

1 Write a critical commentary on the following poem by William Carlos Williams (1883–1963).

The Last Words of My English Grandmother

There were some dirty plates
and a glass of milk
beside her on a small table
near the rank, disheveled bed –

Wrinkled and nearly blind
she lay and snored
rousing with anger in her tones
to cry for food,

5

Gimme something to eat –
They're starving me –
I'm all right – I won't go
to the hospital. No, no, no

10

Give me something to eat!
Let me take you
to the hospital, I said
and after you are well

15

you can do as you please.
She smiled, Yes
you do what you please first
then I can do what I please –

20

Oh, oh, oh! she cried
as the ambulance men lifted
her to the stretcher –
Is this what you call

making me comfortable?
By now her mind was clear –
Oh you think you're smart
you young people,

25

she said, but I'll tell you
you don't know anything.
Then we started.
On the way

30

we passed a long row
of elms. She looked at them
awhile out of
the ambulance window and said,

35

What are all those
fuzzy looking things out there?
Trees? Well, I'm tired
of them and rolled her head away.

40

Turn to page 4 for Question 2

2 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the play *Unman, Wittering and Zigo* by Giles Cooper (1918–1966).

John is a new teacher in the school where the play takes place; all the other characters in the extract are boys. As the extract opens, John is calling the class register at the start of morning lessons.

	[<i>The boys are seated at their desks. JOHN starts to call the roll.</i>]	
John:	Aggeridge, Ankerton, Borby, Bungabine ... Cloistermouth, Cuthbun, Hogg, Lipstrob, Mudd, Muffet, Munn Ma., Orris, Root ...	
Cuthbun:	Please, sir,	
John:	Yes ... er ...	5
Omnes ¹ :	Cuthbun, sir.	
John:	Yes, Cuthbun?	
Cuthbun:	Mr Pelham used to make a joke there sir; he used to call them out together, Orris root you know sir.	
Cloistermouth:	They use it for scenting soap.	10
Orris:	And we used to answer together, Root and me, sir,	
Cuthbun:	Root and I.	
Bungabine:	And we all laughed ... haw haw haw!	
John:	All right ... er ...	
Omnes:	Bungabine, sir.	15
John:	Bungabine. That will do. Terhew, Trindle, Unman, Wittering and Zigo.	
Omnes:	Absent!	
John:	Yes, so I understand.	
Cloistermouth:	He was ill, sir.	20
Unman:	With an unknown disease, sir.	
Lipstrob:	And his father took him to Jamaica, sir.	
Cuthbun:	To recover, sir.	
Orris:	And when he has, he'll come back, sir.	
Aggeridge:	That's why his name's still on the list, sir.	25
John:	Yes, thank you.	
Cuthbun:	Jamaica's in the Caribbean, sir.	
John:	Yes, Cuthbun, I know that.	
Terhew:	Have you ever been there, sir?	
John:	No.	30
Aggeridge:	Mr Pelham went there once.	
Terhew:	Twice.	
Aggeridge:	Once, the other time was Trinidad.	
Cuthbun:	He went to Jamaica the time he went to Trinidad as well.	
John:	Quiet! [<i>There is complete silence.</i>] This is all very interesting, but not to the point. [<i>WITTERING screams with pain.</i>] Who was that? [<i>WITTERING moans.</i>] You? What's your name?	35
Wittering:	Wittering, sir.	

- Cloistermouth:* Wet Wittering, sir.
- John:* Quiet. Come out here, Wittering. 40
[WITTERING comes out and stands in front of JOHN's desk.]
- Cloistermouth:* Mr Pelham called him Wet Wittering, sir.
- John:* Quiet! Now, Wittering, why did you make that noise?
- Wittering:* Sir, I was jabbed, sir.
- John:* Jabbed? 45
- Wittering:* With a compass, sir.
- John:* Who jabbed you?
- Wittering:* I don't know, sir.
- John:* Well, go back to your place and wipe the ink off your chin.
- Wittering:* Sir. 50
- John:* And I don't want any more fooling about, or there'll be trouble.
- Cuthbun:* Sir?
- John:* Cuthbun?
- Cuthbun:* I don't understand, sir.
- John:* What do you not understand, Cuthbun? 55
- Cuthbun:* 'I don't want any more fooling about or there'll be trouble.' It doesn't make sense, sir. Do you mean there'll be trouble if you do want fooling about?
- John:* I mean if there is any more fooling about, verbal or practical, there will be trouble. 60
- Cuthbun:* Oh, I see, sir, yes, sir.
- Cloistermouth:* Mr Pelham always told us we had to be frightfully careful with our English, sir.
- John:* And he was quite right, Cloistermouth. Now then: *McMorrow and Purdie's History of England*, chapter nine. [*The class noisily get out their books and open them.*] All right, all right. [*Silence.*] Has anyone read chapter nine? 65
- Terhew:* Yes, sir.
- John:* Good ... er, Terhew. Perhaps you'd give us an outline of its contents.
- Terhew:* Me, sir, oh no, sir. 70
- John:* And why not?
- Terhew:* I haven't read it, sir.
- John:* You said you had.
- Terhew:* No, sir, you asked if anyone had read it and I said yes, sir, Cuthbun has. 75
- Bungabine:* He's read the lot, sir.
- Trindle:* The whole book.
- Cuthbun:* It ends with the General Strike.
- John:* Does it? Well, tell us about chapter nine.
- Cuthbun:* Actually, sir, I left that chapter out. Terhew was wrong. 80
- Terhew:* I'm most terrible sorry, sir.

¹omnes: all

3 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the novel *A Fine Balance* (1995), by Rohinton Mistry.

'I'm going to get married,' announced Dina at the dinner table.

'Ah,' beamed her brother. 'Good, good. Which one is it, Solly or Porus?' – these two being the gents he had most recently introduced.

Dina shook her head.

'Then it must be either Dara or Firdosh,' said Ruby, smiling meaningfully. 'They are both crazy about you.' 5

'His name is Rustom Dalal.'

Nusswan was surprised; the name did not belong among the numerous candidates he had brought before Dina over the past three years. Perhaps it was someone she had met at one of the family gatherings he so detested. 'And where did we come across him?' 10

'We didn't. I did.'

Nusswan did not like the answer. He was offended that all his efforts, all his choices, were being spurned by her for a total stranger. 'Just like that you want to marry this fellow? What do you know about him and his family? What does he know about you, your family?' 15

'Everything,' said Dina in a tone that made him anxious. 'I've been seeing Rustom for a year and a half now.'

'I see. A well-kept secret,' he said, affecting sarcasm. 'And what does he do, this Dalal fellow, your Rustom-in-hiding?' 20

'He's a pharmaceutical chemist.'

'Hah! Pharmaceutical chemist! A bloody compounder! Why don't you use the proper word? That's what he is, mixing prescription powders all day long behind a counter.'

He reminded himself there was no sense in losing his temper just yet. 'So, when are we going to meet this Father Forty-Lakhs of yours?' 25

'Why? So you can insult him in person?'

'I have no reason to insult him. But it is my duty to meet him, and then advise you properly. In the end it's up to you.'

On the appointed day, Rustom arrived with a box of sweetmeats for Nusswan and Ruby, which he placed in the hands of little Xerxes, who was almost three now. For Dina, he brought a new umbrella. The significance was not lost on her, and she smiled. He winked at her when the others were not looking. 30

'It's gorgeous,' she said, opening it up. 'What a lovely pagoda shape.' The fabric was sea green, and the shaft was stainless steel, with a formidable spike at the end. 35

'That's a dangerous weapon,' joked Nusswan. 'Be careful who you point it at.'

They had tea, with cheese sandwiches and butter biscuits prepared by Ruby and Dina, and the time passed without unpleasantness. But that night, after the visitor left, Nusswan said he could not understand for one moment what was in his sister's head – brains or sawdust. 40

'Selecting someone without looks, without money, without prospects. Some fiancés give diamond rings. Others a gold watch, or at least a little brooch. What does your fellow bring? A bloody umbrella! To think I wasted so much time and energy introducing you to solicitors, chartered accountants, police superintendents, civil engineers. All from respectable families. How will I hold my head up when people hear that my sister married an unambitious medicine-mixing fool? Don't expect me to rejoice or come to the wedding. For me it will be a day of deep, dark mourning.' 45

It was sad, he lamented, that in order to hurt him she was ruining her own life. 'Mark my words, your spite will come back to haunt you. I am powerless to stop you, you are twenty-one, no longer a little girl I can look after. And if you are determined to throw your life away in the gutter, I can only watch helplessly while you do it.' 50

Dina had expected all this. The words washed over her and gurgled into oblivion, leaving her untouched. The way the rain had rolled off Rustom's lovely raincoat, she remembered, on that beautiful night. But she wondered again, as she had so many times, where her brother had learned to rave so proficiently. Neither their mother nor father had had much talent for it. 55

In a few days Nusswan grew calmer. If Dina was getting married and leaving for good, better that it should happen amicably, without too much fuss. Secretly he was also pleased that Rustom Dalal was no great catch. It would have been unbearable if his friends had been rejected in favour of someone superior. 60

He participated in the wedding plans with more enthusiasm and generosity than Dina expected. He wanted to book a hall for the reception and pay for everything out of the money he had been collecting for her. 'We'll have the wedding after sunset, and then dinner. We'll show them how it's done – everyone will envy you. A four-piece band, floral decorations, lights. I can afford about three hundred guests. But no liquor – too expensive and too risky. Prohibition police are everywhere, you bribe one and ten more show up for their share.' 65

That night in bed, Ruby, who was pregnant with their second child, expressed dismay at Nusswan's extravagance. 'It's up to Rustom Dalal to spend, if they want to get married. Not your responsibility – especially when she wouldn't even let you select the husband. She never appreciates anything you do for her.' 70

Rustom and Dina, however, had simpler preferences. The wedding took place in the morning. At Dina's request, it was a quiet ceremony in the same fire-temple where her parents' prayers were performed on each death anniversary. Dustoor Framji, old and stoop-shouldered, watched from the shadows, upset that he had not been asked to conduct the marriage rites. Time was slowing him down, and the flesh of young women was rarely caught now in his once-dexterous embraces. But the name of Dustoor Daab-Chaab clung to his autumnal years even as all else was withering. 'It's disgraceful,' he grumbled to a colleague. 'Especially after my long association with the Shroff family. For death, they come to me. But for a happy occasion, for a wedding, I am not wanted. It's a matter of shamefulness.' 80

BLANK PAGE

Copyright Acknowledgements:

- Question 1 © William Carlos Williams; *The Last Words of My English Grandmother*, in *Selected Poems (American Poets Project)*; The Library of America; 2004.
- Question 2 © Giles Cooper; *Unman, Wittering and Zigo*; Nelson Thornes Ltd; 1971.
- Question 3 © adapted: Rohinton Mistry; *A Fine Balance*; Faber & Faber Ltd; 1996.

Permission to reproduce items where third-party owned material protected by copyright is included has been sought and cleared where possible. Every reasonable effort has been made by the publisher (UCLES) to trace copyright holders, but if any items requiring clearance have unwittingly been included, the publisher will be pleased to make amends at the earliest possible opportunity.

Cambridge International Examinations is part of the Cambridge Assessment Group. Cambridge Assessment is the brand name of University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES), which is itself a department of the University of Cambridge.