying some fairly ordinary things about them). What may have held our attention, though, is their interaction. We can even see how each one, as a person, has been affected by how the others are, as people. Melmotte is a bully because his wife and the other people around him have allowed him to bully them. Madame Melmotte is compliant because she's afraid of Melmotte's anger, and she believes Marie will sign the papers because defying Melmotte is unthinkable; Marie is only stubborn because Melmotte is domineering. More importantly, we see that these relationships are going to change. Marie now has power over Melmotte for the first time; and she has a score to settle.

So be prepared in your exam for questions about how the characters in a passage respond to each other; and if you're writing a 'free' commentary pay attention to that anyway, and to the way the writer directs our attention to those interplays.

This applies to poetry as well as prose. Think about the relationship between the poet and his mother in *Testing the Reality* and the poet and his father in *My Father's Garden*. (There were questions about both of those relationships in the exams from which the poems were taken.)

That finishes our work on *The Way We Live Now*. We could look in more detail at the ***Setting***, ***Action*** etc, of the passage, but we've touched on them all as we've considered the characters, and you've probably had enough for the moment, so:

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Before we move on to look at a poem centred around a character, take a moment to think back to the last passage and decide what is most memorable about it. You'll probably choose Marie's defiance of her oppressive father (with no help at all from her mother). As students of literature rather than life, however, you need to be aware of the subtle techniques by which Trollope brings that defiance to the fore so that we do remember it above all else.

The next poem is about a single person (it's not from a past IB paper; a commentary on the IB 'equivalent' poem can be found in the 'Analysis of further passages' section, on page 62).

PASSAGE 6

Walter Llywarch

I am, as you know, Walter Llywarch,
Born in Wales of approved parents,
Well goitred[1], round in the bum;
Sure prey of the slow virus
5 Bred in quarries of grey rain.

Born in autumn at the right time
For hearing stories from the cracked lips
Of old folk dreaming of summer,
I piled them on to the bare hearth
10 Of my own fancy to make a blaze
To warm myself, but achieved only
The smoke's acid that brings the smart
Of false tears into the eyes.

Months of fog, months of drizzle:
15 Thought wrapped in the grey cocoon
Of race, of place, awaiting the sun's
Coming; but when the sun came
Striking the hills with a hot hand,
Wings were spread only to fly
20 Round and round in a cramped cage,
Or beat in vain at the sky's window.

School in the week; on Sunday chapel:
Tales of a land fairer than this
Were not so tall, for others had proved it
25 Without the grave's passport; they sent
Its fruit home for ourselves to taste…

Walter Llywarch! The words were the name
On a lost letter that never came
For one who waited in the long queue
30 Of life that wound through a Welsh valley.
I took instead, as others had done

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Before, a wife from the back pew[2]
In chapel, rather to share the rain
Of winter evenings than to intrude
35 On her pale body. And yet we lay
For warmth together and laughed to hear
Each new child's cry of despair.

R S Thomas

[1]goitred: suffering from a swelling on the neck; [2]pew: long wooden bench in a church

Character

Begin by noting what we gather from the poem about Walter Llywarch. Use the following headings:

- Age
- Parentage
- Appearance
- Early hopes
- Job
- Marriage
- Later life and fatherhood

These are mundane matters, and it's not necessary for you to write the details down; but in researching them you'll become more confident that you understand the poem (good advice is to start with the simple things).

- Age: Middle?
- Parentage: Respectable – his parents were *'approved'* in the community.
- Appearance: Unhealthy, partly as a result of the conditions of his working life
- Early hopes: Of escape to a better existence
- Job: Quarryman?
- Marriage: To a woman equally trapped
- Later life: Disillusioned, defensive; had several children

But what does 'mundane' mean? Ordinary, everyday, dull? Yes, and that's what Walter's life has seemed to him; so the very fact that the poem concerns itself largely with the plain details of his existence adds to our sense that he is a man trapped in sombreness.

Why, then, write a poem about a man who lives such an unexceptional life?

There are two possible answers. One is that even ordinary men deserve our attention. The other is that Walter isn't so ordinary after all.

Let's begin with the first, the larger, idea.

Here's a typical poetry exam question:

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'Poets explore the significance of ordinary things in extraordinary ways.'

Analyse two or three poems you know well in order to demonstrate the 'extraordinary ways' in which poets explore the significance of ordinary things.

For 'ordinary things' read 'ordinary people', and you have an essay question which you could use *Walter Llywarch* to answer. Walter may be ordinary; but he matters; and the fact that he matters is brought home to us by extraordinary (poetic) means.

The very existence of the poem is in itself a principal 'means': the fact that R S Thomas gave whatever he gave to produce this fine piece of writing is sure indication that Walter Llywarch mattered to him; and if to him, why not to us?

Other methods will emerge as we discuss the poem in more detail.

So let's move on to the second suggestion, that Walter isn't so ordinary after all. You wouldn't be surprised if one of the examiner's guiding questions was, simply, *'What do we learn about Walter Llywarch from the poem?'* Let's build on the basic knowledge we gathered in our earlier reading.

Imagine yourself having picked up a handful of pebbles on the seashore (the facts we listed in the box above, or something like them). They're sand-dusted and salt-stained and you can't see them altogether clearly, so you take them down to the sea and wash them off. (Keep your eyes open, as you walk down and back up the beach, for other, smaller pebbles…) Details, patterns, colours and other possibilities emerge. This one has a grain to it; that one has a hole through it; another isn't a pebble at all but a worn-down piece of shell.

Having looked at the poem, in other words, you must now look at it more closely, take a magnifying glass to it if you like – and be prepared to change your mind about what's there.

Here are some further questions, about Walter and how he is presented, to help you do that.

Verse One:

- *'I am'*: The poem from its very opening is a dec……….
- *'As you know'*: How do we know?
- *'Born in Wales'*: Why give early prominence to the fact?
- *'Well goitred'*: What does the form of the verb *'goitred'* suggest? (The poet could have written 'with large goitres'.)
- *'Round in the bum'*: What's the tone of that phrase?
- *'Sure prey of the slow virus'*: *Is* he suggesting that his lack of health is a result of his surroundings, has been caused by pollution or something similar?
- *'Prey'* in any case reinforces the idea that he is a …………?

- *'I am'*: The poem is a declaration – by Walter, of his existence, however unsatisfying. In effect he presents himself (defiantly? Self-pityingly?)
- *'As you know'*: We are included as members of the same community who *'approved'* his parents. Walter addresses us directly and expects us to know him. R S Thomas thus draws us into the poem and establishes a relationship between us and his subject.

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- *'Born in Wales'*: He is a product of the place where he was born (and about which we learn much as the poem progresses).
- *'Well goitred'*: That this is something that has been *done* to him (by his environment).
- *'Round in the bum'*: Grimly light-hearted? (A man making a jest of his physical shortcomings, as best he can.)
- *'Sure prey of the slow virus'*: Probably; but has the virus attacked his spirit also?
- Victim.

Verse Two:

- *'The bare hearth of my own fancy'*: Walter's early imagination was………………..
- *'Achieved only the smoke's acid'*: He failed to………………..
- *'Acid'* suggests that his failure was…………
- *'False tears'*: Why false?

- *'The bare hearth of my own fancy'*: His imagination was starved, and he had to make do with other people's dreams and stories, and the promises of religion.
- *'Achieved only the smoke's acid'*: He failed to bring the stories alive, even in his imagination.
- *'Acid'*: His failure was corrosive, and ate into his spirit.
- *'False tears'*: Because they were caused by smoke not sorrow; because the stories themselves were false, could not be turned into reality.

Verse Three:

- *'Cocoon…wings'*: Explain the image.

- *'Cocoon…wings'*: Walter's young thoughts were like a pupa enclosed in a restrictive chrysalis; and when he grew (when 'summer' came) and they emerged in butterfly form, he found there was nowhere they could fly to. There was no escape from the routine (school, chapel) of his life.

Verse Four:

- How does Walter know that the old folks' stories, and the ones he hears later in school and at the chapel, are not *'tall'*, i.e. that the place *'fairer than this'* they tell of does really exist?

- People who had travelled there sent back evidence *('fruit')*. The idea of 'a better life' includes that of heaven on earth, which can be reached *'without the grave's passport'*.

Verse Five:

- *'Walter Llywarch!'*: What feeling does the exclamation mark express?
- Is there any criticism implied in the picture of Walter waiting for a letter which would change his life?
- *'The long queue /Of life'*: The image suggests that Walter was………………
- Walter married to avoid…………
- But the marriage was not an empty one: it produced………………..

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- *'Walter Llywarch!'*: Despair? Exasperation? Defiance? Wonderment that so little can have come of his life? All of those?
- We might be tempted to say, 'He should have got on his bike,' in other words taken his future in his own hands. But the whole point of the poem is that Walter *had* no bike, no means of taking an initiative. The tragedy of his life is not that he *didn't* but that he *couldn't*.
- *'The long queue /Of life'*: He was only one of many who had similar dreams; he was submissive, willing to wait his turn for an opportunity which never came.
- Loneliness.
- Some comfort *('we lay /For warmth together')*; some laughter; children…but…

Let's go back to our second question now, and answer it honestly. We have pulled out a lot of detail from the poem, but does any of it make Walter seem exceptional? Perhaps we should change our minds and describe him as ordinary after all; but also as special – *because* he is so ordinary. Is that too much of a paradox?

Don't forget the other people: There are other characters in the poem. List them and make notes on how they add to the poem's meaning or effect.

- Walter's parents: *'Approved'* means, principally, thought well of, and gives us a picture of a close-knit community which watches itself and its members closely. The word also carries the idea of 'tried and tested' ('proved'), however: Walter's parents have survived, however harsh their lives, and the same is expected of him.

- *'Old folk dreaming of summer'*: A glimpse of what Walter will one day become. (Why are their lips described as *'cracked'*?)

- His wife: Why *'from the back pew /In chapel'*? Why does the poet note that her body is *'pale'*? What does his use of the word *'intrude'* suggest about their life together?

Finally, ask yourself what R S Thomas wants us to feel about Walter; and whether we do feel that.

What we've done in our analysis, overall, is retell the story of Walter's whole life, in as much detail as we can, paraphrasing, amplifying and speculating. But in doing that we've lost much of the power of the poem, and it would be a good idea at this point to go back and read it through again, as a poem instead of a test. Try reading it *aloud*.

Now some quick thoughts and questions about the other features of the poem.

1. Setting

- What you'll recall most about the place where Walter lived will be, perhaps, the generally miserable weather (you can list the details if you like). It helps to both symbolise and explain his whole demeanour. Take a second look at one particular phrase, *'Bred in quarries of grey rain'*. We took it to suggest that Walter might work in a quarry. Can you see any other meaning for it?

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- Then there's the sun. It should be an antidote to the greyness of the rest of the year. But find a single word indicating that when it comes it comes as an attack rather than as relief.

3. Action

- The story is best classified as a brief poetic au…………………

4. Style

- The poem's style is that of a lament, an outcry against the death of someone or in this case of someone's hopes. What's the best illustration (of sad-sounding language) from the first verse?

5. Ideas

- Is there horror in the poem's final two lines?

Setting

- Maybe that life for the whole community had to be carved out of what amounted to a looming hillside of rain – all that their climate offered.
- *'Striking'*

Action

- Autobiography

Style

- The long echoes of *'Sure prey of the slow virus /Bred in quarries of grey rain.'*

Ideas

- Perhaps, in the cruelty of the parents' laughter at the thought that their children will be trapped as they were; but perhaps not if we can see the laughter as warm, as an *inclusion* of the children in the life they have all been given. It's the grim and brave humour of *'round in the bum'* once more.

You'll find further ideas about, and practice on, ***Character*** in **Section One Part 6: Further Foundation Passages** (page 57).

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Part 3: A Focus on Action

PASSAGE 7

Since that terrible night six months ago, Ishvar had given up their lodging in the rooming house, at Ashraf's insistence. There was plenty of space in the house, he claimed, now that his daughters had all married and left. He partitioned the room over the shop – one side for [his wife] Mumtaz and himself, the other for Ishvar and
5 his nephew [Omprakash].

They heard Omprakash moving around upstairs, getting ready for bed. Mumtaz sat at the back of the house, praying. 'This revenge talk is okay if it remains talk,' said Ishvar. 'But what if he goes back to the village, does something foolish.'

They fretted and agonised for hours over the boy's future, then ascended the stairs
10 to retire for the night. Ashraf followed Ishvar around the partition where Omprakash lay sleeping, and they stood together for a while, watching him.

'Poor child,' whispered Ashraf. 'So much he has suffered. How can we help him?'

The answer, in time, was provided by the faltering fortunes of Muzaffar Tailoring
15 Company.

A year had passed since the murders when a ready-made clothing store opened in town. Before long, Ashraf's list of clients began to shrink.

Ishvar said the loss would be temporary. 'A big new shop with stacks of shirts to choose from – that attracts the customers. It makes them feel important, trying on
20 different patterns. But the traitors will return when the novelty wears off and the clothes don't fit.'

Ashraf was not so optimistic. 'Those lower prices will defeat us. They make clothes by the hundreds in big factories, in the city. How can we compete?'

Soon the two tailors and apprentice were lucky to find themselves busy one day a
25 week. 'Strange, isn't it,' said Ashraf. 'Something I've never even seen is ruining the business I have owned for forty years.'

'But you've seen the ready-made shop.'

'No, I mean the factories in the city. How big are they? Who owns them? What do they pay? None of this I know, except that they are beggaring us. Maybe I'll have to
30 go and work for them in my old age.'

'Never,' said Ishvar. 'But perhaps I should go.'

'Nobody is going anywhere,' Ashraf's fist banged the worktable. 'We will share what there is here, I said it only as a joke. You think I would really send away my own children?'

35 'Don't be upset, Chachaji, I know you didn't mean it.'

Before long, however, the joke turned into a serious consideration as customers continued to flee to the ready-made store. 'If it goes on like this, the three of us will be sitting from morning till night, swatting flies,' said Ashraf. 'For me, it does not matter. I have lived my life – tasted its fruit, both sweet and bitter. But it is so unfair
40 to Om.' He lowered his voice. 'Maybe it would be best for him to try elsewhere.'

'But wherever he goes, I would have to go,' said Ishvar. 'He is still too young, too many foolish ideas clogging his head.'

'Not his fault, the devil encourages him. Of course you have to be with him, you

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are now his father. What you can both do is, go for a short time. Doesn't have to be
45 permanent. A year or two. Work hard, earn money, and come back.'

'That's true. They say you can make money very quickly in the city, there is so much work and opportunity.'

'Exactly. And with that cash you can open some kind of business here when you return. A paan[1] shop, or a fruit stall, or toys. You can even sell ready-made clothes,
50 who knows.' They laughed at this, but agreed that a couple of years away would be best for Omprakash.

'There is only one difficulty in the way,' said Ishvar. 'I don't know anyone in the city. How to get started?'

'Everything will fall into place. I have a very good friend who will help you find
55 work. His name is Nawaz. He is also a tailor, has his own shop there.'

They sat up past midnight, making plans, imagining the new future in the city by the sea, the city that was filled with big buildings, wide, wonderful roads, beautiful gardens, and millions and millions of people working hard and accumulating wealth.

'Look at me, getting excited as if I was leaving with you,' said Ashraf. 'And if I
60 was younger I would, too. It will be lonely here. My dream was that you and Om would be with me till the end of my days.'

'But we will be,' said Ishvar. 'Om and I will return soon. Isn't that the plan?'

Rohinton Mistry, *A Fine Balance* (1995)

[1] paan: betel nut mixed with lime and served in a green leaf, used in India as a chew

Just to get things going: what happened on *'that terrible night six months ago' (line 1)*?

Answer: ...deredrum erew elpoeP

Action

Not a great deal happens during the course of this passage itself, though, does it? A tailor, with his nephew, moves in with another, older tailor (maybe his father) and his wife. Then a down-turn in the tailoring business forces the younger tailor to consider taking his nephew to the city to find work.

So why have we chosen it as an example of ***Action*** in a short piece of writing?

Well, you wouldn't expect an extract of this length to include a large number of events anyway. If it did, there wouldn't be room for very much else. And it's the 'else' surrounding events which give them their significance – in particular the way people are affected by, consider, respond to, what happens. So there's a kind of secondary action in play: what goes on inside and between the characters, as opposed to what takes place external to them.

The outside events themselves constitute what we might call the 'contextual' action. That includes:

- the events that have already taken place
- the events that occur during the course of the passage, but in the wider world
- the events that seem likely to happen in the future.

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These are the things which happen outside the limits of the 'on-stage' story. Begin your work on this passage by listing the details of all three parts (past, present and future) of this contextual action.

Then answer these questions:

a) Are we given any clues as to who has been murdered?

b) Who is the *'apprentice' (line 24)*?

a) It's likely that it was Omprakash's parents. He seems to be an orphan – Ishvar and Ashraf feel responsible for his future and Ashraf calls Ishvar *'his father' (line 44)* – who has suffered much *(line 12)*; and there is talk of him wanting revenge *(lines 7-8)* back in the village, where the murders may have taken place.
b) Omprakash (look at *lines 36-38* – he is clearly part of their 'unemployment' problem).

All we have done so far is clarify the basics of the passage. That will be an important part of what you do, initially, in the exam: you must work out, at a simple level, just what is happening – who the characters are and what their situation is. A bad mistake here (through hurried reading) can cost you dear…so take time, and re-read the passage as often as you need.

We can now look at some of the subtleties of the story as it is told.

c) How does the writer suggest that Ishvar's and Omprakash's move in with Ashraf is problematical?

d) What do we learn later in the passage which helps explain Ashraf's eagerness to make room for them?

e) How does fate (in the form of unexpected, external events) take a hand in their story?

f) Important developments in the narrative are introduced by key phrases referring to the passing of time. *'Since that…night six months ago' (line 1)* is the first one. Find the others (there are four).

c) Ishvar doesn't want to move, and Ashraf has to insist. In spite of Ashraf's claim that there is plenty of room he has to partition his own bedroom to make the move possible. All of that emphasises (in a small way) the devastating nature of the things that have happened.
d) Ashraf wanted Ishvar and Omprakash to be with him in the final years of his life *(lines 54-55)*.
e) Ashraf and Ishvar are worried that Omprakash will return to the village where his parents were murdered and end up in trouble. It would clearly be a good idea to get him away from the area altogether, but there seems to be no way of doing that. Then they are forced to look for a way by the failure of their business.
f) *'in time' (line 14)*
'A year had passed' (line 16)
'Soon' (line 24)
'Before long' (line 36)

We could call these last details, in ***f)***, 'time markers': they are an important way in which a writer keeps us in touch with the thread of the story. If you are asked a question about the structure of a prose passage or poem you will find that the time markers will help you identify that structure.

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g) See if you can find the time markers in the following passages: A (page 4); B (page 7); F (page 26)

> ***g)*** Passage A: *'after breakfast…After lunch…an early afternoon torpor'*
> Passage B: *'I could count to a ragged 20…the passing of each day…on a Sunday morning…The day that fledged her'*
> Passage F: *'Born in Autumn… Months of fog, months of drizzle… when the sun came…Each new child'*

The Other Areas

1. Setting

Times are changing, economically. What signs are there that changes are also taking place in the way people think?

2. Character

Identify the touches of (mild) humour in the passage.

4. Style

Why does Rohinton Mistry write that the two men *'ascended the stairs to retire for the night' (lines 9-10)* rather than just 'went up to bed'?

5. Ideas

What idea is Ashraf emphasising by banging on the table *(line 32)*?

> ***Setting***
> Ashraf considers the possibility (although he says he is only joking) of abandoning his traditional independence and going to work in a clothing factory; Ishvar thinks more seriously about doing so; and according to him Omprakash has *'too many foolish* (modern?) *ideas'* in his head.
> ***Character***
> *'Traitors'*, *'Maybe I'll have to go and work for them in my old age'*, *'swatting flies'*, *'You can even sell ready-made clothes'*. They're barely amusing, and serve mainly to convey a sense of the writer's warmth towards his characters.
> ***Style***
> They have just spent hours worrying fruitlessly about the boy's future. Even the simple act of going to bed, after all of that, becomes a deliberate and difficult process – a fact reflected in the formality of the language.
> ***Ideas***
> That a family should stay together and share what it has. The detail that it is a *work*table carries the extra suggestion that they will pull through by working together at their trade.

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PASSAGE 8

The Interrogation

We could have crossed the road but hesitated,
And then came the patrol;
The leader conscientious and intent,
The men surly, indifferent.
5 While we stood by and waited
The interrogation began. He says the whole
Must come out now, who, what we are,
Where we have come from, with what purpose, whose
Country or camp we plot for or betray.
10 Question on question.
We have stood and answered through the standing day
And watched across the road beyond the hedge
The careless lovers in pairs go by,
Hand linked in hand, wandering another star,
15 So near we could shout to them. We cannot choose
Answer or action here,
Though still the careless lovers saunter by
And the thoughtless field is near.
We are on the very edge,
20 Endurance almost done,
And still the interrogation is going on.

Edwin Muir, *The Labyrinth* (1949)

Action

'Incident' and 'episode' are useful words when you are writing about ***Action.*** What's the difference between them? Is the event described in this poem an incident or an episode?

> We'd probably call this an incident, since there's an element of chance in it and we aren't sure that it's going to lead to something important…so it may not be a large enough occurrence to qualify as an 'episode', which is a more self-contained part of a bigger story, with a beginning, a middle and an end of its own.

a) What phrases in the first two lines suggest on the one hand that chance has played a part in this encounter, and on the other that there is something inevitable about it?

b) What is the effect of the change of tense in *line 6*?

c) By what means does the writer convey a sense of this being a static incident, with no movement forward and no discernible outcome?

d) How does he also, however, indicate that the incident is approaching a climax?

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a) *'could have…but'* ; *'And then came'*
b) It makes the interrogation itself seem more immediate, as if it's happening *'now'*.
c)

- He repeats the word *'stood'* and also uses *'standing'* to describe the day itself (*'standing'* is what 'static' basically means).
- He gives a list (of questions).
- The questions are not answered.
- The story-teller is distracted (twice) by things he sees happening across the road, as if there is no great urgency in what is happening to *him.*
- He repeats the word *'still'.*

d) By the use of an image *('on the edge')* and the phrase *'Endurance almost done'*. We learn for the first time how harrowing the whole interrogation (and perhaps what has gone before it) has been for the men: they are near breaking point.

The Other Areas

1. Setting

How does the poet use the road as a symbol of division between two worlds?

2. Character

What effect does the writer's use of the first person plural *('We')* have on the reader?

4. Style

What is the effect of the rhyme in *lines 3 and 4*?

5. Ideas

Do you think the captured men are soldiers or refugees? Does our response to the poem depend in part on the answer we give to that question?

Setting

- It separates what might have been (if they had crossed it – their liberty?) from what is (their capture).
- Beyond it carefree lovers – in themselves symbols of human freedom – can be seen. They are *'wandering'* (as if they can go where they please) and they make the land over the road seem like *'another star'*, even though they are physically close – the other side of the road is so near and yet so far.
- The field over the road is both near and *'thoughtless'* – it and the people in it (the lovers) are not aware of the detainees and their plight; and also if the captured men had escaped across to it they would have been freed from their thoughts (cares).

Character

It underlines our perception that this is happening to a *group* of men who have stuck closely together and continue to do so. This encourages us to have sympathy for them, and in any case we more readily identify with them because we feel partly included in the *'We'*.

Style

It emphasises the contrast between the leader and his men: *'intent'* and *'indifferent'* are opposites in this context.

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Ideas
If we think they are refugees we are likely to see them as victims. If they are soldiers we may just think they have been unlucky (or inefficient). Part of the impact of the passage lies in the fact that we do not know why they have come there, and we do not therefore know what the outcome of the interrogation may be.

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Part 4: A Focus on Style

PASSAGE 9

He charged upon her. There in the open. More like a lion. He came, grey all over, his grey hair – or the grey patches of his hair – charging down the steps, having slammed the hall door. And lopsided. He was carting under his arm a diminutive piece of furniture. A cabinet.

It was so quick. It was like having a fit. The houses tottered. He regarded her. He had 5 presumably checked violently in his clumsy stride. She hadn't seen because of the tottering of the houses. His stone-blue eyes came fishily into place in his wooden countenance – pink and white. Too pink where it was pink and too white where it was white. Too much so for health.

What was he doing? Fumbling in the pocket of his clumsy trousers. He exclaimed – she shook at the sound of his slightly grating, slightly gasping voice:

10 'I'm going to sell this thing...Stay here.' He had produced a latch-key. He was panting fiercely beside her. Beside her. Beside her. It was infinitely sad to be beside this madman. It was infinitely glad. Because if he had been sane she would not have been beside him. She would be beside him for a long space of time if he were mad. Perhaps he did not recognize her! She might be beside him for long space of time with him not recognizing her. Like tending your baby!

15 (He opens the door and bids her step inside and wait for him.)

She stepped irresolutely into the shadows: she turned irresolutely to the light...

It was Armistice Day[1]. She had forgotten. She was to be cloistered[2] on Armistice Day. Ah, not cloistered! Not cloistered there. My beloved is mine and I am his! But she might as well close the door.

20 She ought to go away: Instead she had shut the door...No! She ought not to go away! She ought not! He had told her to wait. She was not cloistered[2]. This was the most exciting spot on the earth. It was not her fate to live nun-like. She was going to pass her day beside a madman; her night too…My beloved is mine and I am His!

My beloved is...Why does one go on repeating that ridiculous thing! She did not want to 25 quote the thing. It was jumped out of her by sheer nerves. She was afraid. She was waiting for a madman in an empty house. Noises whispered up the empty stairway!

Source Unknown

[1] Armistice Day: Day commemorating the end of World War I

[2] Cloistered: Shut away (as in a nunnery)

You're probably somewhat puzzled by this passage: What's it *about*?

Don't worry too much for the moment. Ask yourself this question instead: what impressions are we left with when we've read the passage for the first time?

Impressions of
- Violence
- Ridiculousness
- Confusion
- Fear

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- Sadness
- Joy and excitement
- Indecision

So many conflicting feelings in what is quite a short passage! How does that come about?

Largely through the passage's ***Style***, the words the writer has chosen and the order he has used them in.

Here is the first example of each of the impressions we listed above. Add further examples from the passage, and consider the mechanics of each example – how does it contribute to that particular impression?

- Violence: *'He charged upon her' (line 1)*. List, as we have suggested, any further examples you can find, then compare your notes with those in the box below. Then try…
- Ridiculousness: *'And lopsided' (lines 2-3)*
- Confusion: *'It was so quick' (line 4)*
- Fear: *'She shook' (line 8)*
- Sadness: *'Infinitely sad' (line 11)*
- Joy and excitement: *'Infinitely glad' (line 12)*
- Indecision: *'She stepped…light' (line 16)*

Violence:

- *'More like a lion' (line 1)* – animal image
- *'charging' (line 2)* – note the repetition
- *'slammed' (line 2)*
- *'violently' (line 5)*
- *'exclaimed' (line 9)* – speech can be violent, too.
- *'panting fiercely' (lines 11-12)*
- *'jumped out of her' (line 27)* – *'jumped'* is used in an unusual way (as a transitive rather than an intransitive verb, if you want the technical term) and in the sense of 'forced to jump'.

Diction (choice of words) clearly plays an important part here.

Ridiculousness:

- *'carting' (line 3)* – a colloquial (almost slang) term which has the effect of trivialising both what is carried and the carrier…reinforced by *'this thing' (line 11)*
- *'clumsy stride' (line 5)*
- *'fishily' (line 6)*
- *'too pink…too white' (line 7)* – his face is almost clown-like, or like that of a painted *('wooden')* doll.
- *'fumbling…clumsy' (line 9)* – clown-like again
- *'slightly grating, slightly gasping voice'*
- *'Like tending your baby!' (line 15)* – the man, in spite of his threatening behaviour, is helpless.
- *'repeating that ridiculous thing!'* – she, too, is beginning to behave oddly.

Here the emphasis is on details of appearance, speech and movement.

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Confusion:

- *'Like having a fit' (line 4)* – loss of control and consciousness
- *'tottered' (line 4)* – as if they couldn't make up their minds whether or not to fall (maybe belongs with 'Indecision' below).
- *'Presumably' (line 5)* – she isn't sure, *'because of the tottering of the houses'*
- *'What was he doing?' (line 9)*
- *'if he were mad' (line 13)*
- *'Perhaps he did not recognize her!' (lines 13-14)*
- *'She had forgotten' (line 19)* – under the influence of these powerful events, even though something important is due to happen to her today

Her confusion about what is happening helps explain her difficulty in deciding what to do, which is the crux of the passage.

Fear:

- *'sheer nerves' (line 27)*
- *'She was afraid' (line 27)* – did the writer need to make this plain statement?
- *'A madman….an empty house' (line 28)* – the stuff of horror stories
- *'Noises whispered up the empty stairway' (line 28)* – 'atmosphere'

Except for her shaking in *line 10*, her fear emerges only towards the end of the passage, increasing the suspense at that point.

Sadness:

- References to his (possible) madness
- The alternative to staying here – being cloistered *'nun-like' (line 24)*
- The emptiness of the house *(line 28)* – has he sold everything else?
-

Joy and excitement:

- The thought that he may become a baby she can look after
- *'My beloved is mine and I am his'* (several references) – why is *'His'* capitalised the second time? You'll only know if you've read the biblical *Song of Solomon*: the quotation takes on a religious significance and reminds us of the alternative life she perhaps faces, as a nun – a bride to Jesus Christ – or something similar.
- *'The most exciting spot on the earth' (lines 23-24)*
-

Indecision:

- She can't make up her mind whether he's mad or not (as we noted earlier).
- She can't make up her mind whether to stay or go.
- She can't make up her mind whether to give her life to this (possible) madman or to the Church (perhaps).

All of that is reflected in the structure of some of the sentences, beginning of course with the antithesis (balance) of our original example, *'She stepped irresolutely into the shadows, she turned irresolutely to the light' (line 18).* Find more antithesis in *lines 19-20* and *line 22* (the balance isn't so clear-cut; try to apply the phrase 'on the one hand…on the other' to parts of those lines).

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A few other items of style we haven't covered:

- o What effect does the word *'diminutive' (line 3)* have?
- o Repetitions and echoes – we've noted only some.
- o The bathos of *'My beloved is mine and I am his! But she might as well close the door' (lines 20-21)*. Bathos has nothing to do with pathos. It's a sudden descent from elevated subject matter or language to mundane things or words, usually for comic effect. Here it emphasises the woman's feelings of confusion and inner conflict. It also adds a realistic touch: in moments of stress we turn to habitual or practical actions for re-orientation and reassurance. Is there another example in the passage?
- o The sentence structure (in addition to the antithesis already noted). It's………
- o Use of exclamations. How many in the passage?

- o It makes the man seem, by comparison, larger and more powerful.
- o There are too many to list here. Should you list them all in your commentary? Yes, if you feel you have time: they will demonstrate your eye for detail.
- o Perhaps *'My beloved is…Why does one go on repeating that ridiculous thing!' (line 26)*. The descent is from poetry to petty frustration, expressed stiffly *('Why does one')*. Note that what is grammatically a question is punctuated as an exclamation – it is actually an outburst.
- o Very jerky: the sentences (when they are that – there are lots of independent phrases) are short, often very short. That allows sudden changes of direction and produces a zig-zag effect.
- o Eight (all in the second half, where the emphasis is on what she is feeling rather than on what is happening)

Round off this part of your work by listing some adjectives you think could apply to the passage's style. Here are some suggestions for comparison with your own list, when you've completed it:

- o Natural and spontaneous (with a sense of having been written 'on the spot', as events happen and the woman responds in thought and feeling)
- o Informal (language of the kind that it spoken rather than written – colloquial)
- o Incorrect (not in 'proper' sentences: its syntax, or sentence structure, is ragged) – goes hand in hand with the last point
- o Unstructured (lacking formal organisation): even the paragraphs are put together randomly.
- o Original
- o Varied (poetry and plainness mixed)
- o Appropriate (created to fit the situation described)
- o Authentic (believable: this is how *this* woman in *this* situation would think and speak – and write, if she had to write)
- o Vivid (note, among other things, the use of colour and sound)
- o Powerful and vigorous (it carries us forward on a tide of impression and emotion)
- o Dramatic (conveys a sense of immediacy and unexpectedness)

Since this is quite a short passage and there are a lot of unanswerable questions about its context, we can't say a lot about its other features; but there's always something to note…

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Setting

The contrasts between inside and outside and between darkness and light, symbolising the choice the woman faces.

Character

The contradiction in her perceptions of the man *('lion…baby')*

Action

The passage holds us at a point of balance in the story (whatever the story is). How literally are we to take the references to being cloistered and living *'nun-like'*? The choice the woman faces may be a more ordinary one, between possible marriage on the one hand and dedication to a career or profession on the other. Don't feel too anxious if you don't fully grasp what a passage is about, and don't be panicked into wild speculation. There'll always be lots to say about a passage even if you haven't got right to the bottom of the situation it lays out.

Ideas

The beauty of madness, or at least of idiosyncrasy. Choices. The power of love. That's probably as much as we can say.

The next passage has been chosen because its style is very different from the naturalistic writing we've just looked at… and because it dates from almost two hundred years ago.

Don't flinch when you're asked to comment on a piece of 'old' writing. Words change, but they don't change that much…and prose and poetry from former times can speak to us with great power today. You'll see in a moment how modern in a sense these verses are, in their focus on how we treat the environment.

PASSAGE 10

178

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore.
There is society, where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea, and music in its roar:
5 I love not Man the less, but Nature more,
From these our interviews, in which I steal
From all I may be, or have been before,
To mingle with the Universe, and feel
What I can ne'er express, yet cannot all conceal.

179

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10 Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean – roll!
Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
Man marks the earth with ruin – his control
Stops with the shore; upon the watery plain
The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
15 A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,
He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
Without a grave, unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown.

180

His steps are not upon thy paths, – thy fields
20 Are not a spoil for him – thou dost arise
And shake him from thee; the vile strength he wields
For earth's destruction thou dost all despise,
Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,
And send'st him, shivering in thy playful spray
25 And howling, to his Gods, where haply lies
His petty hope in some near port or bay,
And dashest him again to earth: – there let him lay.

These three stanzas are from near the end of a long poem – Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-1815)

You'll need to spend rather longer working out what each line of this poem means. (You shouldn't worry if, when you've tried as hard as you can, some bits still puzzle you. You must just hope that they aren't crucially related to a guiding question.)

Don't get bogged down in detail to begin with, though. Once you've had a quick read through the whole piece, write down what you think it's 'saying'. Then go back and identify the central idea in each verse.

- This whole extract is suggesting that………………………………………………………………..
- The first verse (*Stanza 178*) tells us………..…………………………………
- The second verse repeats the idea from *Stanza 178* that…………………………………, but then says that……………..………………………………………….…………………….
- The idea in the third verse is that the sea is so……………………..that…………………... ………………………...……………………………………………………………………….

- nomatter how much damage Man does to the earth, he is powerless to harm the sea.
- how much it means to the poet to wander in desolate places where he can feel one with nature.
- Man can damage the land……the only signs of harm on the sea are the momentary ones when men are shipwrecked.
- powerful……it treats man as a plaything and destroys him at will.

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Now we can look at some aspects of Byron's style. We can make some useful comparisons with the previous passage.

There's quite a difference, is there not? Here are some of the things we said the language of the 'Source Unknown' passage was. Think of some terms opposite in meaning to the following that could be applied to Byron's style:

- Natural
- Informal:
- Incorrect:
- Unstructured:
- Original:
- Varied:

- Unnatural, contrived
- Formal, stiff (to the point of being rigid?)
- Very correct (closely following the rules of grammar and syntax)
- Tightly organised
- Conventional (that doesn't mean 'ordinary' here: it means 'following poetic convention')
- Consistent – it's the same throughout.

It is, then, very different in some ways from the style of 'Source Unknown'. But what about some of the other things we said that style was?

- Appropriate
- Authentic
- Vivid
- Powerful and vigorous
- Dramatic

Byron's style, too, is appropriate: it's rather grand; but then so is his topic.

It's authentic as well. It is the kind of language a man with his background would be expected to use in thinking and writing (a poem) about a subject of great and universal importance. It 'rings true' because he has struggled to express through it some difficult ideas in a fitting manner…and *because* it's consistent, both within itself and with his other writing.

Vivid? If by that we mean 'capable of putting strong images into the reader's head', then consider *'the lonely shore' (line 2)* and *'like a drop of rain' (line 16).*

Powerful and vigorous? What about the opening line of the second verse?

Dramatic? *'send'st him, shivering…And howling, to his Gods…And dashest him again to earth.'*

So the two styles *are* different, but they have some important characteristics in common.

Let's spend a little more time looking at the syntax of the three stanzas.

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a) One of the principal things we noticed about the prose passage was its short sentences and non-sentences. What about Byron's poetry?

It largely consists of long sentences (the only short ones are the opening two lines of the poem and the ……………………………………………………………………………).

b) What is the effect of these long sentences?

c) Whereas the prose was very unstructured (shapeless, spontaneous), the poem is very patterned (verse is, of course, words in a pattern, or pattern in words). The most obvious early example of patterning is *'There is'* (the opening phrase of each of the first three lines). Find some other examples from later in the poem. (Forget the poem's formal rhyme-scheme for the moment.)

a) first line of the second verse
b) Byron's life was breathless in a way, but he obviously had lots of time to write very measured and polished poetry (and letters) – he never *expresses* himself breathlessly…So we have to look for another reason for, and another consequence of, these long sentences.

Perhaps they indicate that Byron has been carried forward (but not carried away) by his feelings, and that his ideas as a result roll out onto the paper, not in a spontaneous way but with *momentum* – the momentum of his emotions. We can, can't we, describe his feelings as massive (of great weight, or *moment*)? And his subject matter is massive in the same sense…and his language too.
c)

- There are examples of two phrases balanced against each other (antithesis again) in each of *lines 5, 7 and 9.*
- *'Roll…roll!'* (the opening and closing of *line 10*)
- The patterning of *line 18* is really an effect of its diction (Byron has chosen words which don't rhyme but which have sounds in common – the technical term, again, is *assonance*); but it is the syntax of the sentence that holds those words together in a list.
- The structure of two parts of *lines 19 and 20, 'His steps…paths'* and *'thy fields…for him'* is the same, with a cross-over between *'His…thy'* and *'thy…him'*.

What About the Rhyme Scheme?

Rhyme scheme works in some ways like syntax, since within it words are brought together – in a particular order or with a particular connection between them (in this case similarity of sound).

Why do poems rhyme?

That's a large question. A little answer will have to do for the moment. Poems rhyme because poets make music with words…and music is patterns of sound.

We must at some point pay attention, also, to the ***Rhythm*** of poetry (another source of its music) and its overall form. ***Style*** (including rhyme and rhythm) and ***Form*** (the structure, or shape, of a poem) work together. You may want to consider, for instance, the effect produced by the lengthening of each of the final lines of the three verses.

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Each long line (six stressed, or emphasised, syllables instead of four) slows the verse down at its end, allows weight to be placed on important phrases and ideas, and gives a sense of climax, or finality, to the verse.

We should also, before we move on, remind ourselves of another stylistic technique you'll have come across before – ***Alliteration*** (the repetition of consonants, particularly at the beginning of words). Sometimes alliteration, like rhyme, is used only as a means of enhancing the music of a poem. At other times, also like rhyme (remember *'clutch'* and *'touch'* page 9), it can draw attention to the connections of meaning between words. Byron takes *'pleasure'* from the fact that the woods are *'pathless'*: the link in meaning is clear.

Consider the repetition of d, s and h sounds in the last six lines of the extract. Are there any links of meaning between the words which are connected by that alliteration?

The power of Man's **d**estructiveness is negated by the fact that the sea **d**espises it. The repeated hissing sounds of *lines 23-4* convey the strength of the sea's scornful anger. Man **h**owls to his Gods but his **h**ope of rescue will be justified only **h**aply ('perhaps').

What, by the way, is *'howling'* (like 'hissing') an example of?

Onomatopoeia…but you won't get any marks just for labelling it, even if you spell it right.

What job does it do?

It diminishes Man, by copying the sound of the animal noise he makes in his fear and despair.

Think similarly about the examples of onomatopoeia in *lines 4, 16* and *17.*

1. Setting

Enough said. This poem is *about* its setting (i.e. *our* setting, *our* surroundings).

2. Character

What does the tone of the final words of the extract, *'there let him lay'*, tell us about Byron's feelings towards Mankind? Does that feeling contradict a statement he has made earlier in the poem?

3. Action

In so far as there is a story here at all, it is a very generalised one: it's an account (in the present tense) of how man treats the earth and how the sea responds. Would the story (and the poem) have been given more focus if Byron had described a particular shipwreck?

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5. Ideas

So where does the poem's irony lie?

2. Character
Byron scorns Man because of the *'vile strength' (line 21)* he uses against the earth, and is glad to see him brought low by the power of the sea. Man deserves his fate. Compare, however, *'I love not Man the less' (line 5).* Can you see any way of explaining the contradiction?
3. Action
Probably…but try to avoid saying things like 'the writer should have done it this way' – you must work with what you are given.
5. Ideas
Man sets out boldly across the sea but is reduced to a *'shivering…howling'* creature who runs for safety in a *'port or bay' (line 26)* and is dashed against the rocks as he does so. This is not irony of language but of action – the irony of sudden reversal, pride going before a fall.

You'll find further ideas about, and practice on, ***Style*** in **Part 6: Further Foundation Passages** (page 57).

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Part 5: A Focus on Ideas

Here's another passage about the power of the sea, written from an almost opposite perspective – that of a group of shipwrecked sailors trying to make it to shore in a rowing boat.

PASSAGE 11

'Cook,' remarked the captain, 'there don't seem to be any signs of life about your house of refuge.'

'No,' replied the cook. 'Funny they don't see us!'

A broad stretch of lowly coast lay before the eyes of the men. It was of dunes topped with dark vegetation. The roar of the surf was plain, and sometimes they could see the white lip of a wave as it spun up the beach. A tiny house was blocked out black upon the sky. Southward, the slim lighthouse lifted its little gray length. *5*

Tide, wind, and waves were swinging the dinghy northward.

'Funny they don't see us,' said the men.

10 The surf's roar was here dulled, but its tone was, nevertheless, thunderous and mighty. As the boat swam over the great rollers, the men sat listening to this roar. 'We'll swamp sure,' said everybody.

It is fair to say here that there was not a life-saving station within twenty miles in either direction, but the men did not know this fact, and in consequence they made dark and opprobrious[1] remarks concerning the eyesight of the nation's life-savers. Four scowling men sat in the dinghy and surpassed records in the invention of epithets. *15*

'Funny they don't see us.'

The light-heartedness of a former time had completely faded. To their sharpened minds it was easy to conjure pictures of all kinds of incompetency and blindness and, indeed, cowardice. There was the shore of the populous land, and it was bitter and bitter to them that from it came no sign. *20*

'Well,' said the captain, ultimately, 'I suppose we'll have to make a try for ourselves. If we stay out here too long, we'll none of us have strength left to swim after the boat swamps.'

And so the oiler[2], who was at the oars, turned the boat straight for the shore. There was a sudden tightening of muscles. There was some thinking. *25*

'If we don't all get ashore – ' said the captain. 'If we don't all get ashore, I suppose you fellows know where to send news of my finish?'

They then briefly exchanged some addresses and admonitions. As for the reflections of the men, there was a great deal of rage in them. Perchance they might be formulated thus: 'If I am going to be drowned – if I am going to be drowned – if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? Was I brought here merely to have my nose dragged away as I was about to nibble the sacred cheese of life? It is preposterous. If this old ninny-woman, Fate, cannot do better than this, she should be deprived of the management of men's fortunes. She is an old hen who knows not her intention. If she has decided to drown me, why did she not do it in the beginning and save me all this trouble? The whole affair is absurd. But no, she cannot mean to drown me. She dare not drown me. She cannot drown me. Not after all this work.' Afterward the man might have had an impulse to shake his fist at the clouds: 'Just you drown me, now, and then hear what I call you!' *30* *35*

40 The billows that came at this time were more formidable. They seemed always just about to break and rollover the little boat in a turmoil of foam. There was a preparatory and long growl

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in the speech of them. No mind unused to the sea would have concluded that the dinghy could ascend these sheer heights in time. The shore was still afar. The oiler was a wily surfman. 'Boys,' he said swiftly, 'she won't live three minutes more, and we're too far out to swim.
45 Shall I take her to sea again, captain?'

'Yes! Go ahead!' said the captain.

This oiler, by a series of quick miracles, and fast and steady oarsmanship, turned the boat in the middle of the surf and took her safely to sea again.

There was a considerable silence as the boat bumped over the furrowed sea to deeper water.
50 Then somebody in gloom spoke: 'Well, anyhow, they must have seen us from the shore by now.'

The gulls went in slanting flight up the wind toward the gray desolate east. A squall, marked by dingy clouds, and clouds brick-red, like smoke from a burning building, appeared from the south-east.

55 'What do you think of those life-saving people? Ain't they peaches?'

Stephen Crane, *The Open Boat, A Tale of the Sea*, (1897)

[1]opprobrious: rude

[2]oiler: a crewman from the ship's engine-room

Ideas when they run through a longer piece of writing become *themes*. In a shorter piece they will probably be no more than our or the writer's thoughts about what is happening in the extract itself, about how the people in it are behaving, about what the world in which the episode takes place is like, and so on.

All events, all situations, have ideas attached to them. A man falls off a cliff. Ideas? The suddenness of death; the weakness of the human body; the unforgiving nature of the physical world and its laws; the mysteries of human behaviour.

A ship sinks. A group of sailors take to a small boat. After a hazardous time at sea they reach land and struggle to come ashore. They get close, but the waves are too violent and they are forced to turn back to open water. Ideas? List them…the broad ones at least.

- The power of nature
- Man's determination to survive
- His anger at life's stupidities and cruelties
- The irony of being close to and yet far away from safety

That's how readily ideas can emerge from a simple event, even though the story (here) is what predominates and holds our attention – that, and the spirit of the characters, and the way they speak…there's a lot to be said about all three of those.

What are the more precise ideas of the passage?

They begin to show in *line 4*. The land on which the men are pinning their hopes of survival is unpromising. Find details in the same paragraph which support that idea.

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The coast is *'lowly'* – a more normal word would have been 'low', or 'low-lying': *'lowly'* suggests meanness, meagreness. That suggestion is reinforced by the colourlessness of the landscape – *'black'*, *'gray'* – and the smallness of its features (the house is *'tiny'* and the lighthouse *'slim'* and *'little'*).

Note that we've started our study of the ideas of the passage by looking at ***Setting***…

What then *is* the idea in this part of the passage?

Simply that hope can be easily misplaced: the men are not going to escape so easily, and their plight is emphasised by the contrast between the puniness and distance of the land and the power and closeness of the raging ocean. You should be able to find at least half a dozen details in *lines 5-12* which convey the sense that they are in the grip of overwhelming forces.

Trust in other people is just as likely to prove ill-founded. *'Funny they don't see us!' (line 3)* becomes a comically pathetic refrain. Find the other places it appears; then note how the issue is picked up again – three times – further on, and at the end brings the extract to something of a high point.

Lines 9 and *17*; then *18-21*, *50-51*; and finally *55*

'It is fair to say here,' says the author *(line 13)*, writing as someone who knows the whole story and is keen that we should be given all the relevant facts. It's not certain, however, which of two groups of people he wants to be *'fair'* to in his judgement of what is happening. Who are the two groups?

- The people on shore – coastguards or lifeboatmen: they are not within sight of this part of the coast so it's not fair to accuse them of incompetence; but also…
- The sailors themselves who, since they *'did not know this fact'*, are driven to curse those they feel ought to have noticed their plight

Why has the writer made so much, in this way, of the issue of fairness (justice)?

Because it becomes central later on in the passage.

First, however, two other features of the situation are noted. In *lines 22-23* we are reminded that ………………………. is sometimes the only option; and in *lines 25 on* that death is something that must be……………………… for.

self-reliance; prepared

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Then we come to what might be regarded as the heart of the passage, a longer paragraph (beginning *line 28*) in which the men attack the circumstances they find themselves in and also whatever blind or stupid forces brought them here.

Once again the writer takes on a self-declared role: he *represents* the men in the boat, summarising what they say about their fate. He is still interested in the justice of the situation…but now it is the wider issue of Man's vulnerability to the whims of a fickle and incompetent Fate which draws his attention, as it has the sailors'. That is the source of their *'rage'*: the unfairness of the fact that they have struggled this far only to be flung back from the shore, and are now likely to die a miserable death within sight of safety.

Symbols can be very powerful. Symbols are signs, objects, or events which carry with them a meaning beyond themselves...and often a weight of emotion as well (think of flags).

This situation is symbolic, and the colourful outburst of the seamen against it is *our* outburst against the cruelties of a life which can so often treat us with arbitrary harshness.

(A word of warning, however: don't look for symbolism in every passage you are given to comment on. That's a particular danger with poetry. Yes, note the obvious symbols and the extra depth they give to a piece of writing; but don't play 'hunt the hidden meaning'.)

So here are some questions on the central part of the passage, designed to help you see just how this main idea, about the cruelty of life, finds expression.

a) What is the effect of the repetition of *'If I am going to be drowned'*?

b) Why do they believe the seven gods who rule the sea are mad?

c) What is the tone of the phrase *'contemplate sand and trees?' (lines 31-32)*

d) It is not the fact that they are going to die that angers the men, but the fact that they are going to die in such a ……………………… way.

e) *'Preposterous' (line 33)* also expresses the idea identified in ***d)***. Find another, similar word.

f) By what means do the men give themselves another chance at surviving…or at least of prolonging their life for a little while?

a) It underlines the struggle the men have to face their impending death, and also to voice their thoughts and their outrage about it. These are large, difficult ideas for these simple men.
b) Because there seems to be neither rhyme nor reason in how the sea behaves.
c) Scornful and bitter: the land they have almost reached has turned out to be both pitiful and unhelpful. The world, in the end, is as unreliable as the people in it can be.
d) Senseless. Fate is not purposeful and vindictive but an *'old ninny-woman…an old hen who knows not her intention'*.
e) *'absurd' (line 36)*
f) The skill of the oiler who is rowing the boat…and the captain's promptness in following his suggestion that they turn back. In the end (and this extends the main idea a little: the point has already been made, as we saw, in *lines 22-23*) we must in our struggle to survive be ready to fall back on our own resources.

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So lots of ideas branch out from one main one. The last sailor to speak comes close to summing it all up. What he says is, *'What do you think of these life-saving people? Ain't they peaches?'* With a slight change to give it a more universal reference and a more modern ring, he could easily have said: *'What do you think of life? Ain't it a peach?'*

1. Setting

What answer does Nature give to the men's final and weary expression of hope *('Well, anyhow, they must have seen us from the shore by now', lines 50-51)*?

2. Character

Find, towards the end of the central paragraph (the one beginning *line 28*), an example of illogicality which emphasises the men's basic simple-mindedness and adds a touch of pathos to their outcry.

3. Action

What is the effect of the men's silence as they row out to deeper water *(line 49)*?

4. Style

The sailors' expression of frustration in *line 32-33* (and elsewhere) is comic. Does that diminish the effect of what they are saying?

Setting
Gulls fly by, ignoring them, towards the east, which is still *'gray and desolate'*; and a squall appears. There is no sign from the shore.
Character
It's right at the end of the paragraph: *'Just you drown me, now, and then hear what I call you.'* It also contributes to the general sense of absurdity in what is happening to them.
Action
It allows us to imagine the depth of their despair. They have perhaps run out of both words and the will to resist.
Style
No. It adds to our sense of the struggle they have to explain what they feel. Remember what we said earlier about the authenticity of language. Find some other examples of comic expression in the passage, and consider their impact on the reader also.

We can get through the next passage quite quickly, now.

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PASSAGE 12

Heritage

Though on the day your hard blue eyes met mine
    I did not know I had a heart to keep,
All the dead women in my soul
    Stirred in their shrouded sleep.

5 There were strange pulses beating in my throat,
    I had no thought of love: I was a child:
But the dead lovers in my soul
    Awoke and flushed and smiled;

And it was years before I understood
10   Why I had been so happy at your side
With the dead women in my soul
    Teaching me what to hide.

For it was not the springtime that had come,
    Only one strong flower thrusting through the snows,
15 But the dead women in my soul
    Knew all that summer knows.

Dorothea Mackellar, *New Book of Australian Verse*, 1986

If your brain works like most people's it will have seized on a group of key words from the passage, words which relate to something of interest to most of us – *'heart', 'pulses', 'love', 'lovers'*. That swift and automatic focus will have been followed by one on another group of words – *'dead', 'shrouded', 'soul'*.

So this poem is about Love and Death?

Maybe: that's what our brains will signal to us, anyway, at a first read-through. Then we need to set about refining our understanding – by means of a second reading and then a third, both more thorough. Here are some questions to help you with those further readings.

a) What is the very first hint we receive that the poem may be about love?

b) The meaning of the phrase *'a heart to keep'* becomes clear only if we think of its opposite – 'a heart to lose'. What meaning of the word 'keep' beyond simply 'hold' adds to the significance of the line?

c) Then we come to the initially tricky line *'All the dead women in my soul'*. How to explore its meaning? Make a verse-by-verse list of the things the dead women in the poem *do*; that will help you grasp who they *are*.

d) Now try to write down in one sentence what the poem seems to be saying. It's not about death after all, is it?

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a) *'Your hard blue eyes'*. Have you perhaps come across this cliché (over-used phrase) before? Maybe in a love story?
b) Keep *safe (*from giving it away prematurely)
c) Verse 1: They stir in their sleep when the girl feels the first hint of attraction to a man (boy?)
Verse 2: They wake, are pleased when the girl responds physically, and by flushing show that they remember what sexual attraction is like – they too were lovers once.
Verse 3: They teach the girl to hide what she is feeling.
Verse 4: They know what this beginning love will blossom into. So they are…the girl's female ancestors? All the women who have ever loved? Womankind?
d) 'When a young girl feels the first stirrings of love she is responding in the way women have always responded to men, and in a manner all women who have loved would remember with pleasure and approve of.'

Put like that, or however you yourself have put it, the central idea of the poem sounds very flat, doesn't it? That's where the other aspects of poetry, particularly ***Style***, come in, and make it different from psychology, or sociology, or philosophy, or journalism, or just 'plain talk'….

1. Setting:

Minimal, but the girl and the boy are together *somewhere* in the first verse. We imagine them walking (she is by his side) and by association with the later references to the seasons we see them in the countryside, even perhaps near a……………………...

2. Character

This seems to be a woman who in the end was *satisfied* with what love brought her. What phrase suggests that her sexual life was full?

3. Action

Find the time markers.

4. Style

What aspect of the writer's childhood does the image of snow *(line 14)* represent?

1. Setting
Graveyard. When we read a poem its images intermingle in our minds to produce a total effect.
2. Character
'All that summer knows' – the climax of the poem
3. Action
'On the day'; *'I was a child'*; *'it was years before'*; *'springtime…snows…summer'*
4. Style
Purity and innocence

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None of the above is sufficient to explain the power of this poem. When all is said and done, a good poem works by means of a magic of its own which cannot be wholly analysed.

That doesn't mean, however, that we're wasting our time when we try.

We're well on the way to tackling the business of actually writing a commentary. First, however…

Guiding Questions Again

If you are given guiding questions, try to follow these basic rules:

- Don't begin to answer a question until you're sure you understand it.
- Check, when you've finished, that you have answered it.
- If more than one answer is possible (particularly if you're asked for a list) give as many sensible ones as you can think of.
- Find and use an illustration from the passage for each answer or part of an answer you give.
- Watch the clock and give each question roughly equal time (**IB Standard Level**: 2 questions, $1^{1}/_{2}$ hours = … minutes per question?)
- If the questions are numbered, number your answers.
- If you are given a choice of two passages and the instructions say 'either…or', don't, don't try to answer both because you think that might win you more marks or because you run out of things to say about the first one.

Remember that the examiner is not trying to catch you out with his questions; he is trying to help you. Good questions will draw your attention to the important and interesting features of the passage, the things you should be writing about anyway…so *use* the questions, even if you aren't required to answer them one by one.

Write Your Own

Go back to any of the passages you have enjoyed working with, pretend you're the examiner and write a guiding question you think would help candidates explore the passage's 'focus' feature (***Setting*** etc).

You probably won't want to answer your own questions, at least in full; but that's the only way you can test whether a question is a good one. Here, just in case you get stuck, are some more examples of typical guiding questions.

PASSAGE 4 'My Father's Garden' (page 16 – **Setting**): How does the poet's description of his father's place of work help explain the use his father makes of the scrapyard?
PASSAGE 5 'The Way We Live Now' (page 19 – **Character**): By what different methods does the writer reveal the personalities of his characters?
PASSAGE 8 'The Interrogation' (page 36 – **Action**): This poem describes a long, balanced moment in time. How does the writer convey both the sense of balance and the length of the moment?
PASSAGE 9 'Source Unknown' (page 39 – **Style**): Discuss the effect of the passage's repetitions and echoes.
PASSAGE 12 'Heritage' (page 54 - **Ideas**): 'A poem about the mysteries of Womanhood'. What are these mysteries, according to the poet?

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Part 6: Further Foundation Passages

A prose passage with an emphasis on ***Setting***

PASSAGE 13

When I drove over the Pittman line[1] I made two promises to myself. One I kept, the other I did not.

The first was that I would get myself a new name. I wasn't crazy about anything I had been called up to that point in life, and this seemed like the time to make a clean break. I didn't have
5 any special name in mind, but just wanted a change. The more I thought about it, the more it seemed to me that a name is not something a person really has the right to pick out, but is something you're provided with more or less by chance. I decided to let the gas tank decide. Wherever it ran out, I'd look for a sign.

I came pretty close to being named after Homer, Illinois, but kept pushing it. I kept my fingers
10 crossed through Sidney, Sadorus, Cerro Gordo, Decatur, and Blue Mound, and coasted into Taylorville on the fumes. And so I am Taylor Greer. I suppose you could say I had some part in choosing this name, but there was enough of destiny in it to satisfy me.

The second promise, the one that I broke, had to do with where I would end up. I had looked at some maps, but since I had never in my own memory been outside of Kentucky (I was evidently
15 born across the river in Cincinnati, but that is beside the point), I had no way of knowing why or how any particular place might be preferable to any other. That is, apart from the pictures on the gas station toll brochures: Tennessee claimed to be the Volunteer State, and Missouri the Show-Me State, whatever that might mean, and nearly everyplace appeared to have plenty of ladies in fifties hairdos standing near waterfalls. These brochures I naturally did not trust as far as I could
20 throw them out the window. Even Pittman, after all, had once been chosen an All-Kentucky City, on the basis of what I do not know. Its abundance of potato bugs and gossip, perhaps. I knew how people could toot their own horn without any earthly cause.

And so what I promised myself is that I would drive west until my car stopped running, and there I would stay. But there were some things I hadn't considered. Mama taught me well about
25 tires, and many other things besides, but I knew nothing of rocker arms. And I did not know about the Great Plain.

The sight of it filled me with despair. I turned south from Wichita, Kansas, thinking I might find a way around it, but I didn't. There was central Oklahoma. I had never imagined that any part of a round earth could be so flat. In Kentucky, you could never see too far, since there were always
30 mountains blocking the other side of your view, and it left you the chance to think something good might be just over the next hill. But out there on the plain it was all laid out right in front of you, and no matter how far you looked it didn't get any better. Oklahoma made me feel there was nothing left to hope for.

35 My car gave out somewhere in the middle of a great emptiness that according to the road signs was owned by the Cherokee tribe. Suddenly the steering wheel bore no relation to where the car was going. By the grace of some miracle I surely did not yet deserve, I managed to wobble off

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the highway all in one piece and find a service station.

The man who straightened out my rocker arm was named Bob Two Two. I am not saying he
40 didn't ask a fair price – I should have been able to fix it myself – but he went home that night with a pocket full of something near half the money I had. I sat in the parking lot looking out over that godless stretch of nothing and came the closest I have ever come to cashing in and plowing under. But there was no sense in that. My car was fixed.

I had to laugh, really. All my life, Mama had talked about the Cherokee Nation as our ace in the
45 hole. She'd had an old grandpa that was full-blooded Cherokee, one of the few that got left behind in Tennessee because he was too old or too ornery[2] to get marched over to Oklahoma. Mama would say, 'If we run out of luck we can always go live on the Cherokee Nation.' She and I both had enough blood to qualify. According to Mama, if you're one-eighth or more they let you in. She called this our 'head rights.'

50 Of course, if she had ever been there she would have known it was not a place you'd ever go to live without some kind of lethal weapon aimed at your hind end. It was clear to me that the whole intention of bringing the Cherokees here was to get them to lie down and die without a fight. The Cherokees believed God was in trees. Mama told me this. When I was a kid I would climb as high as I could in a tree and not come down until dinner. 'That's your Indian blood,'
55 she would say. 'You're trying to see God.'

From what I could see, there was not one tree in the entire state of Oklahoma.

Barbara Kingsolver, *The Bean Trees* (1988)

[1] town boundary

[2] mean, cantankerous

a) *9-11* What does the long list of the towns Taylor passes through emphasise about her journey, and about the way in which she is going to choose her new name?

b) *13-16* How does Taylor indicate that she knows hardly anything about the area? How does that fact contribute to the more general impression she is trying to create?

c) *16-22* Why is she suspicious of the claims made by the different places she drives through? How do her suspicions add to our understanding of how she views the world?

d) *21* What does the phrase *'an abundance of potato bugs and gossip'* tell us about the place (Pittman) she has left behind?

e) *25-33* What is there about the Great Plain which explains the impact it has on her?

f) *35-38* What phrase sums up the characteristics of the plain? What phrase reminds us that she is suspicious of the places she comes across?

g) What might Bob Two Two's name indicate about him? Is he honest?

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h) *44-49* What do we learn here about the way the Cherokees have been treated in years gone by? What do we learn about Cherokee society as it now is?

i) How does the nature of the Great Plain take on, at this point in the passage, a greater significance for the writer?

j) What word used casually in the paragraph beginning at *line 139* now takes on greater meaning?

Notice the different kinds of setting in evidence:

- The features of the *geographical* setting – the emptiness of the landscape stretching ahead of the writer, and, later, its treelessness – take on a symbolic significance (i.e. a meaning beyond themselves).
- The *historical* setting – what was done to the Cherokee nation – is clearly going to be a focus of attention in the story, and may connect with an interest in the *political setting* of the larger narrative.
- Bob Two Two's apparent honesty – he has charged a fair price for a fair day's work – could be seen to have *moral* and even *economic* implications, particularly if it is shown later that the Cherokees were treated dishonestly by the white man and now struggle to make a living. (We're going well beyond the confines of the passage when we speculate like this, of course, and you shouldn't do that in your commentary.)

Now look through the answers below and note any features of the passage you missed when you did your own work on it.

a) That there's a kind of randomness about both her journey and her selection of a name.
b) She has only looked at *'some maps'* (a rather vague phrase), has never been outside Kentucky before, and cannot distinguish between one town and another. That adds to the feeling that she is gambling with her future.
c) Some of the claims *('the Show-Me State')* appear to be meaningless; most of them are supported by standardised and romanticised pictures; the brochures themselves are flimsy things which flutter away when she throws them out of the car window (if she does); her home town, Pittman, had been given a high-sounding but empty title; and she knows how ready people are to boast without good reason. The world in her view is not a place to be trusted.
d) It's rural, small, small-minded and basically dull.
e) It *is 'Great'* (very large) and she has to get to the other side. There is no way round it. It's empty, and flat, and utterly unpromising. It symbolises her own future.
f) *'a great emptiness'*. The place where she stops is owned by the Cherokee tribe only *'according to the road signs'* – she is cautious about accepting the fact.
g) He could be an Indian – a Cherokee. He seems to be honest: he hasn't overcharged her, even though she's vulnerable.
h) They have been badly treated (*'marched'* off their lands). They are now protected, or protect*ive* – you have to qualify to be *'let in'*.
i) She realises that its emptiness and treelessness make it a wholly unsuitable environment for the Cherokees: her ancestors have been forcibly relocated to an area where their culture could not survive. The world is not just an untrustworthy place, therefore, it is also a cruel and unfair one.
j) *'godless'*

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Guiding Questions on Setting *(for further practice)*

How do features of the landscape Taylor passes through take on an extra significance for her?

This story seems to be about a young woman who is 'jumping out of the frying pan into the fire'. Show how details of the setting support that idea.

The Other Areas

2. Character

a) Find details in the following lines to support the idea that the writer is fatalistic (willing to accept whatever life hands out to her) by nature: *5-7;9-10;12;23-24;30-31;32-33;37;41-43;50-51;51-53*.

(This will demonstrate that even a single straightforward question can draw your attention to many of the passage's details – you have to be willing to search thoroughly and not write down only the first answer you come across, even though it may be a perfectly sound one. You needn't investigate all of the above references if you don't want to, but at least look in the boxed section below at the other things you could have said.)

6-8 She thinks people shouldn't be able to choose their own names, and is willing to let chance choose hers.
9-10 She continues to believe that, even when it seems that she will end up with a ridiculous name: she keeps her fingers crossed superstitiously as if it's all a matter of luck.
12 She even needs to feel that 'destiny' is in control of her life.
25-26 She is prepared to put an even more important decision – about where she will spend the rest of her life – in the hands of fate (in the form of her car).
33 She preferred the view in Kentucky, where she could imagine something was going to happen to her *'just over the next hill'*.
35-36 Her despair at the emptiness of Oklahoma arises out of the fact that, clearly, no nice surprises lie ahead.
39 She sees her escape from a crash as being the result of a miracle rather than her own actions.
44-45 She almost gives up when she finds she has had to use up much of her money, as if she has been dealt too harsh a blow.
53-54 The implication, even though the expression is humorous, is that people can be made to do things against their will (which of course is true).
55-56 One reason for bringing the Cherokees to this hopeless place (she says) was to get them to accept that what had been done to them was inevitable.

None of that is very exciting; but you have to admit it's convincing, just by its very extensiveness. Writing a commentary is largely about presenting good evidence.

Here's a typical guiding question on ***Character***, just to remind you of how details like the ones you have just focused on can help you answer broader questions:

What do we learn from the passage about the kind of woman the central character is?

That's very general, of course; but you're unlikely to get one as precise as the one on her fatalistic outlook. You'd be expected to list each of her personal qualities, with at least one illustration of each.

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Here are some of the things you could mention.

- Her negative attitude towards herself and also towards her life so far
- Her desire for change
- Her fatalism (of course)
- Her cynicism
- Her rather bitter sense of humour
- Her vulnerability to despair
- Her practical sense (reflected in her knowledge about cars and the way she talks herself out of giving up)
- Her sense of justice, or rather injustice
- Her sense of adventure when she was a child…which perhaps still underlies her behaviour now

3. Action

a) The fact that the writer begins this part of her narrative by driving over a *'line'* suggests what?

b) *'The steering wheel bore no relation to where the car was going.'* How does that detail reflect the way the narrative is unfolding?

a) That she is taking a decisive step, and there may be no going back
b) We have the sense that the woman is not at all in control of events and has no idea where she is headed – on her journey and in her life.

A typical and more general guiding question might be:

What indications are there that the woman's past may have a bearing on her future?

She is part Cherokee, and has arrived in an area apparently owned by the Cherokees. Her resources are running low and she may have to seek help. She has grown up with strong feelings about the way the Cherokees have been treated. Her mother has taught her some skills for survival, one of them being that you can claim *'rights'* arising out of your heritage. All of these things may come together in the next stage of the narrative (but don't play guessing games beyond what the examiner asks of you).

4. Style

4-5 'I wasn't crazy about anything I had been called' is an informal, or colloquial, writing style (approximating to speech, or even slang). It is appropriate to the casual, haphazard and chancy way the woman conducts her journey. Find some other examples of the same style.

You probably don't need much help with this question. *'Pretty close…kept pushing it' (line 9)* are the next examples in the passage. There are a dozen or so altogether. If you know the word 'laconic' you'll see that it, too, fits her style of writing.

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5. Ideas

How central to the passage is the idea that the world is a risky place and that life can be unjust?

You needn't answer that question: but you'll see that much of the material you would need to do so is to be found in the details you explored when we were looking at the story's setting.

A Poem with a Focus on Character

PASSAGE 14

The Geranium

When I put her out, once, by the garbage-pail,
She looked so limp and bedraggled,
So foolish and trusting, like a sick poodle,
Or a wizened aster[1] in late September,
5 I brought her in again for a new routine –
Vitamins, water and whatever
Sustenance seemed sensible
At the time: she'd lived
So long on gin, bobbie pins, half-smoked cigars, dead beer,
10 Her shriveled petals falling
On the faded carpet, the stale
Steak grease stuck to her fuzzy leaves.
(Dried-out, she creaked like a tulip.)

The things she endured!
15 The dumb dames shrieking half the night
Or the two of us, alone, both seedy,
Me breathing booze at her,
She leaning out of her pot toward the window.

Near the end, she seemed almost to hear me –
20 And that was scary –

So when that snuffling cretin[2] of a maid
Threw her, pot and all, into the trash-can,
I said nothing.

But I sacked the presumptuous hag the next week,
25 I was that lonely.

Theodore Roethke

[1]aster: type of flower [2]cretin: idiot

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Character

A 'character' in a poem doesn't have to be a person. Another way of looking at that is to say that an object (a flower) can *have* character, and that makes it *like* a person and we can respond to it as if it *is* a person. If we talk or write about it as if it's a person then we are said to be 'personifying' it. You knew that.

Another thing about ***Character*** is that the person around whom the interest of a piece of writing centres isn't always the one who's written about most. This poem describes a geranium (which is very fully personified, to the point where we can clearly call it one of the poem's three characters). But it's the poet (or the character he is pretending to be: we'll need to deal with that aspect of characterisation – the idea of a 'persona' – later) about whom we learn most in the end. This is what we might call 'reflected characterisation', revealing a character to the reader largely through the way they respond to another character.

Here's a set of questions, then, to help you focus on the three characters in *The Geranium*, and on the way they're presented.

a) *2-4* The geranium is compared both to a poodle and to another flower. Which comparison is more effective? Why?

b) *5 'a new routine'*: the geranium had been……………………………………for some time.

c) *10 'shriveled'*: connected to…………………..earlier in the poem. A word later that reinforces both of these is……………………………

d) *12* Why *'fuzzy'*?

e) *13 'creaked like a tulip'*: another…………………..

f) *14 'endured'*: the poet's feelings toward her?

g) *16 'seedy'*: a pun (play on words). The flower is ……………….. and the man is……………………..

h) *18-25* What elements of personality does the geranium reveal in the final stages of the poem (and of her life)?

a) The first one, surely. The poodle is presented as a warm-blooded animal with feelings, and the comparison therefore supports the personification of the geranium; the geranium and the poodle share four adjectives, which together present a clear visual picture; the poet's own feelings are involved (*'foolish'* suggest that he is making a judgement). The aster on the other hand is described only as *'wizened'*, and that word carries little emotional weight. Similes (and metaphors) are often more powerful when the two things compared are largely unalike: two flowers have too much in common for a comparison between them to add much. (Why use it, then? Fair question.)
b) A part of the man's life
c) *'wizened'* (*line 4* - do the two adjectives reinforce each other?) Further reinforcement: *'dried-out' (line 13)*
d) Geranium leaves are, so this is a very accurate adjective. Sometimes description is just description; but does *'fuzzy'* carry the additional idea of 'not looked after'?

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e) flower comparison. This one is different because it adds sound, and suggests that the geranium is suffering from the stiffening effects of age.
f) Admiration? Guilt?
g) Going to seed (as all flowers do towards the end of their life); and he is both unhealthy and unwholesome
h) *19* Desire to survive, and distaste for the poet's way of life
20 The ability to hear him
26 The ability to provide companionship

Are you ready to explore the character of the geranium's owner by yourself? Why not do so in the same way – devise questions and look for answers? (You'll find that the answers sometimes present themselves before the questions…) If you're working in class you could try the questions on each other.

Take a break first.

These are some of this issues that may have come up as you worked on the man's character:

- *Is* he a man rather than a woman?
- If he is a man, is the geranium's gender significant?
- What we learn about the man's lifestyle…and how we learn it
- His feelings and how they change as the poem develops
- Our feelings towards him

But What About the Maid?

Poems, like short stories, often have a twist – a sudden change of direction – at the end. One twist here is that poet suddenly realises (too late) that he has lost a friend when the geranium is thrown out: the final line comes as something of a revelation to the reader.

We might however see a more subtle change of direction a little earlier, in the fact that the maid, who was guilty only of doing her job too well, ends up fired. Is it at all ironic that she, as sickly *('snuffling')* and deserving of pity as the geranium (she is, sadly, not of the brightest), is treated – and described *('hag')* – so harshly? Does the fact that the man had more of a relationship with his flower than with his employee tell us something new about him, or about the poet's attitude towards him?

Careful, here! We're coming close to seeing moralising where there may be none. It's unlikely that Theodore Roethke would have wanted such considerations to get in the way of the touching ending to the poem as it stands. So we've fallen into the trap of looking for hidden meanings 'after the event' – when the real impact of the poem has subsided.

The best poets don't preach.

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Persona

Was Theodore Roethke a dissolute young man who smoked and drank too heavily and had heavy sexual encounters at all hours of the night? No? So who is *'I'* in the poem?

A persona is a character a writer pretends to be in order to tell a story …or, turning it around, a character speaking in the first person (*'I', 'Me'*), as if he's the writer.

Writers can have a lot in common with the personae they create, or nothing at all. What the writer feels towards his central character – or his other characters for that matter – is very important. So is what the writer wants *us* to feel about them.

What do we feel towards the man in *The Geranium*?

The Other Areas

Setting

Done, really. What does the window *(line 19)* represent?

Action

Look simply at how the story falls into time periods (find the 'time markers'), and how that is reflected in the breaks in the poem and the length of each section.

Style

It's all about detail. Is there a difference between a *'garbage pail' (line 1)* and a *'trash can' (line 23)*? If there is, why has the poet used the phrases in that order? If you can't think of anything else, consider their sound.

Ideas

A powerful symbolic representation of what Mankind is doing to the world – or just a poem about a flower?

A Passage with a Focus on Style

PASSAGE 15

**A
Sort
Of
Preface**

It does no good to write autobiographical fiction cause the minute the book hits the stand here comes your mama screamin how could you and sighin death where is thy sting and she snatches

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you out of your bed to grill you about what was going down back there in Brooklyn when she was working three jobs and trying to improve the quality of your life and come to find on page
5 42 that you were messin around with that nasty boy up the block and breaks into sobs and quite naturally your family strolls in all sleepy-eyed to catch the floor show at 5.00 A.M. but as far as your mama is concerned, it is nineteen-forty-and-something and you ain't too grown to have your ass whipped.

And it's no use using bits and snatches even of real events and real people, even if you do cover,
10 disguise, switch-around and change-up cause next thing you know your best friend's laundry cart is squeaking past but your bell ain't ringing so you trot down the block after her and there's this drafty cold pressure front the weatherman surely did not predict and your friend says in this chilly way that it's really something when your friend stabs you in the back with a pen and for the next two blocks you try to explain that the character is not her at all but just happens to be
15 speaking one of her lines and right about the time you hit the laundromat and you're ready to give it up and take the weight, she turns to you and says that seeing how you have plundered her soul and walked off with a piece of her flesh, the least you can do is spin off half the royalties[1] her way.

So I deal in straight-up fiction myself, cause I value my family and friends, and mostly cause I
20 lie a lot anyway.

Toni Cade Bambara, *Gorilla, My Love* (1984)

[1] royalties: the share of the publisher's profits paid to the writer

Some of the things we say here will reinforce the ideas we introduced when we looked at *Source Unknown* (page 39) and the *Childe Harold* extract (page 43).

How would you describe the style of *this* passage? Sloppy? Incorrect? Difficult to follow?

But it *works*. How?

It's as appropriate in its own way as the *Childe Harold* passage, that's how. It's *natural* – it's the way the character talks and writes in her everyday life, and it makes sense to use the same style in the preface to her book. She's clearly going to be giving us an insight in that book into how she lives, or at least into how the people around her live (in spite of what she says about avoiding autobiography). Our language is an enormously important part of our lives: it characterises us, among other things: so she'll want to use her 'own' words.

We defined style near the beginning of the book as 'the way words are put together'. 'Good style', then, is 'the best words in the best order'. The best words in the best order are the ones that most fully communicate, but also most fully *match*, what is being written about.

That all sounds very simple; and we've chosen this passage because it will allow us to say some very simple and straightforward things about style – which is a complicated topic.
Here's a reminder of two helpful terms first of all: ***Diction*** and ***Syntax***.

Diction is choice of words (the 'best' words in the case of good style).

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Syntax (roughly the same as grammar) is the way words are combined in phrases and sentences (their order).

Let's describe the diction of this passage, then. What kind of words has Toni Cade Bambara chosen for the 'Kind of Preface'?

Sloppy and incorrect, you may still want to say (but what is 'correct' language?)

Try to be kinder – call them informal, or colloquial ('typical of speech rather than writing'). Then consider 'authentic' (the kind of words a down-to-earth family might use in a real New York) and 'colourful' and 'vigorous'.

How about humorous? Ironic?

As we apply each of these terms to the passage, we see that language even as basic ('non-literary', you might almost say) as the writer's can be very effective, in the right context.

So the first thing you have to do when you're thinking about style is to postpone as long as possible any judgement of it, until you've seen how it works. Don't jump to call it 'sloppy', or 'incorrect' (or 'old-fashioned', 'too full of big words' or 'obscure') – terms you'll be tempted to use when you come to consider writing from previous centuries. Give writers a chance to reach you through the words they have chosen; then try to decide why they chose *those* words and why they put them in *that* order…and only then decide how effective (how good) their style is. This is an important part of the concept of 'author's choice', something the IB Literature and Language and Literature courses pay full attention to.

'Those words' still, then – the ***Diction*** of the passage: can you find one word or phrase in *'A Sort of Preface'* which is most or all of the things we've listed as typical of Toni Cade Bambara's language – one word or phrase which is sloppy, incorrect, informal, colloquial, authentic, colourful, vigorous, humorous *and* ironical all at the same time?

How about *'catch the floor show' (line 10)*?

It's maybe not incorrect grammatically… but it's probably all of the other things.

Look for one or two more examples.

'Hits the stand…here comes your momma…messin around with that nasty boy' etc etc. Much of the passage, in fact, would fit that description.

Syntax, now. If you agreed earlier that the passage was difficult to follow, you'll have probably realised that the problem lies in the fact that each of the first two paragraphs is one long, break-neck sentence. We're allowed to pause between them, but then the second one begins with another *'And'*, as if the writer didn't really want to stop at all, and we take off at high speed again.

Here are some questions about syntax, and about punctuation (the job of punctuation is to mark out the syntax of a sentence).

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a) We called the diction of the passage authentic. Can you see any way in which the syntax is, as well?

b) Why are there no speech marks around what the characters say?

c) Why, on the other hand, does the writer carefully punctuate *'5.00 A.M.'* and, moreover, use capital letters?

a) Is it that the writer's whole existence is as breathless as the language in which she describes it, with no time for pauses?
b) The people in these episodes say things right out, as they are: there's no distinction between what is thought, said or written. That's one of the features of life as it is lived by the author, and she acknowledges it in her decision not to use speech marks, which would be an artificial demarcation.
c) To emphasise the earliness of the hour and the drama of the clash between mother and daughter, which attracts a *'sleepy-eyed'* family audience.

Here's some more quick practice before we move on from this entertaining passage.

1. Setting

What details indicate that the writer comes from an impoverished background?

2. Character

The writer presents her best friend humorously by showing up a contradiction in her behaviour. Find it.

3. Action

The episodes are described as if they are happening now and happening to *'you'*. What effect does that have?

4. Style *(a couple of extra details worth noting)*

a) *'screamin' (line 6)* is something of an over-dramatisation of the event. So is *'death where is thy sting'.* Find some more examples. You may recognise them more easily as *exaggerated* language.

b) Some of the imagery of the passage is used with deliberate clumsiness *('stabs you in the back with her pen')* to produce a comic effect. Find another example.

5. Ideas

What different views do mother and daughter seem to have about what is necessary for *'quality of…life' (line 8)*?

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1. Setting
Her mother's three jobs; the laundry cart/laundromat; her friend's attempt to get money out of her.
2. Character
The friend is mightily offended by what has been written about her, but that doesn't stop her from asking for a share of the profit from the book *(lines 21-22)*. The contradiction is emphasised by the humorous contrast between the exaggerated language in which she describes her hurt and the slickness of the phrase in which she may have asked for money – *'spin off half the royalties her way'*.
3. Action
It makes them seem universal: this is *always* what happens when you write autobiography, so you'd better not. It gives more point, in other words, to her argument.
4. Style
a). *'snatches'*, *'grill'*, *'the floor show'*, *'stabs you in the back'* , *'walked off with a piece of her flesh'*. (Another term you could use for some of them is 'mock heroic' – phrases from much more heavyweight pieces of writing are used to describe comparatively trivial events, for humorous effect. *'Death where is thy sting'* was a good example. *'Plundered her soul'* is another.)
b). *'plundered her soul and walked off with a piece of her flesh'* (It's alright, by the way, to use the same quotation to illustrate two different points in your commentary.)
5. Ideas
Her mother sees money as an important pre-requisite (which is why she took three jobs to support the family); but choosing your friends carefully also matters (*'that nasty boy up the block'* was something of a problem for her); and discipline (having *'your ass whipped'* at times) is necessary to preserve standards.

The writer herself regards friendship and family as all-important…and perhaps doing what comes naturally (lying, in her case – which is what fiction in a sense is; but also being honest, since her fiction is *'straight-up'* – not disguised autobiography).

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Part 7: Passages from Plays and Non-Fiction Sources

The final passage in Part 6, *A Sort of Preface*, although it is fiction, reads like a mix of editorial, essay and autobiography. We hope the work you have done on it has shown that the SCASI structure can be useful in organising our thinking about a wider range of writing than prose fiction and poetry.

The **IB Language A: Literature Guide** lists essays, biographies, journalism and drama (alongside novels, short stories and poetry) as possible sources of unseen commentary passages for use in the Paper 1 exam, and other examination systems reach out in a similar way beyond fiction and verse. Here, therefore, are extracts from some of those other genres, to which you may wish to practise applying the SCASI treatment.

Some slight re-definition of the SCASI elements may be necessary to that process, and we shall pay attention to that as we move through the passages.

We have selected an extract from a play to begin with, since the step from prose fiction to drama is not a large one, particularly when the fiction (novel or short story) includes substantial amounts of dialogue.

PASSAGE 16 – A Play

[SCENE – A Chamber in an old-fashioned House. MRS. HARDCASTLE and MR. HARDCASTLE are in the middle of a conversation.]

HARDCASTLE: …I love everything that's old: old friends, old times, old manners, old books, old wine; and I believe, Dorothy (taking her hand), you'll own I have been pretty fond of an old wife.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. Lord, Mr. Hardcastle, you're for ever at your Dorothys and your old
5 wifes. You may be a Darby, but I'll be no Joan[1], I promise you. I'm not so old as you'd make me, by more than one good year. Add twenty to twenty, and make money of that.

HARDCASTLE. Let me see; twenty added to twenty makes just fifty and seven.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. It's false, Mr. Hardcastle; I was but twenty when I was brought to bed of Tony, that I had by Mr. Lumpkin, my first husband; and he's not come to years of discretion yet.

10 HARDCASTLE. Nor ever will, I dare answer for him. Ay, you have taught him finely.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. No matter. Tony Lumpkin has a good fortune. My son is not to live by his learning. I don't think a boy wants much learning to spend fifteen hundred a year.

HARDCASTLE. Learning, quotha! a mere composition of tricks and mischief.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. Humour, my dear; nothing but humour. Come, Mr. Hardcastle, you must
15 allow the boy a little humour.

HARDCASTLE. I'd sooner allow him a horse-pond. If burning the footmen's shoes, frightening the maids, and worrying the kittens be humour, he has it. It was but yesterday he fastened my

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wig to the back of my chair, and when I went to make a bow, I popt my bald head in Mrs. Frizzle's face.

20 MRS. HARDCASTLE. And am I to blame? The poor boy was always too sickly to do any good. A school would be his death. When he comes to be a little stronger, who knows what a year or two's Latin may do for him?

HARDCASTLE. Latin for him! A cat and fiddle. No, no; the alehouse and the stable are the only schools he'll ever go to.

25 MRS. HARDCASTLE. Well, we must not snub the poor boy now, for I believe we shan't have him long among us. Anybody that looks in his face may see he's consumptive.

HARDCASTLE. Ay, if growing too fat be one of the symptoms.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. He coughs sometimes.

HARDCASTLE. Yes, when his liquor goes the wrong way.

30 MRS. HARDCASTLE. I'm actually afraid of his lungs.

HARDCASTLE. And truly so am I; for he sometimes whoops like a speaking trumpet – *[Tony hallooing behind the scenes]* – O, there he goes – a very consumptive figure, truly.

[Enter TONY, crossing the stage.]

MRS. HARDCASTLE. Tony, where are you going, my charmer? Won't you give papa and I a little of your company, lovee?

35 TONY. I'm in haste, mother; I cannot stay.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. You shan't venture out this raw evening, my dear; you look most shockingly.

TONY. I can't stay, I tell you. The Three Pigeons expects me down every moment. There's some fun going forward.

40 HARDCASTLE. Ay; the alehouse, the old place: I thought so.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. A low, paltry set of fellows.

TONY. Not so low, neither. There's Dick Muggins the exciseman, Jack Slang the horse doctor, Little Aminadab that grinds the music box, and Tom Twist that spins the pewter platter.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. Pray, my dear, disappoint them for one night at least.

45 TONY. As for disappointing them, I should not so much mind; but I can't abide to disappoint myself.

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MRS. HARDCASTLE. (detaining him.) You shan't go.

TONY. I will, I tell you.

MRS. HARDCASTLE. I say you shan't.

TONY. We'll see which is strongest, you or I. *[Exit, hauling her out.]*

50

HARDCASTLE *[solus].* Ay, there goes a pair that only spoil each other. But is not the whole age in a combination to drive sense and discretion out of doors?

Olive Goldsmith, *She Stoops to Conquer*, or *The Mistakes of a Night*,(1875)

[1]Darby and Joan – a proverbial elderly couple, living quietly and in contentment

Setting

The setting of a play includes, but is not the same as, the play's 'set' – the immediate physical environment visible on stage. The set can, however, give us clues as to the play's setting (if, for instance, it's a kitchen in what is clearly an impoverished rural cottage, or is designed to represent a World War One dug-out); and it can also point us towards the kind of situation we will find in that particular place and at that time.

How does the description of the scene here – *'A chamber in an old-fashioned house'* – prepare us for and connect with the discussion between the two principal characters? ('Chamber' = room.)

It ties in with Mr. Hardcastle's assertion that he likes *'old things'*; and we soon learn that his preference extends to a belief in established standards of behaviour (which is why he disapproves of Tony Lumpkin's bad habits). That in turn is the foundation of his disagreement with Mrs Hardcastle about her son. It's all connected!

Character

In a play, character can be revealed only by what the dramatis personae themselves say and do. The writer, in other words, cannot analyse or comment on what he puts before us (as he could in a novel) – except, to a limited degree, in his stage directions.

We can gather much, however, from what characters tell us about other characters. The reliability factor comes into play here, though – can we trust what we are told? That will depend on how much credibility the speaker has acquired, in the audience's eyes.

Based on your reading of the first nine lines of the passage, which of the two characters would you regard as the more reliable in what they say?

There is no clear answer. Mr. Hardcastle seems a sincere man, in his expression of affection towards his wife; but he is playfully inaccurate about her age. (How old *is* she, however?)

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We might regard Mrs. Hardcastle, on the other hand, as somewhat obtuse (she cannot see that her leg is being pulled) and too readily indignant, and on those grounds as someone whose words bear close examination.

We must therefore suspend judgement until more has happened, and more has been said.

Action

That last comment takes us to the heart of dramatic action. Very often, at or near the beginning of a play, we are presented with a 'situation' which needs to be resolved, and we meet characters whose behaviour, as the situation moves towards its resolution, we will find ourselves feeling strongly about and probably passing judgement on. Whatever early impression we gain of those characters will be confirmed or modified when 'more has happened, and more has been said' – and that of course is a process ongoing, in some cases, until the play's closing lines.

Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle express very different views of Tony Lumpkin and his behaviour. How does the later part of the passage help us determine whose opinion on that subject is the more dependable?

Mr Hardcastle's view is borne out by
- The list of Tony's mischiefs he gives us
- The obvious vigour with which Tony crosses the stage – on his way to the inn
- His (Tony's) unwillingness to *'disappoint'* himself (and his readiness to disappoint his friends)
- The names of his acquaintances, suggesting as they do that his friends tend towards the disreputable
- The way he '*hauls*' his mother off when she tries to stop him leaving.

Mrs. Hardcastle's account of Tony, on the other hand, comes into question when she reveals herself to be a foolishly doting mother.

Style

We have defined good style previously, and loosely, as 'the best words in the best order'. That definition is relevant to the dialogue of a play; but what a dramatist can allow a character to say is limited by appropriateness (of words to character, with all of the limitations imposed by who and what the character is).

What, in the dialogue of this passage, will capture and hold the audience's attention? (In other words, why are the words Oliver Goldsmith gives his characters 'the best words in the best order' for that purpose?)

- It employs the diction and rhythms of real speech, which helps make the characters believable.
- It differentiates between the characters: Mr. Hardcastle, at least to begin with, speaks in a measured and more formal way, whereas Mrs. Hardcastle's speech is comparatively impassioned and colloquial.
- It is basically a battle of words, and a vigorous one.
- Mr. Hardcastle's use of irony (verging on sarcasm) is an entertaining part of that battle.
- The endearments Mrs. Hardcastle uses in addressing Tony *('my charmer', 'lovee')* and her ineffectively wheedling tone make her seem absurd.

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We should also note once more here, however, the concept of 'dramatic style', which identifies the way a dramatist makes use of dramatic conventions (including dialogue) and theatrical possibilities to tell his story on stage.

What from this passage would you judge the dramatic style of *She Stoops to Conquer* to be? (Your answer will of necessity be somewhat brief and tentative. Try using SCASI, however, to organise it.)

- Domestic in its setting
- Stereotypical in its characterisation
- Fast-paced and lively in its action – including its verbal action – with some elements of slapstick (physical comedy)
- Comic and satirical in the style of its dialogue
- Contemporary in its concerns, but with some clear universality

Ideas

What may be some of the play's 'concerns', either contemporary or universal, as evidenced in this passage?

- Change, and modernity
- Ageing, and sensitivity thereto
- Marital harmony and disharmony
- Wayward youth
- The ineffectiveness of education, and its irrelevance when one's future is assured
- Parental indulgence

Where in the passage does Mr. Hardcastle identify such concerns as contemporary (to him)?

In his comment made *solus* (alone on stage): *'But is not the whole age in a combination to drive sense and discretion out of doors?'*

You may have noted, however, that they all have a relevance today, also; and that would be a point worth making in your commentary, when you come to discuss the passage's overall significance and impact.

In light of all of the above, devise two guiding questions that would allow examination candidates to demonstrate their ability to a) understand and interpret the passage and b) write perceptively about its style.

Two of many possibilities…

What in the passage (taken from very near the beginning of the play's opening scene) would encourage the audience to settle further into their seats in expectation of an enjoyable and thought-provoking evening's entertainment?

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What does the dramatist's use of repetition, rhythm, colloquialism (informal speech) and idiom (common expressions) add to the effect of the passage?

You should be able to use some at least of what you have already noticed about the passage to answer either your own questions or the two we have offered above. Here's a checklist for the latter, with some suggestions additional to what we've already noted (mainly regarding the second question).

First question:

- Any significant 'quirkiness' the stage designer has included in his set
- The caricatures Mr and Mrs. Hardcastle seem to be (there is an invitation, in the dialogue, to overplay the parts for comic effect)
- The strength of their disagreements (age-old exam question: 'Drama is conflict.' Discuss)
- The quick vigour of their exchanges
- The issues raised. (By including those you will have paid attention to the phrase 'thought-provoking' in the question. You can't afford to ignore it.)

Second question:

- Mr. Hardcastle's multiple use of *'old'* in his opening speech to emphasise his firmness of preference and lead (rhythmically) up to the sentence's jesting climax
- Mrs. Hardcastle's repetition of *'humour'* in *lines 14-15*, which reveals the emptiness of her argument: the sentence limps, and goes nowhere. (Note, by the way, that 'humour' doesn't mean 'sense of humour'; by the late nineteenth century the term still meant 'temperament or disposition, governed by the humours – fluids – in the body. So Mrs. Hardcastle is simply saying, 'That's the way he is' – a lame excuse for Tony's rambunctiousness.)
- The list (lists have their own rhythm) Mr Hardcastle gives us in of some of Tony's tricks *(lines16-17)*, leading as it does to the amusing climax of the wig episode
- The list (*lines 42-43* – rhythm again) of Tony's acquaintances, descending as it does into 'lowness' and inconsequence in a sort of inverted climax
- The colloquialism and idiom together make us feel that we are privy to a heated conversation between two very real people. No grand speeches here, just a sharp domestic exchange.
- The well-worn nature of some of the expressions used suggest that Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle have been over this ground many times before: *'You're for ever at your Dorothys and your old wifes' (lines 4-5).*

Perhaps the play will be performed, one in day, in a theatre near you…

PASSAGE 17 – Biographical Writing

When the man entered the restaurant from the side steps leading to the dining room he saw DiMaggio[1] standing near the window along with an elderly maitre d' named Charles Friscia. Not wanting to walk in and risk intrusion, the man asked one of DiMaggio's nephews to inform Joe of his presence. When DiMaggio got the message he quickly turned and left Friscia and
5 disappeared through an exit leading down to the kitchen.

Astonished and confused, the visitor stood in the hall. A moment later Friscia appeared and the man asked, 'Did Joe leave?'

'Joe who?' Friscia replied.

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‘Joe DiMaggio.’

10 ‘Haven’t seen him,’ Friscia said.

‘You haven’t *seen* him! He was standing right next to you a second ago!’

‘It wasn’t me,’ Friscia said.

‘You were standing next to him. I saw you. In the dining room.’

‘You must be mistaken,’ Friscia said, softly, seriously. ‘It wasn’t me.’

15 ‘You *must* be kidding,’ the man said, angrily, turning and leaving the restaurant. Before he could get to his car, however, DiMaggio’s nephew came running after him and said, ‘Joe wants to see you.’

He returned expecting to see DiMaggio waiting for him. Instead he was handed a telephone. The voice was powerful and deep and so tense that the quick sentences ran together.

20 *‘You are intruding on my rights. I did not ask you to come. I assume you have a lawyer, you must have a lawyer, get your lawyer!'*

‘I came as friend,’ the man interrupted.

‘That’s beside the point,’ DiMaggio said. ‘I have my privacy, I do not want it violated, you’d better get a lawyer…’ Then, pausing, DiMaggio asked, ‘Is my nephew there?’

25 He was not.

‘Then wait where you are.’

A moment later DiMaggio appeared, tall and red-faced, erect and beautifully dressed in his dark suit and white shirt with the grey silk tie and the gleaming silver cuff links. He moved with big steps toward the man and handed him an airmail envelope, unopened, that the man had 30 written from New York.

‘Here,’ DiMaggio said. ‘This is yours.’

Then DiMaggio sat down at a small table. He said nothing, just lit a cigarette and waited, legs crossed, his head held high and back so as to reveal the intricate construction of his nose, a fine sharp tip above the big nostrils and tiny bones built out from the bridge, a great nose.

35 ‘Look,’ DiMaggio said, more calmly. ‘I do not interfere with other people’s lives. And I do not expect them to interfere with mine. There are things about my life, personal things, that I refuse to talk about. And even if you asked my brothers they would be unable to tell you about them because they do not know. There are things about me, so many things, that they do not know…’

40 ‘I don’t want to cause trouble,’ the man said. ‘I think you’re a great man, and…’

‘I’m not great,’ DiMaggio cut in. ‘I’m not great,’ he repeated, softly. ‘I’m just a man trying to get along.’

Then DiMaggio, as if realizing he was intruding on his own privacy, abruptly stood up. He looked at his watch.

45 ‘I’m late,’ he said, very formal again. ‘I’m ten minutes late. *You’re* making me late.’

The man left the restaurant. He crossed the street and wandered over to the pier, briefly watching the fishermen hauling their nets and talking in the sun, seeming very calm and contented. Then, after he had turned and was heading back towards the parking lot, a blue Impala stopped in front of him and Joe DiMaggio leaned out the window and asked, ‘Do you have a 50 car?’ His voice was very gentle.

‘Yes,’ the man said.

‘Oh,’ DiMaggio said. ‘I would have given you a ride.’

Gay Talese, *The Silent Season of a Hero* (1966)

[1] Joe DiMaggio, perhaps the most famous baseball player of all time.

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You might not regard this as typical biography, since it gives no historical facts, and does not analyse the subject's personality or cultural significance. Let's reverse our usual procedure, however, and look at a pair of guiding questions that may allow us to see what makes the passage so effective – as biography – then we can turn to the other things we might choose to say about it under the five SCASI headings.

> *What insights does the passage give us into DiMaggio's character, and how does it help our understanding of his state of mind at this time in his life?*
>
> *How does Gay Talese recount this incident in such as way as to explain why the visitor, and we, would be confused by it?*

Both questions should point you towards the fact that the passage is entirely narrative. Why has Gay Talese adopted that style of biography (at this point in DiMaggio's story at least)? A quotation from the novelist Edith Wharton may help you decide: 'At every stage in the progress of his tale the novelist must rely on what may be called the *illuminating incident* to reveal and emphasize the inner meaning of each situation. Illuminating incidents are the magic casements of fiction, its vistas on infinity.'

What is true (according to Edith Wharton) for the novelist may also be true for the biographer. So your answer to the first guiding question will perhaps have shown what is 'illuminating' about the episode, and your response to the second one will have said something about the clarity Talese's narrative technique (including his writing style and his use of dialogue) provides as we look through the 'magic casement' at this period in DiMaggio's life. Some suggested responses:

DiMaggio's character and state of mind:

- Protective of his privacy *(lines 4-5, 23-24)*
- Somewhat irritable (*lines 20-2* – note the emphatic italics, and the use of commas to suggest tension and rapid speech)
- Vain *(lines 27-28)*
- Secretive, even as far as his family is concerned (lines 36-39). Does he have something to hide?
- Humble *(lines 1-42)* – or is this just evasiveness, an attempt to 'keep his head down'?
- Capable of feeling guilty at his behaviour, hence his paradoxical willingness to give the visitor a ride (lines 48-52) – or should we note that he first of all takes care to check that a ride will not be not necessary?

Note the questions attached to the last three details we have picked out: DiMaggio comes over, in the passage, as an ambiguous character. Paradoxically, the clarity Talese's narrative technique provides (as noted above) makes plain the lack of clarity in DiMaggio's character.

Talese's narrative technique:

- His use of flat denials in the dialogue *(lines 7-14)* to introduce an air of unreality: this part of the passage reads like something from the Theatre of the Absurd.
- DiMaggio's disappearance *(line 4)*, non-reappearance *(lines 18-19)*, sudden return *(line 27)*, abrupt departure *(lines 43-45)* and unexpected arrival in the car: all of this jerky coming and going is bound to have mystified the visitor.
- The hiatus Talese creates by suddenly focussing (twice – *lines 27-28* and *lines 32-34*) on the details of DiMaggio's appearance. This adds moments of suspense during which we imagine the visitor asking himself, 'What's going to happen now?'
- The contrasts in DiMaggio's speaking tone (aggression, power, calmness, informality, formality, gentleness).

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There are other interesting things to note in the passage, however. Some further questions may help you identify them.

Setting

What suggests that DiMaggio has taken refuge in a close, and up to a point closed, community?

- The visitor is treated throughout as a stranger.
- Friscia is quick to protect DiMaggio, by lying.
- The community has a clear national identity.
- Fishing communities (which this is) are traditionally close.

Character

What is most noticeable about Gay Talese's presentation of the visitor?

He lacks identity:
- He is referred to only as '*the man'*.
- He is not described.
- We are given no reason for his visit.
- He shows only one brief flash of feeling, and says nothing of significance.

Here's a thought. Is there any chance that Gay Talese was himself the visitor, and is now telling the story as if it happened to someone else? How, otherwise, could he have supplied so much detail?

Don't be afraid to speculate about such possibilities in the conclusion of your commentary (but don't do so at length, or wildly).

Action

Why will the visitor have found this to be a very unsatisfying encounter? Why might we not, as readers, find the account of it equally unsatisfying?

- The visitor will feel he has been lied to, played with, and treated dismissively.
- He has discovered that the letter he wrote to DiMaggio has not been opened.
- He has not been able to ask any questions, nor say whatever it was he came to say (DiMaggio cuts him short when he tries).
- He will leave puzzled by the whole event, and particularly by the inconsistencies in DiMaggio's behaviour.

As readers we have probably been engaged by the air of mystery with which Gay Talese invests DiMaggio, and intrigued by the very inconsistencies that have puzzled and upset the visitor. We will expect to discover, however, as we read on, why DiMaggio has behaved in this way.

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Style

'I write as I walk because I want to get somewhere and I write as straight as I can, just as I walk as straight as I can, because that is the best way to get there' (H. G. Wells).

How does that quotation help us understand the effectiveness of Gay Talese's narrative style in this passage (in the parts that are not dialogue)?

He writes directly and matter-of-factly, without expansion or explanation, and his treatment of the whole episode is as off-hand as DiMaggio's treatment of the visitor. 'This is how I am,' DiMaggio seems to be saying 'an ordinary man. Leave me alone.' 'This is simply what happened,' Gay Talese suggests. 'Make what you can of it.'

Ideas

What might we gather from this piece of writing about Gay Talese's view of the primary responsibility of the biographer?

That it is to allow the subject of the biography to speak for himself or herself, as far as that is possible, and avoid coming between him (her) and the reader.

In asking and answering that particular question we have stepped outside the boundaries of the passage itself, and have raised an issue not internal to it. When we look at genres other than those of fiction and poetry, we will likely find that the writer's role (and his own view of it) becomes more of a focus; and the writer himself may emerge more clearly as a persona in his writing.

In this passage, we have seen Gay Talese taking a position in relation to his narrative ('This is simply what happened. Make what you can of it.') – he has adopted a deliberate detachment from the story he tells. Paradoxically, that makes us more aware of him. We can now look at two non-fiction passages in which the writer is even more visible.

Both passages, too, are at a greater distance from fiction and poetry than the drama and biography extracts we have just examined, and you will be able therefore to put SCASI's versatility further to the test.

PASSAGE 18 – Travel Writing

March 3rd. Our next stage was a short one, less than sixty miles to Moshi, the capital of the Chagga country which I had entered from the other side in my trip from Mombasa. It was downhill into a hot plain. I hoped to persuade R. and the brigadier to spend the night at the German hotel on the other side of Kilimanjaro where I had been so comfortable, but there is a
5 huge, brand-new hotel in Moshi itself, built, owned and managed by a Greek; it is named The Livingstone, though Livingstone never came within 200 miles of it. It is the most up-to-date in Tanganyika, all concrete and plastic and chromium plate, and has proved very useful to film companies who come to make dramas of African life 'on location'. A film company was in occupation of the greater part of it at that moment and their lure proved irresistible to the

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10 brigadier, who hoped to find a galaxy of Hollywood starlets. In this he was disappointed. The heroines had already done their part and packed up, leaving the hero, of international repute, and a large, exclusively male rear column of cameramen and 'executives'. But The Livingstone was well equipped and well served, like a liner unaccountably stranded.

Let me here give a word of advice to fellow-tourists in East Africa: keep away from hotels 15 run by the British. We have no calling to this profession. Things are often better further south, but in Tanganyika especially all the defects which distress us at home are accentuated. The forbidding young women who stand behind the 'reception' counters in English provincial hotels have taken the place of post office clerks in the popular imagination for their combination of aloofness and incompetence. Many a weary traveller must have wondered what these wretches 20 do in their hours of leisure. In East Africa he can find out. They sit about with their patrons and make bright conversation. We had suffered from them already and I was to suffer more. Nothing like that happened at The Livingstone. But I felt homesick for the cool verandah of Kibo.

Arusha is a colonial town. Moshi is a model of what liberals hope to see in a self-governing dominion. The Chagga number about 300,000; their land is fertile and healthy. They have in 25 recent years evolved something of a constitutional monarchy. When the Germans came they found a number of local chiefs divided by rivalries which sometimes became violent. They hanged a number of chiefs and appointed one Marealle as paramount. It is his grandson who now reigns as Mshumbree Marealle II, the Mangi Mkuu. He is not infrequently spoken of as 'King Tom'.

30 We arrived at Moshi at 9 o'clock in the morning. The brigadier's eyes brightly scanned the hall of the hotel but [he] was told that the film company had already set out for their day's work. They had hired a number of corner-boys and were dressing them up as Masai and teaching them 'tribal' dances.

I was taken off to the Council Offices and introduced to the paramount chief. The Council 35 Offices are brand-new, spic and span, all paid for from local revenue. Marealle is an engaging young man, who has qualified himself for his high office by taking courses in Social Administration, Economics, Sociology and Psychology at the London School of Economics, without suffering from any of the radical influences popularly associated with that institution. He has also served in Tanganyika as a Welfare Officer and Programmes Manager of the Tanganyika 40 Broadcasting Station and has translated Kipling's 'If' into Kiswahili. He put me in charge of a subordinate to be shown the beauties of his office and dismissed me with an invitation to dinner that evening, saying: 'Don't trouble to dress. Come in your tatters and rags.'

Dinner was highly enjoyable. R., the brigadier and an English accountant and his newly arrived wife and an elderly Greek doctor and his wife comprised the party. Marealle was in 45 anything but 'tatters and rags'; a dandy with great social grace. His house not fifty miles from the nearest Masai bomas is of a date with everything in Moshi, entirely European in design and furniture; tiled bathrooms with towels to match their pastel tints, a radiogram in every room, the latest illustrated papers from England and the U.S.A., a grog tray on the verandah. I cajoled the accountant's wife into asking our host to turn off the wireless…

50 …After dinner… we sat on the verandah. Glasses were refilled. The wireless was on. In almost every official utterance homage is paid to the idea of 'the Tanganyika advance in nationhood'. For someone as unpolitical as myself it is difficult to guess what is meant by 'a nation' of peoples as dissimilar as the Chagga, the Masai, the Gogo, the Arabs of Pangani, the fishermen of Kilwa, the Greek and Indian magnates of Dar-es-Salaam, whose frontiers were 55 arbitrarily drawn in Europe by politicians who had never set foot in Africa.

Evelyn Waugh, *A Tourist in Africa* (1960)

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Setting

As we might expect from a piece of travel writing, there is a strong sense of place here. What kinds of setting other than physical and geographical, however, can you find in the passage?

- Economic (*line 24*)
- Historical (*lines 25-27*)
- Social and cultural (*lines 43-50*)
- Political (*23-25, 50-55*)

Character

At first sight this may not seem a very strong piece of travel writing. It gives us no sense of the exotic, records no startling events, is short of entertaining language, is not perceptively analytical. As we move through it, however, we may begin to feel, more and more, Evelyn Waugh's presence; and when we have finished reading we will probably take away more of the man who wrote than of the place he wrote about.

In what ways, then, does Evelyn Waugh, the man and the writer, emerge from his writing here?

- He makes plain some of his travel preferences *(lines 3-4)*.
- He raises an eyebrow, twice, at the brigadier's predilection for young ladies *(lines 9-10, 30-31)*.
- He is quick to indulge *(lines 14-22)* in a grumble about the service he has received in some hotels – in both Africa and England (which, in the latter case, is irrelevant to his current subject). We have to register this as a personal and off-topic opinion.
- He gives in to his irritation at the fact that a wireless is playing during dinner, and works (discreetly, at least) to have it switched off. He also notes, in the next paragraph, that it has been switched back on – a matter of concern to him alone, it would seem.
- The fact that he is confessedly *'unpolitical'* does not prevent him from expressing a clear and somewhat pessimistic view of Tanganyika's fundamentally tribal structure.

Overall we get a picture of a slightly grumpy, somewhat stuffy, mildly selfish, quietly cynical, rather reactionary and occasionally condescending Englishman Abroad. (You can if you like look for evidence of each of those several traits.)

Does his persona come between us and the place he is writing about? If so, does that matter too much? If at the end of the day we find him to be more interesting than his subject…well, all is not lost.

Other characters are mentioned in the passage, and you should mention them too in your commentary if you have an opportunity. If Evelyn Waugh presents them superficially, is that because in his view they *are* superficial?

Action

Is it at all significant, do you think, that Evelyn Waugh glosses over the actual drive to Moshi, describing it only as *'downhill into a hot plain'*?

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We could read into that the possibility that, as a tourist, it's not the travelling but the arriving that he finds interesting; but beware of over-extrapolation from extracts to whole works.

Does the fact that the passage is an account of a whole day (date given) add shape to what might otherwise be shapeless?

Style

Do you detect any stiffness or self-consciousness in the style of the passage?

Perhaps in Waugh's
- adoption of a false 'hand-on-the-shoulder' familiarity with his readers *('Let me here give a word of advice to fellow-tourists' – line 14)*
- inclusive generality *'We have no calling to this profession' (line15)*
- reference to his inadequacy as a political commentator *('For someone as unpolitical as myself…' – line 52)*
- the sociological observation he goes on to make, which is expressed in rather flat terms as if he feels it is the sort of thing, as a travel writer, he ought to be saying.

Ideas

Does Evelyn Waugh take, overall, a positive or negative view of Tanganyika in its present state, and of the effect outside influences have had on its development? (Draw up a balance sheet.)

Positive:
- The *'fertile and healthy'* nature of the land in at least this part of the country (*line 24*)
- The comparative stability arising from the evolution of a constitutional monarchy (of sorts) – *line 25.*
- The move towards sustainability in the economy and infra-structure (the Council Offices have been *'all paid for from local revenue' – line 35*).
- The paramount chief's civility and hospitality, educational background and apparent sense of civic responsibility

Negative:
- The inappropriateness of some of the visible signs of commercial inroad (The Livingstone Hotel *'all concrete and plastic and chromium plate…like a liner unaccountably stranded' – lines 7 and 13)*
- The importation of certain unsatisfactory features of English life (so that '*all the defects which distress us at home are accentuated*' in Tanganyika – *line 16*)
- Western attempts to romanticise Africa (as illustrated by the film crew hiring street-boys and *'teaching them "tribal" dances' – line 33*)

You may decide that Waugh has been objective and even-handed in his account of the country; alternatively, you may feel that the positives outweigh the negatives not just because of their larger number but because they are more important factors: Waugh's reservations about his Tanganyika experiences seem to be tinged by personal considerations and preferences.

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We’ve seen Evelyn Waugh overshadowing a piece of his writing; now let’s look for Charles Dickens in a piece of his.

PASSAGE 19 - Journalism

We take it that the commencement of a Session of Parliament is neither more nor less than the drawing up of the curtain for a grand comic pantomime, and that his Majesty's most gracious speech on the opening thereof may be not inaptly compared to the clown's opening speech of 'Here we are!' 'My lords and gentlemen, here we are!' appears, to our mind at least, to be a very
5 good abstract of the point and meaning of the propitiatory address of the ministry. When we remember how frequently this speech is made, immediately after THE CHANGE[1] too, the parallel is quite perfect, and still more singular.

Perhaps the cast of our political pantomime never was richer than at this day. We are particularly strong in clowns. At no former time, we should say, have we had such astonishing tumblers, or
10 performers so ready to go through the whole of their feats for the amusement of an admiring throng. Their extreme readiness to exhibit, indeed, has given rise to some ill-natured reflections; it having been objected that by exhibiting gratuitously through the country when the theatre is closed, they reduce themselves to the level of mountebanks, and thereby tend to degrade the respectability of the profession…

15 …But, laying aside this question, which after all is a mere matter of taste, we may reflect with pride and gratification of heart on the proficiency of our clowns as exhibited in the season. Night after night will they twist and tumble about, till two, three, and four o'clock in the morning; playing the strangest antics, and giving each other the funniest slaps on the face that can possibly be imagined, without evincing the smallest tokens of fatigue. The strange noises, the confusion,
20 the shouting and roaring, amid which all this is done, too, would put to shame the most turbulent sixpenny gallery that ever yelled through a boxing-night.

It is especially curious to behold one of these clowns compelled to go through the most surprising contortions by the irresistible influence of the wand of office, which his leader or harlequin holds above his head. Acted upon by this wonderful charm he will become perfectly
25 motionless, moving neither hand, foot, nor finger, and will even lose the faculty of speech at an instant's notice; or on the other hand, he will become all life and animation if required, pouring forth a torrent of words without sense or meaning, throwing himself into the wildest and most fantastic contortions, and even grovelling on the earth and licking up the dust. These exhibitions are more curious than pleasing; indeed, they are rather disgusting than otherwise, except to the
30 admirers of such things, with whom we confess we have no fellow-feeling.

Strange tricks - very strange tricks - are also performed by the harlequin who holds for the time being the magic wand which we have just mentioned. The mere waving it before a man's eyes will dispossess his brains of all the notions previously stored there, and fill it with an entirely new set of ideas; one gentle tap on the back will alter the colour of a man's coat completely; and
35 there are some expert performers, who, having this wand held first on one side and then on the other, will change from side to side, turning their coats at every evolution, with so much rapidity and dexterity, that the quickest eye can scarcely detect their motions. Occasionally, the genius who confers the wand, wrests it from the hand of the temporary possessor, and consigns it to some new performer; on which occasions all the characters change sides, and then the race and

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40 the hard knocks begin anew.

We might have extended this chapter to a much greater length - we might have carried the comparison into the liberal professions - we might have shown, as was in fact our original purpose, that each is in itself a little pantomime with scenes and characters of its own, complete; but, as we fear we have been quite lengthy enough already, we shall leave this chapter just where
45 it is. A gentleman, not altogether unknown as a dramatic poet, wrote thus a year or two ago –

'All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players:'

and we, tracking out his footsteps at the scarcely-worth-mentioning little distance of a few millions of leagues behind, venture to add, by way of new reading, that he meant a Pantomime, and that we are all actors in The Pantomime of Life.

Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz* (1836)

[1]THE CHANGE - a change of government

'Where the dickens is Dickens in all of this?' you may well ask.

He obviously includes himself in the 'We' of the passage; but since that's not a royal 'We', what kind of 'We' is it?

It's a public, and also a journalistic, 'We'. He has set himself up as a representative of the whole nation, and the scourge of its leaders.

'Traditionally, the hero somehow represents the community and carries with him its hopes and fears' (from a past IB exam question). We feel as we read this passage that Dickens has assigned himself an heroic role with regard to politicians – exposing them for what they are, and thus addressing the country's fears about the way it is being led and perhaps, in response to its hopes, attempting to clear the way for a better governance.

Setting

What is it?

An imaginary theatre, in which Parliament is depicted as a stage act, a pantomime.

There's a wider setting, though, of a kind we should be particularly aware of in non-fictional writing. It might be better called *context* – in this case the background against which Dickens wrote. It will include the ongoing political misdeeds of his day, and in that respect is contemporary with him. It also extends, however, to our cultural experience of democracy over the centuries, and to a sense of betrayal that has grown down time as some of those we have elected to power have shown themselves to be incompetent or untrustworthy. (Have you noticed the use of the public 'We' in this paragraph of our own writing? It's easy to slip into that mode.)

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All of that larger context has helped drive what Dickens has written, and helps us, today, to relate to his outburst.

We'll explore the details of the pantomime metaphor more fully under ***Ideas***. For the moment let's consider what we might call the 'overlay' phenomenon.

Character

What we visualise as we read is important. Words create pictures. When the writing is literal, our imagination follows only one line, sees only one thing (the writer's subject). When, however, a writer works figuratively (writing about something as if it is something else altogether) then we visualise both what is being written about and what it is being compared to (in the case of simile) or identified with (in metaphor). In other words, we get two pictures.

What do you visualise when you read this passage?

Politicians in parliament, making speeches? Performers on a stage, in their bright costumes, clowning and cavorting?

Whatever the details, your answer should have included politicians *and* performers. And here's the phenomenon: you will see both simultaneously. One overlays the other. Which one is on top doesn't much matter – it will vary anyway as you read on – and we can perceive the politicians through the clowns, or the other way round. The important thing is that we should, at least some of the time, see the politicians *as* clowns; that's the metaphor.

But where is Dickens?

He, the artist who paints the pictures, the transparencies, is standing to one side and laying one over the other so that we can see them combined; for that is what metaphor is – combination.

We do not see him in any detail – we cannot say as much about him as we were able to say about Evelyn Waugh; but we have a very strong *sense* of him (as we do in all of his writing) – and in particular of his indignation on behalf of the whole country. That's a much stronger feeling than Waugh's grumpiness…

Action

We expect the action in a novel or play to follow a narrative line, and its different parts to have a consecutive and (in good writing) a clear causal connection ('This is happening because that happened.')

What is different about the action of this passage?

Much happens, but it happens in a confused and disconnected way, so there is no narrative thread to follow.

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How is that appropriate to the nature and purpose of the whole passage?

Dickens is writing about an institution (Parliament) whose activities are not governed by logic and show no consistency. Only the logic and consistency or self-interest are evident in the behaviour of its members. That is what Dickens is trying to reveal.

Can you see a different kind of structure (other than a narrative one) in place in the passage, however?

The passage hangs on a framework of ideas: an argument rather than a story runs through it.

This we might expect from non-fiction. Unless it is purely factual or descriptive (a technical manual or a picture of a landscape, for instance) it will probably carry a body of ideas, which if they are to be persuasive will need to work together.

This is action of a sort – 'ideas happening'. Just how they happen in this passage we shall look at in a little while.

Style

Why and in what ways is Dickens' style overblown?

He sets out to convey a sense of enormous enthusiasm, and does so by the use of

- Cliché *('pride and gratification of heart')*
- Exaggeration *('a torrent of words')*
- Contrast *('perfectly motionless', 'all life and animation')*
- Multiple superlatives *('most gracious', 'the strangest', 'the funniest', 'the most turbulent').* Find more examples.

Why is it *deliberately* overblown?

He is playing a game, of course – pretending to be entirely exhilarated at the skills shown by the clown-politicians, while he is in fact (we very quickly realise) appalled by them, since they represent all the worst aspects of Parliamentary behaviour. The more enthusiastic he is (as a theatregoer), the more clearly we see his true feelings (as Charles Dickens).

So the passage is ironical. How does that work, here?

If we return to the concept of overlay, we can see that just as there are two sets of characters in the piece (politicians and clowns), and we can see the one through the other, so there are two writers (theatregoer and journalist); and we perceive Dickens the cynic through the enthusiast he is pretending to be. As the theatregoer he says one thing, and we know that as Charles Dickens he means the opposite. That is what irony is – speaking in opposites. (Note, of course, that this is verbal irony, as opposed to the dramatic

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irony we've come across earlier.) It's as if Dickens is writing in code, and we have to read backwards – turn everything around – in order to reach the true meaning of what he is saying. So 'his Majesty's most gracious speech' = 'The silly things the king says'.

What is the 'true' meaning of each of the following?

- *Richer (line 8)*
- *Strong in (line 9)*
- *Pride and gratification of heart (line 16)*
- *Especially curious (line 22)*
- *Wonderful charm (line 24)*
- *Expert performers (line 35)*
- *Genius (line 37)*

- *Richer* = more stupid
- *Strong in* = cursed with
- *Pride and gratification of heart* = shame
- *Especially curious* = particularly ridiculous
- *Wonderful charm* = absurd symbol of power
- *Expert performers* = silly dupes
- *Genius* = idiot

Ideas

Let's look, then, at the 'ideas happening' in the passage (a form, as we noted above, of ***Action***) and how they are connected. The best way of doing that is to identify the principal statement in each paragraph, then link all the statements (briefly – single conjunctions will do). Here's a start:

(Paragraph 1) A session of Parliament is like a pantomime
(Paragraph 2 – and) our current politicians are very skilful performers

Carry on.

(Paragraph 1) A session of Parliament is like a pantomime
(Paragraph 2 – and) our current politicians are very skilful performers
(Paragraph 3 – since) they entertain us tirelessly
(Paragraph 4 – and) they are particularly good at following the party line
(Paragraph 5 – and) they can also change opinions and sides very rapidly.
(Paragraph 6) This is true of other professions, since the whole of life is pantomime.

It only takes the introduction of the word 'ridiculous' before the word 'pantomime' (in the first and last paragraphs) to make plain what Dickens' overall message is.

That bare outline, however, lacks force. It's only when the ideas are dressed in detail that they can appeal more directly to our senses, and in particular allow us to view the idiocies in our mind's eye.

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Try to decide what each of the following figurative details refers to (Dickens has done the first one for you so that you get the hang of things; and it will help if you have ever watched a news recording of the UK Prime Minister's Question Time):

- *'His Majesty's most gracious speech on the opening thereof may be not inaptly compared to the clown's opening speech of "Here we are!"' (lines 2-4)*
- *'Astonishing tumblers' (line 9)*
- *'Till two, three, and four o'clock in the morning' (line 17)*
- *'Giving each other the funniest slaps on the face' (line 18)*
- *'The strange noises, the confusion, the shouting and roaring' (lines 19-20)*
- *'The wand of office' (line 23)*
- *'Grovelling on the earth and licking up the dust' (line 28)*
- *'Alter the colour of a man's coat completely' (line 34)*

- *'Astonishing tumblers'* = politicians who throw themselves around in order to impress
- *'Till two, three, and four o'clock in the morning'* = late-night Parliamentary sessions
- *'Giving each other the funniest slaps on the face'* = the insults hurled between the two sides of the House
- *'The strange noises, the confusion, the shouting and roaring'* = misbehaviour from the back benches
- *'The wand of office'* = the notional 'whip' by which a party official keeps its members in line
- *'Grovelling on the earth and licking up the dust'* = seeking approval by self-abasement
- *'Alter the colour of a man's coat completely'* = change a man's opinions (or at least what he says they are)

Part of the fun of the passage derives from its invitation guess these equivalences, but it isn't a high-level critical activity so don't spend much time on such things in your commentary. Concentrate more on the process itself, and its satirical effectiveness.

Returning, finally and briefly, to ***Character***: what lasting impression of the writer might we take from the passage?

That he's a crusader, but a somewhat self-righteous one, and perhaps a smug one too: he puts on a writing performance for us with as much 'proficiency…rapidity and dexterity' as the pantomime clowns. He backs away, in his final section, from listing the 'liberal professions' to which the metaphor could be extended; if he had included journalism, he might have had to acknowledge that journalists themselves sometimes share clowns' and politicians' 'willingness to exhibit…for the amusement of an admiring throng'.

A wry comment like that, at the end of everything else you've said, might impress an examiner.

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Part 8: How to Make Notes (further suggestions)

Suppose, in the exam, you are given two (or three, or four) guiding questions. You should probably forget the 1-5 note-taking system we recommended above and go instead for a 1-2 (1-3, 1-4) structure, putting a 1 in the margin (supplemented by underlining, notes etc) every time you find something which will help you answer the first question, and so on. Then when you come to write your answer to the question, you'll be able to move down through all the notes you made on the topic, drawing your ideas together.

If you don't have the assistance of guiding questions…well, then you have a difficult choice to make. We'll say more about that later. First of all here's a short passage with guiding questions. Use the system we've just described (numbering to match each question) to make notes on it. The process will be rather similar to the one you practised when you worked on **PASSAGE 5**, from *The Way We Live Now* (page 20), although there you were concentrating on the different characters in the story.

It's up to you whether, once you've made the notes on this passage, you go on to answer the questions in full – but you should try one, at least.

PASSAGE 20

She was the one who taught scripture and various form subjects. She was the form mistress over us for a year, she was a middle-aged spinster with sandy hair and the beginnings of a sandy moustache and beard, she was Miss Rowena Pringle and she hated me partly because I was hateful and partly because she was hateful and partly because she had a crush on Father Watts-
5 Watt – who had adopted me instead of marrying her – and who was slowly going mad. She had an exquisite niminy-piminy lady-like air. To see her find that she had a blot of ink on her finger – hand up, fingers tapping in a bunch at each other like a tiny, lily-white octopus – was to appreciate just how hysterically clean a lady can be. She withdrew from anything that was soiled – not dirty, soiled – and her religious instruction was just like that. Her clothes were usually in
10 tones of brown. In rainy weather she would wear galoshes[1] and gloves, and be protected all over by a brown umbrella with scallops and silk tassels. She would vanish into the women's staffroom and presently appear in class, picking her way to her high desk, as delicately neat and clean as a chestnut. She wore pince-nez, goldrimmed with a fairy gold chain of almost invisible gold links that descended to the frilly lace on her bosom and was pinned there with a teeny-
15 weeny gold pin. Near the pin there was the watery-gold glimmer of a cut topaz. She had sandy hair, a freckled, slightly fattened face that usually wore a smile of professional benevolence, as arranged and external as her clothes.

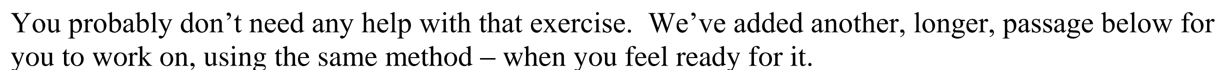
William Golding, *Free Fall* (1959)

[1] *rubber over-shoes*

Guiding Questions

What do we gather from the passage about the writer's feelings towards Miss Pringle?
How do the comparisons in the passage add to its meaning?
Discuss the writer's use of colour.

You probably don't need any help with that exercise. We've added another, longer, passage below for you to work on, using the same method – when you feel ready for it.



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PASSAGE 21

Hetty walked hastily across the short space of pleasure ground which she had to traverse, dreading to meet Mr. Craig, to whom she could hardly have spoken civilly. How relieved she was when she had got safely under the oaks and among the fern of the Chase! Even then she was as ready to be startled as the deer that leaped away at her approach. She thought
5 nothing of the evening light that lay gently in the grassy alleys between the fern, and made the beauty of their living green more visible than it had been in the overpowering flood of noon: she thought of nothing that was present. She only saw something that was possible: Mr. Arthur Donnithorne coming to meet her again along the Fir-tree Grove. That was the foreground of Hetty's picture; behind it lay a bright hazy something – days that were not to
10 be as the other days of her life had been. It was as if she had been wooed by a river-god, who might any time take her to his wondrous halls below a watery heaven. There was no knowing what would come, since this strange entrancing delight had come. If a chest full of lace and satin and jewels had been sent her from some unknown source, how could she but have thought that her whole lot was going to change, and that to-morrow some still more
15 bewildering joy would befall her? Hetty had never read a novel; if she had ever seen one, I think the words would have been too hard for her; how then could she find a shape for her expectations? They were as formless as the sweet languid odours of the garden at the Chase, which had floated past her as she walked by the gate.

She is at another gate now – that leading into Fir-tree Grove. She enters the wood, where
20 it is already twilight, and at every step she takes, the fear at her heart becomes colder. If he should not come! Oh, how dreary it was – the thought of going out at the other end of the wood, into the unsheltered road, without having seen him. She reaches the first turning towards the Hermitage, walking slowly – he is not there. She hates the leveret that runs across the path; she hates everything that is not what she longs for. She walks on, happy
25 whenever she is coming to a bend in the road, for perhaps he is behind it. No. She is beginning to cry: her heart has swelled so, the tears stand in her eyes; she gives one great sob, while the corners of her mouth quiver, and the tears roll down.

She doesn't know that there is another turning to the Hermitage, that she is close against it, and that Arthur Donnithorne is only a few yards from her, full of one thought, and a
30 thought of which she only is the object. He is going to see Hetty again: that is the longing which has been growing through the last three hours to a feverish thirst. Not, of course, to speak in the caressing way into which he had unguardedly fallen before dinner, but to set things right with her by a kindness which would have the air of friendly civility, and prevent her from running away with wrong notions about their mutual relation.

35 If Hetty had known he was there, she would not have cried; and it would have been better, for then Arthur would perhaps have behaved as wisely as he had intended. As it was, she started when he appeared at the end of the side-alley, and looked up at him with two great drops rolling down her cheeks. What else could he do but speak to her in a soft, soothing tone, as if she were a bright-eyed spaniel with a thorn in her foot?

George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (1859)

What impression do we get of Hetty's character and of Arthur's feelings towards her?
How does the writer make use of the setting in which this episode takes place?
How do the similes in the passage add to our understanding of what is happening?
By what means does the writer convey a sense of drama?

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Part 9: Writing Your Commentary (Literature exam only)

By now you should feel that you have learnt to read in new ways and for special purposes; and that you've mastered the technique of making notes on what you've read, using one number system or the other – or neither, if you feel confident doing it your own way.

Here you are in the exam room then, with a pretty good grasp of the poem or piece of prose you've just read several times. You have made notes in the margin of the exam paper, relating either to the guiding questions or to the passage's five aspects (***SCASI***).

If you're working with guiding questions, answer them one by one. If you have been asked to produce a continuous commentary based on the questions, try to link your answers. You may be able to do that by:

- using the last point you make in one answer as a starting point for your next answer
- noting the fact that a quotation from the passage which helps you answer one question is also relevant to another
- giving an overview of the passage at the end of your commentary, in which you say what you have found really unusual or powerful about it and mention (briefly) again some of the most important things you have noted earlier.

If you have no guiding questions, well…here's the hard choice you have to make.

You can put all of your trust in the SCASI system and write a paragraph about each of the passage's elements in turn. You commentary will look like this:

Paragraph 1: Introduction, in which you say *as briefly as possible* what the passage's 'subject matter' is.

> Examples of introductory paragraphs:
>
> **PASSAGE 4** *'My Father's Garden'*: 'David Wagoner tells us how his father proudly brought home things from a scrapyard to make into toys for his children.'
> **PASSAGE 5** *'The Way We Live Now'*: 'This passage is about the attempts of a young woman to resist her domineering father.'
> **PASSAGE 8** *'The Interrogation'*: 'The poem describes an incident in which travellers are caught by an army patrol and interrogated.'
> **PASSAGE 9** *Source Unknown*: 'A woman faces a difficult choice.'
> **PASSAGE 12** '*Heritage'*: 'This is a poem about the early stirrings of womanhood in a young girl.'
>
> Try writing an introductory paragraph for one or more of the other passages.

Paragraph 2: *Setting*

Paragraph 3: *Character*…

…and so on. (Don't use headings).

If you are an **IB Higher Level Literature** candidate, however, it is important that you note the following from the IB 'Language A: Literature Guide':

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‘All commentaries should be continuous and developed; commentaries comprising unrelated paragraphs will not merit a high achievement level.’

You may be able to link your paragraphs in ways similar to those we have suggested you could use to connect your answers to guiding questions:

- using the last point you make in one paragraph as a starting point for your next
- noting the fact that a quotation from the passage which you have used in one paragraph is also relevant in the next
- showing how, for instance, an episode’s ***Setting*** helps explain the ***Character*** of whoever lives there, which in turn determines what takes place (the ***Action***); and then how the writer, in adopting a certain ***Style***, determines our response to those people and their behaviour, and steers us towards particular conclusions (***Ideas***) about the passage and its contents.
- giving an overview of the passage at the end of your commentary, in which you say what you have found really unusual or powerful about it and mention again (briefly) some of the most important things you have noted earlier.

Here’s the alternative – simpler in some ways.

Expand your introductory paragraph so that you give a general idea of what the passage is about – what its central idea, or purpose, or impact is. In other words say the most important single thing you can about the passage.

Then begin with line 1 and work your way down the piece of writing, pointing out everything significant and relating it as far as you can to what you’ve said in your introduction about what the ‘heart’ of the passage is. (You’ll be surprised by how much of the passage’s detail does connect with its central core – that’s what we call ‘tight’ writing…but don’t ignore something interesting just because you can’t make it fit.)

The structure of your commentary will now depend on the structure of the passage. If it’s a poem you can write one paragraph about each verse. If it’s a piece of prose you can write about each of *its* paragraphs in turn…and if it tells a story you can write a paragraph about each part of the incident, as follows.

Example of the breakdown of an incident into its parts *(‘The Way We Live Now’* page 20*)*:

- Marie’s initial refusal to do what her father wants
- Her father’s anger and the way he hides it
- Her mother’s shriek
- Her father’s further tactics
- Marie’s challenge to what he has said
- Melmotte’s struggle to contain his fury and his attempt to alarm her
- Marie’s counter-attack
- Her final refusal

This may mean your paragraphs are of very different lengths. That doesn’t matter.

The advantage of working line-by-line is that you’ll find it easier to do something which is very necessary when you’re writing a commentary – look under every stone to see if there’s anything interesting there.

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You really must consider each line, each word, each punctuation mark even, nomatter how ordinary it seems, to assess what contribution it may be making to the passage and to the writer's purpose. 'Why did he write that?' must be your constant question ('author's choice' again).

The disadvantage of writing your commentary in that way is that you may find it more difficult to come to general critical conclusions about the passage. You will also find it harder to point out connections between its details without doing a lot of jumping around. If there are several references to weapons and battle scattered through the piece, for instance, you're going to be writing about 'images of war' every time you come across an example. It would be better to set aside a separate paragraph for the effect of the war imagery in the passage as a whole – which you could only do if you were using the ***SCASI*** structure, at least in part.

Whichever format you use, do try to save one 'blockbuster' idea for your conclusion. Ideally it will show that you have seen something really special in the passage, and that this piece of writing has had an impact on you. Even better, it may make the examiner himself or herself see the passage in a new light.

Some Other Tips

- If you have a choice of passage, don't automatically choose the one which is easier to understand – there may be less to say about it.

- If, when you've made notes on the passage you've chosen, you feel to be getting nowhere, consider changing to the other passage. You shouldn't do so, however, after anything more than say ten minutes: stick with your original choice, and you'll find that more ideas come once you start writing.

- You've read the passage several times, but you still aren't wholly sure that you've grasped its central meaning (this is more likely to happen with a poem). You don't have guiding questions to help you…so you hardly dare start to write in case you 'get it wrong'. Emergency procedure: start with what you do know (details of the setting, then the characters etc) and trust that your grasp of what the whole thing 'means' will grow as you work. But you should leave the first half-dozen lines of your answer page blank. Then if you do come to a fuller understanding of what the passage is about, overall, you can return and add in an introductory paragraph. If you don't get round to doing that, well the examiner will never know why you left the space, will he?

- What you will not have time to do is write your commentary in draft form and then copy it out again. So write carefully.

- Quotations and examples: In theory, every point you make should be supported by a piece of evidence. That could become a bit pedestrian after a while (one heavy footfall after another) and interrupt the flow of what you're saying. So be sensible about it: make sure that you're illustrating at least your major points by reference to the text.

- Keep your quotations brief. If you need to refer to a longer section, give the beginning and the end, joined by a few full-stops.

- We've given line references for the quotations we've used in this Help Book. There's no need for you to do that in your commentary – the examiner will know where things are

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- Don't use a long word if a short one will do.
- Don't write a long sentence if you can say the same thing in a short one…or two short ones.
- Don't use slang. You may find the man (or the woman) in the Source Unknown passage wacky but there are more precise ways of describing their unusual behaviour.
- Don't pass judgement on the behaviour of the people in the passage. Maybe Melmotte *should* have his backside kicked because of the way he treats his daughter, and maybe Miss Pringle (the teacher in the passage from *Free Fall*) *should* be fired…but it's not your job to say that.
- Base any comments about how good (or bad) a piece of writing is on literary, not personal, criteria – don't say, for instance, that you particularly enjoyed a poem about a cat because you like cats, or that a war poem is a bad poem because you disagree with war.
- Avoid vague or excessive praise ('This magnificent piece of writing demonstrates why Dickens is a world-famous author.')

Practice in writing a full commentary

Here's the prose passage from a past exam, with guiding questions.

If you will be given guiding questions in your own exam, answer the questions here.

If you will have to write your commentary without the help of guiding questions ignore these ones until you've made your (1-5?) notes on the passage, then look at the questions to make sure you haven't missed anything the examiner thinks you should be writing about.

Then write your commentary.

Check how long you spend and compare that with how much time you will be given in the exam.

PASSAGE 22

In one of the rows of desks for two – blackened, ink-scored, dusty desks, with eternally dry ink-wells – sat Laura and Tilly, behind them Inez and Bertha. The cheeks of the four were flushed. But, while the others only whispered and wondered, Laura was on the tiptoe of expectation. She could not get her breath properly, and her hands and feet were cold. Twisting
5 her fingers in and out, she moistened her lips with her tongue. – When, oh when would it begin?
These few foregoing minutes were the most trying of any. For when, in an ominous hush, Mr Strachey entered and strode to his desk, Laura suddenly grew calm, and could take note of everything that passed.
The Principal raised his hand, to enjoin a silence that was already absolute.
10 'Will Miss Johns stand up!'
At these words, spoken in a low, impressive tone, Bertha burst into tears and hid her face in her handkerchief. Hundreds of eyes sought the unhappy culprit as she rose, then to be cast down

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and remain glued to the floor.

The girl stood, pale and silly-looking, and stared at Mr Strachey much as a rabbit stares at the snake that is about to eat it. She was a very ugly girl of fourteen, with a pasty face and lank hair that dangled to her shoulders. Her mouth had fallen half open through fear, and she did not shut it all the time she was on view. *15*

Laura could not take her eyes off the scene: they travelled, burning with curiosity, from Annie to Mr Strachey, and back again to the miserable thief. When, after a few introductory remarks on crime in general, the Principal passed on to the present case, and described it in detail, Laura was fascinated by his oratory, and gazed full at him. He made it all live vividly before her; she hung on his lips, appreciating his points, the skilful way in which he worked up his climaxes. But then, she herself knew what it was to be poor – as Annie Johns had been. She understood what it would mean to lack your tram-fare on a rainy morning – according to Mr Strachey this was the motor impulse of the thefts – because a lolly-shop stretched out its octopus arms after you. She could imagine too, with a shiver, how easy it would be, the loss of the first pennies having remained undiscovered, to go on to threepenny-bits, and from these to sixpences. More particularly, since the money had been taken, without exception, from pockets in which there was plenty. Not, Laura felt sure, in order to avoid detection, as Mr Strachey supposed, but because to those who had so much a few odd coins could not matter. She wondered if every one else agreed with him on this point. How did the teachers feel about it? – and she ran her eyes over the row, to learn their opinion from their faces. *20* *25* *30*

Henry Handel Richardson, from *The Getting of Wisdom* (1910)

What impression do we get of Annie Johns?

What does the author want us to note about the Mr Strachey's behaviour and character?

Analyse the suspensefulness of the passage.

Show how the style of the passage contributes to its overall effect.

When you've completed your commentary, with or without the use of the guiding questions, you may like to tick, on the following list, the details you have referred to. They are grouped according to the four questions, with an additional section – further ideas you could have included in a 'free' commentary.

Q1

- Sensitive and timid (bursts into tears when told to stand up)
- Frightened (pale, frozen – rabbit simile)
- Unattractive *('ugly')*
- Unhealthy looking (pasty face, lank hair)
- Unkempt (long hair which *'dangled'*)
- Stupid-looking (open mouth)
- Pathetic and unhappy (*'miserable'* means both)
- Guilty (*'thief'* – there seems to be no doubt about that)
- Pitiful and weak-willed (Laura's understanding of her situation brings that out)

Q2

- Oppressive and authoritarian (emphasises his power by signalling silence unnecessarily)
- Enjoys frightening the children (he speaks in a threateningly *'low and impressive tone'*)

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- Dictatorial (*'Will Miss Johns stand up!'* is grammatically a question but there's an exclamation mark where the question mark should be – he's effectively turned it into an order)
- Likes to preach to the children, who are a captive audience (he begins with *'a few introductory remarks about crime in general'*), and enjoys his own skill in speaking *('oratory')*
- Lacks understanding or sympathy (his account of Annie's motives is in contrast to Laura's much kinder analysis of them)
- Believes the worst of the children (his explanation of why Annie stole only from better-off students is harsher than Laura's)

Q3

- Signs of heightened emotion in the four children – flushed cheeks, whispering and wondering
- Metaphor – Laura was *'on the tiptoe of expectation'*
- Further physical symptoms in Laura (difficulty in breathing, cold hands and feet, nervous hand gestures, dry mouth)
- A silence which is full of foreboding *('ominous hush')*
- Mr Strachey's dramatic entry (he *'strode'* to his desk)
- Laura's intense observation (she took note of *'everything that passed'*)
- The 'double' silence (when Mr Strachey raises his hand)
- The downcast eyes of the children after Annie has stood up – they dare not look up again
- The size of the gathering (*'hundreds'* of eyes watch Annie rise)
- The rabbit and snake image
- The movement of Laura's eyes back and forward between Annie and Mr Strachey
- The rise and fall of Mr Strachey's oratory, and the length of his speech
- Uncertainty about the outcome

Q4

- Detail (reflects intensity of episode – heightened observation)
- Emphasis on physical sensations (as in Q3; but in addition her eyes are *'burning'* with curiosity in *line 18* and she shivers in *line 27*).
- Formal language *('These few foregoing minutes'*, *'a few introductory remarks'*, *'the present case' etc)* emphasising the formality of the assembly and the seriousness of the incident
- Simple language in the description of the simple girl Annie *('a very ugly girl of fourteen')*
- Imagery of preying creatures (snake, octopus): the world is full of danger for children.

Other points of note

Setting

- The shabbiness of the schoolroom (desks and ink-wells) reflecting the poverty of the education the children are likely to be receiving
- The lay-out of the room – the children and the teachers sit in rows, underlining the formality of the relationships and the drama of what is happening.

Character

Laura is central, and key, to the narrative. If you had been asked to write about her rather than Annie Johns you would have been expected to include some of the following details.

- Her independence, both as a perceptive observer (once she has become *'calm')*, and as a thinker – she has her own opinions about why Annie stole and why she stole only from better-off children.
- The phrase *'while the others only whispered and wondered, Laura…'*, which sets her apart from the beginning
- She is imaginative and sympathetic (she easily puts herself in Annie's place).
- She is intellectually lively and enjoys the finer points of Mr Strachey's rhetoric.
- She is interested in the issues raised by the charge against Annie, and looks at the faces of the teachers to see how far they agree with Mr Strachey.
- She thus acts as the reader's eyes and ears and as a link between us and what is happening in the story, interpreting events and directing our attention towards their underlying significance.

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Ideas

- Adult power over children and how it can be abused
- How people in a group respond when an individual is singled out and exposed
- Crime and punishment
- Social and economic inequality

(None of these is a ‘big’ issue in the passage: they are very much in the background of events.)

Don’t worry if you missed some of that. More practice will help. You should find it reassuring that there is so much to be said about what is a comparatively straightforward piece of writing.

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Section Two: Advanced Passages (IB Literature Higher Level)

These are more complex passages from previous exams. If you think they will take you beyond where you need to be you can miss out this section and go straight to the practice passages in Section Three.

There are five passages here (two poems and two prose extracts and a fifth passage that's a mixture of the two just to make a point). The most effective way to use this part of the book would be to tackle one passage a week (say), setting aside two hours to write the commentary at one sitting – in conditions as near as possible to those of an exam room (an upright chair at a table, no music and no interruptions…but chocolate's ok).

Then take a break before you check what you've written against the notes which follow each passage.

If you're in a hurry (that Maths project and your Art portfolio are both due...the exam's only a couple of months away…or it's next week) then some compromises are possible:

- Don't tackle all five passages.
- If you're less confident about poetry, work only on the poems (same for prose)
- Don't write full commentaries – just make notes
- Don't even make notes: just read each passage a few times and look at its 'Help' box.

As an alternative to working on your own, consider having some sharing sessions with a friend or two, where you read a passage together and plan what you would write about it. Sometimes friends are the best source of help.

Each of the passages below is particularly strong in one ***SCASI*** area…but of course in a free commentary you'd be expected to note pretty well everything of interest.

Just to give you bit of a boost we're returning first of all to a passage we looked at much earlier – from *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins. You'll remember that it was a **Higher Level** passage, and in Section One (page 10) we concentrated on its setting. There was much more to be said about its other aspects than we had time for first time around, however, so it will be a useful starting point for your **Higher Level** practice. Write a commentary on it, following the guidelines we've just given (about conditions etc) – but you can if you like pretend that you've already written the section on ***Setting***, and shorten the time by twenty minutes or so.

Here's the passage again.

PASSAGE 3(B)

Our house is high up on the Yorkshire coast, and close by the sea. We have got beautiful walks all round us, in every direction but one. That one I acknowledge to be a horrid walk. It leads, for a quarter of a mile, through a melancholy plantation of firs, and brings you out between low cliffs on the loneliest and ugliest little bay on all our coast.

5 The sand-hills here run down to the sea, and end in two spits of rock jutting out opposite each other, till you lose sight of them in the water. One is called the North Spit, and one the South. Between the two, shifting backwards and forwards at certain seasons of the year, lies the most horrible quicksand on the shores of Yorkshire. At the turn of the tide, something goes on in the unknown deeps below, which sets the whole face of the quicksand shivering and trembling in a

10 manner most remarkable to see, and which has given to it, among the people in our parts, the name of The Shivering Sand. A great bank, half a mile out, nigh the mouth of the bay, breaks the force of the

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main ocean coming in from the offing[1]. Winter and summer, when the tide flows over the quicksand, the sea seems to leave the waves behind it on the bank, and rolls its waters in smoothly with a heave, and covers the sand in silence. A lonesome and horrid retreat, I can tell you! No boat ever ventures
15 into this bay. No children from our fishing-village, called Cobb's Hole, ever come here to play. The very birds of the air, as it seems to me, give the Shivering Sand a wide berth. That a young woman, with dozens of nice walks to choose from, and company to go with her, if she only said 'Come!' should prefer this place, and should sit and work[2] or read in it, all alone, when it's her turn out, I grant you, passes belief. It's true, nevertheless, account for it as you may, that this was Rosanna
20 Spearman's favourite walk, except when she went once or twice to Cobb's Hole, to see the only friend she had in our neighbourhood, of whom more anon. It's also true that I was now setting out for this same place, to fetch the girl in to dinner, which brings us round happily to our former point, and starts us fair again on our way to the sands.

I saw no sign of the girl in the plantation. When I got out, through the sand-hills, onto the beach,
25 there she was in her little straw bonnet, and her plain grey cloak that she always wore to hide her deformed shoulder as much as might be – there she was, all alone, looking out on the quicksand and the sea.

She started when I came up with her, and turned her head away from me. Not looking me in the face being another of the proceedings which, as head of the servants, I never allow, on principle, to
30 pass without inquiry – I turned her round my way, and saw that she was crying. My bandanna handkerchief – one of six beauties given me by my lady – was handy in my pocket. I took it out, and I said to Rosanna, 'Come and sit down, my dear, on the slope of the beach along, with me. I'll dry your eyes. I'll dry your eyes for you first, and then I'll make so bold as to ask what you have been crying about.'

35 When you come to my age, you will find sitting down on the slope of a beach a much longer job than you think it now. By the time I was settled, Rosanna had dried her own eyes with a very inferior handkerchief to mine – cheap cambric. She looked very quiet, and very wretched; but she sat down by me like a good girl, when I told her. When you want to comfort a woman by the shortest way, take her on your knee. I thought of this golden rule. But there! Rosanna wasn't Nancy, and that's the truth
40 of it!

'Now, tell me, my dear,' I said, what are you crying about?'

'About the years that are gone, Mr Betteredge,' says Rosanna quietly. 'My past life still comes back to me sometimes.'

'Come, come, my good girl,' I said, 'your past life is all sponged out. Why can't you forget it?'

45 She took me by one of the lappets[3] of my coat. I am a slovenly old man, and a good deal of my meat and drink gets splashed on my clothes. Sometimes one of the women, and sometimes another, cleans me of my grease. The day before, Rosanna had taken out a spot for me on the lappet of my coat, with a new composition, warranted to remove anything. The grease was gone, but there was a little dull place left on the nap of the cloth where the grease had been. The girl pointed to that place
50 and shook her head.

'The stain is taken off,' she said. 'But the place shows, Mr Betteredge – the place shows!'

Wilkie Collins *The Moonstone* (1868)

[1] a position in the sea some distance from shore
[2] sew, embroider, or the like
[3] lapels

In the box below are some of the things you could have mentioned in a free commentary. Bear in mind, however, that you wouldn't be expected to note them all – you would run out of time.

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The notes are organised according to the ***SCASI*** system (minus ***Setting***, on this occasion). If you wrote your commentary line-by-line you can still look through the box to see what you might have missed. (But you'll notice that you would have had some difficulty in pulling together examples of the same thing from different parts of the passage. It's important, if you are working line-by-line, to pause every now and then and point out connections or make an 'overview' statement.)

Character

o *Rosanna*

Remember what we said about her when we discussed the passage's setting, in particular the connections we found between her frame of mind and the scenery. The passage goes on to amplify what we learnt about her in those parallels. She is crying – her general unhappiness has spilled over. Her handkerchief is very ordinary *('cheap cambric' 41)* compared with the storyteller's (and there is a further touch of pathos in that detail). It is her *'past life'* which troubles her *(46).*

But she is not just a sad little creature. She:

- shows some independence (dries her own eyes)
- has done a kindness for the storyteller in sponging his coat
- speaks to him quietly and calmly *(line 46)*
- picks up very quickly on his phrase *'all sponged out'* , using it to explain graphically why she can not forget her past
- shows herself overall to be a young woman of strong feelings, sensitivity and intelligence…and we want to know more about her.

o *Mr Betteredge.* He:

- 'belongs' – *'our house…we…our fishing village…our neighbourhood'*
- is a man of some standing within his household and from this position of security can act with both authority *('I never allow…' 34)* and kindness *('I'll dry your eyes for you' 37)*
- is a thinker and an observer *('as it seems to me' 19)*
- is careful in his descriptions almost to the point of fussiness *('One is called the North Spit, and one the South' 7-8)*
- is also careful to be fair-minded in his judgements and allow the readers their own points of view *('I acknowledge…I grant you…account for it as you may…It's true…It's also true…a much longer job than you think it now')*
- is objective, honest and capable of smiling at himself *('I am a slovenly old man' 50)*
- is experienced, a man of the world in his own way *('six beauties given to me by my lady…my age…when you want to comfort a woman')*. You may want to think twice about whom he is referring to in 'my lady', however…
- is kindly.

All of the above make him ideally suited to the task of telling Rosanna's story – with understanding and sympathy but also with perception and perspective.

So we see again, in this analysis of ***Character***, how different aspects of a piece of writing work together: we learn much about Rosanna from the episode's setting; and Mr Betteredge's personal qualities allow him to tell the story in a skilled and insightful way…as we shall now see.

Action (remember, again, that this has to do as much with how the story is told as with what the story is).

o We noted earlier how Mr Betteredge narrows his focus on place, eventually concentrating on only *'that one'* walk. He then takes the reader *on* that walk *('brings you out…you lose sight of them')*

o He thus shares with us his knowledge of the area and his feelings about the bay *('A lonesome and horrid retreat, I can tell you')* – all part of the process of drawing us into the story

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- He is in control of the narrative in that and other ways – he knows where it is going *('of whom more anon')*
- He takes pride in the way he is shaping the tale *('which brings us happily to our former point, and starts us fair again on our way to the sands')*
- He introduces Rosanna with some drama *('I saw no sign of the girl…there she was…there she was, all alone')*
- He keeps the reader alongside him while he sets about dealing with Rosanna *('you will find sitting down on the slope of the beach an easier job than you think it now')*
- He asks the question to which by now the reader too wants an answer *('what are you crying about?')*
- The answer we are given *('My past life')* maintains our curiosity. Mr Betteredge seems to know what it is that troubles Rosanna, but for the moment he is withholding that information from us…and we read on.

The strength of the ***Action*** in this passage, then, lies not in dramatic events but in the way we are led slowly towards a greater understanding of Rosanna and her situation. And of course although we've just given Mr Betteredge the credit for that, the true storyteller is Wilkie Collins, the shadowy figure behind his narrator.

Style

- We've talked about the passage's readers, but this piece of writing is half-way to being an oral account and we should perhaps say 'listeners' instead. Why?
    - Mainly because of the informality of Mr Betteredge's language, in particular his use of the second person (i.e. he addresses us directly – *'brings you out'* etc)
    - He also uses colloquialisms and exclamations *('nigh…I can tell you!…her turn out…starts us fair…but there!…cleans me of my grease')*.
- There are hints of extremes, opposition and conflict in the very diction of the passage *('loneliest and ugliest…two spits of rock jutting out opposite each other'* – note the abrupt sound of those phrases – *'the force of the main ocean…No boat…No children…passes belief')*.
- Mr Betteredge's authority in all matters relating to this seaside neighbourhood is conveyed by his care in naming the various places and by the nautical flavour his language has on occasion *('spits…a great bank…the main ocean…the offing…starts us fair…the slope of the beach along')*.
- His is authoritative in the household; but his relationship with those who work under him is friendly, his attitude to them paternal. That balance is reflected in the range of his language – its formality when he speaks of his job *('another of the proceedings which, as head of the servants, I never allow, on principle, to pass without inquiry'),* and its simplicity and warmth in his dealings with Rosanna *('she sat down beside me like a good girl')*.
- Then there is the dialogue. The passage comes more alive when the characters talk to each other, as you might expect. But speech is used sparingly: it comes in right at the end, is reserved for the crux of the matter – the source of Rosanna's unhappiness. It is given strength by its naturalness (largely monosyllabic and colloquial) but more by the powerful metaphor *('The stain is taken off…')* Rosanna takes up to express her hurt, and the repetition of the climactic statement *('the place shows').* It is in this metaphor that we begin to see the deeper significance of Rosanna's connection to the bay. She comes to an ugly place to think about ugly things.

Ideas

- The metaphor says it all. We can never wholly escape, or forget, our past. The bad things that happen to us or which we have done always leave a mark.
- The other issues that show themselves in the passage are of little importance compared with this, which is central to the story – the story of what these bad things in Rosanna's life have been, and perhaps of how she does in the end escape them, or at least come to terms with them.
- There are *some* other ideas, however…
    - Nature (and therefore life) as a source of threat
    - The strangeness of human behaviour
    - The importance of structure, social or otherwise, as a foundation to our lives
    - The idea of principles (and golden rules) guiding our behaviour

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Now write a commentary on the fine poem which follows. It's quite a difficult poem – not in its central idea, which is straightforward enough (it's about a boy's resentment of his father), but in its detail. General advice: when you hit an obscure word or phrase or idea, make an intelligent guess at its meaning, one which fits the context. Be imaginative but not fanciful. Then move on.

PASSAGE 23

My Father

For being so black
so muscular so well curved
like a groomed show man
too fit everyday for barefoot
5 he made us boys feel
we could kill him

For laughing so deep
down notes from soprano
like a tied stallion sighting
10 a pan of water
he got all laughter stopped
to listen to him

For treating ticks
like berries gathering
15 and the half dead cow
in a bath of herbs and oil
he sat all day in tall grass
sweet-talking weak jaws

For tipping out warm pockets
20 of sticky sugar plums
or sat-on bananas
or squashed up naseberries
he made children descend
on him for things past ripe

25 For expecting my mother
to make money like food
and clothes and be the sum
of every question
he made us go deadfaced
30 when he stayed in

For drawing his name 'X'
and carrying a locked head
to explain stars
like a treetop pointing

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35 he made us acknowledge him
keenly in rage

James Berry, from *Melanthika* (1975)

In the box below we haven't analysed the poem in full, we've just pointed up some of the really unusual and effective things about it.

- The startling contrast between, on the one hand, the details which suggest that the boy admires his father *('muscular…well-curved…groomed show man…laughing so deep…stallion')* and, on the other, the hatred he actually feels for him.
- The sentence-structure. Each verse is (grammatically) a sentence, but the main clause in each case, the central statement, is held back until the last two lines of the verse. The poem's vehemence can therefore take us by surprise – particularly in the first and last verses.
- The distortion in meaning of the *'For'* which opens each verse (one of the things which makes the poem difficult to understand at first). The sense it carries is really 'By', e.g. he attracted children to him *by (lines 23-24)* giving them things to eat; but the fact that the fruit was hardly edible is one of the things the poet blames his father *for.* That technique gives much force to the list of other, more important, things he holds against his father.
- How the poet conveys the gap between how his father is viewed in the community and how he behaves at home.
- The fact that the sons' rage at their father is tempered by their grudging admission that he does struggle to break free of the limitations of his life: he cannot sign his name and his head is *'locked'*; but he tries to *'explain stars'*, and he is *'like a treetop pointing'* – and they must therefore acknowledge him as well as hate him.

Overall, the poem's tremendous power comes from its sense of struggle, and the tension between love and hate it conveys.

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PASSAGE 24

Then one day, quite suddenly, on her return from a ride at Fort William, Nancy had been sent, with her governess, who had a white face, right down South to that convent school. She had been expecting to go there in two months' time. Her mother disappeared from her life at that time. A fortnight later Leonora came to the convent and told her that her mother was dead. Perhaps she was. At any rate, I never heard until the very end what became of Mrs Rufford. Leonora never spoke of her.

And then Major Rufford went to India, from which he returned very seldom and only for very short visits; and Nancy lived herself gradually into the life at Branshaw Teleragh. I think that, from that time onwards, she led a very happy life, till the end. There were dogs and horses and old servants and the Forest. And there were Edward and Leonora, who loved her.

I had known her all the time – I mean, that she always came to the Ashburnhams' at Nauheim for the last fortnight of their stay – and I watched her gradually growing. She was very cheerful with me. She always even kissed me, night and morning, until she was about eighteen. And she would skip about and fetch me things and laugh at my tales of life in Philadelphia. But, beneath her gaiety, I fancy that there lurked some terrors.

I remember one day, when she was just eighteen, during one of her father's rare visits to Europe, we were sitting in the gardens, near the iron-stained fountain. You have no idea how beautiful Nancy looked that morning.

We were talking about the desirability of taking tickets in lotteries – of the moral side of it, I mean. She was all in white, and so tall and fragile; and she had only just put her hair up, so that the carriage of her neck had that charming touch of youth and of unfamiliarity. Over her throat there played the reflection from a little pool of water, left by a thunderstorm of the night before, and all the rest of her features were in the diffused and luminous shade of her white parasol. Her dark hair just showed beneath her broad white hat of pierced, chip straw; her throat was very long and leaned forward, and her eyebrows, arching a little as she laughed at some old-fashionedness in my phraseology, had abandoned their tense line. And there was a little colour in her cheeks and light in her deep blue eyes. And to think that that vivid white thing, that saintly and, swan-like being – to think that…Why, she was like the sail of a ship, so white and so definite in her movements. And to think that she will never…Why, she will never do anything again. I can't believe it…

Anyhow, we were chattering away about the morality of lotteries. And then, suddenly, there came from the arcades behind us the overtones of her father's unmistakable voice; it was as if a modified foghorn had boomed with a reed inside it. I looked round to catch sight of him. A tall, fair, stiffly upright man of fifty, he was walking away with an Italian baron who had had much to do with the Belgian Congo. They must have been talking about the proper treatment of natives, for I heard him say:

'Oh, hang humanity!'

When I looked again at Nancy her eyes were closed and her face was more pallid than her dress, which had at least some pinkish reflections from the gravel. It was dreadful to see her with her eyes closed like that.

'Oh!' she exclaimed, and her hand that had appeared to be groping, settled for a moment on my arm. 'Never speak of it. Promise never to tell my father of it. It brings back those dreadful dreams…' And, when she opened her eyes she looked straight into mine. 'The blessed saints,' she said, 'you would think they would spare you such things. I don't believe all the sinning in the world could make one deserve them.'

Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (1927)

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List the points of special note.

Setting

- The contrast between *'that convent school'* where Nancy was possibly not happy and Branshaw Teleragh, where she was…and between the latter and the wider world where terrible things happen
- The moral setting therefore, in which issues like gambling and more importantly colonialism and inhumanity matter, and in particular matter to Nancy.

Character

- Relationships: in particular the narrator's strong and complex feelings towards Nancy

Action

- The time markers
- The shift from the general to the particular
- The hints of impending tragedy, and the way the writer controls their flow…and the flow of other information (about, for instance, Mrs Rufford's fate). Is there, however, a touch of melodrama in the writing?

Style

- The narrator's tentative style: he is continually adjusting what he says, as if he is reliving the events and exploring the story once more as he tells it, both discovering and perhaps trying to hide some of his feelings for Nancy (*'At any rate…I think that…I mean…she always even kissed me…I fancy…I remember…You have no idea…'* and so on).
- The detailed description of Nancy's appearance, which conveys both her loveliness and the narrator's appreciation of it. Note particularly the use of light, shade and stillness, as if this is a painting capturing her at a moment in time.

Ideas

- The vulnerability of beauty to the harshness of life (the discussion of lotteries is perhaps more relevant than it at first seems…)

PASSAGE 25

We are talking now of summer evenings in Knoxville, Tennessee, in the time that I lived there so successfully disguised to myself as a child. It was a little bit mixed sort of block, fairly solidly lower middle class, with one or two juts apiece on either side of that. The houses corresponded: middle-sized gracefully fretted wood houses built in the
5 late nineties and early nineteen hundreds, with small front and side and more spacious back yards, and trees in the yards, and porches. These were softwooded trees, poplars, tulip trees, cottonwoods. There were fences around one or two of the houses, but mainly the yards ran into each other with only now and then a low hedge that wasn't doing very well. There were few good friends among the grown people, and they were not poor
10 enough for the other sort of intimate acquaintance, but everyone nodded and spoke, and even might talk short times, trivially, and at the two extremes of the general or the particular, and ordinarily nextdoor neighbors talked quite a bit when they happened to run into each other, and never paid calls.

But it is of these evenings, I speak.

15 People go by; things go by. A horse, drawing a buggy, breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt; a loud auto; a quiet auto; people in pairs, not in a hurry, scuffling, switching their weight of aestival[1] body, talking casually, the taste hovering over them

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of vanilla, strawberry, pasteboard and starched milk, the image upon them of lovers and horsemen, squared with clowns in hueless amber. A street car raising its iron moan;
20 stopping, belling and starting; stertorous; rousing and raising again its iron increasing moan and swimming its gold windows and straw seats on past and past and past, the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks; the iron whine rises on rising speed; still risen, faints; halts, the faint stinging bell; rises again, still fainter; fainting, lifting, lifts, faints forgone; forgotten. Now is the
25 night one blue dew.

Now is the night one blue dew, my father has drained, he has coiled the
hose.
Low on the length of lawns, a frailing of fire who breathes.
Content, silver, like peeps of light, each cricket makes his comment
30 over and over in the drowned grass,
A cold toad thumpily flounders.
Parents on porches: rock and rock: From damp strings morning glories:
hang their ancient faces.

On the rough wet grass of the back yard my father and mother have spread quilts. All
35 my people are larger bodies than mine, quiet, with voices gentle and meaningless like the voices of sleeping birds. One is an artist, he is living at home. One is a musician, she is living at home. One is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me. By some chance, here they are, all on this earth; and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the
40 sounds of the night.

After a little, I am taken in and put to bed. Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her: and those receive me, who quietly treat me, as one familiar and well-beloved in that home; but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am.

James Agee, *A Death in the Family* (1957)

[1]aestival : summertime

Either in your note-making on this passage or in the commentary itself (whichever structure you've used for that) you will probably have developed some lists. There are three notable groups of detail, each associated with one of the passage's main ***SCASI*** aspects. Check that somewhere you have covered most of the following.

Setting

- List 1: Details in the opening paragraph which emphasise the ordinariness of everything in Knoxville. Nothing is extreme, everything is middling. The kind of detail we're thinking about? *'little bit…mixed…sort of…fairly…middle class…'* – and that's only in *lines 2 and 3*! You may have been able to find as many as a dozen, in addition to the ones we've just noted.

Style

- List 2: Figures of speech (tricks of language used for effect). If you haven't found examples of each of the following, look again:
  - Imagery (sound, taste, colour)
  - Simile
  - Personification
  - Onomatopoeia
  - Alliteration

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- Repetition
- Rhyme
- Assonance
- Coinage (invention of a new word)

(Remember what we said earlier, however, about it not being enough just to name such things. Try to explain how they work and what they add.)

- You will no doubt also have tackled the questions of how, and why, the straightforward prose of the opening paragraph moves into the poetry of the section beginning *line 13*; and of how, and why, the writer then actually sets the poetry out as verse in *lines 24-30*…then returns to an even simpler form of prose later in the passage. A clue? Maybe the statement in the opening sentence: *'I lived there so successfully disguised as a child'*. The writer sees, and writes, with the plain innocence of a child; but within the child there is a grown-up who perceives and records things in a more penetrating, subtle and sophisticated way.

Ideas

- List 3: The things life is…
  - Trivial
  - Rich
  - Warm
  - Sorrowful
  - Full of significance (to an observant child)
  - Meaningless
  - (arising out of all of the above) Paradoxical

Have you managed to draw all of that together into a statement of the passage's essence? Try this one for comparison:

This is a view of a small-town community through the eyes of a child who sees like a grown-up, and who is therefore able to record both the ordinariness and the unusualness of what he perceives around him – in light, colour and sound…and who struggles to understand his place in it all.

PASSAGE 26

Entirely

If we could get the hang of it entirely
  It would take too long;
All we know is the splash of words in passing
  And falling twigs of song,
5 And when we try to eavesdrop on the great
  Presences it is rarely
That by a stroke of luck we can appropriate
  Even a phrase entirely.

If we could find our happiness entirely
10 In somebody else's arms
We should not fear the spears of the spring nor the city's

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Yammering fire alarms
But, as it is, the spears each year go through
Our flesh and almost hourly
15 Bell or siren banishes the blue
Eyes of Love entirely.

And if the world were black or white entirely
And all the charts were plain
Instead of a mad weir of tigerish waters,
20 A prism of delight and pain,
We might be surer where we wished to go
Or again we might be merely
Bored but in brute reality there is no
Road that is right entirely.

Louis MacNeice, *Plant and Phantom* (1941)

It won't be surprising if you've had to struggle to use the ***SCASI*** system for this poem: it's what you might call a 'conventional' poem, and its weight lies almost wholly in its central idea and the techniques by which that is expressed. If you have persevered you will probably have made some modifications:

Setting here is not a particular place, but the whole world as the poet sees it.

The only ***Characters*** in the poem are people in general *('we')* and the poet himself.

The ***Action*** of the poem lies only in life's day-to-day progress.

There's something to be said about all of those, however, even in their modified and vague form.

Most of your commentary will have focused therefore on the poem's ***Style*** and ***Ideas.***

Louis MacNeice has made things easy for us by stating his central idea simply, and stating it, moreover, three times, in modified form – once in each verse. How close has your understanding of each verse come to the following?

V1. We can never know the whole truth about anything.
V2. Life is too short, and there are too many distractions, for us to achieve complete happiness.
V3. If life were simpler it would be easier but less interesting.

The overall idea of the poem, then, is something like: 'We need to learn to live with, and even be grateful for, life's uncertainties.'

That's not a particularly original thought, is it? So once more we're left with the question of what makes a poem powerful, even when its 'message' is plain and simple.

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The answer must lie, here, in the fact that it's almost three poems – each verse could stand alone. Each verse, however, also makes a contribution to the forward movement of the whole, so that we have a sense of the poem going somewhere, reaching some kind of conclusion, if not climax. The last two lines are pretty firm, aren't they?

So the effect of the poem rests largely in its form, its overall structure (which is really part of its ***Style*** as we have defined it). Think of the verses as transparencies, each one overlaying the one before and adding to it. Overlays have to be aligned, however; and the alignment of each verse comes from its metre and rhyme-scheme, which form a sort of template. Look back and see how much attention you've given to those things in your commentary. If you've ignored them, try analysing them now and make some notes. What you will probably notice, if you haven't done so already, is that this repetition and build-up are what create the poem's music; and it is the music which largely carries the message to us.

Its music – and its imagery. Have you written extensively about the poem's images? You could have noted its principal dependence on nature imagery (MacNeice is after all writing about 'the way the world is')…but there's also a group of images which deal with Man's attempts to control the world's forces (fire alarms) and understand its truths (eavesdropping, charts).

How have you described the (language) style of the poem? As colloquial? Informal? Have you quoted the casual phrases like *'get the hang of it'*, and *'by a stroke of luck'*? Compare it with the *Childe Harold* extract (page 43), which dealt with similarly fundamental features of our relationship with the world. What a difference!

In our discussion of Byron's style, however, we noted how appropriate it was to the weightiness of the subject matter. How can we now argue that a less grand style works well in *'Entirely'*, when its subject matter is just as weighty?

The answer lies in the difference between the two poets' moods and intentions. Byron is agitated about the way we treat the world and wants us to be agitated too. MacNeice on the other hand is counselling acceptance of the way things are: he wants us to be *relaxed* about life's uncertainties…and his style is therefore relaxed. If you've come across the idea that a poem's form (and style) are the same thing as its meaning ('a poem is a poem is a poem') and have had trouble understanding the concept…well, here it is in action. What MacNeice is saying is how he says it.

Don't, whatever you do, feel you've 'got it all wrong' if your interpretation of this or any poem differs from what turns out later to be a more standard reading – or if you get into an argument with the rest of the class or your teacher about what a poem is about. Listen carefully to what others say and be ready, of course, to change your mind; but remember too that there is no answer that is right entirely!

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Section Three: Passages for Further Practice

These are taken from a variety of sources other than past exam papers. So that you can work unaided if you wish, the guiding questions are not attached to the passages themselves but are to be found at the end of this section.

The passages themselves are of varied difficulty. Some are quite short and may take you less than the full length of time.

PASSAGE 27

Auntie lies in the rest home with a feeding tube and a bedpan, she weighs nothing, she fidgets and shakes, and all I can see are her knotted hands and the carbon facets of her eyes, she was famous for her pies and her kindness to neighbors, but if it is true that every hat exhibits a drama the psyche wishes it could perform, what was my aunt saying all the years of my
5 childhood when she squeezed into cars with those too tall hats, those pineapples and colored cockades[1], my aunt who told me I should travel slowly or I would see too much before I died, wore spires and steeples, tulled toques[2]. The velvet inkpots of Schiaparelli, the mousseline de soie[3] of Lilly Dache have disappeared into the world, leaving behind one flesh-colored box, Worth stenciled on the top, a coral velvet cloche[4] inside with matching veil and drawstring
10 bag, and what am I to make of these Dolores del Rio size 4 black satin wedgies with constellations of spangles on the bridge. Before she climbed into the white boat of the nursing home and sailed away--talking every day to family in heaven, calling them through the sprinkling system--my aunt said she was pushing her cart through the grocery when she saw young girls at the end of an aisle pointing at her, her dowager's hump, her familial tremors.
15 Auntie, who claimed that ninety pounds was her fighting weight, carried her head high, hooded, turbaned, jeweled, her neck straight under pounds of roots and vegetables that shimmied when she walked. Surely this is not the place of women in our world, that when we are old and curled like crustaceans, young girls will laugh at us, point their fingers, run as fast as they can in the opposite direction.

from *Except By Nature*, Sandra Alcosser

[1]cockades: bonnets with rosettes or ribbons attached;
[2]tulled toques: silk caps
[3]mousseline de soie: thin silk, like muslin
[4] cloche: bell-shaped hat

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PASSAGE 28

The Tourist from Syracuse

One of those men who can be a car salesman
or a tourist from Syracuse or a hired assassin.
John D. MacDonald

You would not recognize me.
Mine is the face which blooms in
The dank mirrors of washrooms
As you grope for the light switch.

5 My eyes have the expression
Of the cold eyes of statues
Watching their pigeons return
From the feed you have scattered,

And I stand on my corner
10 With the same marble patience.
If I move at all, it is
At the same pace precisely

As the shade of the awning
Under which I stand waiting
15 And with whose blackness it seems
I am already blended.

I speak seldom, and always
In a murmur as quiet
As that of crowds which surround
20 The victims of accidents.

Shall I confess who I am?
My name is all names, or none.
I am the used-car salesman,
The tourist from Syracuse,

25 The hired assassin, waiting.
I will stand here forever
Like one who has missed his bus –
Familiar, anonymous –

On my usual corner,
30 The corner at which you turn
To approach that place where now
You must not hope to arrive.

Donald Justice

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PASSAGE 29

The Voice

Woman much missed, how you call to me, call to me,
Saying that now you are not as you were
When you have changed from the one who was all to me,
But as at first, when our day was fair.

5 Can it be you that I hear? Let me view you, then,
Standing as when I drew near to the town
Where you would wait for me: yes, as I knew you then,
Even to the original air-blue gown!

Or is it only the breeze, in its listlessness
10 Travelling across the wet mead to me here,
You ever being dissolved to wan wistfulness,
Heard no more again far or near?

Thus I: faltering forward,
Leaves around me falling,
15 Wind oozing thin through the thorn from norward,
And the woman calling.

Thomas Hardy

PASSAGE 30

…At the end of this tirade, the peasant rose and stolidly beat the horse with a long string fastened to a stick, shouting hoarsely: 'Ugh! Eeagh! Augh!' The horses awoke, sighed, and moved experimentally – by some mechanical miracle the wheels turned, a shudder ran along our keel, and we were off!

5 Across the bridge into Austrian Novo Sielitza we rattled, and out upon the hard road that led frontward, slowly gaining upon and passing a long train of ox-carts driven by soldiers and loaded with cases of ammunition. Now we were in Bucovina. On the left, low fields green with young crops stretched flatly to the trees along the Prut, beyond which rose the rich hills of Romania; to the right the valley extended miles to cultivated rolling country. Already the *10* June sun poured down windless, moist heat. The driver slumped gradually into his spine, the horses' pace diminished to a merely arithmetical progression, and we crawled in a baking pall of dust like Zeus hidden in his cloud.

'Hey!' We beat upon his back. 'Shake a leg, Dave!'

He turned upon us a dirty, snub-nosed face, and eyes peering through matted hair, and his *15* mouth cracked slowly in an appalling, familiar grin with the intelligent expression of a loaf of bread. We christened him immediately Ivan the Horrible…

'Ooch!' he cried with simulated ferocity, waving the string. 'Aich! Augh!'

The horses pretended to be impressed, and broke into a shuffle; but ten minutes later Ivan was again rapt in contemplation of the infinite, the horses almost stationary, and we moved in *20* white dust…

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Slowly we drew near the leisurely sound of the cannon, that defined itself sharply out of the all-echoing thunder audible at Novo Sielitza. And topping a steep hill crowned with a straggling thatched village, we came in sight of the batteries. They lay on the hither side of an immense rolling hill, where a red gash in the fields dribbled along for miles. At intervals of *25* half a minute a gun spat heavily; but you could see neither smoke nor flame – only minute figures running about, stiffening, and again springing to life. A twanging drone as the shell soared – and then on the leafy hills across the river puffs of smoke unfolding. Over there were the towers of white Czernowitz, dazzling in the sun. The village through which we passed was populous with great brown soldiers, who eyed us sullenly and suspiciously. Over a gateway *30* hung a Red Cross flag, and along the road trickled a thin, steady stream of wounded – some leaning on their comrades, others bandaged around the head, or with their arms in slings; and peasant carts jolted by with faintly groaning heaps of arms and legs.

From *The War in Eastern Europe*, John Reed (1887-1920)

PASSAGE 31

Adolescence – II

Although it is night, I sit in the bathroom, waiting.
Sweat prickles behind my knees, the baby-breasts are alert.
Venetian blinds slice up the moon; the tiles quiver in pale strips.
Then they come, the three seal men with eyes as round
As dinner plates and eyelashes like sharpened tines[1].
They bring the scent of licorice. One sits in the washbowl,
One on the bathtub edge; one leans against the door.
'Can you feel it yet?' they whisper.
I don't know what to say, again. They chuckle,
Patting their sleek bodies with their hands.
'Well, maybe next time.' And they rise,
Glittering like pools of ink under moonlight,
And vanish. I clutch at the ragged holes
They leave behind, here at the edge of darkness.
Night rests like a ball of fur on my tongue.

Rita Dove

[1] Tines: Prongs

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PASSAGE 32

from The Feast of Stephen

I

The coltish horseplay of the locker room,
Moist with the steam of the tiled shower stalls,
With shameless blends of civet, musk and sweat,
Loud with the cap-gun snapping of wet towels
5 Under the steel-ribbed cages of bare bulbs,
In some such setting of thick basement pipes
And janitorial realities
Boys for the first time frankly eye each other,
Inspect each others' bodies at close range,
10 And what they see is not so much another
As a strange, possible version of themselves,
And all the sparring dance, adrenal life,
Tense, jubilant nimbleness, is but a vague,
Busy, unfocused ballet of self-love.

Anthony Hecht

(This is the first verse of a longer poem, and the poet has quite rightly pointed out to us that it can not be fully understood out of context. It will be a useful exercise for you, once you have written a commentary on these fourteen lines, to read the verse again together with the other three verses of what is altogether a very powerful poem, and ask yourself what that additional reading has added to your understanding of the extract above. The poem is printed in full as Appendix 1, page 245, with some guiding notes.)

PASSAGE 33

Although he had paid a brief visit to Walter by darkness the other evening, it was several weeks since Ehrendorf had last seen the Blacketts' house by daylight. It seemed to him to have a forlorn and deserted air. During the raid on Tanglin a bomb had fallen at one edge of the lawn, uprooting the 'flame of the forest' tree beneath which, several months ago, he had been standing with Joan
5 when she had thrown wine in his face at the garden-party. No effort had been made to fill in the crater on whose raised lip the grass lawn continued peacefully to grow; in the facade of the house itself several of the windows which had once been glazed for the air-conditioning now gaped darkly where once they had sparkled with reflections from the pool.

He plodded past the tennis courts whose white lines, washed out by the monsoon rains and
10 not repainted, were by now scarcely visible. Normally, too, there would have been several Tamils working in the flower-beds or cutting back the *lalang* but today he could not see a soul. He paused to stare uncomprehendingly at an untidy mass of broken spars and tattered paper which stood at the margin of the nutmeg grove and which he failed to recognize as the remains of damaged floats for the jubilee celebrations. Can Walter and Joan have left already? he
15 wondered and, resigned though he already was to the fact that he was unlikely ever to see Joan again, he was nevertheless surprised by the intense and chilling sadness which suddenly enveloped him.

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The summer-house, in which the Blacketts in happier times had invited their guests to change their clothes, remained undamaged; Ehrendorf changed rapidly and plunged into the pool which
20 was full of dead leaves and other flotsam. He dived and swam under water for a few feet but the water was murky and disagreeable. How different everything was! Surfacing he bumped into a piece of floating wood on which the words '...in Prosperity' were written. He took a deep breath and dived again; this time he dragged himself on and on through the silent grey corridors, counting the grey tiles on the bottom, inspecting weird grey objects which lay there: a broken
25 flower-pot from which still trailed a slimy grey plant which wavered slightly at his passage, a brick, a rusting metal golf club, a slimy, swollen, disintegrating grey head, horribly merry, which had once belonged to one of the floats and which he also failed to recognize. He would have liked to drag himself on and on through that grey world but his lungs insisted that he should return to the surface. Shaking the water out of his eyes he saw that Joan was walking rapidly
30 towards the pool. Her face was flushed and agitated.

'Oh, hiya. I hope you don't mind me using the pool. I didn't see anyone around. I thought you'd all gone.' He was aware of an extraordinary stiffness of the muscles of his face as he spoke.

Joan had stopped at the edge of the pool and was gazing down at him with an odd expression
35 on her face, restlessly fingering the turban she was wearing. She ignored his greeting, turned away, looked at her watch, turned back to him. At last she said: 'You must help me get to the boat. I've been trying to ring people but everyone else has gone. There's only Abdul here and he's too old … They say there's already a terrible traffic jam beginning … All the 'boys' have cleared off, even the kitchen 'boy', and Father has gone off somewhere … and Monty, I don't
40 know where he is … Nigel had to go and settle some business at the last moment and I'm to meet him at the boat but unless you help me … You see, they've all gone! Father was supposed to be back ages ago to take me down to the docks himself, but even the *syce* isn't there and it's getting late … Jim, I can't manage the luggage by myself, d'you see? Oh, go away! You're completely useless!' she screamed at Abdul suddenly for the elderly servant had followed her
45 out to the lawn and was rubbing his hands anxiously. Shocked, he fell back a few paces but continued to watch Joan.

Ehrendorf had turned over on to his back and was no longer looking at Joan but straight up at the sky which was cloudy though covered with a white haze. Floating with arms outstretched he thought: 'From above I must look as if I'm floating like a star-fish … or perhaps like a piece of
50 flotsam.' In spite of the water bubbling in his ears he could still hear Joan's voice, though quite faintly now. He could tell from its pitch that she was panic-stricken. And this was the girl who had refused to help Matthew get Vera away! He said to himself, floating placidly: 'I wouldn't help her even if my life depended upon it!'

When he turned over to swim to the side he could no longer hear her voice, but she was still
55 there, kneeling in tears at the side of the pool, hammering at it with a piece of broken wood. As he gripped the rounded lip of the pool and heaved himself out of the water he glanced at her, musing on the wonder of a beautiful woman with a disagreeable personality. Such a woman, he mused, was like a lovely schooner with a mad captain. The custodian of this lovely body was a hard-hearted bitch. It was altogether astonishing.
60 'Of course I'll help you,' he said. 'Just wait a moment while I get changed.'

J G Farrell, *The Singapore Grip*

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PASSAGE 34

Gamecock

Fear, jealousy and murder are the same
When they put on their long reddish feathers,
Their shawl neck and moccasin head
In a tree bearing levels of women.
5 There is yet no thread

Of light, and his scabbed feet tighten,
Holding sleep as though it were lockjaw,
His feathers damp, his eyes crazed
And cracked like the eyes
10 Of a chicken head cut off or wrung-necked

While he waits for the sun's only cry
All night building up in his throat
To leap out and turn the day red,
To tumble his hens from the pine tree,
15 And then will go down, his hackles

Up, looking everywhere for the other
Cock who could not be there,
Head ruffed and sullenly stepping
As upon his best human-curved steel:
20 He is like any fierce

Old man in a terminal ward:
There is the same look of waiting
That the sun prepares itself for;
The enraged, surviving-
25 another-day blood.

And from him at dawn comes the same
Cry that the world cannot stop.
In all the great building's blue windows
The sun gains strength; on all floors, women
30 Awaken – wives, nurses, sisters and daughters –

And he lies back, his eyes filmed, unappeased,
As all of them, clucking, pillow-patting,
Come to help his best savagery blaze, doomed, dead-
game, demanding unreasonably
35 Battling to the death for what is his.

James Dickey

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PASSAGE 35

He was tender with her. He wiped her eyelids with his handkerchief, not noticing how soiled it was. It was stained with ink, crumpled, stuck together. Her lids were large and the handkerchief was stiff, not nearly soft enough. He moistened a corner in his mouth. He was painfully aware of the private softness of her skin, of how the eyes trembled beneath their coverings. He dried the tears with an affection, a particularity, that had never been exercised before. *5*

He fetched the chair from behind the desk. When he lifted it the back separated from the seat and clattered to the floor.

'Oh dear.' Lucinda sat, sniffing, on the window ledge. 'Everything is in collapse.' And, indeed, this was how seemed to her, not merely today, but today more than before. It had never been what it appeared to be – the physical monument to her success, her solidity. There was a heavy desk, various bureaux, cabinets, samples of manufacture, but she could never see them as solid, but as theatrics. This was her place of exile, and never more than when the window framed a picture of drunken men playing tug of war. She felt humiliated and powerless, like a child dragged down the street by a large dog on a leash. *10*

There was a claw hammer in her desk drawer. Oscar – although he was at first too energetic and it seemed that he would fail – succeeded in hammering the chair back together. She obliged him by sitting in it. Her back was bathed in afternoon sunshine. *15*

She said, 'You must think me really quite ridiculous.'

He said, 'Oh, no, not at all.'

She held out her hand, received the handkerchief and blew her nose. She was anointed with a blue ink smudge. It sat right on the tip of her nose. 'Am I right to say you guessed the reason for my tears?' *20*

But he had guessed nothing. He felt himself to be too big, too tall, too awkward. She was so condensed and gathered. There was nothing superfluous about her. He squatted with his back against the opposite wall. His legs too long and thin, untidy as a heap of unsawn firewood. *25*

'No,' he said, 'no, really. I have no idea.'

Her face changed subtly. You could not say what had happened – a diminution of the lower lip, a flattening of the cheek, a narrowing of the eye. But there was no ambiguity in her intention. She had withdrawn her trust from him abruptly. 'If you have no idea,' she said, 'how can you not think me ridiculous?' *30*

'Because you do not have a "ridiculous" character.'

They looked at each other and saw each other change from combative stranger to familiar friend and back again, not staying one thing long enough for certainty. She had velvety green irises of extraordinary beauty. Her eye-whites were laced with tangled filaments of red.

'And are you curious?' she asked, pulling and pushing, challenging him even while she promised to confide. 'About the reason for my tears? Are you curious a little bit?' *35*

He was curious, of course he was, but he had a lover's curiosity and he feared what she might say. He imagined the tears were somehow connected to the fat letters she left lying on her marble mantelpiece. He imagined they were produced by Dennis Hasset. He was curious. He was not curious at all. He had a lover's selfishness, was grateful for the intimacy the tears had made possible, was resentful of what they seemed to threaten. *40*

They looked at each other until the look became a stare and both of them lost their nerve at once.

'Yes,' he said, 'of course I am curious.'

He wet the comer of the handkerchief again and tenderly removed the smudge from her nose. She tilted her head a little and closed her eyes. *45*

Peter Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda*

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Passages for Further Practice - Guiding Questions

PASSAGE 27: *Hats* from *Except by Nature*, Sandra Alcosser

- What do we learn from this passage about the writer's relationship with and feelings about her aunt?
- What part is played in the passage by the details the writer gives of her aunt's hats?
- How does the writer emphasise the difference between her aunt as she once was and as she now is?
- Discuss the passage's sentence structure and punctuation.

PASSAGE 28: *The Tourist from Syracuse*, Donald Justice

- In what role does the poet cast you, the reader, in this poem?
- How does the poet make use of references to light, dark, heat, cold and sound to create some of his effects?
- How does the poet bring his poem to a climax?
- What aspects of the poem work together to produce its sinister effect?

PASSAGE 29: *The Voice*, Thomas Hardy

- Describe the relationship between the man and woman in the poem
- How does the man convey his uncertainty about what is happening?
- What use is made of the poem's setting?
- Discuss the sound of the poem

PASSAGE 30: from *The War in Eastern Europe*, John Reed

- What impression of war do we gain from the writer's account of it here?
- What do the several references to the horses contribute to the passage?
- How would you describe the writer's perceptions of and interactions with the people they encounter on their journey (including their driver and the wounded men)?
- What is interesting about the background of landscape and weather against which this battle is taking place?

PASSAGE 31: *Adolescence – II*, Rita Dove

- How does the poet create an atmosphere of fear in the poem?
- Show how that fear is tempered by a feeling of fascination.
- Discuss the poem's visual effects.
- How is the phrase 'at the edge of darkness' key to our understanding of the poem?

(When you have worked through Section Four: How to Compare Passages, you will find it interesting to compare this poem with *Heritage* by Dorothea Mackellar (page 54).

PASSAGE 32: from *The Feast of Stephen*, Anthony Hecht (three questions only)

- How does the poet capture the atmosphere, both physical and emotional, of a boys' locker room (changing-room)?
- What contrasts do you notice between how the poet presents the boys' behaviour and how he describes the locker room as a place?
- How does the extract look forward to a later time in the boys' lives?

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PASSAGE 33: *The Singapore Grip*, J G Farrell

- By what methods does the writer indicate how life has been disrupted for the people of Singapore?
- What do we gather about the state of mind of the two principal characters?
- How do the writer, and Ehrendorf, view Joan's behaviour?
- Identify and discuss the contradictions in the passage.

PASSAGE 34: *Gamecock*, James Dickey,

- How does the poet convey the passion of both the cockerel and the old man?
- What does he want the reader to feel towards them both?
- Discuss the impact of the poem's physical detail.
- Is the poem primarily about a gamecock or about a dying man?

PASSAGE 35: *Oscar and Lucinda*, Peter Carey

- What do we learn from the passage about the characters of Oscar and Lucinda?
- What are we told about the reasons for Lucinda's state of mind?
- How does the writer convey the sense that the relationship between them may be on the point of changing?
- What part is played in the passage by the physical objects described?

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Section Four: How to Compare Literary Passages

Your examiner may want you to compare two passages. That can be quite a complex task, so you need a structure within which to work, or at least a set of headings to make notes under. You'll find that the ***SCASI*** system can work well for that purpose, even if one of the passages is non-literary (as in the case of the new IB Language and Literature written exam).

Part 1: Comparing Passages from Fiction and Poetry

Here are two poems, one from a past **IB Standard Level** paper. Read both poems carefully, then read them again until you're confident you understand them (they aren't very difficult). Then set up a grid, like this but using at least one full page:

Similarities	Differences
Setting	***Setting***
Character	***Character***
Action	***Action***
Style	***Style***
Ideas	***Ideas***

As you come to grips with the poems and develop your ideas about them, complete the grid.

Here are the poems.

PASSAGE 36

The Bystander

I am the one who looks the other way,
In any painting you may see me stand
Rapt at the sky, a bird, an angel's wing,
While others kneel, present the myrrh, receive
5 The benediction from the radiant hand.

I hold the horses while the knights dismount
And draw their swords to fight the battle out;
Or else in dim perspective you may see
My distant figure on the mountain road
10 When in the plains the hosts are put to rout.

I am the silly soul who looks too late,
The dullard dreaming, second from the right.
I hang upon the crowd, but do not mark
(Cap over eyes) the slaughtered Innocents[1],

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15 Or Icarus,[2] his downward plunging flight.

Once in a Garden – back view only there –
How well the painter placed me, stroke on stroke,
Yet scarcely seen among the flowers and grass –
I heard a voice say, ‘Eat,’ and would have turned –
20 I often wonder who it was that spoke.

Rosemary Dobson, *Selected Poems* (1973)

[1] Children King Herod killed to avert the prophecy that a Saviour (Jesus Christ) was going to be born

[2] The son of Daedalus (in Greek Mythology), who made him a pair of wings from wax. The wings melted when Icarus flew close to the sun, and he fell into the sea.

PASSAGE 37

Musée Des Beaux Arts

About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
5 How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
10 That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

In Brueghel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
15 Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water; and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
20 Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

W H Auden

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You can if you wish check your notes against the following.

Similarities	Differences
Setting o Both poems are set within a series of paintings of important events (historical, mythological, military, religious), mainly involving human suffering.	***Setting*** o The religious events in *The Bystander* (the birth of Christ, the Last Supper) have greater prominence. o There is an additional, physical setting in *Musée Des Beaux Arts* – the art gallery where the paintings hang and through which we feel the poet is walking.
Character o Both poems are about the ordinary men and women who find themselves on the edge of these important events.	***Character*** o The poet in *The Bystander* writes as if he is this 'Universal Person'; W H Auden is in the role of a lecturer on The Old Masters.
Action The events described are similar in their significance.	***Action*** There is a little more detail in Auden's accounts (the horse scratching its behind, the colour of Icarus' legs).
Style o Both poems consist of lists of examples. o Neither poem uses figurative language – each is a straightforward description of what is to be seen in the paintings. o Both poems rhyme.	***Style*** o The style of *The Bystander* is more intimate (Rosemary Dobson uses the first and second person verb forms). o Auden's sentence-structure is looser and more fluent – each verse consists of one long sentence, and we have the impression that this is someone talking with ease and at length on a topic which he knows a lot about. o Auden's rhyme-scheme is less rigid – and has the same effect as his looser sentence structure. o There is very brief dialogue in *The Bystander,* which helps to bring that episode – the climactic one – to life.
Ideas o The general idea is the same in each poem. Every important event in the story of the world has ordinary people on its perimeter who are not directly affected by it and may barely notice what is happening o Both poems pay tribute to the skill of the painters	***Ideas*** o Rosemary Dobson sees our failure to understand the importance of events as a shortcoming, or at least a missed opportunity: we are silly souls or dullards, distracted by petty detail. o Auden on the other hand recognises the reality that life must go on, and that we all have the right to decide what is *'important'* to us and therefore worthy of our attention – the right to turn away in *'leisurely'* fashion if we choose. o *The Bystander*, in other words, is judgemental, *Musée Des Beaux Arts* more philosophical.

You will note that we have gone beyond just listing the similarities and differences, and have attempted to explain their effect. You need to do that.

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When you come to write your comparison, you have a choice. You can work through your notes either horizontally (dealing with each of the ***SCASI*** elements in turn) or vertically (writing about one poem, exhaustively, then the other). It doesn't much matter which way you organise your material.

If you are asked to make a judgement about which is the better piece of writing, say what you think, of course, with examples from your commentary to support your decision. Once again there is no single right answer…but make sure you base your judgement on literary rather than personal criteria.

Here's another pair of poems, for further practice. You may already know the first one. They're longer than the last two poems, but in some ways easier to compare because there are bigger differences between them. (That does make the task more straightforward, you will find – differences are easier to spot when they are less subtle).

PASSAGE 38

Snake

A snake came to my water-trough
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,
To drink there.

In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob-tree
I came down the steps with my pitcher
5 And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough before me.

He reached down from a fissure in the earthwall in the gloom
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over the edge of the stone trough
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small clearness,
10 He sipped with his straight mouth,
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,
Silently.

Someone was before me at my water-trough,
And I, like a second comer, waiting.
15
He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,
And flickered his two-forked tongue from his lips, and mused a moment,
And stopped and drank a little more,
Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of earth
20 On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.

The voice of my education said to me
He must be killed,
For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are venomous.

And voices in me said, If you were a man
25 You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off.

But must I confess how I liked him,
How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at my water-trough

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And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless,
Into the burning bowels of this earth?

30

Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?
Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?
Was it humility, to feel so honoured?
I felt so honoured.

And yet those voices:
35 *If you were not afraid, you would kill him!*

And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid,
But even so, honoured still more
That he should seek my hospitality
From out the dark door of the secret earth.

40

He drank enough
And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,
And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air, so black,
Seeming to lick his lips,
And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,
45 And slowly turned his head,
And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice adream,
Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round
And climb again the broken bank of my wall-face.

And as he put his head into that dreadful hole,
50 And as he slowly drew up, snake-easing his shoulders, and entered farther,
A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing, into that horrid black hole,
Deliberately going into the blackness, and slowly drawing himself after,
Overcame me now his back was turned.

I looked round, I put down my pitcher,
55 I picked up a clumsy log
And threw it at the water-trough with a clatter.

I think it did not hit him,
But suddenly that part of him that was left behind convulsed in undignified haste,
Writhed like a log and was gone
60 Into the black hole, the earth-lipped fissure in the wall-front,
At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.

And immediately I regretted it.
I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!
I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.

65

And I thought of the albatross,
And I wished he would come back, my snake.

For he seemed to me again like a king,

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Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
Now due to be crowned again.

70

And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords
Of life.
And I have something to expiate:
A pettiness.

D H Lawrence

PASSAGE 39

The Killer

The day was clear as fire,
the birds sang frail as glass,
when thirsty I came to the creek
and fell by its side in the grass.

5

My breast on the bright moss
and shower-embroidered weeds,
my lips to the live water
I saw him turn in the reeds.

10 Black horror sprang from the dark
in a violent birth,
and through its cloth of grass
I felt the clutch of earth.

O beat him into the ground,
15 O strike him till he dies
or else your life itself
drains through those colourless eves.

I struck again and again.
Slender in black and red
20 he lies, and his icy glance
turns outward, clear and dead.

But nimble my enemy
as water is, or wind,
He has slipped from his death aside
and vanished into my mind.

25

He has vanished whence he came,
my nimble enemy:
and the ants come out to the snake
and drink at his shallow eye.

Judith Wright

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Check that you've said something about:

- The length of the poems, the amount of detail
- The versification (rhythm, rhyme, stanza form)
- Verb tense
- Similes
- The snakes' colour
- The use of quoted speech
- The impact of their encounter on each poet

What if you have to compare a poem with a piece of prose? The principles are the same, and you can use the same structure. You will probably have to take into account, however, the general differences between poetry and prose and say something about that. So have your ideas on the topic ready – but keep your expression of them short and to the point, and avoid over-theorising. Remember it's the two passages you're supposed to be writing about, not literary genres (types of literature) in general.

Here, by way of a little contribution to your thinking (or your class discussion) about the differences, is a note in the form of a poem, by Howard Nemerov:

Because You Asked about the Line between Prose and Poetry

Sparrows were feeding in a freezing drizzle
That while you watched turned into pieces of snow
Riding a gradient invisible
From silver aslant to random, white, and slow.

There came a moment that you couldn't tell.
And then they clearly flew instead of fell.

You may have noticed, in fact, that *Snake* itself is half-way to being prose (just as some of Lawrence's prose is half-way to 'flying' – being poetry). Here, however, is a piece of 'real' prose followed by *The Interrogation* again. Compare them.

PASSAGE 40

Pulling up at my house, I beep on the horn before remembering Roger has sent Charles home. As I get out of the car to open the gates, two ANC jeeps come roaring up the road. I stop to watch them pass. But they don't pass. Instead they screech to a halt and a squad of soldiers, led by a captain, jump out and surround me. The captain is a stocky man with wide-spaced eyes and a flat face. His teeth are individual, discoloured stumps. They have been filed and filled with gold. He asks if I am James Gillespie. I say, rather haughtily, as though it's none of their business, that I am. He says that I am to come with them to the Central Prison for questioning. Thinking of Roger's example, I demand to see his warrant. The captain's reaction is immediate but at the same time unhurried, almost languid. He simply turns to the soldier next to him, takes his rifle and casually smashes the butt into the side of my head. What I feel first is not pain, but nausea, an overwhelming desire to vomit. It's a new experience for me – nausea not from the stomach

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but from the head. As I retch, I try to bend forward but the world is no longer ordered the way I know it to be. Sky and earth are moving, they are intent on changing places. The horizon jumps up to my face, then careers away again. My legs are giving way, I am sliding down. Blinking, I
15 look up at the massed brains of the grey-white clouds above. They swirl around and I am sick again. I splutter and choke as the vomit settles back in my throat. It is not easy to breathe. The captain stoops over me. My eyes are not working as they should. He is in vision for a second, sways away, comes back into view. My head spins.

'Where is Auguste Kilundu?' he demands.

20 I hear him clearly. My ears are working at least.

'Where is Kilundu?'

I try to speak, but nothing comes. I am not sure what I want to say. To tell him I don't know where Auguste is or that I do. I concentrate on getting some words out. The effort causes a wave of nausea to rise. I shut my eyes. The next thing I feel is a blow to my stomach and suddenly my
25 lungs are airless. I let out a groan and gasp to breathe. I feel a sharp pain in my temple. Someone may have kicked me in the head, but I cannot be sure. Panic grips me. I am thinking about brain damage and ruptured internal organs. I am worried they will go too far, that they will kill me before I get to the Central Prison. I want to shout out that I will tell them everything.

I feel myself being dragged to my feet. I think I may have pissed myself. The captain is
30 laughing through his filed, peg teeth.

Ronan Bennet, *The Catastrophist*

PASSAGE 8 (a repeat)

The Interrogation

We could have crossed the road but hesitated,
And then came the patrol;
The leader conscientious and intent,
The men surly, indifferent.
5 While we stood by and waited
The interrogation began. He says the whole
Must come out now, who, what we are,
Where we have come from, with what purpose, whose
Country or camp we plot for or betray.
10 Question on question.
We have stood and answered through the standing day
And watched across the road beyond the hedge
The careless lovers in pairs go by,
Hand linked in hand, wandering another star,
15 So near we could shout to them. We cannot choose
Answer or action here,
Though still the careless lovers saunter by
And the thoughtless field is near.
We are on the very edge,
20 Endurance almost done,
And still the interrogation is going on.

Edwin Muir

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You could also, if you wished, look again at the verses from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (page 43) and the passage from *The Open Boat* (page 49) and compare them. They're both about the power of the sea…

Then there are some very marked similarities between *Heritage* by Dorothea Mackellar (page 54) and *Adolescence II* by Rita Dove (page 113).

Another interesting exercise would be to pair up passages from **Section Six, 'Passages from More Recent Examination Papers'** with passages from earlier in the book. You'll need to wait until you've worked on that section, of course; but you will find that seeing connections between two or more passages will often throw new light on the passages themselves.

Just for good measure, here's *Entirely* again, and a short poem you may have fun comparing with it.

PASSAGE 26 (a repeat)

Entirely

If we could get the hang of it entirely
  It would take too long;
All we know is the splash of words in passing
  And falling twigs of song,
5 And when we try to eavesdrop on the great
  Presences it is rarely
That by a stroke of luck we can appropriate
  Even a phrase entirely.

If we could find our happiness entirely
10 In somebody else's arms
We should not fear the spears of the spring nor the city's
  Yammering fire alarms
But, as it is, the spears each year go through
  Our flesh and almost hourly
15 Bell or siren banishes the blue
  Eyes of Love entirely.

And if the world were black or white entirely
  And all the charts were plain
Instead of a mad weir of tigerish waters,
20 A prism of delight and pain,
We might be surer where we wished to go
  Or again we might be merely
Bored but in brute reality there is no
  Road that is right entirely.

Louis MacNeice, *Plant and Phantom* (1941)

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PASSAGE 41

Glory Be to God for Dappled Things

Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
5 Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.
All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled, (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
10 He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

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Section Five: Non-Literary (and Literary) Passages

In **Section One Part 7** (page 70) we adjusted our definitions of some of the SCASI elements to accommodate literary writing other than prose fiction and poetry. These expanded definitions can also help us approach texts we might not regard as having literary merit – an advertisement, for instance, or a political speech, or an extract from a graphic novel.

Here they are (modified also in line with other thoughts we have had in the course of the book). You will need to bear them in mind when you use SCASI to analyse 'non-literary' passages (as in the **IB Language and Literature course, Standard Level**), or compare 'literary' and 'non-literary' writing (in the equivalent **Higher Level** examination).

Why have we placed single inverted commas around 'literary' and 'non-literary', by the way? Because both terms are capable of a range of definitions. The punctuation symbols '….' when used like that mean that there is some question about the precise meaning of the enclosed word or phrase. Here, they acknowledge that the distinction between the two kinds of writing is an artificial one, and the boundaries between them can be moved in either direction (and in one direction can lead to the assertion that there is no such thing as non-literary writing).

Setting

Original definition: 'where and when these events take place'. We have by now, however, identified several settings beyond those of place and time – geographical, historical, social, political, philosophical, moral and economic. We have also suggested two alternative terms – 'context' and 'background' – to give the concept a wider reference.

'Events' may not seem an appropriate term for some kinds of writing; but something 'takes place' in every kind of written (and other) communication. It takes place as part of what the writer is trying to achieve in his writing, so it is very important to pay early attention to the writer's purpose, given the setting he is working within.

We can thus widen the scope of the term even more, by including the act of writing itself as an event taking place within a specific context, or set of contexts. We shall then be asking the question, 'What was the background against which the writer worked?'

Character

Original definition: 'who takes part'. In some pieces of writing, the writer participates more fully, and is more visible, than any of his characters. There may not even be any characters as such – in an essay, for instance, or a piece of expository writing. There's always the writer, however…

…and the audience. They are one side of the transaction between writer and reader, so we need to give attention to who they are likely to be and how they may respond to what is written.

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Action

Original definition: 'what happens'. In some pieces of writing, however, the action takes the form of a situation which does not change throughout the piece (nothing happens), and can be termed, paradoxically, 'static action'.

Ideas, as well as events, however, can 'happen', we have argued (and when they do, philosophical setting becomes particularly important, as does the way the ideas develop and are structured within the writing). The concept of writer purpose is, again, very relevant: the intent of a piece of writing is the starting-point for the action, whether it is 'event-action', 'ideas-action' (as above) or 'language-action' (see next point).

Style

Original definition: 'how it all happens', and how what happens is recounted. Some particular elements of language style come to the forefront, however, in non-literary writing – voice, register, tone and mood (similar and overlapping terms) – since they have much to do with audience; and the audience for non-literary writing is often very specific.

Language, too, can *happen*… so it is possible to think of 'language events' as part of the action of a piece of writing. They represent much of what takes place between the writer and his audience.

Ideas

Original definition: what conclusions we can draw from all of the above. When we turn to non-literary passages we find that the ideas they carry often predominate – in, for example, a piece of didactic (instructive) or persuasive writing. The other SCASI elements can thus *serve* the ideas (whereas in other kinds of writing, they can serve the narrative, or the characterisation or even the setting. It is rarely the case that they serve the style. You may want to look again at the Dickens passage on page 83, however, with that last possibility in mind.)

The ideas, too, are usually an integral part of the writer's purpose in what we might call functional writing – writing that does a job – since that job is often to persuade us to the writer's point of view.

Apologies for all of that theorising; but we hope it has laid a helpful foundation for the tasks of analysing non-literary writing in itself and also comparing it with what is adjudged to be literary text. In the next section (**Passages from More Recent Literature Examination Papers**) we have provided a set of questions you can ask about each of the SCASI elements, which you may also find useful in your work on the passages below…so you may wish to glance ahead at page 173.

Here, then, is a non-literary passage, with the appropriate rubric from the new **IB Language and Literature course, Standard Level**. When you have worked through it you can (if you're a **Higher Level** student) move on to compare it with the poem on the same topic.

> *Write an analysis on the following text. Include comments on the significance of context, audience, purpose, and formal and stylistic features.*

(One thing to be noted: the word *formal*, since it is distinguished from *stylistic* features, would seem to suggest that the examiner wishes you to pay attention to the 'form' (structure) of the passage in addition

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to its 'style' of language. It's right that you should do so anyway. You can do it, however, under the general heading of ***Style***, since structure is an aspect of style – the way the passage is written.)

PASSAGE 42 – War Correspondence

Nor can money replace the greatest waste of all – the waste in 'killed, wounded, and missing.' The waste of human life in this war is so enormous, so far beyond our daily experience, that disasters less appalling are much easier to understand. The loss of three people in an automobile accident comes nearer home than the fact that at the battle of Sezanne thirty thousand men were
5 killed. Few of us are trained to think of men in such numbers – certainly not of dead men in such numbers. We have seen thirty thousand men together only during the world's series or at the championship football matches. To get an idea of the waste of this war we must imagine all of the spectators at a football match between Yale and Harvard suddenly stricken dead. We must think of all the wives, children, friends affected by the loss of those thirty thousand, and we must
10 multiply those thirty thousand by hundreds, and imagine these hundreds of thousands lying dead in Belgium, in Alsace-Lorraine, and within ten miles of Paris. After the Germans were repulsed at Meaux and at Sezanne the dead of both armies were so many that they lay intermingled in layers three and four deep. They were buried in long pits and piled on top of each other like cigars in a box. Lines of fresh earth so long that you mistook them for trenches intended to
15 conceal regiments were in reality graves. Some bodies lay for days uncovered until they had lost all human semblance. They were so many you ceased to regard them even as corpses. They had become just a part of the waste, a part of the shattered walls, uprooted trees, and fields ploughed by shells. What once had been your fellow men were only bundles of clothes, swollen and shapeless, like scarecrows stuffed with rags, polluting the air.

20 The wounded were hardly less pitiful. They were so many and so thickly did they fall that the ambulance service at first was not sufficient to handle them. They lay in the fields or forests sometimes for a day before they were picked up, suffering unthinkable agony. And after they were placed in cars and started back toward Paris the tortures continued. Some of the trains of wounded that arrived outside the city had not been opened in two days. The wounded had been
25 without food or water. They had not been able to move from the positions in which in torment they had thrown themselves. The foul air had produced gangrene. And when the cars were opened the stench was so fearful that the Red Cross people fell back as though from a blow. For the wounded Paris is full of hospitals – French, English, and American. And the hospitals are full of splendid men. Each one once had been physically fit or he would not have been passed to the
30 front; and those among them who are officers are finely bred, finely educated, or they would not be officers. But each matched his good health, his good breeding, and knowledge against a broken piece of shell or steel bullet, and the shell or bullet won. They always will win. Stephen Crane called a wound 'the red badge of courage.' It is all of that. And the man who wears that badge has all my admiration. But I cannot help feeling also the waste of it. I would have a
35 standing army for the same excellent reason that I insure my house; but, except in self-defence, no war. For war – and I have seen a lot of it – is waste. And waste is unintelligent.

Richard Harding Davis *With the Allies* (1914)

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Setting

Think of the setting here as comprising three concentric circles, with the central circle representing the most immediate context – the battlefields of the First World War. (Draw the circles if you wish.) What context does each of the other two circles represent?

- The second circle (moving out from the centre): the America of 1914, for whose public Davis is writing
- The third, outermost circle: the background of anti-war thinking and writing that has accumulated through the centuries

These are the contexts within which Davis wrote his piece, and therefore the contexts against which we must read it (in so far as we have knowledge of what they were – and that knowledge may be a limited. You will not be assessed in a literature exam, of course, on your knowledge of history…)

What specific references are there to each of the three settings?

The first circle:

- Named places (both towns and countries) – Meaux, Sezanne, Belgium
- Landscapes which convey a sense of the destruction wrought by war throughout the area of conflict – ‘shattered walls, uprooted trees, and fields ploughed by shells’
- Paris, and the accumulation of terrible injuries and suffering to be found there

The second circle:

- Mention of the loss of three people in an automobile accident as a means of providing a ‘connection’ for American readers, most of whom will regard an automobile accident as the cause of injury and death they are most likely to encounter
- Comparison with the size of a football crowd at a match between Yale and Harvard in order to provide, for the same audience, a sense of perspective, of the magnitude of war’s destructiveness
- The simile *‘like cigars in a box’*: a visual bridge to the American culture of the time
- The reference to American casualties, bringing the war ‘home’
- The reference to *‘finely educated’* officers – finely educated, the US reader will assume, at places like Yale and Harvard (connecting with the earlier reference to those two institutions)

The third circle:

- The plain and direct claim in the passage’s opening line that war is a great *‘waste’*, linking the passage to all previous anti-war writing
- The reference to other writing about war – Stephen Crane’s novel *The Red Badge of Courage*
- The statement in the closing lines that *‘war…is waste. And waste is unintelligent’* – an expression of anti-war logic (as opposed to anti-war feeling)

Character

Where does Richard Harding Davis sit, within these concentric settings?

At their heart.

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How do we come to know that? Look for evidence, starting once more with the inner circle and working outwards.

The first, inner circle:

- *'like cigars in a box' (lines 13-14)*: a strong visual (and cultural) image suggesting he has seen this for himself and has thus been at the exact centre of things (in the first circle, in other words)
- *'war – and I have seen a lot of it' (line 36)* – reinforces and amplifies the above point

The second circle:

- *'We have seen thirty thousand men together only during the world's series…we must imagine…We must think…we must multiply' (lines 6-9)*: he identifies with his US readership.

The third, outer circle:

- *'the man who wears that badge has all my admiration' (lines 33-34)*: an expression of personal feeling, but within the third, outer circle, since he refers to soldiers in the most general of all terms: *'the man who…'* ('any man who…')
- *'I would have a standing army for the same excellent reason that I insure my house; but, except in self-defence, no war' (lines 34-36).* This is personal opinion, but given again within the widest of all three settings, the perennial debate on the justifications for war.

What about the other characters in the passage? Who are they, and how are they presented?

- The victims of war – deliberately depersonalised, but pitied
- Davis's US readership – approached as sensitive, intelligent, logical (or at least capable of understanding *his* logic)

Now decide for yourself who the most noticeable persona is (or personae are), in the passage.

Action

Explore the events of the passage, the way they are presented to us, and their effect.

They are confined to its central part *(lines 11-27).* This consists of a lengthy list of awful occurrences, but they are generalised by the use throughout of the third-person plural *('they')*: no one individual is described, no specific incident is noted. This adds to our sense, as we read, that the destruction caused by war is universal and indiscriminate. We feel, too, that the list could have run on, that the writer has had to select from the many incidents he has heard about or witnessed.

Style

In looking thus at 'the way they [the events] are presented to us' we have begun to think about the style of the passage. We can now examine its 'stylistic features' more closely before moving on to its 'formal' (structural) ones – although we have already paid some attention, under ***Action***, to those also.

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The first paragraph:

What gives the opening of the passage a certain impetus?

It carries on, by means of the conjunction ‘Nor’, from what has gone before (clearly an account of a lesser form of waste than the one the writer is now turning his attention to).

How does the writer seek to startle us in this first paragraph?

By moving swiftly from small to ever larger numbers *(‘three’, ‘thirty thousand’, ‘multiply…by hundreds’, those hundreds of thousands’)*

How in the same paragraph does he attempt to trick us into following his line of thinking?

By stating that we have no option in the matter *(‘we must…We must…we must’)* and assuming that we will accept that statement unthinkingly and align ourselves with him (the inclusive *‘we’* is an important part of that effect).

How, later in the paragraph, does Davis seek to draw us also into the scenes of carnage?

He switches from the first person plural *(‘we’)* to the second person *(‘you’, ‘your’)*, telling us what we have seen, even though we were not there, and reminding us of our common humanity with those who have died.

What is ironical (and horrifying) about the scarecrow simile?

Scarecrows are meant to keep birds away from crops. These dead soldiers are their own protectors, however, working as scarecrows in what is probably a futile attempt to stop the birds feeding on their broken bodies.

The second paragraph:

You may have been taught that it’s wrong to begin a sentence with ‘And’ or ‘But’. Find sentences in which the writer has done just that, and justify his breaking of the ‘rule’.

‘And’: *lines 22, 26, 28, 33,36*

The repeated ‘ands’ at the beginning of sentences work emphatically, like an open hand being slapped (not too heavily) on a speaker’s podium, giving weight to the statements delivered and the arguments offered. Most of them contribute to the cumulative effect of the passage, as the writer builds up his case.

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‘But’: *lines 31, 34*

The ‘buts’, on the other hand, give a sense of one thing being balanced against another, reassuring us that the writer is being even-handed and that his conclusions are therefore more likely to be sound.

Now for the passage’s structure (its ‘formal features’, as in the exam rubric). We identified, earlier, its central section as being a list of generalised events. That central section is framed by two different phases in the development of the passage.

What job does the opening phase *(lines 1-11)* do?

It captures our attention with its shocking numbers.

Should the writer have begun a new paragraph in *line 11*? (Give reasons.)

Probably, since the passage switches from fact to narrative, and that new mode continues into the second paragraph.

What then, does the remainder of the first paragraph do?

It puts flesh on the bare numbers that have gone before, albeit decaying flesh; it brings the statistics alive. It does so through the use of more descriptive and figurative language (we’ve already noted the two similes).

In what respects is the opening of the second paragraph different from the end of the first?

Its subject matter shifts from death to ongoing suffering, in its own way more harrowing.

Where, after line 20, might the writer have chosen to begin a new paragraph? (Give reasons.)

Perhaps at *line 27*, *‘For…’* At this point the writer leaves his account of the suffering of the injured and gives a reason for its prolonged nature – the scale of the problem – and then leads us back to his central theme, waste.

All of the above conveys a sense that is very important to the reader as he works through a piece of persuasive writing – that he is being taken somewhere. We have noted the forward movement of the passage’s ‘ideas-action’: the writer’s argument, together with its illustrative detail, carries us onward as steadily as a story would have done.

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Briefly, so that we have made ourselves aware of the concepts, we should now look at the new items we mentioned in our expanded definition of style, and try to relate them to this last passage. (Beware – it's not always easy to distinguish among them.)

Voice: the persona as whom the writer writes (examples: himself, using or implying an 'I', or one of his/her characters).

Register: the general 'style' or 'mode' a writer (or speaker) adopts for a particular purpose or audience (examples – narrative, descriptive, technical, simplified).

Tone: the feelings a writer reveals towards his subject (examples – critical, sentimental) and also towards his audience (examples – intimate, condescending). Imagine it as the sound of his voice if he were reading what he has written.

Mood: the atmosphere or feeling(s) that pervade the piece of writing (examples: gloom, bitterness, celebration).

Identify those items in this passage.

- Voice: himself, in his professional capacity as a war correspondent, and also as a member of the human race He uses *'we'* for the majority of the passage, and personalises his opinions – narrows them down by using *'I'* – only near the end.
- Register: expository and formal but including some dramatic sentence structures for effect
- Tone: appalled, inclusive, persuasive
- Mood: sorrowful, outraged, confident (in his argument)

Ideas

We have already looked at most of the passage's principal ideas, in our work on the other SCASI features. Can you see any that we have missed?

- The inevitable supremacy of armaments over *'good health…good breeding, and knowledge' (lines 31-32)*: such things are not enough, in war, to withstand the power of weaponry.
- The idea that waste is *'unintelligent'* – Richard Davis's underpinning thesis, and the passage's closing point *(line 36)*

Why might we see that last point as one of the most telling in the passage?

Davis is making a clear appeal to us as rational beings: we will surely want to be included with those who think about war, and run their lives, intelligently.

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Here are two guiding questions to round off our work, for the moment, on this passage. You should be able to answer them easily (in your head, if you wish) using the features of the writing we have already picked out.

Analyse the style and structure of the passage, showing how the writer has used them to persuade us to his point of view.

What might we gather from this passage about how the writer sees his role as a war correspondent?

We can now move on to something more challenging: comparing a passage of limited literary worth (the one you've just looked at) against a piece of 'real literature' from a very different genre – poetry. (**IB Standard Level** students – you needn't do this!)

Our use of the word 'against' may suggest that we expect the passages to somehow fight each other in your commentary, and that you should concentrate only on the differences between them. You should begin, however, by considering what they have in common: that's often a firmer platform from which to launch an analysis.

We can apply the new **IB Higher Level (Language and Literature)** rubric for the purpose. Note, again, the use of the term 'formal' (as discussed above):

Analyse, compare and contrast the following two texts. Include comments on the similarities and differences between the texts and the significance of context, audience, purpose, and formal and stylistic features.

PASSAGE 43

Epilogue to *Death of a Hero*

Eleven years after the fall of Troy,
We, the old men – some of us nearly forty –
Met and talked on the sunny rampart
Over our wine, while the lizards scuttled
5 In dusty grass, and the crickets chirred.

Some bared their wounds;
Some spoke of the thirst, dry in the throat,
And the heart-beat, in the din of battle;
10 Some told of intolerable sufferings,
The brightness gone from their eyes
And the grey already thick in their hair.

And I sat a little apart
From the garrulous talk and old memories,
15 And I heard a boy of twenty
Say petulantly to a girl, seizing her arm:

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‘Oh, come away, why do you stand there
Listening open-mouthed to the talk of old men?
Haven’t you heard enough of Troy and Achilles?
20 Why should they bore us for ever
With an old quarrel and the names of dead men
We never knew, and dull forgotten battles?

And he drew her away,
And she looked back and laughed
25 And he spoke more contempt of us,
Being now out of hearing.

And I thought of the graves by desolate Troy
And the beauty of many young men now dust,
And the long agony, and how useless it all was.
30 And the talk still clashed about me
Like the meeting of blade and blade.

And as they two moved further away
He put an arm about her, and kissed her;
And afterwards I heard their gay distant laughter.
35 And I looked at the hollow cheeks
And the weary eyes and the grey-streaked heads
Of the old men – nearly forty – about me:
And I too walked away
In an agony of helpless grief and pity.

Richard Aldington

We needn’t analyse the poem in advance of comparing it: its particular characteristics will emerge when we set it alongside the passage from *With the Allies*.

It’s essential to lay out your ideas in note form before you begin to write, otherwise you’ll surely get muddled. A simple table like the one below will help; and simple opening comments (‘Both pieces of writing are about war’) are good practice.

In your notes, give the passages numbers – [1], [2] – to save time and space.

Similarities	Differences
Setting	***Setting***
Character	***Character***
Action	***Action***
Style	***Style***
Ideas	***Ideas***

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Over to you.

Similarities	Differences
Setting	***Setting***
	o [1] is set in Europe, [2] in Greece.
	o [1] is set in wartime, [2] in a post-war period.
o Both settings are historical…	o …but widely separated in time.
o Physical details of both places are included…	o …but in [1] are generalised *('the waste, a part of the shattered walls, uprooted trees, and fields ploughed by shells'),* in [2] particularised *('the sunny rampart…lizards scuttled in dusty grass').*
Character	***Character***
o Both narrators have much experience of war…	o …but they speak in different 'voices'. The narrator in [2] is an ex-soldier (does that give his words more weight?)
o Both narrators are detached. In [1] the writer is looking down on it all, with a wide perspective, in [2] he sits, symbolically, *'a little apart'* from his friends as they reminisce.	o Characters other than the narrator in [1] are 'real people' but impersonalised *('They were so many you ceased to regard them even as corpses'),* in [2] they are imaginary or legendary (Achilles) but individualised (*'a boy of twenty'* who speaks *'petulantly'*).
Action	***Action***
o Both pieces of writing recount some of the events of war…	o …but the account in [1] is current (i.e. about an conflict ongoing as the writer writes), in [2] retrospective *('Eleven years after the fall of Troy').*
o Both describe suffering…	o …but the account of it in [1] is more horrifying. The physical dreadfulness of war is effectively underplayed in [2]. o [1] is principally about the dead, [2] about survivors and heirs.
Style	***Style***
	o [1] is prose, [2] is poetry.
	o (Register): [1] is straight argument, [2] is narrative and makes use of dialogue.
o The style of both is plain and direct…	o …but [1] uses more rhetorical devices, [2] contains more descriptive detail, making it a more vivid reading experience. o (Tone and mood): of [1] are forceful and rousing, of [2] predominantly sad.
o The structure of both allows steady onward movement towards a conclusion…	o …but the paragraphs in [1] run together, whereas there is clearer delineation of the different sections (stanzas) in [2]: the narrative focus moves from the old men to the narrator to the young couple then back to the narrator and so on.
Ideas	***Ideas***
o Both are about war and its wastefulness…	o …but [1] emphasises war's illogicality, [2] its futility.

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o Both pieces express pity….	o …but it is a more complex feeling in [2] – pity for the dead? His comrades? The young couple (future generations)?
o Both pieces write about things that should not be forgotten…	o …but in [1] the writer's purpose is to open our minds, in [2] it is to stir our feelings. o [1] conveys the journalist's conviction that he can change things (opinions) through his writing, [2] carries a sense of impotence ('helpless grief and pity').

Perhaps you will find, as you set the passages side by side like this, that one illuminates or strengthens the other for you (that here, for instance, the poem has added a poignancy to the journalism). If so, say that in your commentary. In any case, make a concluding point about the overall differences between the two pieces of writing, paying particular attention to their effect on the reader (you yourself, if you wish: you're allowed to personalise your thoughts at the end…but you should have been objective until then).

Try that now.

The journalism is direct, persuasive and well-supported by startling facts. Richard Harding has been as close to the war as it is possible to come, without actually fighting in it. He has then withdrawn, however to write his 'piece', and has therefore lost some immediacy.

The character in the poem has also withdrawn (the war is now history, and he sits apart from his companions), but its memories are still powerfully with him – although kept, by the poet, very much in the shadows – and are easily converted into the feelings of grief and pity he experiences when he listens to the young man.

The journalism tells us what it is like to observe a war; the poem makes us feel what it is like to live it, and to live with it afterwards.

Remember that if you are intending to use SCASI as a basic structure for your comparative analysis, you will need to find ways of linking your paragraphs. There is advice on pages 91-92 above about how you can link paragraphs within the overall SCASI structure.

Here are two more passages for comparison. The first one is (deliberately) at some distance from traditional literary forms: the wider the gap between two pieces of writing, the harder you will have to work to draw them together in your analysis.

We suggest, for present purposes, that you once more carry out a full and separate analysis of the first extract. (We have not provided detailed questions this time.) If you are an **IB Standard Level (Language and Literature)** candidate, that is all you will need to do here. **Higher Level** candidates should go on to produce a full comparison with the second passage – a complete short story.

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PASSAGE 44 – from a Graphic Novel

I

THE STRIP

9.16.07 The Funny Pages

MISTER WONDERFUL BY DANIEL CLOWES

CHAPTER 1

33

Daniel Clowes, *The Funny Pages* (2007)

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Setting

- A coffee bar, early evening
- The coffee bar is quite busy, allowing the possibility of doubt and misunderstanding in the central character.
- The other people in the bar are concerned with their own things (conversation, laptops) and do not notice the unfolding drama.

Character

Characters are sketched in quickly (in both words and pictures).

Central character:

- Middle-aged man awaiting a blind date
- Stereotypical appearance (thinning hair, thick glasses)
- Lacks self-confidence *('the likes of me')*
- Pessimistic: he assumes the young woman will be 'out of his league' unless she is flawed – and perhaps not even then
- Anxious (sweating)
- Somewhat old before his time: disapproves of old woman dressing like younger one, loud use of mobile phone in public.

Young woman:

- Presented ambiguously, and only through the man's perceptions of her.

Young man:

- Contrasted with the central character – brash, noisy, confident, unaware of those around him.

Older woman

- Drawn to look not a lot older than the central character, which makes is seem that he is exaggerating her age in order to reassure himself about his own youth.

Action

Predominantly structured to produce maximum suspense in a short space of time, and lead swiftly to a satirical climax, at our expense as well as the central character's.

- Suggestions in the page heading and story title about what is to follow (something amusing; something ironical – *'Mister Wonderful'*)
- The initial action takes place in the man's head as he speculates about the girl.
- As the situation develops, the writer provides the man (and us) with false clues.
- The man looks desperately for signs that he and the girl have things in common (she is reading *An Inconvenient Truth*; she seems to be looking his way; he sees hope in the expression on her face when she looks at the young man – *'She hates him too!'*)
- There's a 'false alarm' in the middle of the episode.
- The writer keeps us in touch with the (short) timeline *('Nine minutes late', 'Eighteen minutes late')* which stretches out for the central character, emphasising his anxiety.
- We are warned that a conclusion is approaching *('I'm starting to…')*

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- The false alarm earlier turns into real alarm (for the man) when the older woman suddenly appears in front of him, and we realise that we as well as the man have been misled earlier into dismissing her as 'not the one'.
- How does the man respond to the older woman' hopeful smile at the end? How do we?

Style

Language (naturalistic, overall):
- Much use of colloquialism
- Unfinished sentence *('I'm sweating like a…')*
- Religious expletives *('Jesus', 'For God's sake!' 'Oh Dear God')* set against religious affirmations and appeals *('Dear God, please kill me now', 'I'll swear on a stack of my bibles')*, indicating an interesting confusion of belief (superstition?) and non-belief in the two male characters.
- Military terminology *('Middle-aged woman at one o'clock')*, suggesting that he feels threatened, but at the same time is trying to downplay this as a strategic war game.
- *'Undamaged blondie'* – he finds flippant terminology for the girl, to help boost his confidence
- Male characters differentiated through style of speech *('Excuse me Miss', 'dude')*
- Capitalisation throughout, conveying the intensity of the episode for the central character (although of course this is standard in graphic novels)

Graphics:
- Differentiation of thoughts from speech (by colour and shape of text boxes), in the interest of clarity
- Separate boxes for different thoughts, showing man's fragmented thinking
- His text boxes overlap the young man's speech bubbles as if he has stopped paying attention to what the young man is saying
- Use of symbol (cloud) to indicate the man's gloom

Ideas

- The value (to us) of other people and how we assess it
- Prejudgement on the basis of appearance
- Self-image and how it can be distorted
- Human desperation for love
- Sexual matching: criteria
- Blind dating/dating websites and their pitfalls
- How we can be unaware of things happening around us, and beneath the surface of other people's behaviour

(Should we have paid as much attention as we have done to the extract's visual elements? Yes:

> '*Viewing is part of a general multimodal literacy. Written text is often found in combination with still images, moving images and sound. As students become adept at the other literacy skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking, it is also essential that they develop skills in understanding and interpreting the visual images used in conjunction with these texts'* – the **IB Language and Literature Guide.)**

Now read the next passage and use the 'Similarities/Differences' template to compare the two.

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PASSAGE 45 – A Short Story

I had the train compartment to myself up to Rohana, then a girl got in. The couple who saw her off were probably her parents; they seemed very anxious about her comfort, and the woman gave the girl detailed instructions as to where to keep her things, when not to lean out of windows, and how to avoid speaking to strangers.

5 They called their goodbyes and the train pulled out of the station. As I was totally blind at the time, my eyes sensitive only to light and darkness, I was unable to tell what the girl looked like; but I knew she wore slippers from the way they slapped against her heels.

It would take me some time to discover something about her looks, and perhaps I never would. But I liked the sound of her voice, and even the sound of her slippers.

10 'Are you going all the way to Dehra?' I asked.

I must have been sitting in a dark corner, because my voice startled her. She gave a little exclamation and said, 'I didn't know anyone else was here.'

Well, it often happens that people with good eyesight fail to see what is right in front of them. They have too much to take in, I suppose. Whereas people who cannot see (or see very little)
15 have to take in only the essentials, whatever registers most tellingly on their remaining senses.

'I didn't see you either,' I said. 'But I heard you come in.'

I wondered if I would be able to prevent her from discovering that I was blind. Provided I keep to my seat, I thought, it shouldn't be too difficult.

The girl said, 'I'm getting off at Saharanpur. My aunt is meeting me there.'

20 'Then I had better not get too familiar,' I replied. 'Aunts are usually formidable creatures.'

'Where are you going?' she asked.

'To Dehra, and then to Mussoorie.'

'Oh, how lucky you are. I wish I were going to Mussoorie. I love the hills. Especially in October.'

25 'Yes, this is the best time,' I said, calling on my memories. 'The hills are covered with wild dahlias, the sun is delicious, and at night you can sit in front of a logfire and drink a little brandy. Most of the tourists have gone, and the roads are quiet and almost deserted. Yes, October is the best time.'

She was silent. I wondered if my words had touched her, or whether she thought me a
30 romantic fool. Then I made a mistake.

'What is it like outside?' I asked.

She seemed to find nothing strange in the question. Had she noticed already that I could not see? But her next question removed my doubts.

'Why don't you look out of the window?' she asked.

35 I moved easily along the berth and felt for the window ledge. The window was open, and I faced it, making a pretence of studying the landscape. I heard the panting of the engine, the rumble of the wheels, and, in my mind's eye, I could see telegraph posts flashing by.

'Have you noticed,' I ventured, 'that the trees seem to be moving while we seem to be standing still?'

40 'That always happens,' she said. 'Do you see any animals?'

'No,' I answered quite confidently. I knew that there were hardly any animals left in the forests near Dehra.

I turned from the window and faced the girl, and for a while we sat in silence.

'You have an interesting face,' I remarked. I was becoming quite daring, but it was a safe
45 remark. Few girls can resist flattery. She laughed pleasantly – a clear, ringing laugh.

'It's nice to be told I have an interesting face. I'm tired of people telling me I have a pretty

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face.'

Oh, so you do have a pretty face, thought I: and aloud I said: 'Well, an interesting face can also be pretty.'

50 'You are a very gallant young man,' she said, 'but why are you so serious?'

I thought, then, I would try to laugh for her, but the thought of laughter only made me feel troubled and lonely.

'We'll soon be at your station,' I said.

'Thank goodness it's a short journey. I can't bear to sit in a train for more than two-or-three

55 hours.'

Yet I was prepared to sit there for almost any length of time, just to listen to her talking. Her voice had the sparkle of a mountain stream. As soon as she left the train, she would forget our brief encounter; but it would stay with me for the rest of the journey, and for some time after.

The engine's whistle shrieked, the carriage wheels changed their sound and rhythm, the girl

60 got up and began to collect her things. I wondered if she wore her hair in bun, or if it was plaited; perhaps it was hanging loose over her shoulders, or was it cut very short?

The train drew slowly into the station. Outside, there was the shouting of porters and vendors and a high-pitched female voice near the carriage door; that voice must have belonged to the girl's aunt.

65 'Goodbye,' the girl said.

She was standing very close to me, so close that the perfume from her hair was tantalizing. I wanted to raise my hand and touch her hair, but she moved away. Only the scent of perfume still lingered where she had stood.

There was some confusion in the doorway. A man, getting into the compartment, stammered

70 an apology. Then the door banged, and the world was shut out again. I returned to my berth. The guard blew his whistle and we moved off. Once again, I had a game to play and a new fellow-traveller.

The train gathered speed, the wheels took up their song, the carriage groaned and shook. I found the window and sat in front of it, staring into the daylight that was darkness for me.

75 So many things were happening outside the window: it could be a fascinating game, guessing what went on out there.

The man who had entered the compartment broke into my reverie.

'You must be disappointed,' he said. 'I'm not nearly as attractive a travelling companion as the one who just left.'

80 'She was an interesting girl,' I said. 'Can you tell me – did she keep her hair long or short?'

'I don't remember,' he said, sounding puzzled. 'It was her eyes I noticed, not her hair. She had beautiful eyes – but they were of no use to her. She was completely blind. Didn't you notice?'

Ruskin Bond, *The Girl on the Train* (1975?)

Similarities	Differences
Setting o Both modern-day, but…	***Setting*** o …some thirty years apart o [1] a coffee bar (in the US?), [2] a train compartment in India
Character o Two troubled and lonely men interested in finding a partner, speaking in a similar 'voice'	***Character*** o …but demonstrating very different personalities: [1] is pessimistic, filled with self-doubt, censorious (ready to condemn), up-tight, given to panic [2] is

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	gentler, accepting *('perhaps I never would')* but curious, analytical, *'daring'*, quick-thinking
o Both handicapped (blinded)…	o …but in different ways – [1] by personal inadequacy and a great need, which distort his vision, [2] by actual blindness o We feel that the man in [1] will always be handicapped, whereas the train traveller in [2] is blind only *'at the time'* as if he will recover his sight later (or is the phrase *'at the time'* a deliberately off-hand, ironical comment, designed by the story-teller to rouse further sympathy for his character?)
Action	***Action***
o The events are seen from the perspective of the central characters. o They largely take the form of speculation about the two girls. o Suspense arises out of that speculation – 'How will she turn out?' 'Is this the girl for me?'	
o There is a tentative reaching-out towards each girl…	o …but in the case of [1] only in the man's imagination – he never actually speaks to her, he just rehearses what he will say.
o The writer in each case lays clues for the central characters, and for the readers (*An Inconvenient Truth* etc. in [1], the parents' anxiety, some of the girl's questions, the aunt's high-pitched voice and the apology from the entering passenger in [2]).	
o There is an ironic twist at the end of both stories, but…	o …the man in [1] perhaps gets what he deserves*, while in [2] the central character suffers what we may see as the cruelty of a missed opportunity for happiness
Style	***Style***
o Both include dialogue, but…	o …in [1] it is largely internal (taking place inside the central character) o [1] Strongly colloquial, loose, fragmented [2] formal, conventional, connected, fluent o [1] Capitalised throughout, giving a sense of urgency, while [2] uses standard and correct punctuation, providing (in contrast) a sense of calm.
Ideas	***Ideas***
o The human need for love…	o …but [1] treats the theme satirically, [2] sympathetically
o The criteria we use in sexual matching o Prejudgement of other people on the basis of superficial detail o Human worth and how we judge it o Blindness (as in blind dating, distorted perception and physical blindness)	o [2] carries the additional and powerful idea of how unkind life can be, while [1] reminds us of how unkind we can be to ourselves.

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*Take care not to pass moral judgment, yourself, on fictional or other characters you are writing about. Only the writer's view, and representation, of those characters is relevant in a literary analysis.

When you come to write the commentary from your notes, begin with a simple, general statement of what both passages are 'about':

'Both passages are about men hoping to find someone to love, and to love them.'

And don't forget to sum up:

Both the graphic novel and the short story, then, record an episode in which a man with limitations on his life tries to reach out to a young woman who offers some hope of companionship and love. The stories are about failure, but the man in the coffee bar is seen as undeserving of success, whereas the blind man is the victim of a harsh irony.

The choice of media enables the graphic novelist to focus visually, economically and almost brutally on the satirical elements in his narrative, whereas the short story writer can move at a more leisurely pace through his story, allowing its suspenseful detail and its bitter-sweet nature to work more gently on the reader's emotions.

Of all the many kinds of 'non-literary' writing we should be able to take apart and examine effectively, advertising copy is perhaps the most important (after political speeches). On the next page you will find a full-page magazine advertisement for analysis. It is followed by a poem on something of the same subject, for comparison by **IB Language and Literature Higher Level** candidates.

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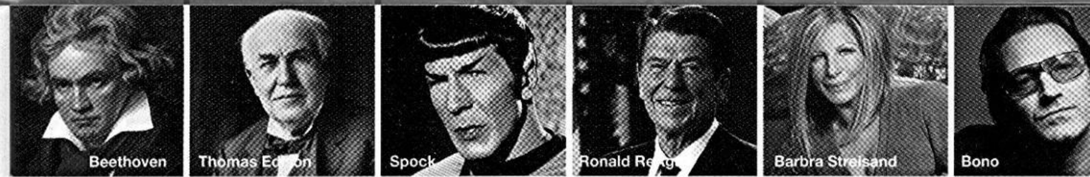
PASSAGE 46 – An Advertisement



Famous Deaf People

Spring is nearly here and this month we decided to have a bit of fun here at CAT-Centro Auditivo de Tavira and find out more about famous people that throughout the years suffered or suffer from hearing loss!

BEETHOVEN While being deaf didn't stop him from writing one of the greatest pieces of music ever produced, it did stop the famous composer from hearing his great achievement in all of its glory. Perhaps if he had access to modern hearing aids, he would have been able to create even more brilliant works before he died. However, while listening to vibrations with his ear against the floor had worked for him, today you'd probably just look silly making music that way.

THOMAS EDISON Lost most of his hearing at the age of 12 years old, Edison went on to patent more inventions than anyone else in history, including the invention of the silent film. Well this is nothing to sneeze at, one can't help wondering if we could have gotten sound films earlier if Edison had the drive to create them.

SPOCK Would Spock wear a hearing aid? With those big ears, it would only seem logical. Especially since Leonard Nimoy, the actor that played him is currently 80 years young and has tinnitus. The character 'Spock' is well into his hundreds, so there is a good chance that his green blood isn't the only thing keeping his hearing going.

RONALD REAGAN Did you know that when Ronald Reagan got his hearing aids, the resulting publicity dramatically increased the demand on the hearing healthcare industry? Almost overnight the processing time for hearing aid fittings went from days to weeks. In contrast, when President Bill Clinton got his hearing aids the industry was hardly affected at all.

BARBRA STREISAND Singing diva, movie star and political activist, Barbra Streisand has suffered from tinnitus (ringing ears or ear noise) since the age of seven. According to the Independent, a British newspaper, Barbra believes her volatile temperament stems from her hearing affliction, which disrupts her sleep and affects her balance.

BONO U2 lead singer, Bono, describes his hearing problem in his lyrics. Bono derived his name from a hearing aid store in his hometown of Dublin, Ireland which had a sign that read "Bonavox Hearing Aids."

Many things in life energise you.
Let better hearing be one of them.

Did you know that nearly one in two people over the age of 50 has a hearing loss? In my experience, the earlier you compensate for a hearing loss, the easier life will be. You'll have more energy to partake in conversations and social gatherings.

Oticon Agil takes the hard work out of making sense of sounds and following conversations

Tavira Hearing Centre - Praça da Republica
n.12 2nd Floor - Tavira (in front of the town hall)

Book your appointment now 281 094 116

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Setting

- There are four concentric settings:
  - A business premises where the advert was devised *('Here at CAT-CENTRO we decided…')*
  - The commercial world, where what matters is selling things people need (or, in some cases, don't need)
  - A modern world where people develop hearing loss as they get older *('nearly one in two people over the age of 50')*
  - A wider, older world where, historically, people have always had hearing problems
- The writer also draws our attention to the fact that it is almost spring, traditionally a time when people prepare themselves for the summer ahead, decide to 'get in shape', and deal with some of the issues (medical and otherwise) in their lives.
- There is a fifth setting within the advert – the romantic town where the young woman is playing 'Guess who?' with her man.

Character

- The persona of the writer is at the forefront – he/she is a hearing loss expert *('in my experience')*, part of a team *('we')* offering to help anyone with a hearing problem.
- There is a careful mix of figures in the body of the advert, from the worlds of entertainment (popular and highbrow), science and politics, so as to appeal to as wide an audience as possible.
- The figures have been chosen to demonstrate three truths: there is no stigma attached to hearing loss; it is possible to achieve great things even with impaired hearing; a reduction in hearing impairment, however, could make it possible for us to reach even greater heights.
- Some irrelevant facts are included only for the sake of reader interest (the failure of Bill Clinton's adoption of a hearing aid to stimulate sales; Barbra Streisand's moodiness; the origin of Bono's name).
- The two main characters in the street scene are young, attractive and in an affectionate relationship (all things to be envied, perhaps, by older people); and the street vendor looking on approvingly is a somewhat exotic figure.

Action

It lies in:

- The accounts of the lives of the six public figures, with a highlight on contrast (between handicap/ achievement; achievement/potential for further achievement; public/personal)
- The episode recorded in the street photograph, suggesting that if we have a hearing problem we would enjoy higher energy levels (and feel more like playing games) if we had the problem fixed. The caption *('Have more energy with your hearing loss')* makes that point clearly, if somewhat awkwardly.
- The exhortation to *'Book your appointment now'.* The writer advises the reader to do something, and in that way the 'action' of the advert reaches out beyond the page.

Style

- The heavy-font heading *('Famous Deaf People')* carries no indication that this is an advertisement: it could well, at first glance, be a general-interest article.

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- The writer adopts a buoyant tone from the beginning *('Spring is nearly here…have a bit of fun').*
- The effect is reinforced by the exclamation mark at the end of the opening paragraph.
- An attempt at jollity is maintained throughout the profiles *('you'd probably just look silly', 'With those big ears').* Does the jollity ring false?
- The writer asks rhetorical questions at the beginning of two of the 'public figure' paragraphs *('Would Spock…?', 'Did you know…?')* in order to draw the reader further into the writing
- In the second of those two paragraphs, the phrase *'the hearing healthcare industry'* is an attempt to aggrandise the business of selling hearing aids and represent it as a public service as well as a commercial enterprise.
- The photograph, again at first glance, could be from a travel advert…
- The (few) grammatical errors and stylistic flaws suggest that the writer is a non-native speaker of English. Does that affect how we respond to the advert?
- We have reproduced the advert in black and white. What difference would colour have made?

Much of the above has to do with what might be called 'advertising technique'. The moral issues often seen as arising from that should not normally concern you in literary analysis: don't get hot under the collar, for instance, about advertisers' attempts to coax, inveigle or even mislead the reader.

Ideas

- Triumph over handicap
- Enjoyment of life in old age
- Technology and how it can help us

Final comment?

A clumsy advert?

IB Higher Level candidates (and anyone else who has a continuing interest): here's the more stylish (and rather beautiful) piece of writing for comparison with the advert.

PASSAGE 47

to a friend, growing deaf

the gardens of the snow grow beautiful
and I have heard this morning
the scientists discovered at Mount Palomar
new stars of greater brightness
5 than our self-consuming sun –
oh, smaller, smaller we become

nevertheless I keep my eye on the buds

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and recently upon a January journey
felt sharp action of an ecstasy
10 thinking I would be here – quite likely –
when all the fences blossom plum-beginnings,
small pink hopes of pear
and the lanes of the country-side
turn like slow green worms
15 towards the old worn magnets
of the sky

in other words, I am alive
and feeling it enough to want to send
an aria from *Tosca* to you,
20 *Vissi d'arte* out on the wave-lengths
of the long grasses
we left to our inheritors,
across the stretches of the cloudy systems
astronomers can measure with their line instruments,
25 arms can gauge by longing

for I have skied into the winds of this year
without you and shall henceforth
and know it in the cockle-shells
of my surest intuition
30 how you hear the doors slam shut
is still a pain to me
greater than the blind drawn on our meeting

O, in the storehouse of your enlarging eye
remember the way the world lit up
35 in golden-rod
when I crossed once to you
singing like a bride –
all the undiscovered stars
have no brightness comparable to that

40 nor can the inter-stellar silences
be known more deeply than the time
when you last put your hand upon my head,
turned without saying

and an aria from *Tosca* to you

45 I play it this morning in my multi-level dwelling
spinning disc in the winter sun of this simple house
filled with familiar shadows on the carpet
and things in their proper places
and the tamed birds

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50 singing on their leafless branches
in the Herman vase

the music is never the composer's
but ours

hear it in the shrinking ear of your world
55 repossessed

I send it on waves untapped by mathematics,
unimpeded by any faltering cochlea[1].

Joan Finnigan

[1]cochlea: part of the inner ear

<u>Similarities</u>	<u>Differences</u>
Setting The wider settings are somewhat the same: o A world where people develop hearing loss and sometimes go completely deaf. o A world also, however, in which the effects of that can be ameliorated… o A world in which it is almost Spring *('Spring is nearly here', 'I keep my eye on the buds')* with all its associations of renewal…	***Setting*** o …but in different ways: by hearing aids in [1], or by the strength of friendships and memories, in [2] o …which is a central theme in [1] (renewal of hearing) but a pointer in [2] to the fact that the friend's hearing cannot be saved o [2], however, has an additional, cosmic setting *('stars of greater brightness/ than our self-consuming sun', 'all the undiscovered stars')*, which adds a perspective from which we can see even something as unwelcome as deafness as less than tragic in the overall scheme of things, particularly when it is ameliorated by friendship and love..
Character o Both writers are visible in their writing… o Both are attempting to sell or give us something … o Both writers include 'other people' (characters) in their writing…	***Character*** o …but in [1] he/she remains shadowy, whereas in [2] we are allowed insight into the poet's personal life in her *'multi-level dwelling…this simple house'.* o …but in [1] the advertiser is marketing hearing aids, in [2] the poet is offering a vision of the power of love in the face of personal disaster. o …but the writer in [1] selects them carefully to support his commercial approach to the reader, and supplies detailed information about them, while in [2] the friend is a 'given', and remains a ghostly figure.

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Action	*Action*
o Deafness is seen as something which restricts, narrows, our lives, a sort of background action to both the advert and the poem (*'smaller, smaller we become'* as we realise the vastness of the universe and the limiting effects of hearing loss as *'the doors slam shut'*). o The action in both pieces of writing spans past; present; future…	o …but in [1] it does so through historical figures; springtime; a future in which sufferers' hearing will have improved, and [2] through past happiness *('the way the world it up in golden-rod')*; the metaphysical sending of the musical gift; the unknown time in which the sufferer will have only memories *('the storehouse of your enlarging eye')* to sustain him or her. o The action in [2] largely takes the form of developing emotion ('feeling-action', a kind we failed to mention earlier – *'sharp action of an ecstasy'*).
Style o Buoyant in both cases, but…	*Style* o …in [1] the buoyancy is forced and has a clear commercial motivation, in [2] it is authenticated by the warmth of the relationship between the two people, and the conviction of the poet that her friend's future will hold much of value, *'unimpeded by any faltering cochlea'.* o [1] Clichéd *('in all of its glory', 'one can't help wondering', 'nothing to sneeze at')*, [2] cliché-free, with rich and original diction and phrasing *('blossom plum-beginnings', 'the cockle-shells/ of my surest intuition')* o [2] makes much greater use of figurative language to enlarge and enrich the poem's canvas: · cosmic images *('stretches of the cloudy systems')* · symbol *('small pink hopes of pear')* · simile *('turn like slow green worms')* · metaphor *('the wave-lengths/ of the long grasses')*
Ideas o The achievements of science and technology (reducing hearing loss, discovering new stars)…	*Ideas* o …but their inability to cure some cases of total deafness – ironical, in the case of [2], when so much is seen to have been achieved, and so much is about to be lost… o …and, given that inability, the power of love to transcend the limitations of the physical world and project a gift of music *'on waves untapped by mathematics'.*

Now write your closing paragraph (if you haven't already done so) without any help from us. It's important that you develop confidence in your own ideas.

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Here are some further pieces of non-literary text, from a variety of sources, to provide you with more practice in that kind of analysis in preparation for the **IB Language and Literature** Paper I exam, at both **Standard** and **Higher Level**. We have, as usual, suggested something of what you could say about each passage, under the SCASI headings. To assist **Standard Level** candidates, we have also attached typical guiding questions to the passages.

PASSAGE 48 – A Eulogy

Cher's Tribute speech for Sonny Bono
9 January 1998, Palm Springs, California

Please excuse my papers, but I've been writing this stupid eulogy for the last 48 hours. And, of course, I know that this would make Sonny really happy. It's like Den said: "He got the last laugh."

So because I've had to write some of it down doesn't mean that I'm unprepared. It just means
5 that I'm over prepared in that this is probably the most important thing I've ever done in my life. Don't pay any attention *[weeping]*. This is probably going to happen from time to time. And I also know that he is some place loving this. Also, I have to wear the glasses that I made so much fun of him. I called him Mr. Magoo. I said, "You know, you've got to get some better glasses. You know, I don't care if you're Republican or not, you've got to look cooler than this." So now
10 I have to wear the glasses that I make fun of him for saying. There are a couple of things – I want to tell some stories – but there are a couple of things I really want to get perfect for him. So I have to read.

Some people were under the misconception that Son was a short man, but he was heads and tails taller than anyone else. He could see above the tallest people. He had a vision of the future and
15 just how he was going to build it. And his enthusiasm was so great that he just swept ever body along with him. Not that we knew where he was going, but we just wanted to be there *[audience laughs]*. He was also successful at anything he ever tried. Not the first time he tried maybe, but he just kept going. If he really wanted something, he kept going until he achieved it. Once he told me that, when he was a teenager, he got his nose broken six times because he used to get
20 into fights with guys that were much bigger than him. And he said that they would just be beating the crap out of him and would just be keep going back and going back and going back. I said, "Well, why?" And he said, "Because eventually I would just wear them down." *[audience laughs]*. And if you know him, we all got worn down.

Some people thought that Son wasn't very bright, but he was smart enough to take an introverted
25 16-year-old girl and a scrappy little Italian guy with a bad voice and turn them into the most successful and beloved couple of this generation. And some people thought that Son wasn't to be taken seriously because he allowed himself to be the butt of the jokes on the Sonny and Cher show. What people don't realize is that he created Sonny and Cher. And he knew what was right for us, you know? He just always knew the right thing. And he wanted to make people laugh so
30 much that he had the confidence to be the butt of the joke because he created the joke.

When I was 16-years-old, I met Sonny – Salvatore Philip Bono. And the first time I ever saw him, he walked in this room. And I had never seen anything like him before in my life. Because he was Sonny way before we were Sonny and Cher. He had this thing about him. He walked into

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this room, and I swear to God I saw him and like everybody else in this room was just washed away in this soft focus filter – kind of like when Maria saw Tony at the dance. And I looked at him, and he had like this weird hair-do between Caesar and Napoleon. As a matter of fact, one of the first things that he ever told me was that he was a descendent of Napoleon, and that his father had shortened the name of Bonaparte to Bono when he came to this country. But that he didn't want to make too big a deal out of this. Now you have to realize, at this time, he was talking to a girl who thought that Mount Rushmore[1] was a natural phenomenon. So we were definitely a marriage made in heaven.

35

40

[1]Mount Rushmore: mountain in South Dakota with massive sculptures of former US presidents carved into its rock face

Setting

Reminder: concentric circles.

- Inner circle: the subject of the eulogy, Bono, is quite properly at its heart, and is placed within the context of his life – Italian America, with its sense of aspiration *('his father had shortened the name of Bonaparte to Bono when he came to this country')* and violence incidents *('he used to get into fights').*
- Second circle: Bono's funeral. The mourners are an important part of that. They are described as *'the audience',* acknowledging that the event has an element of entertainment in it. In fact there is an assumption that many of the audience come *from* the world of entertainment, or are at least au fait with it: note the reference to Mr. Magoo *(line 8)*, and the cinematographic term *'soft focus filter'* in the further film world reference, to *West Side Story (line 35).*

  The audience is mixed, however *('And if you know him…'),* and Cher takes that into account in what she says and how she says it. (n.b. The characteristics of the mourners could equally well have been dealt with under ***Character***.)
- Third circle: a world beyond this one, from which Sonny now looks on *('he is some place loving this', line 7).* It is a world which has always had an influence on their lives *('So we were definitely a marriage made in heaven', lines 40-41).*

Character

Reminder: the idea of the writer as a character in his/her own work.

- Cher progressively brings Sonny, in a sense, back to life *('this would make Sonny really happy… he is some place loving this… I have to wear the glasses that I made so much fun of')* – his actual glasses, we may presume, so there is a link to him through them.
- She then builds up a picture of him, noting many things: his slight oddity (his heavy glasses and his *'weird'* hairstyle); his vision; his enthusiasm; his perseverance; his 'smartness'; his aura.
- Her own character comes forward during the course of the eulogy, but she is careful not to let it eclipse his *('I had never seen anything like him before in my life.')*
- She is self-effacing, in fact, and presents herself as *'introverted'* and ignorant in her early years and somewhat short-sighted and a bit scatter-brained now *('So I have to read').*

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Action

Reminder: it's possible to find more than one kind of action in a piece of writing.

- We have a sense of continuous 'writer/speaker action', beginning 48 hours ago, when Cher started to write her eulogy, and continuing on into points in her speech beyond this opening section *('This is going to happen from time to time').*
- This reference to what may happen later in the eulogy generates some suspense for us: What is she going to say? Will she make any mistakes? Will she break down altogether?
- This feeling of suspense is increased by our awareness of the struggle and uncertainty within her *'but there are a couple of things I really want to get perfect for him. So I have to read.'*
- The mourners' responses ('audience action') are very much a part of the passage's forward movement, and we as readers are reassured by their reactions as listeners.
- There is a further, main, line of action running through the passage, however – the story of Sonny and Cher's life together, and their growth from being *'an introverted 16-year-old girl and a scrappy little Italian guy with a bad voice'* towards becoming *'the most successful and beloved couple of this generation'.* (Is there an element of risk in that latter claim? Cher perhaps calculated that she would be allowed to get away with it, in the circumstances.) It is this narrative element that gives the eulogy its backbone.

Style

Reminder: voice, register, tone, mood

- Voice: First-person, as someone intimately involved with the subject.
- Register: a mix of…
  - Formal and informal *('He had a vision of the future and just how he was going to build it'*; *'they would just be beating the crap out of him')*
  - Personal and objective *('this is probably the most important thing I've ever done in my life'; 'He was also successful at anything he ever tried')*
  - Colloquialism *('you know?')*
  - Broken syntax *('There are a couple of things – I want to tell some stories –')*
  - Direct address to the audience *('Please excuse my papers', 'Don't pay any attention')*
  - Dialogue
- Tone: varying…
  - Apologetic *('Please excuse')*
  - Dismissive *'this stupid eulogy'*
  - Affectionate *('And he knew what was right for us, you know?)*
  - Humorous
  - Also adopts story-telling idiom *('Now you have to realize').*
- Mood: deep sorrow intermingled with brave humour
- Cher says she is *'over prepared'* (discuss that idea). Take into account, however, that she is reading from her 'over prepared' text, and making errors as she does so. What is the effect of that?

All of the above adds an unexpected and welcome freshness to the eulogy.

Do remember that it's not enough to list the features of a piece of writing, without explaining what their effect on the reader is, and what they bring to the passage.

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Ideas

- o Love and loss
- o Courage in adversity
- o Honouring the dead
- o Life after death
- o The need to put the record straight when someone dies *('Some people were under the misconception', 'Some people thought')*

Perhaps we haven't said enough, in our notes, about the purpose of the passage. It's fairly self-evident …but try to put it into words,

Guiding Questions

What do we gather from the passage about the relationship Cher shared with Sonny, and how it may have changed over the years?

By what methods does Cher reach out to her audience?

PASSAGE 49 – Popular Scientific Writing

By Steve Jones

Is dirt really such a Bad Thing?

Bacteria – and lots of them – are essential to the health and smooth functioning of the human body.

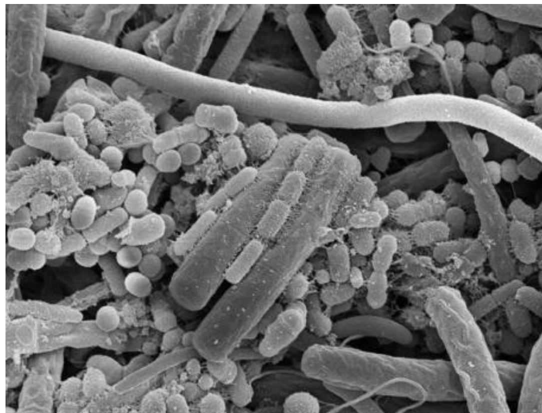

Photo: Bacteria on the surface of a human tongue. Magnification: x10,000

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	This week the Wellcome Collection is putting on a filthy exhibition. It celebrates dirt in all its variety and our attempts to keep it at bay. Just a few hundred yards from its miscellany of objects once towered the dust heaps of Kings Cross, scene of Dickens's Our Mutual Friend and a reminder of the capital's proud boast, as revealed by a recent poll, to be the dirtiest city in
5	Europe. We could soon win another plaudit. My own office is across the street from the Wellcome. I have been cleaning it out and have left each day black with filth from the tiny (and noxious) particles that belch from lorry exhausts on Euston Road and which, unless a plan to control them emerges soon from the Mayor, may merit a huge fine from Brussels.
	Dirt, it is generally agreed, is a Bad Thing, and the exhibition has striking images of London's
10	once-polluted water and of the obsessive attempts by the Dutch and the Germans (but less so the British) to keep their houses clean. It shows how sewage, the dirtiest dirt of all, has a sordid attraction of its own. Its curators follow in the steps of the Italian artist Pierre Manzoni who in 1961 produced his greatest work, 90 tins of Merde d'Artiste, sold for their weight in gold. Some are now leaking but are still treasured by aesthetes.
15	That may seem repellent, but without their contents, we would be in deep – what's the word? – trouble. Every reader of this column is less human than they were on the day they were born. They emerged sterile into the world but, within minutes, were invaded by billions of bacteria. Those creatures still pass through in vast numbers. Each adult has ten times as many in their guts as they have cells of their own. Billions more live in the nooks and crannies of the skin, the
20	mouth and elsewhere. We bear a kilogram's worth of internal aliens. Every assembly is as unique as a fingerprint (and has been used by the police to see whose hands have been on a computer keyboard).
	There are rules about who lives where. The forehead supports a community distinct from the arm, and the leg from the foot. Mouth and stomach are distinct and each has fewer types of
25	bacterium than do other sites (for some reason, the back of the knee is particularly diverse).
	Such creatures are a forgotten organ, as essential as the liver. In the large intestine, they break down indigestible plant tissues for their own use – and make soluble chemicals soaked up by our guts. They also destroy harmful bacteria. Their chemical signals help the gut to develop and prime the immune system. Germ-free mice do not thrive: their immune system is feeble, their
30	bowels do not move as they should, and they are generally unhealthy. Such animals are also anxious and obsessive. Our internal bacteria make plenty of the nerve transmitters associated with mood, and inner filthiness may even play a part in keeping us cheerful.
	The developed world is in the midst of an attack of conditions in which the body's defences fail to respond properly to external enemies. They include allergies, multiple sclerosis, juvenile onset
35	diabetes and irritable bowel syndrome, in all which the immune system turns upon itself.
	Too much hygiene can be harmful. Children from affluent families without a dog, living in cities rather than the country, who stay home rather than going to nursery are shielded from infection – and are more likely to suffer from such diseases.
	In the same way chickenpox and measles are less frequent among African children infected with
40	hookworms than among their cleaner peers. The presence of parasites has improved the efficiency of the immune system. That mechanism – like the brain – needs to be educated.

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45 Infection involves a complex conversation between parasite and hosts, as each adapts to the other. Viruses, such as that for hepatitis A (a food and water-borne disease that has little effect on most people), are particularly effective. Antibodies against it were carried by almost all British children 50 years ago, but the proportion has dropped to one in four. The immune system is learning less than it did.

50 A little judicious dirt might even help to fend off such illnesses. Inflammatory bowel disease is treated with steroids but some say that, a refreshing drink based on the eggs of an intestinal worm from pigs is just as effective. A revulsion against that has led to the search for the worms' chemical signals of identity to prime the immune system instead. On the way out of the exhibition, do not wash your hands, please.

from *The Daily Telegraph,* 10th August 2011

Setting

- The passage's core setting is the Wellcome exhibition hall.
- That in turn is located, historically, within a London where *'once towered the dust heaps of Kings Cross, scene of Dickens's Our Mutual Friend'.*
- That history is brought up to date with an account of London as it now is, full of *'tiny (and noxious) particles'* and under threat of sanctions from the wider European community (as represented by Brussels).
- Then there is the much wider context of the article as a whole – Life, in the biological sense, and in its totality.
- Later in the passage, however, there is an interesting shift within that broadest of all contexts, back down to a focus on *'the developed world'*, which *'is in the midst of an attack of conditions in which the body's defences fail to respond properly to external enemies'.*
- We leave, finally, through the door of the exhibition hall, being exhorted *not* to wash our hands.

So the passage's setting ranges from narrow to historically wider, then conceptually very wide, and then geographically narrower, to very narrow once more. The writer is thus on the move throughout his article and those continuous shifts add a sense of vigour to the writing.

Character

Reminder: 'the writer in his work' – but remember to look for other characters.

- The writer lets us see what he looks like, in his photograph, and his article perhaps draws credibility from the fact that he appears 'normal'.
- He places himself in relation to the exhibition *('My own office is across the street from the Wellcome')* – he is on 'home turf' – and that helps establish his position as an ordinary working scientist, or journalist, in a relevant location.
- He admits to not knowing some things *('for some reason, the back of the knee is particularly diverse'),* which may make us more willing to believe him when he does offer us information.

In all of the above, we have an example of character supporting argument – of the writer giving weight to his writing by dint of who and what he persuades us he is.

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- o Other characters?
  - The bacteria we think of as villains but who turn out to be heroes
  - The parasites and hosts, *'involved in a complex conversation'* and learning to adapt to each other
  - The over-protected children of the developed world (set in contrast to their apparently but not so under-protected African peers)

All of those help provide a vision of a truly world-wide community, across all races and species, interdependent and sometimes surprisingly in need of protection. Giving us that vision is, it seems, the writer's primary purpose.

Action

- o The shifts in setting (already noted) are a major way in which the passage 'moves'.
- o The argument also moves, however. Here it is, in essence:
  - The world is a dirty place.
  - Most people are fascinated and at the same time horrified by the dirt.
  - Dirt, however, (and the bacteria it harbours) is an essential part of our lives.
  - Bacteria and viruses perform a range of useful functions.
  - We are under threat, not from dirt, but from cleanliness.
  - We need to learn how to accept what dirt does for us, rather than just seek to eradicate it.
- o There are some asides from the main argument – barely relevant details added for interest *('Every assembly is as unique as a fingerprint – and has been used by the police to see whose hands have been on a computer keyboard').* We can regard those as little skips in the onward march of the argument.
- o Our entry into the Wellcome exhibition hall, and our exit from it at the end of the article, can be seen as symbolic action. We have passed through the exhibition, and through the writer's discourse.

Style

Reminder: include format, layout and image in your notes.

- o The writer opens with a challenging headline, in the form of a question *('Is dirt really such a Bad Thing?)* Note the unusual use of capitalisation. What effect does that have?
- o He then clearly and simply states his thesis, in large font, boldface italic.
- o The photograph (probably in colour in the original), is designed to catch our attention, since bacteria like this will be living on *our* tongues. The image (a careful choice?) is not repulsive, however, since the bacteria are not at all bug-like.
- o The opening sentence in the passage itself is deliberately ambiguous, making the exhibition seem as if it may be pornographic. Other mildly shocking language appears further into the passage *('90 tins of Merde d'Artiste').* There is something tongue-in-cheek about both of those examples, however – the writer is playing games with us, deliberately exciting our attention (in the second example using the original French to partly disguise the rudeness).

Other things to note:

- o Scientific and medical language (lots of that), making the writing more convincing as well as more informative
- o Figurative language:
  - Metaphor *('at bay')*
  - Paradox *'In the same way chickenpox and measles are less frequent among African children infected with hookworms than among their cleaner peers'*

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- Oxymoron (condensed paradox – but mild): *('sordid attraction', 'judicious dirt')*
- Humorous coyness *('we would be in deep – what's the word? – trouble')*
- Inclusiveness *('Every reader of this column')*
- Startling figures *('Each adult has ten times as many in their guts as they have cells of their own')*
- A final amusing touch, harking back to the earlier toilet humour *('On the way out of the exhibition, do not wash your hands, please.')*

The overall effect of all of those features of the writing is to make it livelier and certainly more amusing than a dry, purely scientific equivalent would have been.

Ideas

- The power of modern science *('Magnification: x10,000')*
- The need to adjust our thinking (and feeling) in line with what science tells us

Show how this passage challenges commonly-held perceptions about its subject.

How does the writer use language, layout and image to attract and hold reader interest?

PASSAGE 50 – Pop Culture Writing

A Religious Experience

"HOW STAR WARS CHANGED MY LIFE!"

I saw *Star Wars* six times when it came out – six times, on the big screen. That might not seem too impressive now, when kids with VCRs can watch *Toy Story* or *Mortal Kombat* a kazillion times, but in the 1970s, it meant something.

I wasn't the only one. I was 7 when it came out, and most boys I knew made repeated treks to the cineplex, dragging reluctant parents or older siblings. ("You've already seen it! Wouldn't you rather see the new Herbie movie?") The champ, at least among my circle, was my friend Wayne, who boasted 10 viewings. It was unverifiable, but we took him at his word. My own claim to fame was going to *Star Wars* for my birthday two years in a row – which says something both about the length of the movie's first run and the degree of my obsession.

In retrospect, I'm not sure what exactly drove the need for repeated exposures to a time "long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away." There have been plenty of movies I've liked – loved, even –

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since *Star Wars*, but not many I've felt compelled to sit through again and again. Even the ones I have watched multiple times – *Casablanca*, *Blue Velvet*, *My Life as a Dog* – have felt more like visits to old friends, without the raw excitement that accompanied each *Star Wars* pilgrimage.
All I can figure is that at that age, *Star Wars* fulfilled some role for me beyond entertainment or
15 escapism. It was, I think, more like going to church. I can't say for sure, since the closest I actually got to church as a kid was my friend Wayne's mom, who used to hear the voice of God in her head (it was interesting how often God wanted Wayne and his brothers to settle down and clean up their rooms). But for a primary schooler just starting to make sense of the world, *Star Wars* offered a simple cosmology, complete with robots and laser rifles.

20 There's this essence of good – the "Force" – that everybody's part of whether they know it or not. There's ultimate evil, the "Dark Side," which is really scary but also kind of cool. And there are mere mortals, who know they should be good but are tempted by evil (7-year-olds with prescribed bedtimes don't need anyone to explain to them the seductiveness of absolute power).
As I grew up and learned more about my various friends' religions, I never found anything that
25 made much more sense than that.

Of course, by the time the sequels came out, I was older and less open to receiving life wisdom from the big screen. They were fun, they had lots of explosions, and I didn't see either of them more than twice.

And now *Star Wars* is coming back. I'll go, just to see an old friend, but probably only once.
30 Unless, of course, it's still here on my birthday…

Jesse Fox Mayshark, published in *Pop Cult Magazine,* http://www.popcultmag.com (2005)

Setting

- The writer's childhood (in the 1970s) – see also under ***Character***
- The different world he lives in at the time of writing (2005). It's slightly dated for today's reader *('VCRs')*; it too is a world, however, in which media play an increasingly powerful part, raising important questions about their role in our own lives.

Character

The writer captures the flavour of his childhood. As a 7-year-old he shared some of the characteristics of that early world, and in writing about it (as we could have done more fully under ***Setting***) we are also writing about him as he was then.

- He shared the focus and determination *('obsession', 'need')* of childhood.
- He felt its *'raw excitement'.*
- He shared its competitiveness *('champ', boasting').*
- He was trusting of his friends *('It was unverifiable, but we took him at his word').*

He has carried some of those traits through into adulthood.

- He still shows a simplistic belief in human goodness *('There's this essence of good – the "Force" – that*

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everybody's part of whether they know it or not').

- He is excited at the thought of seeing a new *Star Wars* film.

However, he has changed in some ways.

- He is more aware of the existence of evil, and the temptation towards it.
- He has become analytical (see under ***Action***), and that need to understand his early experience drives the whole article.

Action

We have here a new kind of action – analysis-action (*'In retrospect, I'm not sure what exactly drove the need', 'It was, I think', 'All I can figure is')* – which carries us through the passage like a series of events.

- It's anecdotal, in a small way – it relies on memories from the writer's childhood as a starting-point.
- The analysis is tentative *('I'm not sure' etc).*
- It leaves some questions unanswered, or not fully answered, including the central one – why *did* the original film means so much to him?
- The passage also touches the story of his life – where he was then, where he is now, where he will be tomorrow (will he go to see the film a second time?)

Style

- The main heading *("How Star Wars Changed My Life!")* is in streamlined font, very much in the style of that found on *Star Wars* posters. It is complete with speech marks and an exclamation mark, which makes it a very 'loud' title.
- The photo seems to have been chosen to deliberately 'date' the film (n.b. the hairstyles) and emphasise the youthful innocence of the two characters (tying in with the writer's own childhood innocence).
- The writer uses various techniques of language to enliven the writing:
  - Repetition, for emphasis *('six times…six times, on the big screen')*
  - Metaphor *('treks', 'pilgrimage')* – examine their implications
  - Paradox *('really scary but also kind of cool')*
  - Humour *('it was interesting how often God wanted Wayne and his brothers to settle down and clean up their rooms')*
  - Personification *('an old friend')*
  - Adolescent idiom *('kazillion', 'cool')* – an attempt to appear 'cool' himself, in his approaching middle age? How old is he at the time of writing, in fact?
  - Dialogue *("You've already seen it! Wouldn't you rather see the new Herbie movie?")*
  - A quote from the movie *("long, long ago, in a galaxy far, far away.")*

Ideas

- The power of the cinema
- The spiritual/moral needs of the young, and their desire *'to make sense of the world'*
- The inadequacy of religion to help them do that
- Illusion (the film) and belief *('It was, I think, more like going to church')* – raising the question of the difference between those two things.

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Explore the significance of the article's title ('A Religious Experience').

How, by the way he writes and the way he has set out his article, does Jesse Mayshark indicate that he is working his way, with some difficulty, towards an understanding of what 'Star Wars' has meant to him? How does he attempt to take us along with him?

PASSAGE 51 – A Political Speech

Richard Milhous Nixon: *First Inaugural Address*

[…] indicates deleted paragraph(s)

Senator Dirksen, Mr. Chief Justice, Mr. Vice President, President Johnson, Vice President Humphrey, my fellow Americans – and my fellow citizens of the world community:

I ask you to share with me today the majesty of this moment. In the orderly transfer of power, we celebrate the unity that keeps us free.

5 Each moment in history is a fleeting time, precious and unique. But some stand out as moments of beginning, in which courses are set that shape decades or centuries.

This can be such a moment.

Forces now are converging that make possible, for the first time, the hope that many of man's deepest aspirations can at last be realized. The spiraling pace of change allows us to contemplate,
10 within our own lifetime, advances that once would have taken centuries.

In throwing wide the horizons of space, we have discovered new horizons on earth. […]

Standing in this same place a third of a century ago, Franklin Delano Roosevelt addressed a Nation ravaged by depression and gripped in fear. He could say in surveying the Nation's troubles: "They concern, thank God, only material things."

15 Our crisis today is the reverse.

We have found ourselves rich in goods, but ragged in spirit; reaching with magnificent precision for the moon, but falling into raucous discord on earth.

We are caught in war, wanting peace. We are torn by division, wanting unity. We see around us empty lives, wanting fulfillment. We see tasks that need doing, waiting for hands to do them.

20 To a crisis of the spirit, we need an answer of the spirit.

To find that answer, we need only look within ourselves.

When we listen to "the better angels of our nature," we find that they celebrate the simple things, the basic things – such as goodness, decency, love, kindness.

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Greatness comes in simple trappings.

25 The simple things are the ones most needed today if we are to surmount what divides us, and cement what unites us.

To lower our voices would be a simple thing.

In these difficult years, America has suffered from a fever of words; from inflated rhetoric that promises more than it can deliver; from angry rhetoric that fans discontents into hatreds; from
30 bombastic rhetoric that postures instead of persuading.

We cannot learn from one another until we stop shouting at one another – until we speak quietly enough so that our words can be heard as well as our voices. […]

To match the magnitude of our tasks, we need the energies of our people – enlisted not only in grand enterprises, but more importantly in those small, splendid efforts that make headlines in
35 the neighborhood newspaper instead of the national journal.

With these, we can build a great cathedral of the spirit – each of us raising it one stone at a time, as he reaches out to his neighbor, helping, caring, doing. […]

Over the past twenty years, since I first came to this Capital as a freshman Congressman, I have visited most of the nations of the world.

I have come to know the leaders of the world, and the great forces, the hatreds, the fears that
40 divide the world. […]

I also know the people of the world.

I have seen the hunger of a homeless child, the pain of a man wounded in battle, the grief of a mother who has lost her son. I know these have no ideology, no race.

I know America. I know the heart of America is good. […]

45 Only a few short weeks ago, we shared the glory of man's first sight of the world as God sees it, as a single sphere reflecting light in the darkness.

As the Apollo astronauts flew over the moon's gray surface on Christmas Eve, they spoke to us of the beauty of earth – and in that voice so clear across the lunar distance, we heard them invoke God's blessing on its goodness.

50 In that moment, their view from the moon moved poet Archibald MacLeish to write:

"To see the earth as it truly is, small and blue and beautiful in that eternal silence where it floats, is to see ourselves as riders on the earth together, brothers on that bright loveliness in the eternal cold – brothers who know now they are truly brothers."

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In that moment of surpassing technological triumph, men turned their thoughts toward home and humanity – seeing in that far perspective that man's destiny on earth is not divisible; telling us that however far we reach into the cosmos, our destiny lies not in the stars but on Earth itself, in our own hands, in our own hearts. *55*

We have endured a long night of the American spirit. But as our eyes catch the dimness of the first rays of dawn, let us not curse the remaining dark. Let us gather the light.

60 Our destiny offers, not the cup of despair, but the chalice of opportunity. So let us seize it, not in fear, but in gladness – and, "riders on the earth together," let us go forward, firm in our faith, steadfast in our purpose, cautious of the dangers; but sustained by our confidence in the will of God and the promise of man.

(1969)

Setting

- Ceremonial - an elected US President taking up office as arguably the most powerful man in the world
- Immediate historical setting: soon after man's first landing on the moon
- Recent historical setting: at the end of a 'dark' period in American history *('We have endured a long night of the American spirit.')*
- The speech will have a world-wide audience, part of the context within which it is delivered *('my fellow citizens of the world community').*

Character

n.b. You must set aside what you have heard and decided, previously, about Richard Nixon and his presidency, and answer only on the basis of what is discernible in the passage.

Having subtracted all of our previous knowledge about the man, we can perceive in the passage only that he:

- Is speaking very much in his public role, as President-elect
- Is nevertheless ready to offer his strong personal convictions *('I know America. I know the heart of America is good.')*
- Reminds us of his credentials as a statesman already of world stature *('I have come to know the leaders of the world').*

Action

- There is no more than a hint of narrative in the speech – Nixon's references to the moon landing.
- The principal action therefore is ideas-action, which is in fact very vigorous: Nixon hops from one stepping-stone to the next, generating sound-bites as he goes.
- The logical connections among the ideas are quite loose, even taking into account the deletions from the original.
- The resulting effect is one of overall jerkiness, accentuated by the short, dramatic sentences and paragraphs *('This can be such a moment.')*
- We do have a strong sense nevertheless of movement towards a climax…and we would expect Nkixon, as he

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speaks, to become louder and even more measured in his delivery as he nears it.
- There is one other kind of action, of course, and it is particularly noticeable – language-action (see ***Style)***

Style

You will find that this passage contains a large number of rhetorical devices. Remember, again, that it is not enough to list such 'tricks of language': you should attempt to explain how they work in this context, and how they contribute to (or detract) from the quality of the writing.

- The style throughout is grand (so grand, in fact, that we may feel Nixon is 'grand-standing'). Side question: how far has the fact that he is speaking to a worldwide as well as a domestic audience influenced the style he has chosen?
- His tone can be described as 'ringing' but it is carefully softened at times by something approaching sentimentality *('I have seen the hunger of a homeless child')*
- He quotes from a poem, and repeats a significant phrase towards the end of his speech – suggesting his sensitivity and cultural sophistication ('Look! I read poetry!')
- The sheer number of rhetorical devices might lead us to suspect that he is using style to hide a lack of substance:
  - Alliteration: (*'majesty of this moment', line 3, 'home and humanity' lines 54-55* – linking the two concepts in this latter case, to make their appeal more powerful)
  - Antithesis *('rich in goods, but ragged in spirit', line 16, 'To a crisis of the spirit, we need an answer of the spirit', line 20)*
  - Assonance *('surmount…cement, lines 25-26)*
  - Metaphor *('a great cathedral of the spirit', line 36)*
  - Repetition *('in our own hands, in our own hearts' 56-57)*
  - Cliché *('We have endured a long night of the American spirit. But as our eyes catch the dimness of the first rays of dawn, let us not curse the remaining dark. Let us gather the light', 'the cup of despair…the chalice of opportunity')*
  - Rhythm *('firm in our faith, steadfast in our purpose, cautious of the dangers', lines 61-62)*

Ideas

- The importance of particular moments in history – like this one *('But some stand out as moments of beginning, in which courses are set that shape decades or centuries')*
- The stability that *'the orderly transfer of power'* (as in the present ceremony, including its ceremonial language) gives to a political system and a society.
- There are lots of other ill-defined ideas in the speech, which may lead us to see it as an example of what, within it, Nixon himself calls *'inflated rhetoric that promises more than it can deliver'*. We should perceive an irony in that.

Joint question on ***Style*** and ***Ideas***, for consideration: how far has the fact that Nixon is speaking to a worldwide as well as a domestic audience influenced what he has said and how he has chosen to say it?

What outcomes is Richard Nixon aiming for in this address?

Explore the use of contrast, and other rhetorical devices, in the speech.

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PASSAGE 52 – Technical Writing

The Hatfield Rail Crash

Engineering is often easier to depict than to describe. One striking thing about engineers – apart from their disenchantment with the managerial class set above them and the trivialized culture which neglects them – is how often they want to draw things; words not being up to the work of describing the technical reality. During the research for this piece, I was handed several instant drawings. 'Give us a pen,' engineers would say, 'Look, it works like this.' *5*

In a phenomenon known as 'the dynamics of the wheel/rail interface', drawing is especially useful. One day in November I took the train from London to Peterborough – a very slow train which moved gingerly over the crash site – to meet a young engineer, Philip Haigh, who writes for the specialist magazine, *Rail*. 'Give us a pen,' he said at one point, and then: 'Do you have a 5p piece?' He drew round the circumference of the coin to produce a circle with a diameter of about ¾in or 2cm. That was the size of the contact area between a wheel and a rail when train and track were in perfect equilibrium. Perfection requires the straightest rail and the truest wheel; but if these ideal conditions were met, Haigh said, then only a ¾in strip would wear along the rail top (which is 2¾in wide). In an electric locomotive, 100 tons of vehicle and machinery could be shared among eight wheels and eight of these 5p contact spots. Each 5p would support a weight of 12.5 tons. Given a powerful engine, the friction caused by turning all eight wheels against two rails would easily haul a train of 1,000 tons at 115 miles an hour. *10* *15*

And when the train reaches a curve? 'The contact spot shifts for both wheel and rail,' Haigh said. What happens is this: the wheels are asked to obey a new direction by the rail. That instruction, combined with centrifugal force, pushes the wheel against the rail on the outside of a curve. The shoulder between flange and wheel hits the corner of the rail. At low speed, that hardly matters, the train will scrape round. At high speed, say 125 mph, the train needs some corrective to try to restore its equilibrium. Therefore the track is 'canted' – tilted like the racing track in a velodrome, with the outside rail the higher of the two. But different kinds of train travel at different speeds and would need different levels of cant if their equilibrium was always to be perfect. Engineers reach a compromise: a cant that will work at different speeds, though not perfectly for all of them. The difference between the ideal cant for a high-speed rail and the most practical cant for all trains is known as 'cant deficiency'. At high speed, the wheels still shift position and put an extra stress on the higher rail, attacking its inner corner, the corner from which the gauge is measured: the gauge corner. *20* *25* *30*

Rails are made to take pressure from the top. Exposed to this different, sideways pressure from, say sixty fast trains a day, seven days a week, they can begin to crack: gauge corner cracking.

See diagram on next page.

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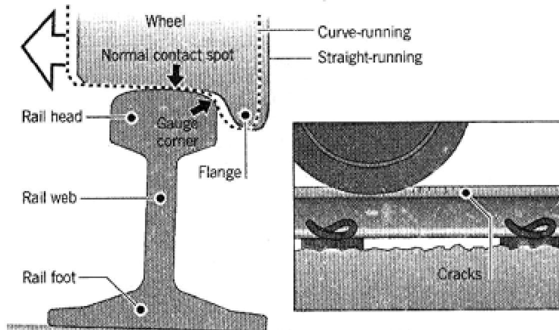
THE HATFIELD CRASH

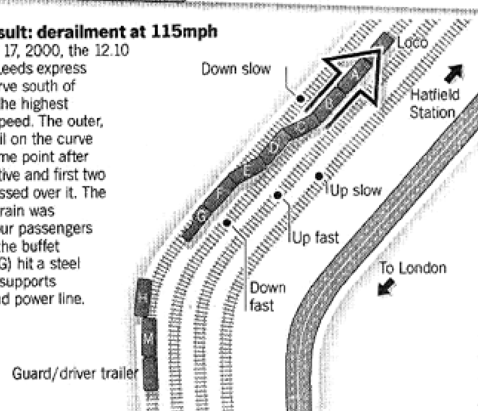
1. The cause: gauge corner cracking

The normal contact area between wheel and rail is on the rail top. When the wheels of trains travelling at high speed hit a curve, sideways thrust creates a different area of contact by pushing the wheel's flange against the rail's inner or 'gauge' corner. The stress in the steel, repeated hundreds of times a week, can cause tiny cracks.



2. The result: derailment at 115mph

On October 17, 2000, the 12.10 London to Leeds express took the curve south of Hatfield at the highest permitted speed. The outer, defective rail on the curve broke at some point after the locomotive and first two coaches passed over it. The rest of the train was derailed. Four passengers died when the buffet car (coach G) hit a steel pole which supports the overhead power line.



Ian Jack, published in *Granta*, A Magazine of New Writing (1973)

Setting

- An investigation into what may have been a controversial rail crash (since there were four deaths)
- There will probably be a background of more press articles, and perhaps legal proceedings.
- We can see the audience as part of the context within which Ian Jack is writing. They are interested readers of *Granta*, a Magazine of New Writing – presumably literary rather than railway enthusiasts.
- They are, in either case, likely to be intelligent readers who like to have things explained to them.

Character

The writer:

- Eager to explain…
- …but patient
- Works hard to maintain a balance between writing above his readers' heads and 'talking down' to them.
- Tells us that he has carried out *'research'* into his topic (in case we didn't assume that), in order to establish

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credibility.

Engineers:
- Resent (according to the writer):
  - The incompetence of non-engineers to whom they are answerable
  - Not being fully acknowledged or respected for what they do.

Does the writer encourage us to see them as prima donnas?
- On the other hand they show clear professionalism and take pride in the precision with which they must work *('perfect equilibrium', 'Perfection requires the straightest rail and the truest wheel').*

Action

- The writer introduces a narrative element, with characters, to relieve the passage's dry technicality *('One day in November I took the train from London to Peterborough').*
- Suspense runs through the passage. The article's main, explanatory body is couched in general, theoretical terms, and employs the present tense *('The shoulder between flange and wheel hits the corner of the rail. At low speed, that hardly matters, the train will scrape round.')* We are aware throughout, however, of the ghostly 'real' crash that must have happened at Hatfield. That adds tension to the writing: 'We've had the theory; when will we hear about the crash itself?' we ask, as we read..

Style

Text page:
- The writer uses much technical language *('the dynamics of the wheel/rail interface')* – but he is aware that he is using it (in the above example he introduces the phrase with *'a phenomenon known as'*) and works to make his meaning accessible (next point).
- When introducing a new technical term *('canted')* he frames it in single inverted commas to show that it needs explanation; then he gives the explanation – in this case, by means of a simile *('tilted like the racing track in a velodrome').* Later in the passage, he twice offers an explanation for a new term before using the term itself *('The difference between the ideal cant for a high-speed nail and the most practical cant for all trains is known as 'cant deficiency', 'its inner corner, the corner from which the gauge is measured: the gauge corner.'* He does the same in the passage's final lines, to explain *'gauge corner cracking'.*
- He also softens the overall technicality of the passage:
  - He is prepared to be inexact in order not to appear too pedantically precise *('say 125 mph', 'say sixty fast trains a day).* 'Say' is short for 'let us say', a phrase that sees the writer and reader as working in partnership through these explanations.
  - He attempts to add texture by using descriptive ('literary', non-scientific) language *('gingerly', 'scrape round' 'attacking').*
  - The dialogue he inserts is deliberately colloquial, in order to humanise engineers in general and Haigh in particular *('Give us a pen').*
  - He also uses a single piece of Socratic dialogue: he imagines the reader asking a question *('And when the train reaches a curve?')* which he then allows his character, Haigh, to provide an answer to.
  - There is even a weak example of personification *('the wheels are asked to obey a new direction by the rail').*

Illustration page:
- Notes to the illustrations are in plain technical language, with brevity and clarity as the overriding aims…so there is no descriptive detail, no figurative writing or language effects.
- The writer uses clear, numbered section headings in heavy font: *'1. The cause: gauge corner cracking, 2. The*

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result: derailment at 11 mph.'

- There is a difference in tense between the two sections of text. 1. outlines the universal principles involved, 2. briefly describes what happened during accident.
- There is an effective 'overlaying' of the diagrams of the rail profile *('Curve-running', 'Straight-running')*, which clarifies, visually, the difference between the two conditions.

Ideas

- The value of visual communication
- The pride (and sensitivity) of the professional
- The complexities of rail engineering, but engineers' (Man's) ability to cope with them…usually.

Show how text and images work together to help explain the causes of the Hatfield rail crash.

What methods does the writer use to make his explanations interesting for the general reader?

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Section Six: Passages from More Recent Literature Examination Papers

We have included these to give you access to a further selection of passages across a wide range of topics, forms and styles. We have not differentiated between levels of difficulty: sometimes passages that seem as if they will be troublesome open up very readily when you begin to work on them; and a piece of what appears to be straightforward writing can present unforeseen problems when you begin to analyse it (often because it *is* simple).

The guiding questions are designed to draw attention to the each passage's key aspects. IB teachers and students will find them a particularly useful addition to the **Higher Level** passages, which did not have questions attached to them in the original examination papers. We have placed the questions together at the end of this section, so that all passages can be used for unaided commentary practice.

You can use the passages in a variety of ways. The following are alternatives (but not all mutually exclusive).

1. Read them through just for interest and pleasure, and do nothing more.

2. Read them through and select two or three you would be most confident writing about in the exam (in other words, go through only the preliminary stage of the 'commentary experience' – passage selection).

3. Read each one through and decide which of the five ***SCASI*** elements is predominant in it (i.e. is most significant or has most impact on the reader). Then decide on the next most telling aspect, and so on. Your response for the first passage below might read, for instance: ***Narrative***, ***Setting***, ***Character*** and so on. (It may not – all your answers will be debatable.)

4. Devise a set of five guiding questions for each passage, covering the five ***SCASI*** elements. You could then, of course, set about answering them, or at least make notes towards a response. You could also work with other students to see just how answerable (and helpful) your questions are. (It's quite likely, when you perform this exercise, that there will be overlap between some of your questions; and not all passages will yield questions on all five topics.) You will be able to compare your questions with those we have placed at the end of this section.

5. Focus on one of the ***SCASI*** elements, and explore the part it plays in a selection (or all) of the passages. Then turn your attention to the other elements. You will thus develop a thorough understanding of each of the elements in turn, as it shows itself in a variety of writing. Here are some questions to help you.

Setting

- Is the setting predominantly geographical, historical, social, political, philosophical, moral or economic? (You'll find some clarification of those terms on page 11.)
- How 'large' is the setting (e.g. is it very local and specific, or universal)?
- How much physical detail is included in the descriptions?
- Are any of the physical details symbolic?
- Does the writer 'move around' within the setting (focusing on different parts of it in turn)?
- Does the setting tie in particularly well with any of the other ***SCASI*** elements (e.g. is it does help reveal character, support the action, help express the central idea)?
- Does the setting raise any questions?

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Character

- Is the only character the writer himself or herself? What impression do we get of him (her) as person?
- Is either the writer or one of his/her characters clearly trying to present himself/herself to us in a particular light?
- If there is a central character other than the writer is he (she) also the narrator? What is the effect of that?
- If there is more than one character in the passage, is the main focus on them as individuals or on their relationship?
- What is the writer's relationship with his or her character(s)?
- What does the writer want us to feel about the character(s) in the passage?

Action

- Is most of the action in the past, present or future?
- Does the main interest of the passage lie in the past, present or future?
- Is there anything particularly interesting or unusual about the verbs in the passage?
- Is there a problem to be solved?
- Is there a climax?
- What in the passage makes us care about 'what happens next' in the action?

Style

- What is notable about the diction (choice of words)?
- What patterns of imagery (groups of images) can you detect?
- How does the passage work on the reader's senses?
- What examples of figurative (non-literal) language can you find? Are there patterns in its use?
- Is the sentence structure mainly simple or complex?
- How does the writer use dialogue?
- Are there unusually large numbers of questions, exclamations or commands, alongside plain statements?
- How does the organisation of the passage (into lines, paragraphs or stanzas) match the content, and in particular the development of the content? ('Content' includes both action and ideas.)
- Are there any other special effects in the passage, arising from its style?

Ideas

- Does the passage make a statement or simply ask a question?
- How general, or how precise, are the ideas? (e.g. do they apply to all of us all the time, or to only a small number of us sometimes?) Another way of asking the question: how big are the ideas?
- How ambiguous are the ideas? (i.e. can the passage be interpreted in more than one way?) If so, which is the most likely interpretation?
- If there is ambiguity, is it deliberate on the part of the writer?
- Does the passage's title (if it has one) help us understand the passage itself?

All of the above will allow you insight into the passages, and help you develop a check-list of what to look for if you have to write a commentary without the assistance of guiding questions.

6. Use the passages for straightforward practice. SL candidates can use the guiding questions as the basis for their commentaries. HL candidates will find it helpful to check their finished commentaries against the questions to see whether they've covered all the areas the examiner might have thought important.

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PASSAGE 53

She looked away up into the sky: the palest kind of blue, a big quiet light. High up, two birds were flying together, drawing a straight line through the air like aircraft in formation.

Just over the brow of the hill was a fork in the road and a flaking wooden sign. One fork pointed downhill towards CASCADE RIVULET, the other uphill, to HANGING ROCK. 5 Someone had tied a stone on the end of a bit of string and hung it from the sign. She laughed aloud, suddenly, a noise like a bark.

The dog twisted its head to look up at her in surprise and she stopped laughing. She glanced around, as if someone might have heard her, laughing on an empty road, and looked at the rock again. It was not really all that funny.

10 Below her, she could see Cascade Rivulet glinting metallically between the trees. The road ahead of her turned a sudden sharp corner down the slope, so steep it had washed away into long corrugations, and then all at once there was the river, and the bridge.

She recognised it straight away from its picture in the paper, a humble little thing, the bend giving it an apologetic look. It was hard to see why the town was split on it. She walked down to 15 it, feeling stones rolling away from under her shoes down the slope. A white ute[1] was parked at the far end of the bridge but there was no sign of anyone, only a flat paddock in which some cows stood all lined up the same way like ornaments along a mantelpiece.

She stopped in the middle of the bridge and looked down at the river. Sun shone through the transparent amber water and lit up rounded rocks just under the surface, and fans of white sand. 20 Where a band of sun cast a slice of black shadow, the water was dark and secretive.

She wanted to go down there, under the bridge, and saw that the fence at one end had collapsed, the wooden posts leaning crookedly where the bank had been scoured out by flood. She would not have actually forced her way through anyone's fence. She knew how farmers felt about them, and about city folk who had no respect for them. But someone had been there before 25 her. She could see where the post had been eased further sideways in the soft ground, and a rip down the dirt of the bank, where someone's heels had slid.

Underneath, the bridge was a quaint, clumsy thing, a clutter of primitive timbers wedged against each other into crude simple joints. Where each horizontal met a vertical, each had had a piece removed so they were locked tightly together.

30 It was like two people holding hands.

From a distance the old wood looked nothing more interesting than grey, but close up, each timber had its own colour and its own personality. One was pink-grey with fine streaks of red like dried blood in the grain. Another was green-grey with circular blooms of brown-grey lichen, the next was the bleached blue-grey with a kinked grain like an old-fashioned marcel wave[2].

35 She stood with her shoes sinking slowly in the damp sand, looking up into the underbelly of the bridge, feeling the muscles twitching in her thighs after the fast walk. It was all coarse and clumsy, but as well as the subtle textures of the grain, the shapes fitted together in a satisfying way, and there was what they called at the Museum an *interplay* between the light and the shadow that drew the eye back to look again and again.

40 She got a notebook and pencil out of her pocket and stood drawing squares and long rectangles that interlinked and interlocked, glancing between her page and the pencil.

When she had filled a page she turned over and started again. She spent a long time getting the angles right where one rectangle came in and locked into another. It looked so simple as to be not worth a second glance, but drawing it showed how complicated it really was.

45 When she had covered the third page she felt she had the shapes right, and started to shade the squares and rectangles with her pencil. Light, dark, light, dark. It was in no way a realistic

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drawing of the way the bridge looked, but it was what it might look like if you reduced it to its essence: simple squares and rectangles, simple lights and darks, arranged in a way that was not as simple as it seemed.

from Kate Grenville, *The Idea of Perfection* (1999)

[1] ute: pick-up truck ('utility vehicle')
[2] marcel wave: a particular hair style

PASSAGE 54

Otherwise

I come
from an opposite country
to yours, where water spirals
and the moon waxes
5 otherwise.
my stars assemble in unfamiliar patterns
and I watch often
not traffic or television
but hour by hour the huge tide
10 absently fingering rocks and small shells
and the wet brown kelp
where fish go sliding through.

if you were with me now
on my favourite beach
15 we'd watch the distant seismograph
of silver peaks darkening to indigo
and walk on the breakwater
towards the harbour mouth,
disturbing the flocks of terns
20 that wheel up shrieking in slim wild voices
to land again behind us
renewing their conference. I would slip
my cold hand in your pocket,
you'd look at me and grin
25 and we would walk together quietly
right to the very end,
where big chained rocks hold back
the same Pacific ocean, lumbering in.

Cilla McQueen, from *Axis: poems and drawings* (2001)

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PASSAGE 55

The air smelled like diamonds. It was sharp in their lungs. Jane lay in a hole in the sand dug by the tide 'round her bones; she was cold. Further on there was Sloan without Sybil. There was Nolly. None of them moved. Theirs was a not-life, a state of nonbeing, a coma from which they were waking, a stage in the life of a worm. Their hearts were beating, their lungs emptied and
5 filled, but the wall they had ridden onto the shore had collapsed on their memory, none of them knew whose body this was, whose pain she was feeling, or even, most strange, if the pain was the proof that she was still living. Each one, when she was able to, wept. No one was glad to discover that she was still alive. This was not life as she'd known it. This was a torture. Gradually, slowly, they moved. They were not far from each other. From where she was, Gaby
10 could make out the shapes of some others, all orange. Things that could not swim were swimming: trees, the horizon, a bee. Colors swam. There were orange forms crawling out of the earth. Gaby tried to move and remembered her knees. Needles were turning in them, her knees had been shaved on the coral. They stung. Basta![1] she wanted to say, but her tongue was covered with sand. How many hours it took them to wake didn't matter. They woke. They woke slowly.
15 They couldn't move. Life preservers had saved them, sleeveless orange jackets defining their species among the corpses of fishes strewn at the high water line. By noon of that day the heat raised a stench of dead fish and dried seaweed. The adjutant storks had returned with gannets and jungle crows – carrion eaters arrived. They stalked around Oopi, testing her palatability, pecking her till she jacked herself into a sit. Her head hurt and the sun was too bright. She was
20 confused. She was wearing one shoe. She picked herself up and felt dizzy. This orange thing was hot and it wouldn't come off when she pulled it. How long had she slept? She was scratchy and stiff. What was the name of this game? Where was breakfast? She walked down the slope to the water and squatted and peed through her knickers. Something about it suggested that it wasn't right but it felt like the right thing to do. She took off her shoe and forgot it. Something smelled
25 awful. She noticed the fish. She walked up the beach and the birds ran at her, letting her know their opinion. They were eating the fish by the dozens, scissoring out the gray flesh with their beaks. She felt thirsty. Amanda was clutching her head in her hands and Oopi sat down in the sand next to her. "I'm thirsty," she said. "This orange thing is bothering me."

"Take it off, then," Amanda tried to say kindly. The boats were both gone. She had been sitting
30 and staring for hours, waiting for Help.

Marianne Wiggins, from *John Dollar* (1989)

[1] Basta: enough

PASSAGE 56

Parachute

Parachute men say
The first jump
Takes the breath away
Feet in the air disturbs
5 Till you get used to it

Solid ground
Is now where you left it

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As you plunge down
Perhaps head first
10 As you listen to
Your arteries talking
You learn to sustain hope

Suddenly you are only
Holding an open umbrella
15 In a windy place
As the warm earth
Reaches out to you
Reassures you
The vibrating interim is over

20 You try to land
Where green grass yields
And carry your pack
Across the fields

The violent arrival
25 Puts out the joint
Earth has nowhere to go
You are at the starting point

Jumping across worlds
In condensed time
30 After the awkward fall
We are always at the starting point.

Lenrie Peters, from *A New Book of African Verse* (1984)

PASSAGE 57

So the playground was hell: Chinese burns, pinches, slaps and kicks, and horrible games. I can still hear the noise of a thick wet skipping rope slapping the ground. There'd be a big girl each end and you had to leap through without tripping. Joining in was only marginally less awful than being left out. It's said (truly) that most women forget the pain of childbirth; I think that we all *5* forget the pain of being a child at school for the first time, the sheer ineptitude, as though you'll never learn to mark out your own space. It's doubly shaming – shaming to *remember* as well, to feel so sorry for your scabby little self back there in small people's purgatory.

My first days at school were punctuated by fierce contests in the yard, duels almost, complete with spectators, with the one girl who might have been expected to be my friend. In fact, she did *10* become my very best friend, years later, when we went round holding hands painfully fast and giggling together hysterically, but for now she was my sworn enemy. Gail (she even had a funny name, like me) had hair in ringlets, green-hazel eyes and pale, clear, slightly olive skin stretched tight and shiny over her muscles, and she was nearly a year older than I was. She'd have won our war in any case, though, since she was so physically confident, in charge of her body even when *15* she was five. Was she already going to dancing lessons? I don't remember. In adult life she

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became a teacher of physical education and modern dance herself, and even in the days of our adolescent intimacy she would sometimes win an argument by twisting my wrist. I was convinced at the start, anyway, that she was simply better at inhabiting her body than I was – not only better at face-pulling, hair-pulling, pinching, scratching and every sort of violence, but wiry
20 and graceful, so that she made me feel like an unstrung puppet.

Once she'd thoroughly trounced me in public, Gail ignored me and held court in her own corner every playtime. She remained something of a loner, however. Other little girls might admire the ringlets and the dresses with smocking on the yokes[1], and the white socks that stayed up, but she was not allowed out to play in the square after school and everyone knew that she
25 had to sit for hours every night while her grandmother twisted her hair in rags. What really set her apart, though – even more effectively than the vicarage[2] set me apart – was the fact that her mother was divorced.

Lorna Sage, *Bad Blood* (2000)

[1] smocking on the yokes: a pattern sewn onto the front of dresses, below the neckline
[2] vicarage: the local church minister's house

PASSAGE 58

Two Hands

My father in his study sits up late,
a pencil nodding stiffly in the hand
that thirteen times between breakfast and
supper led a scalpel an intricate
5 dance. The phone has sobbed itself to sleep
but he has articles to read. I curse
tonight, at the other end of the house,
this other hand whose indecisions keep
me cursing nightly; fingers with some style
10 on paper, elsewhere none. Who would have thought
hands so alike – spade palms, blunt fingers short
in the joint – would have no more in common? All
today, remembering the one, I have watched
the other save no one, serve no one, dance
15 with this pencil. Hand, you may have your chance
to stitch a life for fingers that have stitched
new life for many. Down the *Lancet*[1] margin
this hand moves rapidly as mine moves slow.
A spasm shakes the phone at this elbow.
20 The pencil drops: he will be out again.

Jon Stallworthy, Root and Branch (Phoenix Living Poets) (1976)

[1]*Lancet*: medical journal

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PASSAGE 59

I was lucky. I was not the eldest son. For that reason not much was expected from me. I was left to myself a great deal, and enjoyed much freedom. My appearance and demeanour did not pose a threat to anyone. I was a very ordinary boy. You see me now as a Sultan, surrounded by all the symbols of power. You are impressed and, possibly, even a bit frightened. You worry that if you 5 exceed certain proprieties your head might roll in the dust. This fear is normal. It is the effect which power has on the Sultan's subjects. But this same power can transform even the most diminutive personality into a figure of large proportions. Look at me. If you had known me when I was a boy and Shahan Shah was my oldest brother you would never have imagined that I could be the Sultan of Misr, and you would have been right. Fate and history conspired to make me 10 what I am today.

The only person who saw something in me was my paternal grandmother. When I was nine or ten years old, she saw me and a group of my friends trying to kill a snake. As boys we would compete with each other in these foolish things. We would try and grab a snake by its tail and then swing it, before crushing its head on a stone or, as the braver ones among us did, stamping 15 on its head with our feet.

My grandmother, having observed this scene carefully, shouted at me.

"Yusuf! Yusuf ibn Ayyub! Come here at once!"

The other boys ran away, and I walked slowly towards her, expecting a blow around my ears. My grandmother had a legendary temper and, so Shadhi had once told me, she had struck my 20 father across the face when he was a grown man. No one dared to ask the cause of such a public display. My father had left the room and, so they say, mother and son did not speak to each other for a year. In the end, it was my father who apologized.

To my amazement, she hugged me and kissed me in turn on both my eyes.

"You are fearless, boy, but be careful. Some snakes can strike back, even when you have them 25 by the tail."

I remember laughing with relief. She then told me of a dream she had experienced before I was born.

"You were still inside your mother's belly. I think you kicked a great deal. Your mother used to complain sometimes that she felt she was going to give birth to a colt. One night I dreamt that 30 a large man-swallowing snake was crawling towards your mother, who was lying uncovered in the sun. Your mother opened her eyes and began to sweat. She wanted to move, but could not lift her body. Slowly the snake crawled towards her. Then suddenly, like the door of a magical cave, her belly opened. An infant walked out, sword in hand, and, with one mighty blow, decapitated the serpent. Then he looked at his mother and walked back into her stomach. You will be a great 35 warrior, my son. It is written in your stars and Allah himself will be your guide."

My father and uncle laughed at my grandmother and her foolish dreams, but even at that time this interpretation undoubtedly had a positive effect on me. She was the first person to take me seriously.

Tariq Ali, The Book of Saladin (1998)

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PASSAGE 60

Summer Solstice, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

The war had turned inward until it resembled
suicide. The only soothing thing was water.
I passed the sentries, followed the surf out of sight.
I would sink into the elements, become simple.

5 Surf sounds like erasure, over and over.
I lay down and let go, the way you trust an animal.
When I opened my eyes, all down the strand
small crabs, the bright yellow of a crayon,

had come out onto the sand. Their numbers, scattered,
10 resembled the galactic spill and volume of the stars.
I, who had lain down alone, emptied,
waked at the center of ten thousand prayers.

Who would refuse such attention. I let it sweeten me
back into the universe. I was alive, in the midst
15 of great loving, which is all I've ever wanted.
The soldiers of both sides probably wanted just this.

Marilyn Krysl, *Warscape with Lovers* (1997)

PASSAGE 61

Wimsey did not want to hear any more. He made his way down to the belfry[1] door and climbed the stair to the ringing chamber. The bells were still sounding their frenzied call. He passed the sweating ringers and climbed again – up through the clock-chamber, piled with household goods, and up and on to the bell-chamber itself. As his head rose through the floor, the brazen
5 fury of the bells fell about his ears like the blows from a thousand beating hammers. The whole tower was drenched and drunken with noise. It rocked and reeled with the reeling of the bells, and staggered like a drunken man. Stunned and shaken, Wimsey set his foot on the last ladder.

Halfway up he stopped, clinging desperately with his hands. He was pierced through and buffeted by the clamour. Through the brazen crash and clatter there went one high note, shrill
10 and sustained, that was like a sword in the brain. All the blood in his body seemed to rush to his head, swelling it to bursting-point. He released his hold on the ladder and tried to shut out the uproar with his fingers, but such a sick giddiness overcame him that he swayed, ready to fall. It was not noise – it was brute pain, a grinding, bludgeoning, ran-dan[2] crazy, intolerable torment. He felt himself screaming, but could not hear his own cry. His ear-drums were cracking; his
15 senses swam away. It was infinitely worse than any roar of heavy artillery. That had beaten and deafened, but this unendurable shrill clangour was a raving madness, an assault of devils. He could move neither forward nor backwards though his failing wits urged him, 'I must get out – I must get out of this.' The belfry heaved and wheeled about him as the bells dipped and swung within the reach of an outstretched hand. Mouth up, mouth down, they brawled with their
20 tongues of bronze, and through it all that shrill, high, sweet, relentless note went stabbing and

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shivering.

He could not go down, for his head dizzied and stomach retched at the thought of it. With a last, desperate sanity he clutched at the ladder and forced his tottering limbs upward. Foot by foot, rung by rung, he fought his way to the top. Now the trap-door was close above his head. He raised a leaden hand and thrust the bolt aside. Staggering, feeling as though his bones were turned to water, and with blood running from his nose and ears, he felt rather than stepped, out upon the windy roof. As he flung the door to behind him, the demoniac clangour sank back into the pit, to rise again, transmuted to harmony, through the louvres of the belfry windows. *25*

Dorothy L. Sayers, The Nine Tailors (1982)

[1]belfry: a bell tower
[2]ran-dan a loud banging noise (dialect or slang)

PASSAGE 62

Child and Insect

He cannot hold his hand huge enough.
How can he cage the sudden clockwork fizz
he has snatched from the grassblades?
He races back, how quick he is,
look! to his mother *5*
through the shrieking meadow.
But kneeling at her side
finds only a silence in his fearful clutch.
Revealed, the grasshopper
lies broken on his palm. *10*
It is
nothing now: its dead struts snapped
even the brittle lidless eyes
crushed into the tangle.
Sunlight *15*
and the landscape flood away
in tears.
For honor he dare not
look at what is cradled in his fingers
and will not be comforted. *20*
0,
will not.

Yet quick and now
as if by magic the undead insect
with a flick re- *25*
assembles itself
throbs
and is latched to a leaf a yard away.
And once again incredibly it skirls unspoilt

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30 its chirruping music.
He weeps, sick with relief and rage.
'There now, my love. It wasn't hurt at all.'
His mother laughs and puts an arm
around him.
35 Tearfully
he shakes her off.
He will not rejoice (in time he may
but that is not yet certain) after
such betrayal of this grief.
40 He must not
have tears torn from him
by petty trickery.

Before his mother's eyes he would not care
to do to (and perhaps not ever)
45 but gladly in this instant he
could snatch this creature up and
shatter it
for leaving him so naked.

Robert Druce (1980)

PASSAGE 63

A country bus drew up below the church and a young man got out. This he had to do carefully because he had a peg leg[1].

The roadway was asphalted blue.

It was a summer day in England. Rain clouds were amassed back of a church tower which
5 stood on rising ground. As he looked up he noticed well those slits, built for defence, in the blood coloured brick. Then he ran his eye with caution over cypresses and between gravestones. He might have been watching for a trap, who had lost his leg in France for not noticing the gun beneath a rose.

For, climbing around and up these trees of mourning, was rose after rose, while, here and
10 there, the spray overburdened by the mass of flower, a live wreath lay fallen on a wreath of stone, or on a box in marble colder than this day, or onto frosted paper blooms which, under glass, marked each bed of earth wherein the dear departed encouraged life above in the green grass, in the cypresses and in those roses gay and bright which, as still as this dark afternoon, stared at whosoever looked, or hung their heads to droop, to grow stained, to die when their turn
15 came.

It was a time of war. The young man in pink tweeds had been repatriated from a prisoners' camp on the other side. Now, at the first opportunity, he was back.

He had known the village this church stood over, but not well. He had learned the walks before he turned soldier, though he had met few of those who lived by. The graveyard he had
20 never entered. But he came now to visit because someone he loved, a woman, who, above all at night, had been in his feelings when he was behind barbed wire, had been put there while he was away, and her name, of all names, was Rose.

The bus, with its watching passengers, departed. In the silence which followed he began to

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climb the path leading to those graves, when came a sudden upthrusting cackle of geese in a panic, the sound of which brought home to him a stack of faggots[2] he had seen blown high by a grenade, each stick separately stabbing the air in a frieze[3] which he had watched fall back, as an opened fan closes. So, while the geese quietened, he felt what he had seen until the silence which followed, when he at once forgot.

But there was left him an idea that he had been warned.

Propping himself on his stick, he moved slowly up that path to the wicket gate between two larger cypresses. He felt more than ever that he did not wish to be observed. So he no longer watched the roses. As if to do his best to become unseen, he kept his eyes on the gravel over which he was dragging the peg leg.

For there was a bicycle bell, ringing closer and closer by the church, clustering spray upon spray of sound which wreathed the air much as those roses grew around the headstones, whence, so he felt, they narrowly regarded him.

Which caused him to stop dead when a boy of about six came, over the hill on a tricycle, past the porch; then, as the machine got up speed, he stood to one side, in spite of the gate still being closed between the two of them. He sharply stared but, as he took in the child's fair head, he saw nothing, nothing was brought back. He did not even feel a pang, as well he might if only he had known.

Charley was irritated when the boy, after getting off to open the gate and climbing onto his machine again, shrilly rang the bell as he dashed past. Then the young man started slowly on his way once more. And he forgot the boy who was gone, who spelled nothing to him.

For Rose had died while he was in France, he said over and over under his breath. She was dead, and he did not hear until he was a prisoner. She had died, and this sort of sad garden was where they had put her without him, and, as he looked about while he leaned on the gate, he felt she must surely have come as a stranger when her time came, that if a person's nature is at all alive after he or she has gone, then she could never have imagined herself here nailed into a box, in total darkness, briar roots pushing down to the red hair of which she had been so proud and fond. He could not even remember her saying that she had been in this churchyard, which was now the one place one could pay a call on Rose, whom he could call to mind, though never all over at one time, or at all clearly, crying, dear Rose, laughing, mad Rose, holding her baby, or, oh Rose, best of all in bed, her glorious locks abounding.

Henry Green, the opening paragraphs of the novel *Back* (1946)

[1]peg leg: wooden leg
[2]faggots: a bundle of firewood
[3]frieze: a decorative edging near the top of a wall

PASSAGE 64

Night Wind

Tonight the wind blows through
all the worlds I have known and
through all the lives I have led.
The wind blows in the trees,
deeper into each. (5)
The wind blows forever,

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strains like something
endlessly departing.
Restless, impatient,
10 it races without burden.

The night wind implores me through walls,
claims me inside buildings.
The night wind is an empire
in exodus, a deliverance
15 beside the dark shape of trees. Oaks
that wrestle the gusty twilight
under starry skies.

The wind takes
me in its giddy rush and
20 gathers me into a storm of longing,
rising on wings of darkness.
There is a music in the wind.
The thrum of guy wires[1]
of a thousand branches.
25 Muffled percussion
of banging doors, the
sibilous[2] clamour of rushing leaves.

Above me the Milky Way
and leaping, striding, I am the
30 bloodrun of the atmosphere.
Racing with leaves and newspapers
down deserted streets,
over fields and playgrounds.
I pace the wind
35 through forests and beside highways.
Along oceans and rivers
the gale's mysterious, unspoken imperative
is a joyous delirium with
nothing at its end.

Christopher Dewdney, from *Demon Pond* (1984)

[1]Wires stretched tight and pegged to the ground to hold a pole upright.
[2]Making a hissing noise

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PASSAGE 65

The child had been born punctually. This first grave and alarming duty of entering into the world was performed not only unflinchingly but with a flourish: for this thoroughly satisfactory child was a boy. His little organism, long before birth, had put aside the soft and drowsy temptation to be a female. It would have been so simple for the last pair of chromosomes to have doubled up like the rest, and turned out every cell in the future body complete, well-balanced, serene, and feminine. Instead, one intrepid particle decided to live alone, unmated, unsatisfied, restless, and masculine; and it imposed this unstable romantic equilibrium on every atom of the man-child's flesh, and of the man-child's sinews. To be a male means to have chosen the more arduous, though perhaps the less painful adventure, more remote from home, less deeply rooted in one soil and one morality. It means to be pledged to a certain courage, to a certain recklessness about the future: and if these risks are to be run without disaster, there should be also a greater buoyancy, less sensitiveness, less capacity for utter misery than women commonly show. Yet this compensation is sometimes lacking. Mysterious influences may cross and pervade the system, and send through it, as it were, a nostalgia for femininity, for that placid, motherly, comfortable fullness of life proper to the generous female.

Had the unborn Oliver decided to be a girl, he – or rather she – could hardly have been blamed. Such a result would have been equally involuntary, equally normal, equally useful; yet somehow it would have been disappointing. Our admirably gentle and admirably stern Oliver Alden, always choosing the darker and the ruder duty, would have missed existence. Or he would have begun – and how wrong that would have been! – by cheating his mother's hopes. Because while Mrs. Alden always declared that women were intellectually the equals of men and morally their superiors, yet she would have felt that a little girl was only a second-best baby: and how ill that would have gone with her settled determination that everything in her new life – except perhaps her husband – should be absolutely first rate! No: Providence was rewarding her for aiming high.

The child was a fine boy, full weight, perfectly formed, fair-skinned with large grey eyes, and a little fuzz of limp, yellow hair. At the first contact with freedom he wagged his arms and legs about vigorously, experimentally, silently: he seemed ready for everything, anxious for nothing, willing to wait and see. Philosophy possessed the soul of this child from his first breath: inarticulately, of course, as it was destined, at bottom, to remain always; because the words which his education supplied were not capable of uttering it truly. But in action, in determination, and by a sort of inner blind fortitude, his faith was distinctly in him from the beginning. There were good things and there were bad things, and there was an equal duty to pull through both and come out somehow on the further side of all trouble. At least, so I venture to put it into words for him, words which wouldn't have satisfied him; but at this first moment of his existence I may presume to understand him better than he understood himself.

George Santayana from *The Last Puritan* (1935)

PASSAGE 66

Wild Bees

Often in summer, on a tarred bridge plank standing,
Or downstream between willows, a safe Ophelia[1] drifting
In a rented boat – I had seen them come and go,

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Those wild bees swift as tigers, their gauze wings a-glitter
5 In passionless industry, clustering black at the crevice
Of a rotten cabbage tree, where their hive was hidden low.

But never strolled too near. Till one half-cloudy evening
Of ripe January, my friends and I
Came, gloved and masked to the eyes like plundering desperadoes,
10 To smoke them out. Quiet beside the stagnant river
We trod wet grasses down, hearing the crickets chitter
And waiting for light to drain from the wounded sky.

Before we reached the hive their sentries saw us
And sprang invisible through the darkening air,
15 Stabbed, and died in stinging. The hive woke. Poisonous fuming
Of sulphur filled the hollow trunk, and crawling
Blue flame sputtered – yet still their suicidal
Live raiders dived and clung to our hands and hair.

O it was Carthage under Roman torches,
20 Or loud with flames and falling timber, Troy![2]
A job well botched. Half of the honey melted
And half the rest young grubs. Through earth-black smoldering ashes
And maimed bees groaning, we drew out our plunder.
Little enough their gold, and slight our joy.

25 Fallen then the city of instinctive wisdom.
Tragedy is written distinct and small:
A hive burned on a cool night in summer.
But loss is a precious stone to me, a nectar
Distilled in time, preaching the truth of winter
30 To the fallen heart that does not cease to fall.

James K. Baxter, from Collected Poems (1984)

[1] Ophelia, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, went mad through love and drowned herself in a river.
[2] Carthage and Troy: two Ancient Greek cities which burned to the ground.

PASSAGE 67

The ship sank.[1] It made a sound like a monstrous metallic burp. Things bubbled at the surface and then vanished. Everything was screaming: the sea, the wind, my heart. From the lifeboat I saw something in the water.

I cried, 'Richard Parker, is that you? It is so hard to see. Oh, that this rain would stop!
5 Richard Parker? Richard Parker? Yes, it is you!'

I could see his head. He was struggling to stay at the surface of the water.

'Jesus, Mary, Muhammad and Vishnu, how good to see you, Richard Parker! Don't give up, please. Come to the lifeboat. Do you hear this whistle? TREEEEEEE! TREEEEEEE! TREEEEEEE! You heard right. Swim, swim! You're a strong swimmer. It's not a hundred feet.'

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10 He had seen me. He looked panic-stricken. He started swimming my way. The water about him was shifting wildly. He looked small and helpless.

'Richard Parker, can you believe what has happened to us? Tell me it's a bad dream. Tell me it's not real. Tell me I'm still in my bunk on the Tsimtsum and I'm tossing and turning and soon I'll wake up from this nightmare. Tell me I'm still happy. Mother, my tender guardian 15 angel of wisdom, where are you? And you, Father, my loving worrywart? And you, Ravi[2], dazzling hero of my childhood? Vishnu preserve me, Allah protect me, Christ save me, I can't bear it! TREEEEEEE! TREEEEEEE! TREEEEEEE!'

I was not wounded in any part of my body, but I had never experienced such intense pain, such a ripping of the nerves, such an ache of the heart.

20 He would not make it. He would drown. He was hardly moving forward and his movements were weak. His nose and mouth kept dipping underwater. Only his eyes were steadily on me.

'What are you doing, Richard Parker? Don't you love life? Keep swimming then! TREEEEEEE! TREEEEEEE! TREEEEEEE! Kick with your legs. Kick! Kick! Kick!'

He stirred in the water and made to swim.

25 'And what of my extended family – birds, beasts and reptiles? They too have drowned. Every single thing I value in life has been destroyed. And I am allowed no explanation? I am to suffer hell without any account from heaven? In that case, what is the purpose of reason, Richard Parker? Is it no more than to shine at practicalities – the getting of food, clothing and shelter? Why can't reason give greater answers? Why can we throw a question further than we can pull 30 in an answer? Why such a vast net if there's so little fish to catch?

His head was barely above water. He was looking up, taking in the sky one last time. There was a lifebuoy in the boat with a rope tied to it. I took hold of it and waved it in the air.

'Do you see this lifebuoy, Richard Parker? Do you see it? Catch hold of it. HUMPF! I'll try again. HUMPF!'

35 He was too far. But the sight of the lifebuoy flying his way gave him hope. He revived and started beating the water with vigorous, desperate strokes.

'That's right! One, two. One, two. One, two. Breathe when you can. Watch for the waves. TREEEEEEE! TREEEEEEE! TREEEEEEE!'

My heart was chilled to ice. I felt ill with grief. But there was no time for frozen shock. It 40 was shock in activity. Something in me did not want to give up on life, was unwilling to let go, wanted to fight to the very end. Where that part of me got the heart, I don't know.

'Isn't it ironic, Richard Parker? We're in hell yet we're still afraid of immortality. Look how close you are! *TREEEEEEE! TREEEEEEE! TREEEEEE!* Hurrah, hurrah! You've made it, Richard Parker, you've made it. Catch! *HUMPF!*'

45 I threw the lifebuoy mightily. It fell in the water right in front of him. With his last energies he stretched forward and took hold of it.

'Hold on tight, I'll pull you in. Don't let go. Pull with your eyes while I pull with my hands. In a few seconds you'll be aboard and we'll be together. Wait a second. Together? We'll be *together?* Have I gone mad?'

50 I woke up to what I was doing. I yanked on the rope.

'Let go of that lifebuoy, Richard Parker! Let go, I said. I don't want you here, do you understand? Go somewhere else. Leave me alone. Get lost. Drown! Drown!'

He was kicking vigorously with his legs. I grabbed an oar. I thrust it at him, meaning to push him away. I missed and lost hold of the oar.

55 I grabbed another oar. I dropped it in an oarlock and pulled as hard as I could, meaning to move the lifeboat away. All I accomplished was to turn the lifeboat a little. Bringing one end closer to Richard Parker.

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I would hit him on the head! I lifted the oar in the air.
He was too fast. He reached up and pulled himself aboard.
60 'Oh my God!'

Ravi was right. Truly I was to be the next goat. I had a wet, trembling, half-drowned, heaving and coughing three-year-old adult Bengal tiger in my lifeboat. Richard Parker rose unsteadily to his feet on the tarpaulin, eyes blazing as they met mine, ears laid tight to his head, all weapons drawn. His head was the size and the colour of the lifebuoy, with teeth.
65 I turned around, stepped over the zebra and threw myself overboard.

Yann Martel, *Life of Pi* (2001)

[1] The narrator is travelling on a ship, the *Tsimtsum*), transporting animals to a zoo
[2] The narrator's brother

PASSAGE 68

Planting a Sequoia[1]

All afternoon my brothers and I have worked in the orchard,
Digging this hole, laying you into it, carefully packing the soil.
Rain blackened the horizon, but cold winds kept it over the Pacific,
And the sky above us stayed the dull gray
5 Of an old year coming to an end.

In Sicily a father plants a tree to celebrate his first son's birth –
An olive or a fig tree – a sign that the earth has one more life to bear.
I would have done the same, proudly laying new stock into my father's orchard,
A green sapling rising among the twisted apple boughs,
10 A promise of new fruit in other autumns.

But today we kneel in the cold planting you, our native giant,
Defying the practical custom of our fathers,
Wrapping in your roots a lock of hair, a piece of an infant's birth cord,
All that remains above earth of a first-born son,
15 A few stray atoms brought back to the elements.

We will give you what we can – our labor and our soil,
Water drawn from the earth when the skies fail,
Nights scented with the ocean fog, days softened by the circuit of bees.
We plant you in the corner of the grove, bathed in western light,
20 A slender shoot against the sunset.

And when our family is no more, all of his unborn brothers dead,
Every niece and nephew scattered, the house torn down,
His mother's beauty ashes in the air,
I want you to stand among strangers, all young and ephemeral to you,
25 Silently keeping the secret of your birth.

Dana Gioia, from *The Gods of Winter* (1991)

[1] Giant fir tree

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PASSAGE 69

She put a record on the turntable. The record player was still on the sideboard where it had been for years. Loyal studied the album cover; five men in musician's chairs, a swirl of yellow color coming from their hands to the top of the cover and red letters bursting, "MUSIC TO SING ALONG WITH - Volume 7 - Country Ballads."

5 The record rotated, double-stop fiddle harmonies of a sentimental country song filled the room. Starr stood in front of the oven, feet side by side, hands folded in a knot of fingers, held in front of her crotch. Middle-aged, in wrinkled whipcords and a sweatshirt, but something of the old vulnerable beauty persisting. Perhaps she knew it.

She counted silently, then sang "He was just passing through, I was all alone and blue." The
10 words forced themselves up into her nose, she reached for the cheap sadness. Loyal couldn't help it, felt the barroom tears jerking out of his eyes. That song always got to him, but here he had to sit in a damn kitchen chair, couldn't even hunch over a beer. So he closed his eyes and wished Jack had lived.

The quiche was good, and they ate all of it. It was easier now, no talking, the food on the plates,
15 the forks spearing and lifting. She put a paper napkin near his hand. Jack's chair was empty. Pickles. The coffee perked. How many times had he sat here?

"So, what do you think of my singing, Loyal?"

That was the kind of question he couldn't answer.

"It's fine. I like it fine."

20 Sour face. She poured coffee while his fingers pinched up crumbs in the quiche dish. All of Jack's things were scattered around as if he'd just stepped out. Well, that's all he'd done, just stepped out. The rope he knotted while they watched television on a peg by the door, a pair of boots, stiff now from disuse. Bills still on the Victorian spindle. The grey rancher's hat, the band stained with Jack's sweat, on top of the side board where he always slung it when he came in for
25 dinner.

"Think you might go back to Wisconsin, see your kids? Must be all growed up now."

"Them ties was cut too long ago. With blunt scissors." She said the milk was on the turn.

He smelled it and said he'd take his coffee without.

"I know I'm not going to sing at any rodeo, Loyal. My voice is weak, I'm too old. Old ladies
30 don't sing at rodeos. But you know, I don't feel old. I feel like I've got the liveliest part of my life still ahead. I could stay on the ranch, Loyal, but not alone. A man is needed." She couldn't say it much clearer.

The coffee. Its blackness in the familiar blue cups. He stirred in sugar. Her spoon clinked.

Then all at once the awkwardness was gone. Stories of things he had seen began to pour out,
35 the words firing from between his loosened and gapped teeth. He told her about Cucumber drowning in a mine, midnight driving with Bullet over dangerous passes where headlights failed, the mountain lion. He, who had talked little, talked much, swelled to a glowing huckster selling stories of his life. At two in the morning, Starr nodding off, wanting nothing but sleep and silence, he stopped. They were tired of each other, each longed for the relief of solitude. He said
40 he would sleep on the daybed beside the stove. The kitchen stank of cigarettes.

In the morning she gave him Jack's pearl gray cowboy hat.

E. Annie Proulx, *Postcards* (1992)

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PASSAGE 70

Brainstorm

The house was shaken by a rising wind
That rattled window and door. He sat alone
In an upstairs room and heard these things: a blind
Ran up with a bang, a door slammed, a groan
5 Came from some hidden joist, a leaky tap
At any silence of the wind walked like
A blind man through the house. Timber and sap
Revolt, he thought, from washer, baulk and spike.
Bent to his book, continued unafraid
10 Until the crows came down from their loud flight
To walk along the rooftree overhead.
Their horny feet, so near but out of sight,
Scratched on the slate; when they were blown away
He heard their wings beat till they came again,
15 While the wind rose, and the house seemed to sway,
And window panes began to blind with rain.
The house was talking, not to him, he thought,
But to the crows; the crows were talking back
In their black voices. The secret might be out:
20 Houses are only trees stretched on the rack.
And once the crows knew, all nature would know.
Fur, leaf and feather would invade the form,
Nail rust with rain and shingle warp with snow,
Vine tear the wall, till any straw-borne storm
25 Could rip both roof and rooftree off and show
Naked to nature what they had kept warm.
He came to feel the crows walk on his head
As if he were the house, their crooked feet
Scratched, through his hair, his scalp. He might be dead,
30 It seemed, and all the noises underneath
Be but the cooling of the sinews, veins,
Juices, and sodden sacks suddenly let go;
While in his ruins of wiring, his burst mains,
The rainy wind had been set free to blow
35 Until the green uprising and mob rule
That ran the world had taken over him,
Split him like seed, and set him in the school
Where any crutch can learn to be a limb.

Inside his head he heard the stormy crows.

Howard Nemerov, *New and Selected Poems* (1960)

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PASSAGE 71

"I give up," said Jo. "We seem to lose ground every time. We dig her out, then she crawls back in, only deeper."

Linda loyally and staunchly defended the fortress in which her mother seemed to have taken refuge.

5 Jo defiantly wanted to break through. "Like shock treatment," she said. "It's the only way to bring her out."

Sharon, the middle daughter, gave her mother a loom.

And so, late in life, she took up weaving. She attended a class and took detailed notes, then followed them step by step, bending to the loom with painstaking attention, threading the warp 10 tirelessly, endlessly winding, threading, tying. She made sampler after sampler, using the subdued, muted colours she liked: Five inches of one weave, two inches of another, just as the teacher instructed.

For a year she wove samplers, geometric and repetitious, all in browns and neutral shades, the colors she preferred. She was fascinated by some of the more advanced techniques she began 15 to learn. One could pick up threads from the warp selectively, so there could be a color on the warp that never appeared in the fabric if it were not picked up and woven into the fabric. This phenomenon meant she could show a flash of color, repeated flashes of the color, or never show it at all. The color would still be there, startling the eye when the piece was turned over. The backside would reveal long lengths of a color that simply hadn't been picked up from the warp 20 and didn't appear at all in the right side of the fabric.

She took to her loom with new excitement, threading the warp with all the shades of her life: Gray, for the cold, foggy mornings when she had, piece by piece, warmed little clothes by the heater vent as Jo, four, stood shivering in her underwear; brown, the color of the five lunch bags she packed each morning with a sandwich, cut in half and wrapped in waxed paper, napkin, fruit, 25 and potato chips; Dark brown, like the brownies they had baked "to make Daddy come home" from business trips – Sharon and Jo had believed he really could smell them, because he always came home.

Now when the daughters came home they always found something new she had woven. Linda dropped by almost every week to leave her own daughter, Terry, at "Bachan's house" 30 before dashing off to work. When Linda's husband came to pick her up, Terry never wanted to leave "Bachi" and would cling to her, crying at the door.

She continued to weave: White, the color of five sets of sheets, which she had washed, hung out, and ironed each week – also the color of the bathroom sink and the lather of shampoo against four small black heads; blue, Cathy's favorite color.

35 Sharon came by from time to time, usually to do a favour or bring a treat. She would cook Mexican food or borrow a tool or help trim trees in the garden. She was frustrated with the public school system where she had been substitute teaching and was now working part time in a gallery.

Sometimes Sharon bought yarn for her mother to weave: Golden brown, the color of the 40 Central Valley in summer. The family had driven through the valley on their way lo the mountains almost every summer. They would arrive hot and sweating and hurry into the cool, emerald green waters of the Merced river. The children's floats flashed yellow on the dark green water. Yellow, too, were the beaten eggs fried flat, rolled, and eaten cold, with dark brown pickled vegetables and white rice balls. She always sat in the shade.

45 Jo was working abroad and usually came home to visit once a year. She and Michael had broken up. During the visits the house would fill with Jo and her friends. They would sit in the

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back room to talk. Jo visited her mother's weaving class and met her weaving friends.

"So this is the daughter," one of them said. "Your mother's been looking forward to your visit. She never misses a class except when her daughters are home."

50 Soon it was time for Jo to leave again. "Mom's colors," she remarked to Sharon as she fingered the brown muffler her mother had woven for her.

"Put it on," said Sharon.

Jo did, and as she moved toward the light, hidden colors leaped from the brown fabric. It came alive in the sunlight.

55 "You know, there's actually red in here," she marveled, "and even bits of green. You'd never know it unless you looked real close."

"Most people don't," Sharon said.

The two sisters fell silent, sharing a rare moment together before their lives diverged again. The muffler was warm about Jo's neck.

60 At the airport, Jo's mother stood next to Jo's father, leaning slightly toward him as an object of lighter mass naturally tends toward a more substantial one. She was crying.

When Jo was gone she returned to the house, and her loom. And amidst the comings and goings of the lives around her, she sat, a woman bent over a loom, weaving the diverse threads of life into one miraculous, mystical fabric with timeless care.

R L Sasaki, *The Loom* (1989)

PASSAGE 72

The Wasps' Nest

Two aerial tigers,
Striped in ebony and gold
And resonantly, savagely a-hum,
Have lately come
5 To my mailbox's metal hold
And thought
With paper and with mud
Therein to build
Their insubstantial and their only home.
10 Neither the sore displeasure
Of the U.S. Mail
Nor all my threats and warnings
Will avail
To turn them from their hummed devotions.
15 And I think
They know my strength,
Can gauge
The danger of their work:
One blow could crush them
20 And their nest; and I am not their friend.
And yet they seem
Too deeply and too fiercely occupied
To bother to attend.

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Perhaps they sense
25 I'll never deal the blow,
For, though I am not in nor of them,
Still I think I know
What it is like to live
In an alien and gigantic universe, a stranger,
30 Building the fragile citadels of love
On the edge of danger.

James L Rosenberg (1962)

PASSAGE 73

The Hawk

tilted while we sat still,
theoretic thing,
and streaked, bent tense to kill
on pointed wing—

5 what was a feathered cross
cruising admired in skies
became what we knew of hawks—
a clawed surprise

to tear whatever it was—
10 lamb tottering lost
or rabbit hopping in grass—
some gentleness,

as if nature had meant
to demonstrate by this
15 bird with a low intent,
its deadly purpose—

how meekness hasn't a chance
under the eye of power,
the high, wide cateyed glance
20 and hookbeak glower

of a hawk or anything else
so well equipped
with plumages of stealth,
sharply tipped.

25 So we thought as we watched
the hawk swoop down—
nothing is safe that's soft

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or slow on the ground,

yet we had food for thought
30 when the hawk flapped up again—
tenderness hadn't been caught.
It blended in.

Harold Witt (1966)

PASSAGE 74

(love song, with two goldfish)

(He's a drifter, always
floating around her, has
nowhere else to go. He wishes
she would sing, not much, just the scales;
5 or take some notice,
give him the fish eye.)
(Bounded by round walls
she makes fish eyes
and kissy lips at him, darts
10 behind pebbles, swallows
his charms hook, line and sinker)
(He's bowled over. He would
take her to the ocean, they could
count the waves. There,
15 in the submarine silence, they would share
their deepest secrets. Dive for pearls
like stars.)
(But her love's since
gone belly-up. His heart sinks
20 like a fish. He drinks
like a stone. Drowns those sorrows,
stares emptily through glass.)
(the reason, she said
she wanted)
25 (and he could not give)
a life
beyond the
(bowl)

Grace Chua (2003)

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PASSAGE 75

The birds chattered in the fir trees by the front corner of the house, dusting the yard with more snow. Maybe they made all that noise to comfort one another in the cold. She wished she could gather them all into her house. Why didn't their little bodies freeze like ice-cubes? What kept them warm? Their little hearts beating fiercely like an old coal stove? How many shovels had she shucked into one of them?

5 She saw her neighbor pouring a bucket on his garden rows. Probably sheep manure. He was far away but he waved at her and the howl of his black dog broke the cold. Her cat looked up, alarmed.

On the edge of her garden she found a cob emptied of its corn. It sparkled on one end with frost. She looked at the muffin-tin shape. The honeycomb openings where the kernels had gone. 10 She decided the spirits left it there. Everytime she moved they snipped another detail from the world. They had taken enough from her. Now she was getting parts of it back, sucking them deep within herself. She felt her bowels rumble. The thick branches of the bush stitched a net for her. The empty garden rows. All of them growing like frozen vines around her. Maybe she'd disappear into them someday.

15 Inside the house once more, she wiped a place to look through the window. Her cat would be scratching at the door soon. She lit the stove and boiled water for tea. She saw that the wet teabag looked like birdseed. She turned the furnace down even farther when it came on. She didn't want to call the gas truck yet. She would wear her coat and scarf, her galoshes and gloves in the house.

20 Where was her needle? She needed to work her fingers. They felt blue and cold. She'd sew a bright pocket on the dress she was working on. A pocket to help her remember everything she saw. Things she noticed, thoughts she wanted to store in her head. The bush with the blue gas-flame of the blue jays' heads. The pattern of frost growing on the windows. How it covered the glass like ancient cave markings or the scribblings of a child. No, it wasn't the frost at all. It was 25 the spirits that got loose when it was cold. The north wind opened up a highway and they slipped right down to the Great Lakes from the north. Hadn't she seen them after her husband died last winter? Hadn't she heard his ice-fishing decoys rattle one night? Weren't the spirits a pale blue when she looked from the window, floating around the house like manta rays[1]? Their graceful edges undulating in the dim light from the window. Now they were wrapping her house in 30 cellophane. She knew it as she stood at the sink looking out. Something scratched the door and it startled her, but she remembered it was the cat and she let him in.

She knew another secret. They had been in her house. They could walk across the floor without creaking. They could sit on her roof and she'd never know it. Stingrays with their blue-finger edges. Devilfish! She whacked the counter with her broom. The cat ran.

35 They were coming to take her too. She panicked at the sink. She saw her husband in his icehouse fishing in winter. She felt like she was walking barefoot across the ice to him. She fought to hold to the counter. But she was shuffling across the lake. The drift of cold fog across the ice was like a line of old people. Inside her head, birds flew from the wall. They banged at the windows to get out. Up the road, the church steeple hung like a telephone pole pulled 40 crooked by its wires after an ice storm. How long had she been there? The room circled like the round hole in the ice. She felt the tight hole around her chest. There was something hurting her ankles. She was tangled in the fishing line that went down into the cold, dark hole below her. Now the sun shined its wicked and beautiful pattern on the kitchen window. The cold fog still shuffled across the lake. Something knocked the old cans and kettles from the counter to the 45 floor. She was walking up the road now. Wasn't the afternoon light through the window-frost

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like a church? How many years had she sung hymns up the road? The little tendrils of the ice like petroglyphs[2]? She heard her children drawing in the frost on the windows. She reached for the finger she saw at the glass. But the icehole burped like her old husband in his chair and the frigid water closed her up.

Diane Glancy, *Polar Breath* (1993)

[1] manta rays: large, flat fish with wide fins, that seem to fly slowly through the water
[2] petroglyphs: prehistoric symbols or pictures scratched in rock

PASSAGE 76

Piano and Drums

When at break of day at a riverside
I hear jungle drums telegraphing
the mystic rhythm, urgent, raw
like bleeding flesh, speaking of
5 primal youth and the beginning,
I see the panther ready to pounce,
the leopard snarling about to leap
and the hunters crouch with spears poised;

And my blood ripples, turns torrent,
10 topples the years and at once I'm
in my mother's lap a suckling;
at once I'm walking simple
paths with no innovations,
rugged, fashioned with the naked
15 warmth of hurrying feet and groping hearts
in green leaves and wild flowers pulsing.

Then I hear a wailing piano
solo speaking of complex ways
in tear-furrowed concerto;
20 of far-away lands
and new horizons with
coaxing diminuendo, counterpoint,
crescendo. But lost in the labyrinth
of its complexities, it ends in the middle
25 of a phrase at a daggerpoint.

And I lost in the morning mist
of an age at a riverside keep
wandering in the mystic rhythm
of jungle drums and the concerto.

Gabriel Okara (1968)

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PASSAGE 77

The afternoon darkened early and he was working peeringly in the semi-dusk when someone coughed behind him. A man and a woman stood in the aisle, and when his eyes were used to the better light on the church floor he noticed the woman was Marjory. The man said heartily, "Hullo, Duncan," and Marjory raised her hand and smiled. Thaw said "Hullo" and looked down
5 on them, smiling slightly. The man said, "We were visiting friends in Lenzie and we thought, old times and so forth, why not run in and see Duncan? So here we are."
The man peered up through the ladders.
"You must have cat's eyes to work in this light."
"The switches are behind the door."
10 "No no. No no. I quite like it in this dimness, more mysterious, if you know what I mean … Very impressive. Very impressive."
Marjory said something he couldn't hear. He said, "What?"
"This isn't your usual style of work, Duncan."
After a short silence Thaw said, "I'm trying to show more air and light."
15 The man said, "So you are. So you are." He moved back into the body of the church, looking at the mural and quietly humming. He said, "You're nearly finished."
"Far from it."
"It looks finished to my untutored eye."
Thaw indicated bits to be repainted.
20 "How much longer will you be on it?"
"A few weeks."
"Then what will you do. Teach?"
"I don't know."
He turned round and pretended to work. After a moment he heard the man cough and say, "Well,
25 Marjory," and, "I think we'll be getting along now, Duncan."
Thaw looked round and said goodbye. The two people had moved back into the middle of the church. The man said, "By the way, did you know Marjory and I are thinking of getting married?"
"No."
30 "Yes, we're thinking about it."
"Good."
There was silence then the man said, "Well, goodbye, Duncan. When we're married you must look in on us. We still think of you now and again."
Thaw shouted, "Good."
35 The syllable clattered upon the ceiling and walls. At the door he saw Marjory look back and raise her hand, but couldn't see if she was smiling or not.

It was too dark to work now. He lay on the planks, his thoughts returning to Marjory in a puzzled way, like a tongue tip returning to a hole from which a tooth has been pulled. He was sure he had just seen a girl without special beauty or intelligence. He wondered why she had
40 been all he wanted in a woman. She was as unlike Marjory as Mrs. Thaw's corpse had been unlike his mother. He wished he had said something ironic and memorable but she had given him no chance. "This isn't your usual style of work, Duncan."

Alasdair Gray, *Lanark* (1981)

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PASSAGE 78

The Heaven of Animals

Here they are. The soft eyes open.
If they have lived in a wood
It is a wood.
If they have lived on plains
5 It is grass rolling
Under their feet forever.

Having no souls, they have come,
Anyway, beyond their knowing.
Their instincts wholly bloom
10 And they rise.
The soft eyes open.

To match them, the landscape flowers,
Outdoing, desperately
Outdoing what is required:
The richest wood,
15 The deepest field.

For some of these,
It could not be the place
It is, without blood.
These hunt, as they have done,
20 But with claws and teeth grown perfect,

More deadly than they can believe.
They stalk more silently,
And crouch on the limbs of trees,
And their descent
25 Upon the bright backs of their prey

May take years
In a sovereign floating of joy.
And those that are hunted
Know this as their life,
30 Their reward: to walk

Under such trees in full knowledge
Of what is in glory above them,
And to feel no fear,
But acceptance, compliance.
35 Fulfilling themselves without pain

James Dickey, from *The Whole Motion* (1845-1992)

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PASSAGE 79

The Gift

To pull the metal splinter from my palm
my father recited a story in a low voice.
I watched his lovely face and not the blade.
Before the story ended, he'd removed
the iron sliver I thought I'd die from.

I can't remember the tale,
but hear his voice still, a well
of dark water, a prayer.
And I recall his hands,
two measures of tenderness
he laid against my face,
the flames of discipline
he raised above my head.

Had you entered that afternoon
you would have thought you saw a man
planting something in a boy's palm,
a silver tear, a tiny flame.
Had you followed that boy
you would have arrived here,
where I bend over my wife's right hand.

Look how I shave her thumbnail down
so carefully she feels no pain.
Watch as I lift the splinter out.
I was seven when my father
took my hand like this,
and I did not hold that shard
between my fingers and think,
Metal that will bury me,
christen it Little Assassin,
Ore Going Deep for My Heart.
And I did not lift up my wound and cry,
Death visited here!
I did what a child does
when he's given something to keep.
I kissed my father.

Li-Young Lee, from *Rose* (1986)

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PASSAGE 80

In her soft-carpeted, thick-curtained, richly furnished chamber, Mrs Marroner lay sobbing on the wide, soft bed.

She sobbed bitterly, chokingly, despairingly; her shoulders heaved and shook convulsively; her hands were tight-clenched. She had forgotten her elaborate dress, the more elaborate 5 bedcover; forgotten her dignity, her self-control, her pride. In her mind was an overwhelming, unbelievable horror, an immeasurable loss, a turbulent, struggling mass of emotion.

In her reserved, superior, Boston-bred life, she had never dreamed that it would be possible for her to feel so many things at once, and with such trampling intensity.

She tried to cool her feelings into thoughts; to stiffen them into words; to control herself – and 10 could not. It brought vaguely to her mind an awful moment in the breakers at York Beach, one summer in girlhood when she had been swimming under water and could not find the top.

In her uncarpeted, thin-curtained, poorly furnished chamber on the top floor, Gerta Petersen lay sobbing on the narrow, hard bed.

She was of larger frame than her mistress, grandly built and strong; but all her proud young 15 womanhood was prostrate now, convulsed with agony, dissolved in tears. She did not try to control herself. She wept for two.

If Mrs Marroner suffered more from the wreck and ruin of a longer love – perhaps a deeper one; if her tastes were finer, her ideals loftier; if she bore the pangs of bitter jealousy and outraged pride, Gerta had personal shame to meet, a hopeless future, and a looming present 20 which filled her with unreasoning terror.

She had come like a meek young goddess into that perfectly ordered house, strong, beautiful, full of goodwill and eager obedience, but ignorant and childish – a girl of eighteen. Mr Marroner had frankly admired her, and so had his wife. They discussed her visible perfections and as visible limitations with that perfect confidence which they had so long enjoyed.

25 Mrs Marroner was not a jealous woman. She had never been jealous in her life – till now.

Gerta had stayed and learned their ways. They had both been fond of her. Even the cook was fond of her. She was what is called ‘willing’, was unusually teachable and plastic[1]; and Mrs Marroner, with her early habits of giving instruction, tried to educate her somewhat.

“I never saw anyone so docile,” Mrs Marroner had often commented, “It is perfection in a 30 servant, but almost a defect in character. She is so helpless and confiding.”

She was precisely that: a tall, rosy-cheeked baby; rich womanhood without, helpless infancy within. Her braided wealth of dead gold hair, her grave blue eyes, her mighty shoulders and long, firmly moulded limbs seemed those of a primal earth spirit; but she was only an ignorant child, with a child’s weakness.

35 When Mr Marroner had to go abroad for his firm, unwillingly, hating to leave his wife, he had told her he felt quite safe to leave her in Gerta’s hands – she would take care of her.

“Be good to your mistress, Gerta,” he told the girl that last morning at breakfast. “I leave her to you to take care of. I shall be back in a month at latest.”

Then he turned, smiling, to his wife, “And you must take care of Gerta, too,” he said, “I 40 expect you’ll have her ready for college when I get back.”

This was seven months ago. Business had delayed him from week to week, from month to month. He wrote to his wife, long, loving, frequent letters, deeply regretting the delay, explaining how necessary, how profitable it was, congratulating her on the wide resources she had, her well-filled, well-balanced mind, her many interests.

45 “If I should be eliminated from your scheme of things, by any of those ‘acts of God’ mentioned on the tickets, I do not feel that you would be an utter wreck,” he said. “That is very

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comforting to me. Your life is so rich and wide that no one loss, even a great one, would wholly cripple you. But nothing of this sort is likely to happen and I shall be home again in three weeks – if this thing gets settled. And you will be looking so lovely, with that eager light in your eyes
50 and the changing flush I know so well – and love so well. My dear wife! We shall have to have a new honeymoon – other moons come every month, why shouldn't the mellifluous[2] kind?"

He often asked after 'little Gerta', sometimes enclosed a picture postcard to her, joked with his wife about her laborious efforts to educate "the child", was so loving and merry and wise. All this was racing through Mrs Marroner's mind as she lay there with the broad, hemstitched border
55 of fine linen sheeting crushed and twisted in one hand, and the other holding a sodden handkerchief.

She had tried to teach Gerta, and had grown to love the patient, sweet-natured child, in spite of her dullness. At work with her hands, she was clever, if not quick, and could keep small accounts from week to week. But to the woman who held a Ph.D., who had been on the faculty
60 of a college, it was like baby-tending.

Perhaps having no babies of her own made her love the big child the more, though the years between them were but fifteen.

To the girl she seemed quite old, of course; and her young heart was full of grateful affection for the patient care which made her feel so much at home in this new land.

65 And then she had noticed a shadow on the girl's bright face. She looked nervous, anxious, worried. When the bell rang, she seemed startled, and would rush hurriedly to the door. Her peals of frank laughter no longer rose from the area gate as she stood talking with the always admiring tradesmen.

Mrs Marroner had laboured long to teach her more reserve with men, and flattered herself that
70 her words were at last effective. She suspected the girl of homesickness, which was denied. She suspected her of illness, which was denied also. At last she suspected her of something which could not be denied.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Turned* (1911)

[1] plastic: easily shaped or moulded
[2] mellifluous: flowing sweetly or smoothly

PASSAGE 81

Minority

I was born a foreigner.
I carried on from there
to become a foreigner everywhere
I went, even in the place
planted with my relatives,
six-foot tubers sprouting roots,
their fingers and faces pushing up
new shoots of maize and sugar cane.

All kinds of places and groups
of people who have an admirable
history would, almost certainly,
distance themselves from me.

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I don't fit,
like a clumsily-translated poem;

like food cooked in milk of coconut
where you expected ghee[1] or cream,
the unexpected aftertaste
of cardamom or neem[2].
.
There's always that point where
the language flips
into an unfamiliar taste;
where words tumble over
a cunning tripwire on the tongue;
where the frame slips,
the reception of an image
not quite tuned, ghost-outlined,
that signals, in their midst,
an alien.

And so I scratch, scratch
through the night, at this
growing scab of black on white.
Everyone has the right
to infiltrate a piece of paper.
A page doesn't fight back.

And, who knows, these lines
may scratch their way
into your head –
through all the chatter of community,
family, clattering spoons,
children being fed –
immigrate into your bed,
squat in your home,
and in a corner, eat your bread,
until, one day, you meet
the stranger sidling down your street,
realise you know the face
simplified to bone,
look into its outcast eyes
and recognise it as your own.

Imtiaz Dharker (1997)

[1] ghee: liquified butter used in cooking Indian food
[2] neem: the shoots and flowers of the neem tree, eaten as a vegetable in India

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Guiding Questions for Section Six Passages

PASSAGE 55: *The Idea of Perfection*, Kate Grenville

- Show how the passage's focus on setting moves from broad to narrow, superficial to analytical and casual to intense. (*Setting*)
- What impressions do we gain of the central character, and of the reasons for her behaviour? (*Character, Action*)
- Explore the passage's visual impact. (*Style*)
- What issues (social, philosophical or artistic) does the passage raise? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 56: Otherwise, Cilla McQueen

- Show how the poem moves back and forward between two settings, local and universal. (*Setting*)
- What do we learn about the relationship between the two people in the poem, and about their situation? (*Character, Action*)
- What do you find interesting about the way the poem is written? (*Style*)
- In what way is the poem an expression of optimism? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 57: from *John Dollar*, Marianne Wiggins

- How does the writer use details of the surroundings to indicate something of the predicament the girls find themselves in? (*Setting, Action*)
- What do we gather about the age of the girls and their relationships? (*Character*)
- How does the style the writer adopts convey the intensity of this experience? (*Style*)
- What does the passage suggest about how human beings react to disaster? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 58: *Parachute*, Lenrie Peters

- What does the poem suggest about the relationship of Man with his environment? *(Setting)*
- How far does the person writing the poem speak convincingly and with authority? *(Character)*
- Show how the poem's structure is aligned to its narrative (*Action*)
- How does the writer bring the experience of a parachute fall alive for us? *(Style)*
- What general conclusions about life does the poet seek to draw from his account of parachuting? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 59: from *Bad Blood*, Lorna Sage

- What do we learn from the passage about the community (including the school community) in which the writer grew up? (*Setting, Ideas*)
- Explore the writer's attitude towards Gail. (*Character*)
- Discuss the way the narrative moves backwards and forwards though time. (*Action*)
- Show how description and analysis are effectively interwoven in the passage. (*Style*)

PASSAGE 60: *Two Hands*, Jon Stallworthy

- In what way is the setting (two rooms at opposite ends of a house) appropriate to the situation depicted in the passage? (*Setting*)

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- ‘Both a tribute and an expression of dissatisfaction.’ Discuss this comment on the passage. (*Character*)
- What can we gather from the passage about the writer’s intentions? (*Action*)
- Explore the way the writer uses verb tenses to help express his feelings. (*Style*)
- What do the physical objects mentioned in the poem represent, beyond themselves? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 61: from *The Book of Saladin*, Tariq Ali

- What do we learn from the passage about the values and customs of the society to which the narrator belongs? (*Setting*)
- How does the narrator seek to present himself, as a person, to his listener? (*Character*)
- How does the writer of the passage (as opposed to the narrator) make use of the story within the story? (*Action*)
- What subtleties do you notice in what is essentially a simple narrative style? (*Style*)
- What does the passage suggest about how we see, and respond to, other people? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 62: *Summer Solstice, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka*, Marilyin Krysl

- Discuss the interplay of the three concentric rings the writer finds herself at the centre of – the beach, the war, creation. (*Setting*)
- Why could this poem have been named ‘Departure and Return’? (*Character, Action*)
- What do the comparisons add to the poem’s meaning and effect? (*Style*)
- How are war, and this particular war, represented in the poem? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 63: from *The Nine Tailors*, Dorothy L Sayers

- What features of the bell tower may symbolise the general situation Wimsey finds himself in? (*Setting*)
- How would you describe Wimsey’s state of mind? (*Character*)
- By what methods does the writer seek to convey the intensity of Wimsey’s experience? (*Style*)
- What would you regard as the ironies of the passage? (*Action*, *Ideas*)

PASSAGE 64: *Child and Insect*, Robert Druce

- What does the poem suggest about the relationship between the child and his mother? (*Character*)
- Discuss the poem’s sudden changes of direction. (*Action*)
- Show how the poet uses language (both in his choice of words and in their layout) to capture the drama of the episode. (*Style*)
- What lesson or lessons may the child take from his experience? (*Setting*, *Ideas*)

PASSAGE 65: from *Back*, Henry Green

- How does the writer use the setting of this episode to convey his central character’s state of mind? (*Setting, Character*)
- Are there any indications in the passage of how the story may develop beyond this point? (*Action*)
- How does the passage’s style contribute to its atmosphere of drama and high emotion? (*Style*)
- What does the passage suggest about life, death, love and war? (*Ideas*)

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PASSAGE 66: *Night Wind*, Christopher Dewdney

- o How does the poet convey a sense of vast scale in the poem's setting? (*Setting*)
- o What force in his life does the night wind represent, for the poet? (*Character, Ideas*)
- o Discuss the suggestion that the poem describes a lot of events but that nothing really happens. (*Action*)
- o Consider the contribution the poem's verbs make to its overall effect. (*Style*)

PASSAGE 67: from *The Last Puritan*, George Santayana

- o What impression do we get of the kind of world the child is being born into? (*Setting*)
- o For what kind of behaviour in Oliver's later life does the story of his birth seem to be preparing us? (*Character, Action*)
- o By what stylistic means does the storyteller seek to show that he writes with authority? (*Style*)
- o Show how in this passage the author strives to be fair to both sexes, and not offend either. (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 68: *Wild Bees*, James K Baxter

- o Show how in the opening two stanzas the poet uses seemingly irrelevant detail to help establish the poem's early mood. (*Setting*)
- o What feelings does the poet have about this episode, looking back on it? (*Character*)
- o What elements of the poem's style contribute to our sense that this is both a dramatic event and one of large significance? (*Style, Action*)
- o What, in this poem, is lost, and what is gained? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 69: from *Life of Pi*, Yann Martel

- o How does the absence of detail in the setting increase the focus of the passage? (*Setting*)
- o The narrator addresses a wide range of other beings (people, gods, religious figures, animals). What do we gather about him from the things he says to them, and the way he says them? (*Character, Style*)
- o How does the writer convey the difficulties and drama of this whole episode? (*Action*)
- o Explore the conflicts and contradictions in the passage (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 70: *Planting a Sequoia*, Dana Gioia

- o What do you find appropriate to the poem as a whole about where and when the tree is being planted? (*Setting*)
- o What feelings is the poet seeking to express? (*Character*)
- o Show how the poet subtly introduces, then confirms, the reasons for this planting. (*Action*)
- o What is the effect of the poet's use of the second person ('you', 'your') to address the tree? (*Style*)
- o What does the poem suggest about human life? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 71: from *Postcards*, E Annie Proulx

- o Discuss the writer's use of physical detail. (*Setting*)
- o What impression are we given of Starr, at this point in her life? (*Character*)
- o Explain how the writer conveys the tensions and conflicts that arise as these two people move into a new stage in their relationship. (*Action*)

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- Show how the awkwardness of the situation is reflected in the awkwardness of the passage's style in both the dialogue and the narrative. (*Style*)
- What does the passage have to say about human needs? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 72: *Brainstorm*, Howard Nemerov

- What sort of place is the World, as represented in this poem? (*Setting*)
- Trace the changes in the central character's mood as the poem progresses. (*Character*)
- Show how the poet conveys the sense that the storm is increasing throughout the poem (*Action*)
- What effects of sound has the poet aimed for, and with what intention? In your response consider the poem's diction, rhyme and rhythm. (*Style*)
- Discuss the significance of the poem's title. (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 73: from *The Loom*, R L Sasaki

- How does the writer convey a sense of family, and community? (*Setting*)
- Why does her weaving come to mean so much to the girls' mother? (*Character*)
- We may be surprised to find, in line 60, that the girl's father is still alive. Why is that? (*Action*)
- What do the many references to colour contribute to the passage? (*Style*)
- What does the passage suggest about human creativity and the artistic process? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 74: *The Wasps' Nest*, James L Rosenberg

- What parallels does the poet draw between the world the wasps find themselves in and his own? (*Setting, Ideas*)
- What attitudes and characteristics (shared or not) are demonstrated by the wasps, the U.S. Mail Service, and the poet? (*Character, Ideas*)
- What do you find interesting or effective about the tenses of the poem's verbs? (*Action, Style*)
- Discuss the poet's line divisions and the distribution of his rhymes. (*Style*)

PASSAGE 75: *The Hawk*, Harold Witt

- What effect is gained by the poet's avoidance of landscape detail? (*Setting*)
- How does the poet present the hawk in such a way as to create surprise in the poem's ending? (*Character, Action*)
- What use does the poet make of contrast in the poem? (*Style*)
- In what ways is the poem an affirmation? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 76: *(love song, with two goldfish)*, Grace Chua

- What aspects of life underwater, and in particular life in the goldfish bowl, does the poet emphasise? (*Setting*)
- What feelings towards the male fish does the poet try to arouse in us? (*Character*)
- Show how the poet uses brackets to demarcate developments in the narrative. (*Action*)
- Discuss the poet's use of idiom. (*Style*)
- What does the poem suggest about the nature of love, both human and fishy? (*Ideas*)

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PASSAGE 77: *Polar Breath*, Diane Glancy

- What relationship does the woman seem to have with her physical environment? (*Setting*, *Character*)
- How, amid all the confusion in the woman's mind, does the writer succeed in conveying the nature of her real situation?
- Show how the passage depends for its effect on the juxtaposition of the mundane and the illusionary. (*Style*)
- What does the passage suggest about the nature of death and the process of dying?

PASSAGE 78: *Piano and Drums*, Gabriel Okara

- How does the poet set two the poem's different settings in contrast with each other? (*Setting*)
- What is the poet's/speaker's frame of mind? (*Character*)
- How does the poet convey a sense of continuous movement throughout the poem? (*Action*)
- Examine the poet's use of symbol and imagery (*Style*)
- What does the poem suggest about the difficulty of moving, and living, between two cultures? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 79: *Lanark,* Alasdair Gray

- What do the details of this passage's setting contribute to its effect? (*Setting*)
- What do we learn about Duncan Thaw's character and present state of mind? (*Character*)
- How does the writer convey, indirectly and naturally, the facts of this situation? (*Action*)
- How does the writer suggest the awkwardness of the conversation that takes place among the three characters? (*Style*)
- What does the passage suggest about the nature of human relationships? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 80: *The Heaven of Animals*, James Dickey

- What are the principal qualities of a heaven, as identified by James Dickey here? (*Setting, Ideas*)
- How does James Dickey differentiate between the different kinds of creature in the poem? (*Character*)
- What in the poem conveys the sense that its action takes place in eternity? (*Action*)
- What in the style and format of the poem contributes to its air of calm and certainty? (*Style*)

PASSAGE 81: *The Gift*, Li-Young Lee

- How does the poem depend for its effect on the connection between two worlds, past and present? (*Setting, Action*)
- How does the poet want us to view his father? (*Character*)
- How well does the writer succeed in preventing warmth from becoming sentimentality? (*Style*)
- What 'gifts' does the father give his son? (*Ideas*)

PASSAGE 82: *Turned*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman

- How does the nature of the household in which this situation has arisen help explain the impact of the events on the two women? (*Setting, Character*)
- Discuss the ambiguity of 'She wept for two' and its effect on the reader. (*Action*)

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- Why might we regard the style of the passage as ‘reserved, superior, Boston-bred’, and why is it an appropriate style for this piece of writing? (*Style*)
- How does the passage raise the issue of power over others and the responsibility it brings?

PASSAGE 83: *Minority*, Imtiaz Dharker

- How does the poet contrive to create a universal setting for his poem? (*Setting*)
- What range of feelings do you detect in the poet? (*Character*)
- How does the poem run from past through present and towards future? (*Action*)
- Show how the poet makes use of food imagery to give the poem cohesion (*Style*)
- What contribution does Imtiaz Dhaker see writers as making to the development of mankind? (*Ideas*)

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Section Seven: IB Literature Practice (Mock) Examinations

Both Examination A and Examination B are suitable for SL and HL practice.

Taking the exam:

- Choose a block of time (**Standard Level** one-and-a-half hours, **Higher Level** two hours) during which you will not be disturbed.
- Find a quiet place and set it up as nearly as you can to resemble an examination room, with
  - an upright chair and a table with a good writing surface
  - appropriate temperature and lighting
  - a watch or clock
  - sufficient paper and pens, including coloured felt tips to help you mark the passage.
- When you are ready, note the time (write it down) and the time you will need to finish (write it down).
- Begin.

Choosing the passage:

- Don't decide ahead of time to write about the prose or the poetry passage.
- Read both passages carefully before you choose one.
- Don't automatically choose the one which is easier to understand – there may be less to say about it.
- When you have made a preliminary choice, read that passage (and maybe the other one) again before you begin work – just to make sure. A mistake now can cost a lot later.
- If, when you've begun to make notes on the passage you've chosen, you feel to be getting nowhere, consider changing to the other passage. You shouldn't do so, however, after anything more than say ten minutes: stick with your original choice, and you'll find that more ideas come once you start writing.

Making notes:

- Use the margins of the passage itself.
- Underline or circle details in the passage you think are significant, and link them to your margin notes.
- SL candidates: consider colour-coding (or number-coding) the parts of the passage you think will help you answer each of the guiding questions.
- HL candidates: if you have a structure you intend to use in your commentary (like the one we will suggest later) consider colour-coding (or number-coding) details from the passage to match your structure.

Writing the commentary:

- You will not have time to write your commentary in draft form and then copy it out again. So write carefully and legibly.
- Leave time at the end to read through what you have written.

Evaluating your answer (when it's all over):

There are suggestions for doing that on pages.

If any of the above contradicts what your teacher has suggested, follow your teacher's advice. He or she knows you better than we do…

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Mock Examination A

Instructions to candidates

Standard Level (1 hour 30 minutes):

*Write a guided literary analysis on **one** passage only. You must respond directly to both of the questions provided.*

(Guiding questions for Standard Level candidates can be found on page 214.)

Higher Level (2 hours):

*Write a literary commentary on **one** of the following:*

(HL candidates: Do not look at the SL guiding questions on page 214. You may however use them after you have completed your commentary, to check that you have covered the areas the examiner has thought important).

1. (a)

The gaunt building stood on rock. The distinctive feature was a window flanked by two smaller ones, as an adult might stand with protective arms around children's shoulders. Fan lights over the door. Quoyle noticed half the panes were gone. Paint flaked from wood. Holes in the roof. The bay rolled and rolled.

5 'Miracle it's standing. That roofline is as straight as a ruler,' the aunt said. Trembling.

'Let's see how it is inside,' said Quoyle. 'For all we know the floors have fallen into the cellar.'

The aunt laughed. 'Not likely,' she shouted joyfully. 'There isn't any cellar.' The house was lashed with cable to iron rings set in the rock. Streaks of rust, notched foot-holds in the stone like *10* steps, crevices deep enough to hide a child. The cables bristled with broken wires.

'Top of the rock not quite level,' the aunt said, her sentences flying out like ribbons on a pole. 'Before my time, but they said it rocked in storms like a big rocking chair, back and forth. Made the women sick, afraid, so they lashed it down and it doesn't move an inch but the wind singing through those cables makes a noise you don't forget. Oh, do I remember it in the winter storms. *15* Like a moaning.' For the house was garlanded with wind. 'That's one reason I was glad when we moved over to Capsize Cove. There was a store at Capsize and that was a big thing. But then we shifted down the coast to Catspaw, and a year later we were off to the States.' Told herself to calm down.

Rusted twenty-penny nails; planks over the ground-floor windows. Quoyle hooked his fingers *20* under the window planks and heaved. Like pulling on the edge of the world.

'There's a hammer in the car,' he said. 'Under the seat. Maybe a pry bar. I'll go back and get them. And the food. We can make a picnic breakfast.'

The aunt was remembering a hundred things. 'I was born here,' she said. 'Born in this house.' Other rites had occurred here as well.

25 'Me too,' said Sunshine, blowing at a mosquito on her hand. Bunny slapped at it. Harder than necessary.

'No you weren't. You were born in Mockingburg, New York. There's smoke over there,' she

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said, looking across the bay. ‘Something’s on fire.’

‘It’s chimney smoke from the houses in Killick-Claw. They’re cooking their breakfasts over
30 there. Porridge and hotcakes. See the fishing boat out in the middle of the bay? See it going along?’

‘I wanna see it,’ said Sunshine. ‘I can’t see it. I can’t SEE it.’

‘You stop that howling or you’ll see your bottom warmed,’ said the aunt. Face red in the wind. Quoyle remembered himself crying ‘I can’t see it,’ to a math teacher who turned away, gave no
35 answers. The fog tore apart, light charged the sea like blue neon.

The wood, hardened by time and corroding weather, clenched the nails fast. They came out crying. He wrenched the latch but could not open the door until he worked the tire iron into the crack and forced it.

Dark except for the blinding rectangle streaming through the open door. Echo of boards
40 dropping on rock. Light shot through glass in slices, landed on the dusty floors like strips of yellow canvas. The children ran in and out the door, afraid to go into the gloom alone, shrieking as Quoyle, levering boards outside, gave ghostly laughs and moans, ‘Huu huu huu.’

Then inside, the aunt climbing the funneled stairs, Quoyle testing floorboards, saying be careful, be careful. Dust charged the air and they were all sneezing. Cold, must; canted doors on
45 loose hinges. The stair treads concave from a thousand shuffling climbs and descents. Wallpaper poured backwards off the walls. In the attic a featherbed leaking bird down, ticking mapped with stains. The children rushed from room to room. Even when fresh the rooms must have been mean and hopeless.

‘That’s one more dollar for me!’ shrieked Bunny, whirling on gritty floor. But through the
50 windows the cool plain of sea.

Quoyle went back out. The wind as sweet in his nose as spring water in a thirsty mouth. The aunt coughing and half-crying inside.

‘There’s the table, the blessed table, the old chairs, the stove is here, oh my lord, there’s the broom on the wall where it always hung,’ and she seized the wooden handle. The rotted knot
55 burst, straws shot out of the binding wire and the aunt held a stick. She saw the stovepipe was rusted through, the table on ruined legs, the chairs unfit.

‘Needs a good scurrifunging. What mother always said.’ Now she roved the rooms, turned over pictures that spit broken glass. Held up a memorial photograph of a dead woman, eyes half open, wrists bound with strips of white cloth. The wasted body lay on the kitchen table, coffin against
60 the wall.

‘Aunt Eltie. She died of TB.’ Held up another of a fat woman grasping a hen.

‘Aunt Pinkie. She was so stout she couldn’t get down to the chamber pot and had to set it on the bed before she could pee.’

Square rooms, lofty ceilings. Light dribbled like water through a hundred sparkling holes in the
65 roof, caught on splinters. This bedroom. Where she knew the pattern of cracks on the ceiling better than any other fact in her life. Couldn’t bear to look. Downstairs again she touched a paint-slobbered chair, saw the foot knobs on the front legs worn to rinds. The floorboards slanted under her feet, wood as bare as skin. A rock smoothed by the sea for doorstop. And three lucky stones strung on a wire to keep the house safe.

The Shipping News, E Annie Proulx

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1. (b)

Twice Shy

Her scarf *à la* Bardot,
In suede flats for the walk,
She came with me one evening
For air and friendly talk.
5 We crossed the quiet river,
Took the embankment walk.

Traffic holding its breath,
Sky a tense diaphragm:
Dusk hung like a backcloth
10 That shook where a swan swam,
Tremulous as a hawk
Hanging deadly, calm.

A vacuum of need
Collapsed each hunting heart
15 But tremulously we held
As hawk and prey apart,
Preserved classic decorum,
Deployed our talk with art.

Our juvenilia[1]
20 Had taught us both to wait,
Not to publish feeling
And regret it all too late –
Mushroom loves already
Had puffed and burst in hate.

25 So, chary and excited
As a thrush linked on a hawk,
We thrilled to the March twilight
With nervous childish talk:
Still waters running deep
30 Along the embankment walk.

Seamus Heaney

[1]Juvenilia: an author's early writings

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Guiding Questions for Standard Level Candidates Only

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Remember, also, that the IB Literature Guide makes the point that '*it is anticipated that students may also explore other relevant aspects beyond the guiding questions in order to achieve the higher marks'*. So do try to find other worthwhile things to say about the passage, beyond the questions you must answer.

1. (a) *The Shipping News*

Explore both the house's character and its setting.

What do we learn about the people in the passage from their differing reactions to the house?

What contribution do the writer's comparisons make to the passage?

How adequate would *A Return to the Past* be as a title for the extract?

1. (b) *Twice Shy*

In what ways are the details of the poem's setting important?

Show how the poet captures the tension and uncertainty in the relationship between the two characters.

Show how elements in the poem's style help bind it together.

What does the poem's title suggest as its central idea?

End of Examination

When you have completed your commentary, take a long break before you begin to think about how well you may have done. When you are ready (and not necessarily today) you can come back and look at our suggestions for evaluating your answers.

(You may like to exchange your work with another student who has written about the same passage, so that you can discuss the quality of each other's commentaries.)

Assessing Your Commentary

The examiner will assess your commentary according to four main criteria:

Criterion A: Understanding and interpretation

• How well does the student's interpretation reveal understanding of the thought and feeling of the

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passage?
• How well are ideas supported by references to the passage?

Criterion B: Appreciation of the writer's choices
• To what extent does the analysis show appreciation of how the writer's choices of language, structure, technique and style shape meaning?

Criterion C: Organization
• How well organized and coherent is the presentation of ideas?

Criterion D: Language
• How clear, varied and accurate is the language?
• How appropriate is the choice of register, style and terminology? ("Register" refers, in this context, to the student's use of elements such as vocabulary, tone, sentence structure and terminology appropriate to the task.)

You'll find it difficult to assess your performance in relation to C and D, but it's worth asking yourself:
- Organization: 'Have I organised my answer well, and linked my paragraphs?'
- Language: 'Have I expressed myself clearly and avoided sloppy or casual language?'

Here is some more detailed help, however, with the first three criteria.

Standard Level Candidates

We've made notes below (in response to each guiding question) on things you could have said to show how well you have understood, interpreted, and appreciated the writer's choices in, the passage. You may wish to tick off the ideas you did include in your commentary. (Don't worry if you've missed quite a lot – our list is a full one.)

Higher Level Candidates

You can use the same notes, even though you were not given the guiding questions. Taken together, the questions cover much of what you would want to say about the passage.

As far as organising your commentary is concerned, you may have taken a simple 'word-by-word, line-by-line' approach, rather than using the ***SCASI*** layout. If you did, check that some larger ideas have emerged from your comments on the passage's detail.

1. (a) ***The Shipping News***

'Explore both the house's character and its setting' *(Setting)* It might have helped you to deal with each item (character, setting) separately (always look for ways of breaking questions down into smaller parts). Character: o *gaunt* (line 1): uncared-for, weak through lack of nourishment o *bristled with broken wires* (line 10): mildly threatening o *Rusted twenty-penny nails* (line 19): weakened by time o *clenched* (line 36): resistant to intrusion o *Echo of boards dropping on rock* (lines 39-40) empty, hollow; holding nothing of interest or use

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- *mean and hopeless* (line 48): permanently, inherently miserable
- *stovepipe…rusted through…table on ruined legs…chairs unfit* (lines 55-56): wholly without promise, beyond redemption

Setting:
- *the bay rolled and rolled* (line 4): image of the sea as a symbol of nature's inexorable force
- *a store at Capsize…big thing…Catspaw…off to the States* (lines 16-17): the wider, more attractive world
- *Killick-Claw…cooking breakfasts over there. Porridge and hotcakes* (lines 29-30): as above (on a smaller scale)
- *fishing boat* (line 30): life, and work, pass the house by
- *cool plain of sea* (line 50): uncaring nature at large
- *memorial photograph* (line 58): setting in time as well as place – a strong sense of the house's past (lots of similar details)
- *rock smoothed by the sea* (line 68): the effects of time, even on rock (so no wonder it's had an effect on the house)

'What do we learn about the people in the passage from their differing reactions in and to the house?' *(Character)*

Aunt:
- *That roofline…ruler* (line 5): sees only what she wants to see.
- *Trembling…calm down* (lines 5, 18): easily given to emotion.
- Her past closely interlinked with the house's (lines 8-15, and later)
- *joyfully*: child-like in her enthusiasm for what they have found.
- *coughing and half-crying* (line 52): overcome with memories
- *Couldn't bear to look* (line 66): pained by some of what she recalls of her own past

Quoyle:
- *Quoyle noticed* (lots of things wrong, lines 3-4): realistic
- *For all we know…*(lines 6-7): pessimistic, even
- *gave no answers* (lines 34-35): like the house, he feels
- *wrenched…forced* (lines 37-38): demands entry
- *Huu huu huu* (line 43): creates a sense of fun and adventure, for the sake of the children
- *testing…careful, careful* (lines 43-44): untrusting.

Sunshine and Bunny:
- *Me too* (line 25): Sunshine wants to be part of this event, to establish a past here.
- *Harder than necessary* (lines 25-26): Bunny resentful of something – Sunshine's attempt to stake a claim in the house?
- *rushed from room to room…whirling* (lines 47, 49): excited.

'What contribution do the writer's comparisons make to the passage?' *(Style)*

There are lots of them! (You may have identified more than ten, and as many as fifteen if you have included both similes and metaphors.) Here are the first four, just to indicate what kind of comment would be appropriate in answer to the question.
- *as an adult…shoulders* (line 2): the house as a place which once afforded protection against the violent elements (ties in with Quoyle's protectiveness towards the children).
- *roofline…straight as a ruler* (line 5): the defiance of the house, or perhaps the defiance of the aunt in insisting that what man built has endured.
- *notched foot-holes like steps* (lines 9-10): the idea of man having to cut a foothold in the rock in order to maintain his place.
- *her sentences…pole* (line11): a sense of celebration at their return.

The others, in case you've missed some (add your own comments now if need be):
- *rocked in storms like a big rocking chair, back and forth* (line 12)
- *Like a moaning* (line 15)
- *The house was garlanded with wind* (line 15)

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- *Like pulling on the edge of the world* (line 20)
- *light charged the sea like blue neon* (line 35)
- *Light…landed on the dusty floors like strips of yellow canvas* (lines 44-41)
- *mapped with stains* (lines 46-47)
- *the cool plain of the sea* (line 50)
- *sweet in his nose as spring water in a thirsty mouth* (line 51)
- *Light dribbled like water* (line 64)
- *foot knobs…worn to rinds* (line 67)

wood as bare as skin (line 68)

'How adequate would *A Return to the Past* be as a title for the extract?' *(Ideas)*

You might be expected to have agreed, generally, with the suggestion, but to have added some ideas that go beyond 'A Return to the Past', eg:

- The struggle between man-made things and the elements
- The resilience of the human spirit (the aunt's excitement and hope)
- Realism versus misplaced optimism
- The implications of this visit for the family's future

1.(b) **Twice Shy**

'In what ways are the details of the poem's setting important?' *(Setting)*

They are important because:

- They convey a sense of the stillness and gentleness (*quiet river, swan*) which is also a feature of the relationship between the characters.
- They suggest the normality in some ways of what is happening (the two characters take ***the** embankment walk*, which many have taken before them).
- The mention of spring (*March*) is symbolic; so is *twilight* – the young people are out walking between day and night, and also moving from one kind of relationship into another.
- The waters of the river run still and deep – like, proverbially, their relationship.

'Show how the poet captures the tension and uncertainty in the relationship between the two characters.' *(Character)*

In:

- The paradoxical way the girl is dressed (stylishly *à la Bardot* and sensibly in flat shoes)
- The personification of the traffic and the sky (both holding their breath)
- The sense of drama evoked by the *backcloth*, as on a stage, which is *Tremulous* – note the meaning and effect of the hawk image.
- The suggestion, in *vacuum of need*, that powerful natural forces are at work
- The extension (twice) of the hawk image
- The formal diction of *Preserved classic decorum*
- The association of *Deployed* with the idea of strategy (reinforced in *with art*)

'Show how elements in the poem's style help bind it together.' *(Style)*

- Repetition and echo (lines 3 and 27, 4 and 28, 5 and 29, 6 and 30)
- Extended images (*hawk…hunting*; *juvenilia…childish talk*)
- Rhyme and rhythm – you should have said as much as you could about the patterns they create, and how those help connect everything in the poem.

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'What does the poem's title suggest as its central idea?' *(The question on Ideas)*

- The boy and girl have both had earlier and unhappy experiences with love. The poet makes use of the proverb *Once bitten, twice shy* to give this fact a central position in the poem and to explain why they are so cautious.
- You could then have expanded your answer to show how the following two images develop that idea:

  Our juvenilia…too late
  Mushroom loves…hate

So how *can* you assess how well you've done?

Only in broad terms:

- If what we have included above is the sort of thing you've said in your commentary, you've probably done well.
- If you have managed to include half, or more than half, of the actual ideas we have listed, you have probably done very well.

Here's a further exercise you could undertake if you wished:

- There's no question related directly to the Action of either the prose passage or the poem. Devise one (in each case), and make notes towards an answer.

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Mock Examination B

Instructions to candidates

Standard Level (1 hour 30 minutes):

*Write a guided literary analysis on **one** passage only. You must respond directly to both of the questions provided.*

(Guiding questions for Standard Level candidates can be found on page 223.)

Higher Level (2 hours):

*Write a literary commentary on **one** of the following:*

(HL candidates: Do not look at the SL guiding questions on page 223. You may however use them after you have completed your commentary, to check that you have covered the areas the examiner has thought important).

1. (a)

All morning Buddy had been teaching me how to ski.

First, Buddy borrowed skis and ski poles from a friend of his in the village, and ski boots from a doctor's wife whose feet were only one size larger than my own, and a red ski jacket from a student nurse. His persistence in the face of mulishness was astounding.

5 Then I remembered that at medical school Buddy had won a prize for persuading the most relatives of dead people to have their dead ones cut up whether they needed it or not, in the interests of science. I forget what the prize was, but I could just see Buddy in his white coat with his stethoscope sticking out of a side pocket like part of his anatomy, smiling and bowing and in my tracks, flushed and panting.

10 'But Buddy, I don't know how to zigzag yet. All those people coming down from the top know how to talking those numb, dumb relatives into signing the post-mortem papers.

Next, Buddy borrowed a car from his own doctor, who'd had TB himself and was very understanding, and we drove off as the buzzer for walk-hour rasped along the sunless sanatorium corridors.

15 Buddy had never skied before either, but he said that the elementary principles were quite simple, and as he'd often watched the ski instructors and their pupils he could teach me all I'd need to know.

For the first half-hour I obediently herring-boned up a small slope, pushed off with my poles and coasted straight down,' he observed, as I negotiated my slope for the twentieth time. 'Now

20 let's try you on the rope tow.'

I stopped zigzag.'

'Oh, you need only go half-way. Then you won't gain very much momentum.'

And Buddy accompanied me to the rope tow and showed me how to let the rope run through my hands, and then told me to close my fingers round it and go up.

25 It never occurred to me to say no.

I wrapped my fingers around the rough, bruising snake of a rope that slithered through them, and went up.

But the rope dragged me, wobbling and balancing, so rapidly I couldn't hope to dissociate

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myself from it half-way.
30 There was a skier in front of me and a skier behind me, and I'd have been knocked over and stuck full of skis and poles the minute I let go, and I didn't want to make trouble, so I hung quietly on.

At the top, though, I had second thoughts.

Buddy singled me out, hesitating there in the red jacket. His arms chopped the air like khaki
35 windmills. Then I saw he was signalling me to come down a path that had opened in the middle of the weaving skiers. But as I poised, uneasy, with a dry throat, the smooth white path from my feet to his feet grew blurred.

A skier crossed it from the left, another crossed it from the right, and Buddy's arms went on waving feebly as antennae from the other side of a field swarming with tiny moving animalcules
40 like germs, or bent, bright exclamation marks.

I looked up from that churning amphitheatre to the view beyond it.

The great, grey eye of the sky looked back at me, its mist-shrouded sun focusing all the white and silent distances that poured from every point of the compass, hill after pale hill, to stall at my feet.

45 The interior voice nagging me not to be a fool – to save my skin and take off my skis and walk down, camouflaged by the scrub pines bordering the slope – fled like a disconsolate mosquito. The thought that I might kill myself formed in my mind coolly as a tree or a flower.

I measured the distance to Buddy with my eye.

His arms were folded, now, and he seemed of a piece with the split-rail fence behind him –
50 numb, brown and inconsequential.

Edging to the rim of the hilltop, I dug the spikes of my poles into the snow and pushed myself into a flight I knew I couldn't stop by skill or any belated access of will.

I aimed straight down.

A keen wind that had been hiding itself struck me full in the mouth and raked the hair back
55 horizontal on my head. I was descending, but the white sun rose no higher. It hung over the suspended waves of the hills, an insentient pivot without which the world would not exist.

A small, answering point in my own body flew towards it. I felt my lungs inflate with the inrush of scenery – air, mountains, trees, people. I thought, 'This is what it is to be happy.'

I plummeted down past the zigzaggers, the students, the experts, through year after year of
60 doubleness and smiles and compromise, into my own past.

People and trees receded on either hand like the dark sides of a tunnel as I hurtled on to the still, bright point at the end of it, the pebble at the bottom of the well, the white sweet baby cradled in its mother's belly.

My teeth crunched a gravelly mouthful. Ice water seeped down my throat.

65 Buddy's face hung over me, near and huge, like a distracted planet. Other faces showed themselves up in back of his. Behind them, black dots swarmed on a plane of whiteness. Piece by piece, as at the strokes of a dull godmother's wand, the old world sprang back into position.

'You were doing fine,' a familiar voice informed my ear, 'until that man stepped into your path.'

70 People were unfastening my bindings and collecting my ski poles from where they poked skyward, askew, in their separate snowbanks. The lodge fence propped itself at my back.

Buddy bent to pull off my boots and the several pairs of white wool socks that padded them. His plump hand shut on my left foot, then inched up my ankle, closing and probing, as if feeling for a concealed weapon.

75 A dispassionate white sun shone at the summit of the sky. I wanted to hone myself on it till I grew saintly and thin and essential as the blade of a knife.

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'I'm going up,' I said. 'I'm going to do it again.'

'No, you're not.'

A queer, satisfied expression came over Buddy's face. 'No, you're not,' he repeated with a final smile. 'Your leg's broken in two places. You'll be stuck in a cast for months.' *80*

from *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia Plath

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1. (b)

The Woman at the Washington Zoo

The saris go by me from the embassies.

Cloth from the moon. Cloth from another planet.
They look back at the leopard like the leopard.

And I…
5 This print of mine, that has kept its color
Alive through so many cleanings; this dull null
Navy I wear to work, and wear from work, and so
To my bed, so to my grave, with no
Complaints, no comment; neither from my chief,
10 The Deputy Chief Assistant, nor his chief –
Only I complain; this serviceable
Body that no sunlight dyes, no hand suffuses
But, dome-shadowed, withering among columns,
Wavy beneath fountains – small, far-off, shining
15 In the eyes of animals, these beings trapped
As I am trapped but not, themselves, the trap,
Aging, but without knowledge of their age,
Kept safe here, knowing not of death, for death
– Oh, bars of my own body, open, open!

20 The world goes by my cage and never sees me.
And there come not to me, as come to these,
The wild beasts, sparrows pecking the llamas' grain,
Pigeons settling on the bears' bread, buzzards
Tearing the meat the flies have clouded…
25 Vulture,
When you come for the white rat that the foxes left,
Take off the red helmet of your head, the black
Wings that have shadowed me, and step to me as man,
The wild brother at whose feet the white wolves fawn,
30 To whose hand of power the great lioness
Stalks, purring…
You know what I was,
You see what I am: change me, change me!

Randall Jarrell

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Guiding Questions for Standard Level Candidates Only

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Remember, also, that the IB Literature Guide makes the point that '*it is anticipated that students may also explore other relevant aspects beyond the guiding questions in order to achieve the higher marks'*. So do try to find other worthwhile things to say about the passage, beyond the questions you must answer.

1. (a) *The Bell Jar*

What do we learn from the passage about the two central characters, and about their relationship?

By what means does the writer control the narrative, and give it shape?

What contribution do the comparisons make to the passage?

The episode carries a significance for Esther which goes beyond the events themselves. Explore it.

1. (b) *The Woman at the Washington Zoo*

What significance lies in the fact that the poem is set in Washington?

What do we learn from the poem about the life the woman leads, and her feelings towards it?

Give a detailed account of the poem's structure and development.

Examine the poet's use of repetition.

End of Examination

When you have completed your commentary, take a long break before you begin to think about how well you may have done. When you are ready (and not necessarily on the same day) you can come back and look at our suggestions for evaluating your answers.

(You may decide to exchange your work with another student who has written about the same passage, so that you can discuss the quality of each other's commentaries.)

Assessing Your Commentary

The examiner will assess your commentary according to four main criteria:

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• How well does the student's interpretation reveal understanding of the thought and feeling of the passage?

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• How well are ideas supported by references to the passage?

Criterion B: Appreciation of the writer's choices
• To what extent does the analysis show appreciation of how the writer's choices of language, structure, technique and style shape meaning?

Criterion C: Organization
• How well organized and coherent is the presentation of ideas?

Criterion D: Language
• How clear, varied and accurate is the language?
• How appropriate is the choice of register, style and terminology? ("Register" refers, in this context, to the student's use of elements such as vocabulary, tone, sentence structure and terminology appropriate to the task.)

You'll find it difficult to assess your performance in relation to C and D, but it's worth asking yourself:
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- Language: 'Have I expressed myself clearly and avoided sloppy or casual language?'

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Standard Level Candidates

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Higher Level Candidates

You can use the same notes, even though you were not given the guiding questions. Taken together, the questions cover much of what you would want to say about the passages.

As far as organising your commentary is concerned, you may have taken a simple 'word-by-word, line-by-line' approach, rather than using the ***SCASI*** layout. If you did, check that some larger ideas have emerged from your comments on the passage's detail.

1. (a) ***The Bell Jar***

'What do we learn from the passage about the two central characters, and about their relationship?'
(Character)
The best way of dealing with multi-part questions like this is to take each item separately (in this case, the characters first, one by one, and their relationship next). Always look for ways of breaking questions down into smaller parts.

You should base the majority of your points on details you can point to in the text. Sometimes, however, you will be able to make a general, or introductory, comment without supporting it, as in the first bullet below:
Esther:
- Our overall impression of Esther: timid and unsure of herself.

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- *'All those people coming down from the top know how to zigzag'*: Compares herself unfavourably (but perhaps, in this case, sensibly) with others.
- *It never occurred to me to say no*: Unquestioning.
- *I'd have been knocked over and stuck full of skis and poles the minute I let go*: Prone to exaggerate her own weakness and vulnerability.
- *I didn't want to make trouble*: Self-effacing, unassertive, shy.
- *The thought that I might kill myself formed in my mind coolly as a tree or a flower*: Faces the possibility of a serious accident in a detached way. Is more realistic than Buddy? Has a self-destructive tendency?
- *I aimed straight down*: Supports the previous suggestion.
- *'I'm going up,' I said. 'I'm going to do it again'*: Determined, easily carried away.

Buddy:

- Overall impression of Buddy: very confident, rather overbearing.
- *His persistence in the face of mulishness*: Determined, but in a different way from Esther: he is in competition with other people, she with herself.
- *persuading the most relatives… smiling and bowing and talking*: Takes satisfaction from the control he exercises over others; does that in a manipulative way.
- *Buddy had never skied before either, but*: Very sure of his own knowledge.
- *Buddy seemed pleased with my progress*: Is he in fact more pleased with his abilities as a teacher than with Esther's performance in itself?
- *'Oh, you need only go half-way'*: Very quick to supply an answer which will allow him to retain control (even if it's an inadequate answer).
- *A queer, satisfied expression came over Buddy's face*: Having been proved wrong (about the safety of what Esther was attempting) he is pleased to be able to speak with certainty about her injuries.

Their relationship:

- He seems to want to help her.
- She seems to trust him, is perhaps slightly in awe of him.
- *For the first half-hour I obediently herring-boned*: She is willing to take instructions from him, and is only driven to question them through fear (*'But Buddy…'*)
- *'You were doing fine…until that man stepped into your path'*: Is he trying to make her feel better or shift the blame from himself?
- *'No, you're not,' he repeated with a final smile*: The fact that she will be partially immobilised will give him even more control over her. The repetition and the smile both emphasise his satisfaction.
- By the end of the episode she is perhaps beginning to question her reliance him: we would expect her to ask herself the reason for his *queer* expression and his *final smile*.

Note that there may well be some overlap between your answers. There's no reason why you shouldn't use the same quotation to make two different points.

- It's also acceptable to leave a question open, as in 'Is he trying to make her feel better or…?', when there's some uncertainty in the passage itself. (The uncertainty may in fact be part of the writer's technique.)

By what means does the writer control the narrative, and give it shape?' *(Action)*

Control:

- The first paragraph gives us a time-context (*All morning*).
- We are then taken right back to the beginning of the episode, and four of the next five paragraphs open with order-markers (*First…Then…Next…For the first half-hour*).
- The very short paragraphs which follow break up the narrative, each one taking us one more step towards what we increasingly feel will be a disaster.
- Plath holds us at the top of the slope, along with her central character, for eight paragraphs, while Esther has her *second thoughts*.

Shape:

- The start and finish points of the episode are clearly delineated (*All morning Buddy had been teaching me*

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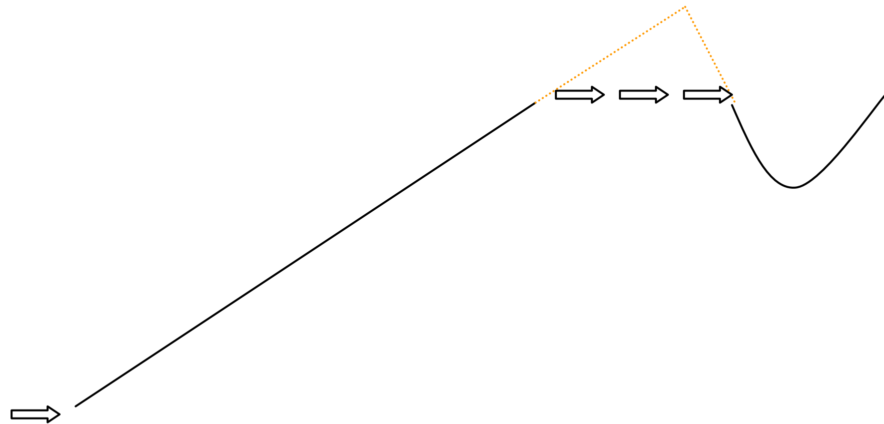
how to ski... 'You'll be stuck in a cast for months'); and there's a degree of contrast between them (mobility/immobility, endeavour/failure, time periods).

- Just as the action is about to reach its height (*I hurtled on to the still, bright point*) Plath jumps to the aftermath of Esther's fall (*My teeth crunched a gravelly mouthful.*) She thus withholds the climax we have been expecting, deliberately flattening the apex of the narrative.
- She then replaces the missing climax with a secondary one, when we learn the extent of Esther's injuries. There is therefore a lift in intensity at the end of the passage after what has been, in its effect, an anti-climax. (You probably shouldn't include diagrams in your exam answer, but it may help you to draw one in your notes, representing the shape of the passage you're writing about. The one for this passage might look something like:



Try adding line numbers (or phrases) from the passage matching the points at which the line changes direction.

'What contribution do the comparisons make to the passage?' *(Style)*

You may have identified as many as fifteen, if you have included both similes and metaphors. Here are the first four, just to indicate what kind of comment would be appropriate in answer to the question.

- *his stethoscope sticking out of a side pocket like part of his anatomy*: Macabre image which sets the pattern for Plath's representation of Buddy as a slightly absurd but also dangerous figure.
- *the rough, bruising snake of a rope that slithered through them*: Mainly suggests the danger Esther faces, but with a secondary suggestion of the surprises in store for her: we would expect a snake to be smooth and slippery.
- *His arms chopped the air like khaki windmills*: Buddy, like a windmill, is out of place on a ski slope; and once more he is seen as slightly ridiculous. The jerkiness of his movements also suggests his agitation.
- *Buddy's arms went on waving feebly as antennae*: Buddy has been reduced to the proportions of a distant insect, trying and failing to communicate with Esther. He is now of no more help to her than the other skiers, *animalcules* (tiny creatures) no bigger than *germs*.

The other comparisons, in case you've missed some (add your own comments now if need be, but look at the context of each example first):

- *tiny moving animalcules like germs, or bent, bright exclamation marks*
- *that churning amphitheatre*
- *The great, grey eye of the sky*
- *fled like a disconsolate mosquito*
- *formed in my mind coolly as a tree or a flower*
- *he seemed of a piece with the split-rail fence behind him – numb, brown and inconsequential*
- *receded on either hand like the dark sides of a tunnel*
- *near and huge, like a distracted planet.*
- *as at the strokes of a dull godmother's wand*
- *as if feeling for a concealed weapon*

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- *saintly and thin and essential as the blade of a knife.*

(It's not clear, in the last example, where the comparison begins. Does Plath see the blade of the knife as saintly and thin as well as essential? Food for discussion…)

Don't forget that the guiding question is a general one You will be expected to examine each comparison separately, but only within the context of some overall comment such as: 'The intensity of Esther's experience is reflected in the sharpness and originality – even oddity – of the similes and metaphors she uses to express it.'

In addition, if you notice links among some of the comparisons, or the images they evoke, note that. The insect similes, for instance, indicate how the other people on the ski slope (including Buddy) and Esther's own *interior voice*, shrink to insignificance as she sets off down the slope. (The other skiers later become *black dots swarming on a plane of whiteness* – not in itself a very strong comparison, but you could point out the connection with the insect images.)

'The episode carries a significance for Esther which goes beyond the events themselves. Explore it.' *(Ideas)*

- *Buddy borrowed a car from his own doctor, who'd had TB himself and was very understanding, and we drove off as the buzzer for walk-hour rasped along the sunless sanatorium corridors*: First hint of significant context for what becomes in Esther's mind more than a simple skiing lesson. Are she and Buddy in the sanatorium to receive treatment for an illness? Is her reckless flight down the mountain a symbolic escape, or even the expression of a death-wish?
- *The great, grey eye of the sky looked back at me, its mist-shrouded sun focusing all the white and silent distances that poured from every point of the compass, hill after pale hill, to stall at my feet.* She feels to be at the centre of things, in a vast *amphitheatre*, where her performance over the next several minutes is going to be closely observed, as if this is a momentous occasion.
- The two paragraphs beginning *line 60* present the rush down the slope as a journey back into Esther's own life, to its earliest point – her birth, and life since then, in reverse. It is a process of purification, as she leaves behind the years of *doubleness and smiles and compromise*. In her imagination she is about to become unborn; but the crash happens first.
- Her wish to go back up the mountain, then, comes perhaps from a desire to complete the process of escape and purification, to become *saintly and thin and essential as the blade of a knife.* (Depending on how full your analysis of this simile was, in your answer to the third guiding question, you may have been able to build on it here.)

1. (b) **The Woman at the Washington Zoo**

What significance lies in the poem's Washington setting? *(Setting)*

- *The saris go by me from the embassies*: Washington is a very international city, and the central character compares herself unfavourably with the exotically-dressed women she meets at the zoo.
- *neither from my chief, /The Deputy Chief Assistant, nor his chief*: She herself is only a cog in the capital's bureaucratic machinery.
- *dome-shadowed, withering among columns, /Wavy beneath fountains*: The distinctive architectural landmarks of Washington loom over and oppress her, causing her to dry up and lose her substance, shape and certainty.

What do we learn from the poem about the life the woman leads, and her feelings towards it? *(Character)*

You can use again some of the material you included in the previous answer, but do so only briefly, and put a slightly different slant on it if possible. Additional points*:*

- *this dull null /Navy I wear to work, and wear from work*: Her life is colourless and repetitive.
- *So /To my bed, so to my grave*: She fears it will stay that way until she dies. Neither her lonely bed nor her equally lonely grave will offer her anything more.
- *no /Complaints, no comment*: The men in her professional life do not even take enough interest in her to

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criticise her; and she seems to have no men in her private life.

- *these beings trapped /As I am trapped but not, themselves, the trap*: She blames herself for creating her own cage by giving away her freedom to habit and low expectation.
- *Aging, but without knowledge of their age, /Kept safe here, knowing not of death*: Her pain is all the greater because, unlike the animals, she knows what is happening to her.
- *The world goes by my cage and never sees me*: She feels unacknowledged, even by the birds and the people going about their daily business around her.
- The depth of her desperation is revealed when she calls out to the vulture, a symbol to her of natural power and sexuality, to free her from her imprisonment.

Give a detailed account of the poem's structure and development. *(Action)*

- The opening stanza (one line only) establishes a dual base from which the woman will judge the quality of her own existence. (The women she sees passing by are colourful in appearance, and come from countries with romantic associations.)
- This duality carries on into the next stanza (two lines only). The women's rich dress (*Cloth from the moon...from another planet*) gives them equal status in the woman's eyes with the most exotic animals in the zoo (*They look back at the leopard like the leopard*).
- The short, broken line that follows introduces a long rambling stanza setting the woman's life in contrast to what has gone before. At first sight the stanza seems out of control, and it never quite becomes a sentence, as if the woman has lost her way among her feelings; but it is held together by her intense focus on her clothing (*This print of mine…this dull null /Navy*), then on the body it covers (*this serviceable /Body*) and finally, with passion, on that body as a cage in which she is trapped (*Oh, bars of my own body, open, open!*)
- She then seems to take breath (at *line 20*) and begins again in a calmer tone, voicing her sense of injustice through the whole of the ensuing stanza. Note, however that the birds she is accusing of ignoring her grow larger in size through the five lines of the stanza (*sparrows…Pigeons…buzzards*), leading into her outcry *Vulture* at the beginning of the next stanza. So there runs through the stanza a sense that her anguish is growing once more.
- The next stanza (lines 25-31) carries the poem towards its climax: the woman pleads with the vulture to transform itself into a sexual force (*The wild brother*) that will in turn (final stanza) transform her (*change me, change me!*) into a powerful wild creature like the '*great lioness'* she has envied in line 30.

Examine the poet's use of repetition. *(Style)*

As we noted in relation to the third question on Passage a), your answers will be strengthened by any overarching comment you feel able to make. Here, for instance, you could include the introductory point that some of the repetition in the poem is not exactly that: phrases are echoed (with slight changes) rather than repeated – as in the opening examples below.

- *Cloth from the moon. Cloth from another planet*: There is some adjustment in the second phrase, as if the woman is searching for a more powerful way to describe the saris – their cloth is from a planet more distant, and perhaps more colourful, than our pale moon.
- *Navy I wear to work, and wear from work*: The repetition here suggest the sameness and circularity of her daily life.
- *so /To my bed, so to my grave*: The underlying suggestion is that since she has no good (sexual) reason to remove her clothes when she arrives home from work, she sleeps in them; and the repetition of the simple *'so to my…so to my'* indicates how small a step it will be from her empty bed to her empty grave.
- *no /Complaints, no comment*: The third (weaker) example of repetition in what is a closely-spaced string of four emphasises the negativity of her situation.
- *My chief…his chief*: Suggests the strictness of the hierarchy of which she is a disregarded part.
- *no sunlight dyes, no hand suffuses*: Her body, always encased in navy, is never exposed to the sun; and no male hand ever touches and *suffuses* it (causes it to redden with passion). The repetition here continues the negatives of the earlier example *no /Complaints, no comment*, and picks up again the idea that her life (like her body) is totally colourless. (Navy, for the purposes of the poem, is seen as barely a colour.)
- *open, open!*: The repetition here and in the final example is the repetition of outcry and abandonment – to an

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undeniable need to escape from a sterile present into an enriched future.

- *change me, change me!*: This climactic repetition forcefully expresses the woman's final and paradoxical plea. She asks that the vulture become human and free her from her humanity so that she can become an animal, perhaps *the great lioness* she has envied earlier. She will then be able herself, like the women in the opening stanza, to *look back at the leopard like the leopard*.

(Second overarching comment): The poem's repetitions are not just superficial devices of language, but act integrally to give weight to its central themes.

So how *can* you assess how well you've done?

Only in broad terms:

- If what we have included above is the sort of thing you've said in your commentary, you've probably done well.
- If you have managed to include half, or more than half, of the actual ideas we have listed, you have probably done very well.

Here are three further exercises you could undertake if you wished:

- There's no question related directly to the Setting of the prose passage. Devise one, and make notes towards an answer.

- The 'missing' item from the SCASI list in the questions on the poem is Ideas. Devise one, and make notes towards an answer.

- Compare the two passages, prose and poem, under the headings Intention (what each writer is trying to do), Methods (how he/she is trying to do it) and Success (how thoroughly they have achieved their aims).

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Section Eight: Advanced Placement Essay Questions

Advanced Placement candidates have rather less time than most (forty minutes) to write their commentaries. AP guiding questions therefore tend to be more focused.

PASSAGE 1: from *Maiden Voyage*, Denton Welch

Write an essay analysing the writer's narrative technique and showing how he conveys the intensity and drama of his character's experience.

PASSAGE 2: *Testing the Reality*, Tony Harrison

Show how in this poem the poet uses the central image of the birds to explore the death of his mother and his feelings about it.

PASSAGE 3: from *The Moonstone*, Wilkie Collins

Analyse the narrative techniques of this passage, showing in particular how details of Rosanna's character, situation and state of mind are revealed to the reader.

PASSAGE 4: *My Father's Garden*, David Wagoner

Explain how the physical settings of the poem and its other details give us an insight into the character of the poet's father and commemorate his struggles and achievements.

PASSAGE 5: from *The Way We Live Now*, Anthony Trollope

Show how the central conflict between Marie and her parents is revealed by how they speak and what they say, and by the writer's own comments on both of those things.

PASSAGE 6: *Walter Llywarch*, R S Thomas

Explore the central character's frame of mind, and discuss the methods by which the poet reveals it to us.

PASSAGE 7: from *A Fine Balance,* Rohinton Mistry

Discuss the writer's story-telling technique, showing how he delicately explores the way in which his characters set about working through their problems.

PASSAGE 8: *The Interrogation,* Edwin Muir

Analyse this poem in full, showing how Edwin Muir conveys with great economy the intensity of the captives' experience.

PASSAGE 9: Source Unknown

Show how the style of this passage reflects its high emotion.

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PASSAGE 10: from *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron

Discuss this extract in detail, showing how Byron conveys the importance of his topic and the strength of his feelings about it.

PASSAGE 11: from *The Open Boat, A Tale of the Sea,* Stephen Crane

Explore the means by which Stephen Crane engages the reader in this account of ordinary men facing imminent death.

PASSAGE 12: *Heritage*, Dorothea Mackellar

Show how Dorothea Mackellar connects what she experienced as a child with what she knows now as a woman.

PASSAGE 13: from *The Bean Trees*, Barbara Kingsolver

Explore the writer's use of a journey as a symbol of search for meaning and direction in one's life.

PASSAGE 14: from *Free Fall*, William Golding

Analyse the methods Golding uses to present the character of Miss Pringle.

PASSAGE 15: from *Adam Bede*, George Eliot

Write an account of the passage in which you show how the writer builds up an expectation in the reader that the consequences of this meeting will be unfortunate.

PASSAGE 16: from *The Getting of Wisdom,* Henry Handel Richardson

Discuss Laura's effectiveness as an observer, narrator and interpreter of the events in this episode.

PASSAGE 17: *My Father*, James Berry

Give a full account of how in this poem James Berry conveys the power of the conflict both between the characters and within the boy himself.

PASSAGE 18: from *The Good Soldier*, Ford Madox Ford

Show how Ford Madox Ford establishes that his narrator is very fully involved in, and affected by, the story he is telling.

PASSAGE 19: from *A Death in the Family*, James Agee

Show how and to what purpose James Agee uses a variety of writing styles in this passage.

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PASSAGE 20: *Entirely,* Louis MacNeice

Analyse this poem, showing how Louis MacNeice makes what is essentially a broad philosophical statement in such a way that it carries meaning and power for us in our everyday lives.

PASSAGE 21: *Hats* from *Except by Nature*, Sandra Alcosser

'Both a celebration and an outcry.' Analyse the passage in detail to show how the writer has made it both of these things.

PASSAGE 22: *The Tourist from Syracuse*, Donald Justice

Write a full account of this poem, showing how the poet works to ensure that we will find reading it a disturbing experience.

PASSAGE 23: *The Voice*, Thomas Hardy

Show how Hardy in this poem conveys a deep sense of loss.

PASSAGE 24: from *The War in Eastern Europe*, John Reed

Explore the means by which the writer of this passage presents war as a casual and futile human activity.

PASSAGE 25: *Adolescence – II*, Rita Dove

Show how the poet captures the delicacy of this moment of balance in a young girl's life.

PASSAGE 26: from *The Feast of Stephen*, Anthony Hecht

Discuss this poetic extract in detail, showing how the poet represents the process of growth from boyhood to young manhood.

PASSAGE 27: from *The Singapore Grip*, J G Farrell

Explore Ehrendorf's response to the events described this passage, showing how he swings between detachment from and involvement with them.

PASSAGE 28: *Gamecock,* James Dickey

Write an essay about this poem in which you explain how it could be seen as a celebration.

PASSAGE 29: from *Oscar and Lucinda*, Peter Carey

Show how Peter Carey explores the relationship between his characters and conveys the sense that they are at a crossroads in it so that this is therefore a very important moment in their lives.

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PASSAGE 30: *The Bystander*, Rosemary Dobson

Show how Rosemary Dobson communicates the idea that the great events of history are not recognised as such until after they have happened.

PASSAGE 31: *Musée Des Beaux Arts*, W H Auden

Discuss this poem in detail, showing how Auden conveys the sense that he speaks with authority both about painting and about human suffering.

PASSAGE 32: *Snake*, D H Lawrence

Analyse D H Lawrence's narrative skill in this poem, showing how by his use of detail and by personalising the event he seeks to convey the significance of this encounter.

PASSAGE 33: *The Killer*, Judith Wright

Show how Judith Wright tells this story as a vivid and real event but then at the end of the poem gives the episode a sudden and unexpected symbolic significance.

PASSAGE 34: from *The Catastrophist*, Ronan Bennet

Discuss Ronan Bennet's skill in telling this story and in particular in conveying the horror of the episode.

PASSAGE 35: *Glory Be to God for Dappled Things*, Gerard Manley Hopkins

Show how the twin concepts of 'lists' and 'patterns' are central to both the idea and the style of this poem.

PASSAGE 36: *The Idea of Perfection*, Kate Grenville

Explore this passage, showing how the writer presents a unique view of the place described, through the eyes of her central character.

PASSAGE 37: *Otherwise*, Cilla McQueen

Show how the poet explores the connection between our lives as individuals and the wider setting in which we live them.

PASSAGE 38: from *John Dollar*, Marianne Wiggins

Explore the writer's narrative technique in this passage, showing how she presents the situation very much 'at ground level' – from the perspective of the characters in it.

PASSAGE 39: *Parachute*, Lenrie Peters

Show how the poet recreates a very exact physical experience in words and then seeks to give it a universal significance.

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PASSAGE 40: from *Bad Blood*, Lorna Sage

Discuss the methods the writer uses to capture and explore an early childhood experience.

PASSAGE 41: *Two Hands*, Jon Stallworthy

Explore the writer's use of balance and contrast, and other techniques, to express the nature and strength of the inner conflict he feels.

PASSAGE 42: from *The Book of Saladin*, Tariq Ali

Analyse the writer's presentation of his central character (the narrator).

PASSAGE 43: *Summer Solstice, Batticaloa, Sri Lanka*, Marilyin Krysl

Explore the means by which the poet presents this episode as the turning of a corner in her thinking and in her feelings.

PASSAGE 44: from *The Nine Tailors*, Dorothy L Sayers

Discuss the dramatic effects aimed for in this passage.

PASSAGE 45: *Child and Insect*, Robert Druce

Explore the means the writer uses to convey the intensity and significance of the child's experience.

PASSAGE 46: from *Back*, Henry Green

Write a detailed commentary on this passage, showing how the writer conveys the sense that this is a very significant episode in Charley's life.

PASSAGE 47: *Night Wind*, Christopher Dewdney

Analyse this poem fully, showing how the poet succeeds in expressing the significance (both in itself and for him) of the night wind.

PASSAGE 48: from *The Last Puritan*, George Santayana

Show how in this extract the writer works to maintain a balance between narrative and analysis. How well has he succeeded?

PASSAGE 49: *Wild Bees*, James K Baxter

Explore this poem fully, showing how the poet uses a vividly realised episode to illustrate what for him are important truths.

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PASSAGE 50: from *Life of Pi*, Yann Martel

Write a detailed commentary on this passage, showing what makes it an unusual and powerful piece of writing.

PASSAGE 51: *Planting a Sequoia*, Dana Gioia

Give a full account of this poem in which you explain how the poet has succeeded in subtly expressing powerful feelings of personal grief while at the same time writing something which has meaning for us all.

PASSAGE 52: from *Postcards*, E Annie Proulx

Analyse the writer's narrative techniques in this passage, explaining what effects she is aiming for and assessing how successful she has been.

PASSAGE 53: *Brainstorm*, Howard Nemerov

Write a full account of this poem, paying careful attention to the way the poet explores the nature and origins of some of Mankind's insecurities.

PASSAGE 54: from *The Loom*, R L Sasaki

Write a full analysis of this passage, showing how the details of the mother's weaving relate to the whole family situation of which she is part.

PASSAGE 55: *The Wasps' Nest*, James L Rosenberg

Explore this poem, showing why it is a good example of poetry's power to reveal the extraordinary significance of ordinary things and events.

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Section Nine: Extremely Short Passages for Extremely Quick Practice

It won't be easy to find the blocks of time needed to write full-length practice commentaries, when you're already trying to fit lots of things into your study day (or into what is supposed to be your weekend). So here are some short quotations from a variety of sources (not all of them literary). Whenever you have ten minutes or so to spare, choose one and make notes on it. You'll have done well if you find one interesting thing to say about each – they *are* short – but some will allow you to say more, and we've added notes and questions on a later page in case you're wholly mystified by any of them.

Can the ***SCASI*** system still help you? Perhaps – but you will need to substitute 'Situation' for 'Action'). Here's a set of quick ***SCASI***-type questions for you to apply to each quotation (there'll often be no certain answer to give, however, and you'll find yourself mainly writing about style – which is probably what you feel you need most practice in doing anyway):

- *S*: Is there a place?
- *C*: Who's involved?
- *A*: What's the situation? (i.e. 'What if anything is going on?')
- *S*: What's interesting about the words and the way they're arranged?
- *I*: Is there an idea (either stated or underlying) or topic?

Alternatively, just enjoy the quotations for their own sake.

A

The lights burn low in the barber-shop
And the shades are drawn with care
To hide the haughty barbers
Cutting each other's hair.
(*The Tales the Barbers Tell*, Morris Bishop)

B

Proximity was their support; like walls after an earthquake they could fall no further for they had fallen against each other. (*Friends and Relations*, Elizabeth Bowen)

C

Father declared he was going to buy a new plot in the cemetery, a plot all for himself. 'And I'll buy one on a corner,' he added triumphantly, 'where I can get out.' Mother looked at him, startled but admiring, and whispered to me, 'I almost believe he could do it. (*Life with Father*, Clarence Day)

D

Pale Ebenezer thought it wrong to fight
But Roaring Bill (who killed him) thought it right.
(*Epigrams, The Pacifist*, Hilaire Belloc)

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E

I love to feel events overlapping each other, crawling over one another like wet crabs in a basket. (*Balthazar*, Laurence Durrell)

F

There was so much sculpture that I should certainly have missed the indecencies if Major Pomby had not been considerate enough to mention them. (*Hindoo Holiday*, J R Ackerley)

G

I suppose I shall subscribe to hospitals. That's how people seem to give to the poor. I suppose the poor are always sick. They would be, if you think. (*A Family and a Fortune*, Ivy Compton-Burnett)

H

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious (*Mary Poppins,* R M and R R Sherman)

I

It's going to give me a little *vista* which will be rather exciting, I think! I shall see more sky – which is always desirable. I hope I shall see the horizon – which would be *very* jolly!…Then, I shall have a sense of space – of distance…A little glimpse into the beyond, as it were. (*Showing the Garden*, Ruth Draper)

J

The most formidable headmaster I ever knew was a headmistress…She had X-ray pince-nez and that undivided bust popularised by Queen Mary. I think she was God in drag. (Nancy Banks-Smith in *The Guardian* newspaper)

K

When lovely woman stoops to folly
And finds too late that men betray
What charm can soothe her melancholy?
What art can wash her tears away?
(*Woman*, Oliver Goldsmith, 1728-1774)

L

To be buried in lava and not turn a hair, it is then a man shows what stuff he is made of. To know he can do better next time, unrecognizably better, and that there is no next time, and that it is a blessing there is not, there is a thought to be going on with. (*Malone Dies*, Samuel Beckett)

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M

Some have too much, yet still do crave;
  I little have, and seek no more.
They are but poor, though much they have,
  And I am rich with little store:
They poor, I rich; they beg, I give;
They lack, I leave; they pine, I live.
(*My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is*, Sir Edward Dyer, 1550?-1607)

N

I've danced with a man, who's danced with a girl, who's danced with the Prince of Wales. (*Picnic*, Herbert Farjeon)

O

Who ever heard of a clockwork orange?…The attempt to impose upon man, a creature of growth and capable of sweetness, to ooze juicily at the last round the bearded lips of God, to attempt to impose, I say, laws and conditions appropriate to a mechanical creation, against this I raise my sword-pen. (*The Clockwork Orange*, Anthony Burgess)

P

Between the curtains the autumnal sunlight
With lean and yellow fingers points me out;
The clock moans: Why? Why? Why?
(*Living*, Harold Munro)

Q

The oily water on the river mirrored the red sky, sun sunk on top
  of final Frisco peaks, no fish in that stream, no hermit in those
  mounts, just ourselves rheumy-eyed and hung-over like old
  bums on the river-bank, tired and wily.
(*Sunflower Sutra*, Allen Ginsberg)

R

Sitting as huge as Asia, seismic with laughter,
Gin and chicken helpless in her Irish hand
(*Sonnet to My Mother*, George Barker)

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Notes for Comparison

A

The lights burn low in the barber-shop
And the shades are drawn with care
To hide the haughty barbers
Cutting each other's hair.
(*The Tales the Barbers Tell*, Morris Bishop)

S: A barber shop! Time of day? Details of setting (first two lines) contributing to *mood*.
C: What single word in the verse has the most impact (i.e. throws the most light on the situation)? Haughty? Explain why.
A: Something sneaky being done
S: Alliteration of *'lights…low'* and *'hide...haughty…hair'*; deliberate rhythm suggesting the barbers' careful planning
I: The power of professional pride, and the implication that even barbers are human: it's the fact that the poet feels the need to make that point, to give away the barbers' terrible secret, which is most significant.

B

Proximity was their support; like walls after an earthquake they could fall no further for they had fallen against each other. (*Friends and Relations*, Elizabeth Bowen)

S: A marriage?
C: Man and wife?
A: The impact of a personal disaster?
S: Brief statement in abstract terms which is then 'translated' and given concrete form by a simile; alliteration of *'fall…further'* emphasising the finality of their collapse; assonance of *'further…other'* emphasising the finality of their coming together
I: The importance of closeness between people; the idea that there is a level below which we will not fall (but perhaps only if we have support)

C

Father declared he was going to buy a new plot in the cemetery, a plot all for himself. 'And I'll buy one on a corner,' he added triumphantly, 'where I can get out."' Mother looked at him, startled but admiring, and whispered to me, 'I almost believe he could do it.' (*Life with Father*, Clarence Day)

You've probably asked yourself, and answered, these questions:

- What's the significance of *'declared'*?
- Why *'all for himself'*?
- What is Father triumphant about?
- Why is Mother startled?
- Why does she whisper?

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D

Pale Ebenezer thought it wrong to fight
But Roaring Bill (who killed him) thought it right.
(*Epigrams, The Pacifist*, Hilaire Belloc)

S: Philosophical: two opposing beliefs
C: Two different men holding to different ideas; the contrast between their names and between *'Pale'* and *'Roaring'* (is *'Roaring'* part of Bill's name, in fact? What difference does that make? Does it relate him to the community and its perception of him?)
A: A simple death, or at least a death simply noted
S: The way the single most important fact is included in parenthesis, almost as an aside; conciseness, pithiness – the marks of an epigram.
I: Even when beliefs are held in balance, there can be outcomes, and they may be permanent; some beliefs are dangerous

E

I love to feel events overlapping each other, crawling over one another like wet crabs in a basket. (*Balthazar*, Laurence Durrell)

Similar in structure and effect to the *Friends and Relations* extract (B), except that the topic *('events')* is given a physical presence in the word *'overlapping'*, which prepares us for the simile. What does the wetness of the crabs suggest? What other qualities of life's events are pointed up by the simile?

F

There was so much sculpture that I should certainly have missed the indecencies if Major Pomby had not been considerate enough to mention them. (*Hindoo Holiday*, J R Ackerley)

S: Historical and exotic Eastern location in colonial times
C: Someone 'in the know' about the indecent statues (Major P) and a naïve visitor
A: Major P keen that the visitor shouldn't miss what for him are the significant bits of sculpture
S: Ambiguity of *'considerate'* – is the visitor pleased to have had the rude bits pointed out to him (her?); weakness of *'mention'*, as if Major P has been cautiously off-hand
I: The subtleties in play when two people who don't know each other find themselves on morally questionable ground

G

I suppose I shall subscribe to hospitals. That's how people seem to give to the poor. I suppose the poor are always sick. They would be, if you think. (*A Family and a Fortune*, Ivy Compton-Burnett)

S: Middle-class family
C: Man or woman who has just acquired money (it's alright to take clues from the name of the book…)
A: Discussion about what to do with the money
S: Vagueness, as if this is all a new experience *('I suppose…seem…suppose…would be')* and lack of urgency suggested by the same phrases; differentiation between *'people'* and *'the poor'*, as if they're two separate species; short sentences, indicating the slowness and jerkiness of this thinking process.
I: The ignorance in some parts of the community of the lives of people in other parts. The condescending stupidity of the speaker (Character again), who does not realise the significance of his or her phrase *'if you think'*. If you think about what? The conditions the poor live in? Maybe the money should be used to do something about *that*.

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H

Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious (*Mary Poppins*, R M and R R Sherman)

Forget what you may remember of the song (if you can). Does the word in itself convey a feeling of happiness? If so, how? (Do the positive associations of *'super'* carry us all the way through to the end? Does *'docious'* remind us of 'delicious'? Why not 'ferocious'? Maybe the syllable *'al'* helps. What about the jaunty rhythm?)

Perhaps you think the sound of it is really just atrocious.

Try making up some long nonsense words of your own, designing them for particular effect. You probably haven't been asked to do by a teacher that since you were much younger…

I

It's going to give me a little vista which will be rather exciting, I think! I shall see more sky – which is always desirable. I hope I shall see the horizon – which would be very jolly!…Then, I shall have sense of space – of distance…A little glimpse into the beyond, as it were. (*Showing the Garden*, Ruth Draper)

S: Near or on a plot of land next to a house
C: A woman (or man) with plans
A: Outline of future action
S: The inadequacy of the speaker's vocabulary to express this reaching out towards the world the passage describes – she borrows a foreign word (*'vista'*, italicised to show that she is not wholly comfortable with it) and qualifies it with the paradoxical *'little'* which effectively negates it. *'Jolly'* is a rather poor word, is it not, to describe a view of the horizon? There are other qualifiers – words which limit the meaning of the words to which they are attached (*'rather'* and *'little'* again) and which indicate her uncertainty, as do *'I think!'* ,*'I hope'* and *'as it were'*. There are also emphatic, terms, however, which counteract this effect and convey a sense of naïve enthusiasm *('I shall…always…very…I shall')*. So as in the extract from *A Family and a Fortune* above we have a character thinking her way into a new experience and using words tentatively; but the mood here is much more positive.
I: How the environment we create for ourselves (in so far as we can do so) can symbolise our outlook on life, and can change as our outlook changes. Overall we are given a glimpse of someone clearing a way through to life outside their immediate surroundings, without being wholly certain as to what they will find there.

J

The most formidable headmaster I ever knew was a headmistress…She had X-ray pince-nez and that undivided bust popularised by Queen Mary. I think she was God in drag. (Nancy Banks-Smith in *The Guardian* newspaper)

S: A school, sometime well in the writer's past
C: Grown-up woman and a head teacher from her childhood
A: Reminiscence about an early experience
S: Paradox and ambiguity (headmaster/headmistress; technologically advance X-ray/old-fashioned pince-nez, with the contrast emphasised in the rhyme; masculinity/femininity in the *'undivided'* bust and the outrageous and irreverend final image); the force of ***'that** undivided bust'*, including the reader in an acknowledgement of what almost amounts to a national icon from the past
I: The perceptiveness of the young, who see the inappropriateness of some of the labels we give ourselves

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K

When lovely woman stoops to folly
And finds too late that men betray
What charm can soothe her melancholy?
What art can wash her tears away?

(*Woman*, Oliver Goldsmith, 1728-1774)

This extract begins with two generalisations/assumptions:

- All women…….(are lovely – in a moral or spiritual sense, we guess)
- All men……….(are disloyal)

Does the fact that the generalisations may not always hold true weaken the poem since we may feel that it is not founded in the reality we know?

'Stoops' describes a physical movement. What does the word imply in this context?

'Folly' suggests what about women, in addition to their 'loveliness'?

The third and fourth lines are rhetorical questions of the most extreme kind, since not only is no answer expected, there is no answer, according to the poet, that can be given. Does this extreme position weaken the poem further?

What's the link between *'charm'* and *'art'*? (Taken together, they suggest *supernatural* charm and *magic* art.) How does that help the poet make his point? (Since woman's loveliness and man's disloyalty are universals of nature, there is no power, even supernatural power, sufficient to interfere with the consequences of woman's folly – so the poet's argument goes.)

Is the verse, overall, sympathetic to women?

L

To be buried in lava and not turn a hair, it is then a man shows what stuff he is made of. To know he can do better next time, unrecognizably better, and that there is no next time, and that it is a blessing there is not, there is a thought to be going on with. (*Malone Dies*, Samuel Beckett)

S: Anywhere
C: A man who is pondering the paradoxes of life
A: None, appropriately
S: The way the sentences unfold in a straight line, with each new segment offering a contrasting consideration: blunt and frightening image of the opening phrase > easy colloquialism of *'not turn a hair…stuff he is made of'* > *'next time'* (magnified by *'unrecognizably'*) > *'no next time'* > *'blessing there is not'* > the open-ended *'to be going on with'*, as if there is more unfolding to do as the writer does more thinking. The two *'ands'* are the hinges of the second sentence. The grammatical awkwardness of the whole suggests the thinker's struggle.
I: The search for an understanding of life goes on…

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M

Some have too much, yet still do crave;
  I little have, and seek no more.
They are but poor, though much they have,
  And I am rich with little store:
They poor, I rich; they beg, I give;
They lack, I leave; they pine, I live.
(*My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is* Sir Edward Dyer, 1550?-1607)

You've probably noted the simplicity of the language (mainly monosyllables), appropriate to the simplicity of the poet's life as he describes it. In spite of its simplicity, however, it creates a complex music. There are three groups of words linked by their sound. List them (here's the first one in each group, with the number of other words you should be able to add):

- *'much'* (a further three):
- *'crave'* (a further five):
- *'more'* (a further three):

The music intensifies towards the end of the verse, as a result of:

- The accumulation of echoes
- The compression of the language *('They poor, I rich')*

N

I've danced with a man, who's danced with a girl, who's danced with the Prince of Wales. (*Picnic*, Herbert Farjeon).

The repetitive structure of each of the phrases, each one representing a step backwards from the topic of the sentence, as if we're pulling open a telescope and looking at the Prince of Wales through the wrong end. Note the rhythm, which matches this suggestion of mechanical extension (compare the unfolding of the passage from *Malone Dies*). This is satirical writing. What is being satirised?

O

Who ever heard of a clockwork orange?…The attempt to impose upon man, a creature of growth and capable of sweetness, to ooze juicily at the last round the bearded lips of God, to attempt to impose, I say, laws and conditions appropriate to a mechanical creation, against this I raise my sword-pen. (*The Clockwork Orange*, Anthony Burgess)

S: A man alone at his desk penning a protest?
C: A man of strong feelings, certainly
A: Threat of violence, at least verbal
S: Oratorical devices (i.e. tricks of language appropriate to public speaking): opening rhetorical question; pause indicated by *'…'*; the simple and powerful orange symbol given an extra dimension by the onomatopoeia of *'ooze juicily'*; the addition of weightiness to the prose by the slight archaism *'at the last'* (as opposed to just 'at last' – is it an abbreviation of 'at the last trumpet', i.e. 'on the Day of Judgement'?); the personalising of the image of God; repetition as the speaker returns *('to attempt to impose, I say')* to the central thrust of his sentence; the final symbol (with its proverbial reference) and symbolic gesture.
I: We must not treat men as if they were machines.

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P

Between the curtains the autumnal sunlight
With lean and yellow fingers points me out;
The clock moans: Why? Why? Why?
(*Living*, Harold Munro)

S: A bedroom?
C: Someone who wants to say in bed?
A: The struggle to start the day
S: Personification x 2: there are other characters in this drama
I: One of life's problems

Other questions you may have asked:

- Why are the curtains drawn?
- Why is there a gap between them?
- Why has the poet chosen *'autumnal'* sunlight?
- Why, then, *'lean and yellow'* fingers?
- Why *'points me out'* (remember 'drama' above)
- Clocks don't moan, they tick. So?

Q

The oily water on the river mirrored the red sky, sun sunk on top
of final Frisco peaks, no fish in that stream, no hermit in those
mounts, just ourselves rheumy-eyed and hung-over like old
bums on the river-bank, tired and wily.
(*Sunflower Sutra,* Allen Ginsberg)

S: Setting as a reflection of mood: what you notice is what you feel (oily water, red sky, things missing)
C: Two (?) disillusioned men. What has tired them? Why are they still, however, *'wily'*?
A: The night after the night before
S: Diction - Why *'on top of'* rather than 'behind'? Meaning and effect of *'final'*? The negatives *('no…no… just')*. Why call the river a *'stream'*? Why call mountains *'mounts'*?
I: Life's sordidness? It's the missing things that are significant – the fish from the river and the hermit (symbol of?) from the mountains

R

Under the window where I often found her
Sitting as huge as Asia, seismic with laughter,
Gin and chicken helpless in her Irish hand
(*Sonnet to My Mother,* George Barker)

S: What does the fact that his mother is sitting under the window suggest about her?
C: Is this a tribute? To which of her qualities? The significance of *'helpless'*?
A: The relevance of *'often'*
S: One simile and one metaphor (find them and remind yourself of the difference); how one leads into the other
I: How the idiosyncracies of someone we love can make us love them more.

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Appendix 1: An Extract Back in Context

The Feast of Stephen

I

The coltish horseplay of the locker room,
Moist with the steam of the tiled shower stalls,
With shameless blends of civet, musk and sweat,
Loud with the cap-gun snapping of wet towels
5 Under the steel-ribbed cages of bare bulbs,
In some such setting of thick basement pipes
And janitorial realities
Boys for the first time frankly eye each other,
Inspect each others' bodies at close range,
10 And what they see is not so much another
As a strange, possible version of themselves,
And all the sparring dance, adrenal life,
Tense, jubilant nimbleness, is but a vague,
Busy, unfocused ballet of self-love.

II

15 If the heart has its reasons, perhaps the body
Has its own lumbering sort of carnal spirit,
Felt in the tingling bruises of collision,
And known to captains as esprit de corps.
What is this brisk fraternity of timing,
20 Pivot and lobbing arc, or indirection,
Mens sana in men's sauna, in the flush
Of health and toilets, private and corporal glee,
These fleet caroms, plies and genuflections
Before the salmon-leap, the leaping fountain
25 All sheathed in glistening light, flexed and alert?
From the vast echo-chamber of the gym,
Among the scumbled shouts and shrill of whistles,
The bounced basketball sound of a leather whip.

III

Think of those barren places where men gather
30 To act in the terrible name of rectitude,
Of acned shame, punk's pride, muscle or turf,
The bully's thin superiority.
Think of the Sturm-Abteilungs Kommandant
Who loves Beethoven and collects Degas,
35 Or the blond boys in jeans whose narrowed eyes
Are focussed by some hard and smothered lust,

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Who lounge in a studied mimicry of ease,
Flick their live butts into the standing weeds,
And comb their hair in the mirror of cracked windows
40 Of an abandoned warehouse where they keep
In darkened readiness for their occasion
The rope, the chains, handcuffs and gasoline.

IV

Out in the rippled heat of a neighbor's field,
In the kilowatts of noon, they've got one cornered.
45 The bugs are jumping, and the burly youths
Strip to the waist for the hot work ahead.
They go to arm themselves at the dry-stone wall,
Having flung down their wet and salty garments
At the feet of a young man whose name is Saul.
50 He watches sharply these superbly tanned
Figures with a swimmer's chest and shoulders,
A miler's thighs, with their self-conscious grace,
And in between their sleek, converging bodies,
Brilliantly oiled and burnished by the sun,
55 He catches a brief glance of bloodied hair
And hears an unintelligible prayer.

Anthony Hecht

If you enjoyed writing about the opening verse of this poem (given on page 93) you will also be interested to see where it 'goes' in the remaining three verses.

It may help you to know that St Stephen was an early Christian martyr, stoned to death, and that Sturm-Abteilungs were 'brownshirts' (fascists under the command of Hitler). Think about the connection between the setting of the first two verses (which is comparatively modern) and those established in the final two (historically more distant). Now you can perhaps see why when the poem is put together again its parts mean much more.

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Final Words

We hope you've found this book useful. It will have worked if it makes you feel more confident as you approach the examination. It will have worked even better if you take away from it a clearer understanding of how good writing is put together. It will have worked best of all if you remember some of the writers you've been exposed to, seek out more of what they've written, and read what you've found not in order to get ready for an exam but just because you want to.

Good luck with the exam, however…

Email us at wordsmith@clix.pt if you need further help or advice – or if you want to make suggestions about either LitWorks.com or *Writing Unseen Commentaries*. We'd be pleased to hear from you.

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