

1 Write a critical commentary on the following passage from the novel *The Good Earth* (1931) by Pearl S. Buck.

It was Wang Lung's marriage day. At first, opening his eyes in the blackness of the curtains about his bed, he could not think why the dawn seemed different from any other. The house was still except for the faint, gasping cough of his old father, whose room was opposite to his own across the middle room. Every morning the old man's cough was the first sound to be heard. Wang Lung usually lay listening to it and moved only when he heard it approaching nearer and when he heard the door of his father's room squeak upon its wooden hinges. 5

But this morning he did not wait. He sprang up and pushed aside the curtains of his bed. It was a dark, ruddy dawn, and through a small square hole of a window, where the tattered paper fluttered, a glimpse of bronze sky gleamed. He went to the hole and tore the paper away. 10

"It is spring and I do not need this," he muttered.

He was ashamed to say aloud that he wished the house to look neat on this day. The hole was barely large enough to admit his hand and he thrust it out to feel of the air. A small soft wind blew gently from the east, a wind mild and murmurous and full of rain. It was a good omen. The fields needed rain for fruition. There would be no rain this day, but within a few days, if this wind continued, there would be water. It was good. Yesterday he had said to his father that if this brazen, glittering sunshine continued, the wheat could not fill in the ear. Now it was as if Heaven had chosen this day to wish him well. Earth would bear fruit. 15 20

He hurried out into the middle room, drawing on his blue outer trousers as he went, and knotting about the fullness at his waist his girdle of blue cotton cloth. He left his upper body bare until he had heated water to bathe himself. He went into the shed which was the kitchen, leaning against the house, and out of its dusk an ox twisted its head from behind the corner next the door and lowed at him deeply. The kitchen was made of earthen bricks as the house was, great squares of earth dug from their own fields, and thatched with straw from their own wheat. Out of their own earth had his grandfather in his youth fashioned also the oven, baked and black with many years of meal preparing. On top of this earthen structure stood a deep, round, iron cauldron. 25 30

This cauldron he filled partly full of water, dipping it with a half gourd from an earthen jar that stood near, but he dipped cautiously, for water was precious. Then, after a hesitation, he suddenly lifted the jar and emptied all the water into the cauldron. This day he would bathe his whole body. Not since he was a child upon his mother's knee had anyone looked upon his body. Today one would, and he would have it clean. 35

He went around the oven to the rear, and selecting a handful of the dry grass and stalks standing in the corner of the kitchen, he arranged it delicately in the mouth of the oven, making the most of every leaf. Then from an old flint and iron he caught a flame and thrust it into the straw and there was a blaze. 40

This was the last morning he would have to light the fire. He had lit it every morning since his mother died six years before. He had lit the fire, boiled water, and poured the water into a bowl and taken it into the room where his father sat upon his bed, coughing and fumbling for his shoes upon the floor. Every morning for these six years the old man had waited for his son to bring in hot water to ease him of his morning coughing. Now father and son could rest. There was a woman coming to the house. Never again would Wang Lung have to rise summer and winter at dawn to light the fire. He could lie in his bed and wait, and he also would have a bowl of water brought to him, and if the earth were fruitful there would be tea leaves in the water. Once in some years it was so. 45 50

And if the woman wearied, there would be her children to light the fire, the many children she would bear to Wang Lung. Wang Lung stopped, struck by the

thought of children running in and out of their three rooms. Three rooms had always seemed much to them, a house half empty since his mother died. They were always having to resist relatives who were more crowded—his uncle, with his endless brood of children, coaxing. 55

“Now, how can two lone men need so much room? Cannot father and son sleep together? The warmth of the young one’s body will comfort the old one’s cough.”

But the father always replied, “I am saving my bed for my grandson. He will warm my bones in my age.” 60

2 Write a critical commentary on the following poem by Joseph Furtado (published 1942).

Long Years Ago

I knew a sweet maiden
 With beautiful eyes,
 Long years ago;
 I have seen many eyes
 But no pair like hers— 5
 They haunt me so!

She lived on the field side
 In a mean little hut,
 Long years ago;
 I lived on the hill side 10
 In a clean little house—
 And hence mine woe.

And ne'er the sun rose,
 And ne'er the sun set,
 Long years ago— 15
 No matter what weather—
 But found us together
 And watched us grow.

Two light-hearted children
 With smiles we had parted, 20
 Long years ago;
 Of partings and pain,
 Of life and its trials,
 What could we know?

I am sitting now lone 25
 On the steps we sate on,
 Long years ago—
 O to see once again
 The beautiful eyes
 That haunt me so. 30

Joseph Furtado (1872–1945)

Turn over for Question 3

3 Write a critical commentary on the following passage from the novel *The Mountain is Young* (1958) by Han Suyin.

Anne has recently arrived in Nepal with her husband John. Together with a number of local people they spend the day sightseeing in the mountains around the capital city, Kathmandu.

They had Indian *dhosis*, baked flat cakes, for breakfast, made with flour and onion, light and savoury, though Paul Redworth stuck to a standard English breakfast. John had rallied, was now talking and laughing frequently, his face bright red, asking questions about the road and the camp from the Colonel, and every now and then turning to Anne. 5

‘We might do a bit of walking,’ he said, ‘go straight down by those mountain paths and rejoin the jeeps lower down.’

‘In winter,’ said Colonel Jaganathan, ‘our workers get on their spades and ski down the slopes.’

Then it was time to get back on the jeeps, and Unni turned to Anne and said: 10
‘Would you like to drive?’

‘I don’t think I could, I’ve never driven a jeep. And not on a mountain road.’

‘Then it’s time you tried.’ He went round to the front of the jeep and said: ‘Jump in. It’s yours.’

‘Is Anne going to drive?’ said John, and began to laugh. 15

‘Yes, Mrs Ford is going to drive,’ replied Unni, smiling.

‘Well, well,’ said Paul Redworth, climbing in with a fraction of hesitation. ‘Have you ever driven a jeep before?’

‘Never,’ said Anne, very loud and clear. ‘But I’m going to.’

Unni sat in the middle between Paul Redworth and Anne. ‘The road’s clear,’ he 20
said. ‘Blow your horn round the corners, as you never know when a lorry may be driving up and those Nepalese drivers never blow *their* horns. That’s all. The rest you’ll do easily.’

‘But it’s a left-hand drive, and she’s never driven anything but a right-hand drive, and she’s not good with a car,’ said John, still laughing, but with irritation. 25

Unni looked at him speculatively from his seat in the jeep. ‘Go on,’ he said to Anne, ‘start.’

Coming with Unni the road had looked difficult, but they had winged over 30
unmade portions rough with boulders and stones, potholes and narrow places where small slips had dented the road-bed; but now, driving herself, Anne felt every pebble. The jeep tilted and she had an uncontrollable urge to throw herself inwards and away from what she had not noticed until now, the precipice, a few thousand feet down, which bordered the road all the way.

‘It didn’t look that far below us yesterday,’ she managed to say between clenched teeth at one moment, and Unni replied: 35

‘I rolled two hundred feet down one day and I’m still here.’

She swerved too quickly and Paul Redworth on the other side uttered an exclamation of fear as his shoulder grazed an overhanging rock.

‘That’s all right, there was an inch to spare,’ said Unni. He himself appeared 40
completely happy, he had no hat on, his dark hair was ruffled, his leather jacket open, both his arms enveloped the two seat backs on either side of him. ‘I like this,’ he declared. ‘It’s relaxing.’ He closed his eyes.

‘For heaven’s sake keep your eyes open,’ implored Anne tensely, ‘I’m frightened.’

‘I thought you enjoyed this,’ said Unni.

‘I do, but I’m scared.’ 45

‘Can you sing?’

‘Not very well.’

‘It’s awfully nice to hear singing up a mountain road. I’ll sing to you then.’ And suddenly, effortlessly, he began to sing a Nepalese song, and it was the song that

Rukmini had sung in jail; then he sang another, then whistled it, looked at Anne, and said, 'You're doing fine.' 50

They were climbing up to the pass, and at a turn Paul said: 'Ah, there they are, the snow peaks.'

'Where?' said Anne.

'Don't look now,' said Paul. 'Stick to the road, lass.' 55

'We get down just below here and have a rest and some food and look at the snow lords,' said Unni.

Further down they stopped, got out, and climbed a hillet¹ upon which was an upright concrete slab on which had been engraved:

TO THE MEMORY OF 60
THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE CORPS OF
INDIAN ENGINEERS WHO LOST THEIR LIVES
BUILDING THE ROAD

Round them in an immense arc, bounding the rim of the world, were all the snow peaks in their rifts and folds, watchful magnificence in being and in name. 65

'Breath-taking, breath-taking,' said Father MacCullough, and with binoculars he and Paul started identifying them, reciting their names: Dhaulaghiri, Manaslu, Nanda Devi, Himalchuli, Annapurna, Gosainthan, and suddenly Paul said: 'Look, look, there's Everest, I'm sure.'

Small and grey between two nearer and seemingly larger peaks, with a grey spume which was the snow blown off its top by the eternal wind, was Chomolungma, Everest. 70

¹ *hillet*: a small hill

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