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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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Paper 7 Comment and Appreciation

May/June 2019

2 hours

No Additional Materials are required.

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

An answer booklet is provided inside this question paper. You should follow the instructions on the front cover of the answer booklet. If you need additional answer paper ask the invigilator for a continuation booklet.

Answer **two** questions.

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

All questions in this paper carry equal marks.

This document consists of **6** printed pages, **2** blank pages and **1** Insert.

1 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the novel *The Colour* by Rose Tremain (published in 2003).

The dog, Lady, was the first to hear it. She was standing at the river's edge, pursuing her favourite occupation of trying to gobble up small fish as they swam within reach of her mouth. She raised her head and listened. She was attuned now to the sounds of the bush, even to the sudden crash of a tree or a cascade of falling rock, but this presented itself to her as something frightening, something new and unknown, and she started to whine.

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Harriet was a little way off, wearing a shawl and her old knitted hat to try to keep off the rain. She was examining what looked like a piece of greenstone, feeling its surprising smoothness, as though it had been polished by its constant slip and roll among the smaller stones. Harriet was so preoccupied by the greenstone that she paid little attention to Lady's whining, but then she, too, heard the roar coming from the direction of the gorge, and then she looked up and saw arriving, at the bend in the river, a wall of white water like a vast, breaking wave, and before she could cry out, the wave swept down upon Lady and snatched her away.

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The water crashed by inches from Harriet's feet, almost obliterating the shingle strand on which the tent stood. Behind the first wave came a second and then a third, and then the river calmed, but rose higher still, drowning the banks, frothing and whirling in a swelling tide.

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Harriet unlaced her boots and kicked them off, snatched her hat from her head and her shawl from her shoulders and waded into the freezing water. She began calling to Lady, but the sound of her voice was gone instantly as the swiftness of the flood caught her in its cold arms and she fell under.

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Water streamed into her mouth and she felt her heavy, drenched skirts drag her down into the weeds. She kicked out, thrashed against the pull of the skirts, tried to claw her way up towards the turmoil of light far above her, as her lungs burned and the icy coldness of the river pressed on her skin and sent shock-waves into her bones.

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She felt her head come to the surface and she coughed and choked and gulped for a mouthful of air and saw the sky for a brief, white moment, but her clothes weighed her down and the sky vanished once more and Harriet Blackstone knew that she was drowning.

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She was falling into a green darkness. Yet she still fought and kicked against the winding sheet of her skirts, thrashed upwards with her arms, and now at last a bright bubble of sky burst once again above her face and she struggled to hold it there, to hold the sky above her, to emulate the rose at the base of the waterfall, rising through its own drowning, 'obstinate in resurrection'.

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She heard herself shrieking, as though this sharp sound piercing the air might play a role in holding up her head, but she knew that she was helpless against the icy current. And what cold was entering her veins! No cold in any snow-filled winter had been as terrible as the cold which had its grip upon her now. Harriet knew that even if she could vanquish the tug of the saturated skirts, she had no weapon with which to fight the cold ...

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Unless ...

Unless it was her voice, her cries of ice going up into the air, so she tried to stretch these out, each one like a high note on a flute, taking all the breath that remained.

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And then, as she choked again on the water and her cries were cut off, she felt her body being slammed into something yielding, like a thicket of weed and this thicket held her still as she saw the flood keep driving past her and she reached out and tried to clutch at this yielding thing and she got hold of it and found that it had some cunning pattern or design that she knew to be shaped by people and not by nature and she searched for the word to describe it, searched and searched

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as she let her body be wrapped round by it and felt her skirts slowly billow to the surface, as though both she and they had suddenly become weightless.

Then she remembered the word.

A net.

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- 2 Write a critical commentary on the following poem by Mary Ursula Bethell (published in 1929).

Pause

When I am very earnestly digging
I lift my head sometimes, and look at the mountains,
And muse upon them, muscles relaxing.

I think how freely the wild grasses flower there,
How grandly the storm-shaped trees are massed in their gorges,
And the rain-worn rocks strewn in magnificent heaps.

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Pioneer plants on those uplands find their own footing,
No vigorous growth, there, is an evil weed;
All weathers are salutary¹.

It is only a little while since this hillside
Lay untrammelled likewise,
Unceasingly swept by transmarine winds².

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In a very little while, it may be,
When our impulsive limbs and our superior skulls
Have to the soil restored several ounces of fertiliser,

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The Mother of all will take charge again,
And soon wipe away with her elements
Our small fond human enclosures.

¹ *salutary*: healthy, wholesome

² *transmarine winds*: winds that blow across the ocean

Turn over for Question 3.

3 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the short story *Kevin* by Catherine Lim (published 1980).

It was the first time that Kevin had experienced real fear. Before Miss Lam read out the marks, she had looked at Kevin, shaken her head and smiled a little ruefully. “Kevin Lee Keng Seng,” she addressed him with undue drama, “Mong Chiaw and Ravindran Pillai beat you this time.” But his hopes held: surely he had that 95%? Miss Lam read the names of the first five boys in order of merit: Kevin’s name was sixth on the list – he had obtained 82%.

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Kevin went pale, his jaw dropped, he couldn’t believe it. The sense of impending danger rushed upon him; it drained his mouth dry. But the tears were held back; it was only after the school bell had rung for dismissal and he was on his way home, dragging his feet along the hot tarred road, his heavy satchel of books strapped on his back, that he began to cry. He sniffled noisily, forgetting to use the handkerchief that his mother put every morning in his trouser pocket, and wiping his nose on his sleeve:

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“Don’t cry, Kevin.” It was the playful, untidy Boon Kee, but now looking very serious as he tried to comfort his best friend.

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“My mother – she’s sure to wallop me!” sniffed Kevin. “She’ll be so angry; I’ve never got less than 95% before!” And Kevin stopped under a tree by the roadside and refused to go on, dreading the anger and punishment that awaited him at home.

“You bluff her, say you got 100%,” advised the unrealistic Boon Kee. Kevin looked at him scornfully and said, “You think you’re so clever! My mother looks at all the test sheets. I can’t bluff her!”

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Boon Kee dredged his mind for more ideas and came up with another suggestion, beaming, “I know, I know! When Miss Lam returns the test sheets, you change the 82% to 100%! I can do it for you, I got a red ball pen like hers.” Kevin looked at him with yet more scorn.

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“Why are you so stupid?” he sighed. “She can see the mistakes on the test sheet. You cannot bluff this way, I tell you!”

The two boys lapsed into gloomy silence. Kevin leaned against the tree and began throwing pebbles desultorily into a drain. He discovered a packet of chewing gum in his shirt pocket which he gave to Boon Kee, remembering that his mother didn’t like him to chew gum, and then continued throwing pebbles into the drain.

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“I got to go now,” said Boon Kee, his mouth full of gum. “Boy, I hope your mum doesn’t wallop you. Bye!”

“Bye!” said Kevin, and picked up his satchel to continue the fearful way home.

He pushed open the garden gate with as little noise as he could; he walked into the house with slow, soft steps, putting off the dreaded moment of parental vengeance as long as he could.

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His mother wasn’t at home; that brought immediate relief. The old servant was in the kitchen; when she heard him, she came running, crying out in a distressed voice, “Kevin, your poor mother – she’s in hospital – it’s her ulcers – she had to be rushed there this morning –”

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The boy managed to curb a powerful upsurge of feelings. The servant’s face, now streaked with tears, searched Kevin’s for signs of filial concern.

“Your mother’s in hospital,” she repeated, frowning at him in severe disapproval.

“How long will she be there?” asked Kevin, in a trembling voice, for the effort of holding back the surge of feelings was beginning to prove too great for him.

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“I don’t know, perhaps a week, she was very ill,” said the servant and again her eyes fastened on the boy’s face, and her expression showed she was both perturbed and displeased.

In the privacy of his room, Kevin threw himself upon his bed, pummelled his pillows, did a somersault and landed on the floor with a bump, before grabbing hold of some books and flinging them into the air with wild abandon. His eyes sparkled. His cheeks glowed.

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