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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 7 Comment and Appreciation

October/November 2010

2 hours

Additional Materials: Answer Booklet/Paper

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

If you have been given an Answer Booklet, follow the instructions on the front cover of the Booklet.

Write your Centre number, candidate number and name on all the work you hand in.

Write in dark blue or black pen.

Do not use staples, paper clips, highlighters, glue or correction fluid.

Answer **two** questions.

You are reminded of the need for good English and clear presentation in your answers.

At the end of the examination, fasten all your work securely together.

All questions in this paper carry equal marks.

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This document consists of **6** printed pages and **2** blank pages.



- 1 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the novel *The Grass is Singing* (1950) by Doris Lessing. Mary and her husband Dick live in a remote rural part of Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe; Dick has lived in this region of the country for some years. Mary joined him only recently, having previously lived in a city.

As time passed, the heat became an obsession. She could not bear the sapping, undermining waves that beat down from the iron roof. Even the usually active dogs used to lie all day on the verandah, moving from place to place as the bricks grew warm under them, their tongues lolling wetly, so that the floor was covered by small pools. Mary could hear them panting softly, or whining with exasperation because of the flies. And when they came to put their heads on her knee, pleading for sympathy because of the heat, she would shoo them off crossly: the enormous, rank-smelling animals were an irritation to her, getting under her feet as she moved about the little house, leaving hairs on the cushions, snuffling noisily for fleas when she was trying to rest. She would lock them out of the house, and in the middle of the morning she would tell the boy to carry a petrol tin full of lukewarm water into the bedroom, and, having made sure he was out of the house, she stripped herself and stood in a basin on the brick floor, pouring it over her. The scattering drops fell on the porous brick, which hissed with dryness. 5 10

'When is it going to rain?' she asked Dick. 15

'Oh, not for another month yet,' he answered easily, but looking surprised at her question. Surely she knew when the rains were likely to fall? She had been in the country longer than he had. But it seemed to her that in the town there had been no seasons, really, not as there were here. She had been out of the rhythm of cold and heat and rain. It had been hot, it had rained, the cold weather had come – yes, certainly; but it was something extraneous to her, something happening independent of her. Here body and mind were subservient to the slow movement of the seasons; she had never in her life watched an implacable sky for signs of rain, as she did now, standing on the verandah, and screwing up her eyes at the great massed white clouds, like blocks of glittering crystal quartz sailing through the blue. 20 25

'The water is going very quickly,' said Dick, one day, frowning.

It was fetched twice a week from the bottom of the hill where the well was. Mary would hear shouting and yelling, as if someone were in agonized pain, and going out to the front of the house, she watched the water-cart come through the trees, drawn by two slow-moving beautiful oxen, straining with their hindquarters up the slope. The cart was two petrol drums lashed to a frame, and in front the disselboom¹ rested on yokes on the necks of the big powerful beasts. She watched the thick muscles surging under the hide, and saw how branches of trees had been laid over the drums to keep the water cool. Sometimes it splashed up and made a fine sparkling spray falling through the sunshine, and the oxen tossed their heads and blew out their nostrils, smelling the water. And all the time the native driver yelled and howled, dancing beside his beasts and lashing with his long whip that coiled and hissed in the air, but never touched them. 30 35

'What are you using it for?' asked Dick. She told him. His face darkened, and he looked at her in incredulous horror, as if she had committed a crime. 40

'What, wasting it like that?'

'I am not wasting it,' she said coldly. 'I am so hot I can't stand it. I want to cool myself.'

Dick swallowed, trying to keep calm. 'Listen to me,' he said angrily, in a voice he had never before used to her. 'Listen to me! Every time I order the watercart to fetch water for the house, it means a driver, and two waggon boys, and two oxen off other work for a whole morning. It costs money to fetch water. And then you go and throw it away! Why don't you fill the bath with water and get into it, instead of wasting it and throwing it away each time?' 45

She was furious. This seemed the last straw. Here was she, living in a hut, uncomplainingly, suffering these hardships; and then she could not use a couple of gallons of water! She opened her mouth to shout at him, but before she could, he had become suddenly contrite because of the way he had spoken to her; and there was another of those little scenes which comforted and soothed her: he apologizing, abasing himself, and she forgiving him.

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But when he had gone, she went into the bathroom, and stared down at the bath, still hating him for what he had said. The bathroom had been built on after the house was finished. It was a lean-to with mud walls (mud plastered over bush poles) and a tin roof. Where the rain had run through the joins in the roof, the whitewash was discoloured and the mud cracked. The bath itself was of zinc, a shallow zinc shape set into a dried mud base. The metal had been dazzling once; she could see how it had been because the scratches on the dull surface glittered brightly. Over many years a patina of grease and dirt had formed, and now, when it was scrubbed, it wore thin in patches only. It was filthy, filthy! Mary stared down at it, stiff with distaste. When she bathed, which was only twice a week because of the trouble and cost of fetching water, she sat gingerly at the extreme end of the bath, trying to touch it as little as possible, and getting out as soon as she could. Here a bath was like medicine, which had to be taken, not a luxury to be enjoyed.

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The arrangements for the bath were unbelievable, she cried, tearing herself to pieces with her own anger. On bath nights two petrol tins of water were heated on the stove, and carried into the bedroom and set down on the floor. They were covered over with thick farm sacks to keep the water hot, and the sacks were hot and steamy and sent up a musty smell. Across the tops of the tins pieces of bushwood had been wedged, to carry them by, and the wood was greasy with much handling. She just would not put up with it, she said at last, turning to leave the bathroom in angry distaste. She called the boy and told him to scrub the bath, to scrub it until it was clean. He thought she meant the usual scrubbing, and in five minutes had finished. She went to examine it: it was just the same. Stroking her fingers over the zinc, she could feel the crust of dirt. She called him back and told him to clean it properly, to go on scrubbing till it shone, every inch of it.

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¹*disselboom*: main beam of cart

- 3 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the short story *Wayside House* by Charlotte Mew, published in 1901, exploring in particular how the writer describes characters and their relationship with each other.

Captain Henley is a young soldier, about to leave for war; before he goes he has just asked Lady Hopedene to marry him.

'And so you send me away unanswered?' said the young man, rising reluctantly, taking his gloves from the table and glancing meanwhile at the obdurate little lady on the sofa, who witnessed his distress with that quizzical kindness, which distracted him, in her clear, rather humorous blue eyes.

'I will give you an answer if you wish it.'

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'I would rather hope, – you do give me a ray of hope?'

'Just a ray,' she admitted, laughing, with the same disturbing air of indulgence. 'But don't magnify it – one has a habit, I know, of magnifying "rays" – and I don't want you to come back – if you do come back – with a whole blazing sun.'

'You are very frank, and a little cruel.'

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'I am afraid I mean to be – both. It is so much better for you.' She was twisting the rings round her small fingers while she spoke, as if the interview were becoming slightly wearisome.

'You treat me like a boy,' he broke out, with youthful bitterness.

'Ah! the cruellest treatment one can give to boys,' she answered, looking up at him with her hovering brilliant, vexatious smile. But meeting his clouded glance she paused, and abandoned temporarily the lighter line of argument.

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'Forgive me, Captain Henley –'

He scanned the treacherous face to see if the appellation so sedately uttered were not designedly malicious, but her next words reassured him.

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'I will be more serious. See, – frankly, cruelly perhaps, – I do not know my heart.' She did not falter over the studied phrase. 'You are not the first,' observing his troubled features ruefully, as she dealt the innocent blow. 'You may not be – the last.'

It left her lips a little labouredly, despite its apparent levity, but he was too much absorbed to notice fine shades of accent, and she went on, – 'I am not so charming as you think me, but that's a foregone conclusion. Shall I say, not so charming as I seem? At eighteen I made – I will not suggest I was led into – a loveless marriage. It was a failure, of course. I do not want to make another. I shrink from helping, shall we say, you? to a similar mistake. You must pardon me if I admit I do look upon you as – young; for years, you know, are deceptive things, – even with women.'

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His boyish face expressed annoyance.

'Ah! I meant you to smile, and you are frowning. I should not be outraged if any one offered me the indignity you resent so foolishly; but then I am not – fortunately or unfortunately – so young as you. Come, be reasonable,' she urged, with a singular sweetness of persuasion: 'if I do not know my mind, is it so strange in me to suppose that yours may change? Again forgive me if I anticipate you. I have been glib enough with "nevers" and "for evers" in my day; but I shun them. I listen to them with more caution now. "Never", "for ever",' she repeated, and mused for a moment over the words. 'I sometimes imagine one is only safe in speaking them on the threshold of another life than this. It is a fancy of mine we should not use them now. Please humour it.'

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'I am not so diffident, doubtful, nor possibly so cynical,' he began; but she interposed with the wave of a little glittering hand.

'Precisely; therefore I warn you. Why,' she proceeded, with an unmistakable note of tenderness, which he did not catch, 'you are even younger than I thought. I am glad – heartily – that you are going to the front. Cut up as many rascals as you can, – a little fighting will bring you a lot of wisdom, and – oh yes! I know what a brute I am! – you want it badly. Come back in a year with your M.C. or without it, or how

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with an ounce or two of experience in your pocket, and, if you do come back to me – he winced at the repetition of the ‘if’ and the doubt implied by it – ‘I promise to treat you like a man.’

‘And give me my answer?’

‘Yes.’ She pronounced it with sudden softness.

‘Meanwhile?’

‘Meanwhile, husband the “ray” if you like, but don’t extend it; and remember it pledges us both to nothing. You’ – she rapidly substituted ‘we – are free.’

‘You are free of course, Lady Hopedene,’ he agreed, with becoming solemnity. ‘I shall always consider myself bound. I – I – should like you to know that I do not consider myself free.’

‘As it please you,’ she yielded, with a flash of amusement shot at the melancholy countenance.

‘It will be my only consolation,’ he returned, with ponderous sadness.

‘So be it, then: I mustn’t rob you of that. But remember, if the occasion calls, that I acquit you absolutely from reappearance at this bar.’

A slight break in her voice reminded her that the time had come for his dismissal, and she proceeded promptly: ‘Now we must say Good-bye.’

‘Only *au revoir*.’

‘You are very literal; I like the old phrase best.’ She rose and took his hand, holding it longer than usual; and he looked down at her perturbedly. ‘Am I to have only a frown to keep?’

‘Keep that,’ he cried, suddenly stooping to kiss the frail white fingers in his palm.

Then he turned away quickly, went out and closed the door, missing, behind it, that curious fragrance of her presence, fresh and keen like morning air in meadows, subtler and sweeter than the faint perfume that hung about her person.

She stood motionless, tasting his departure: the smile which she had given him leave to take had faded from her eyes, and they were staring blankly at the door.

Copyright Acknowledgements:

Question 1 © Doris Lessing; *The Grass is Singing*; Flamingo; 1950

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