

English A: literature – Higher level – Paper 1
Anglais A : littérature – Niveau supérieur – Épreuve 1
Inglés A: literatura – Nivel superior – Prueba 1

Thursday 1 November 2018 (afternoon)

Jeudi 1 novembre 2018 (après-midi)

Jueves 1 de noviembre de 2018 (tarde)

2 hours / 2 heures / 2 horas

Instructions to candidates

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Write a literary commentary on one passage only.
- The maximum mark for this examination paper is **[20 marks]**.

Instructions destinées aux candidats

- N'ouvrez pas cette épreuve avant d'y être autorisé(e).
- Rédigez un commentaire littéraire sur un seul des passages.
- Le nombre maximum de points pour cette épreuve d'examen est de **[20 points]**.

Instrucciones para los alumnos

- No abra esta prueba hasta que se lo autoricen.
- Escriba un comentario literario sobre un solo pasaje.
- La puntuación máxima para esta prueba de examen es **[20 puntos]**.

Write a literary commentary on **one** of the following:

1.

I received one evening a telephone call from my wife saying that she was about to jump in the river. In the midst of a despair which had become so tremendous as to freeze all emotion I suddenly heard her tearful voice announcing that she could stand it no longer. She was calling to say good-bye—a brief, hysterical speech and then click! and she had vanished and her
5 address was the river. Terrible as I felt I nevertheless had to conceal my feelings. To their query as to who had called I replied—‘Oh, just a friend!’ and I sat there for a moment or two gazing at the minute spot which had become the infinitesimal speck in the river where the body of my wife was slowly disappearing. Finally I roused myself, put on my hat and coat, and announced that I was going out for a walk.

10 When I got outdoors I could scarcely drag my feet along. I thought my heart had stopped beating. The emotion I had experienced on hearing her voice had disappeared; I had become a piece of slag¹, a tiny hunk of cosmic debris void of hope, desire, or even fear. Knowing not what to do or where to turn I walked about aimlessly in that frozen blight which has made Brooklyn the place of horror which it is. The houses were still, motionless, breathing gently as people
15 breathe when they sleep the sleep of the just. I walked blindly onward until I found myself on the border of the old neighbourhood which I love so well. Here suddenly the significance of the message which my wife had transmitted over the telephone struck me with a new impact. Suddenly I grew quite frantic and, as if that would help matters, I instinctively quickened my pace. As I did so the whole of my life, from earliest boyhood on, began to unroll itself in swift
20 and kaleidoscopic fashion. The myriad events which had combined to shape my life became so fascinating to me that, without realizing why or what, I found myself growing enthusiastic. To my astonishment I caught myself laughing and weeping, shaking my head from side to side, gesticulating, mumbling, lurching like a drunkard. I was alive again, that’s what it was. I was a living entity, a human being capable of registering joy and sorrow, hope and despair. It was
25 marvellous to be alive—just that and nothing more. Marvellous to have lived, to remember so much. If she had really jumped in the river then there was nothing to be done about it. Just the same I began to wonder if I oughtn’t to go to the police and inform them about it. Even as the thought came to mind I espied a cop standing on the corner, and impulsively I started towards him. But when I came close and saw the expression on his face the impulse died as quickly
30 as it had come. I went up to him nevertheless and in a calm, matter-of-fact tone I asked him if he could direct me to a certain street, a street I knew well since it was the one I was living on. I listened to his directions as would a penitent prisoner were he to ask the way back to the penitentiary² from which he had escaped.

35 When I got back to the house I was informed that my wife had just telephoned. ‘What did she say?’ I exclaimed, almost beside myself with joy.

‘She said she would call you again in the morning,’ said my mother, surprised that I should seem so agitated.

When I got to bed I began to laugh; I laughed so hard the bed shook. I heard my father coming upstairs. I tried to suppress my laughter but couldn’t.

40 ‘What’s the matter with you?’ he asked, standing beside the bedroom door.

‘I’m laughing,’ I said. ‘I just thought of something funny.’

‘Are you sure you’re all right?’ he said, his voice betraying his perplexity. ‘We thought you were crying. ...’

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¹ piece of slag: small piece of poor quality coal

² penitentiary: jail

2.

Call

So many voices, throwing floodlights
on our lives.
My hand shields the phone.
After all the clatter and the shouting
5 I stand alone, in the small space
made by the candle that is your voice,
trying to open a window back to home.

Everywhere, the noise,
the sound of tills*, traffic,
10 sirens, electric drills.
Even the birdsong
has a different accent,
hustling the day along.
I came here to stand still,
15 after weeks of hesitating
at other people's doors,
seeing their lives in lighted windows,
looking in at basements, at dinner
being made, smelling the food,
20 all the tables laid.

I measure out your voice in seconds.

I have rung to see
if our tamarind tree is still there,
where my brothers are,
25 because home moved house
to bring me here,
and faces crumpled with the years.
Fields shifted
further and closer with the drift
30 of light and shade, and the seasons
made different clothes for me,

heavy, weighed down by wool.
And you are sitting alone
in a room in a house in another country.

Imtiaz Dharker, *The terrorist at my table* (Bloodaxe Books, 2006)
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* tills: cash registers