
LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

9695/71

Paper 7 Comment and Appreciation

October/November 2016

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 story *The First Party* (1953) by Attia Hosain.

After the dimness of the verandah, the bewildering brightness of the room made her stumble against the unseen doorstep. Her nervousness edged towards panic, and the darkness seemed a forsaken friend, but her husband was already steadying her into the room.

'My wife,' he said in English, and the alien sounds softened the awareness of this new relationship. 5

The smiling, tall woman came towards them with outstretched hands and she put her own limply into the other's firm grasp.

'How d'you do?' said the woman.

'How d'you do?' said the fat man beside her. 10

'I am very well, thank you,' she said in the low voice of an uncertain child repeating a lesson. Her shy glance avoided their eyes.

They turned to her husband, and in the warm current of their friendly ease she stood coldly self-conscious.

'I hope we are not too early,' her husband said. 15

'Of course not; the others are late. Do sit down.'

She sat on the edge of the big chair, her shoulders drooping, nervously pulling her sari over her head as the weight of its heavy gold embroidery pulled it back.

'What will you drink?' the fat man asked her.

'Nothing, thank you.' 20

'Cigarette?'

'No, thank you.'

Her husband and the tall woman were talking about her, she felt sure. Pin-points of discomfort pricked her and she smiled to hide them.

The woman held a wineglass in one hand and a cigarette in the other. She wondered how it felt to hold a cigarette with such self-confidence; to flick the ash with such assurance. The woman had long nails, pointed and scarlet. She looked at her own – unpainted, cut carefully short – wondering how anyone could eat, work, wash with those claws dipped in blood. She drew her sari over her hands, covering her rings and bracelets, noticing the other's bare wrists, like a widow's. 25

'Shy little thing, isn't she, but charming,' said the woman as if soothing a frightened child.

'She'll get over it soon. Give me time,' her husband laughed. She heard him and blushed, wishing to be left unobserved and grateful for the diversion when other guests came in. 30

She did not know whether she was meant to stand up when they were being introduced, and shifted uneasily in the chair, half rising; but her husband came and stood by her, and by the pressure of his hand on her shoulder she knew she must remain sitting.

She was glad when polite formality ended and they forgot her for their drinks, their cigarettes, their talk and laughter. She shrank into her chair, lonely in her strangeness yet dreading approach. She felt curious eyes on her and her discomfort multiplied them. When anyone came and sat by her she smiled in cold defence, uncertainty seeking refuge in silence, and her brief answers crippled conversation. She found the bilingual patchwork distracting, and its pattern, familiar to others, with allusions and references unrelated to her own experiences, was distressingly obscure. Overheard light chatter appealing to her woman's mind brought no relief of understanding. Their different stresses made even talk of dress and appearance sound unfamiliar. She could not understand the importance of relating clothes to time and place and not just occasion; nor their preoccupation with limbs and bodies, which should be covered, and not face and features alone. They made problems about things she took for granted. 40

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Her bright rich clothes and heavy jewellery oppressed her when she saw the simplicity of their clothes. She wished she had not dressed so, even if it was the custom, because no one seemed to care for customs, or even know them, and 55 looked at her as if she were an object on display. Her discomfort changed to uneasy defiance, and she stared at the strange creatures around her. But her swift eyes slipped away in timid shyness if they met another's.

2 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from the novel *A Dry White Season* by André Brink (published in 1979).

The narrator receives an unexpected telephone call from his old friend Ben.

The moment he telephoned I knew something was wrong. For it was a Friday morning and he was supposed to be at school.

“Can you meet me in town?” he asked impatiently, before I could recover from the surprise of his call. “It’s rather urgent. I’m phoning from the station.”

“You on your way somewhere?”

5

“No, not at all.” As irritably as before. “Can you spare me the time?”

“Of course. But why don’t you come to my office?”

“It’s difficult. I can’t explain right now. Will you meet me at Bakker’s bookshop in an hour?”

“If you insist. But—”

10

“See you then.”

“Good-bye, Ben.” But he’d already put down the receiver.

For a while I remained confused. Annoyed, too, at the prospect of driving in to the city centre from the journal’s premises in Auckland Park. Parking on Fridays. Still, I felt intrigued, after the long time we hadn’t seen each other; and since the journal had gone to press two days before there wasn’t all that much to do in the office.

15

He was waiting in front of the bookshop when I arrived. At first I hardly recognised him, he’d grown so old and thin. Not that he’d ever been anything but lean, but on that morning he looked like a proper scarecrow, especially in that flapping grey overcoat which appeared several sizes too big.

20

“Ben! My goodness—!”

“I’m glad you could come.”

“Aren’t you working today?”

“No.”

“But the school vac¹ is over, isn’t it?”

25

“Yes. What does it matter? Let’s go, shall we?”

“Where?”

“Anywhere.” He glanced round. His face was pale and narrow. Leaning forward against the dry cold breeze he took my arm and started walking.

“You running away from the police?” I asked lightly.

30

His reaction amazed me: “For God’s sake, man, this is no time for joking!” Adding, testily, “If you’d rather not talk to me, why don’t you say so?”

I stopped. “What’s come over you, Ben?”

“Don’t stand there.” Without waiting for me he strode on and only when he was stopped by the traffic lights on the corner I did catch up with him again.

35

“Why don’t we go to a café for a cup of coffee?” I suggested.

“No. No, I’d rather not.” Once again he glanced over his shoulder – impatient? scared? – and started crossing the street before the lights had returned to green.

“Where are we going?” I asked.

“Nowhere. Just round the block. I want you to listen. You’ve got to help me.”

40

“But what’s the matter, Ben?”

“No use burdening you with it. All I want to know is whether I may send you some stuff to keep for me.”

“Stolen goods?” I said playfully.

“Don’t be ridiculous! There’s nothing illegal about it, you needn’t be scared. It’s just that I –” He hurried on in silence for a short distance, then glanced round again. “I don’t want them to find the stuff on me.”

45

“Who are ‘they’?”

He stopped, as agitated as before. “Look, I’d like to tell you everything that’s happened these last months. But I really have no time. Will you help me?”

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“What is it you want me to store for you?”

“Papers and stuff. I’ve written it all down. Some bits rather hurriedly and I suppose confused. But it’s all there. You may read it, of course. If you promise you’ll keep it to yourself.”

“But—”

55

“Come on.” With another anxious glance over his shoulder he set off again. “I’ve got to be sure that someone will look after it. That someone knows about it. It’s possible nothing will happen. Then I’ll come round one day to collect it again. But if something does happen to me —” He jerked his shoulders as if to prevent his coat from slipping off. “I leave it to your discretion.” For the first time he laughed, if one could call that harsh brief sound a laugh. 60

¹ *school vac*: school vacation or holiday

3 Write a critical commentary on the following poem by John Robert Lee (published in 1992).

Mango

On Sunday afternoons in mango season,
 Alleyne would fill his enamel basin
 with golden-yellow fruit, wash them in clean water,
 then sit out in the yard, under the grapefruit tree,
 near the single rose bush, back to the crotons¹, 5
 place the basin between his feet,
 and slowly eat his mangoes, one by one, down to the clean white
 seed.
 His felt-hat was always on his head. The yellow basin, chipped near
 the bottom, 10
 with its thin green rim, the clear water, the golden fruit,
 him eating slowly, carefully, picking the mango fiber from his teeth,
 under those clear, quiet afternoons, I remember.
 Me sitting in the doorway of my room, one foot on the steps that
 dropped 15
 into the yard, reading him, over a book. That's how it was.

¹ *crotons*: tropical flowering plants

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