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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

9695/07

Paper 7 Comment and Appreciation

October/November 2008

2 hours

Additional Materials: Answer Booklet/Paper

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

If you have been given an Answer Booklet, follow the instructions on the front cover of the Booklet.

Write your Centre number, candidate number and name on all the work you hand in.

Write in dark blue or black pen.

Do not use staples, paper clips, highlighters, glue or correction fluid.

Answer **two** questions.

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

At the end of the examination, fasten all your work securely together.

All questions in this paper carry equal marks.

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This document consists of **7** printed pages and **1** blank page.



- 1 Write a critical commentary on the following passage from the play *An Inspector Calls* (1946) by J B Priestley, paying particular attention to the way in which the writing in the passage reveals the Birling family and their relationships with each other.

The family (Mr and Mrs Birling, Eric and Sheila) are celebrating the fact that Sheila has just become engaged to be married to Gerald Croft; they have all just finished a large and enjoyable dinner together.

- BIRLING: You ought to like this port¹, Gerald. As a matter of fact, Finchley told me it's exactly the same port your father gets from him.
- GERALD: Then it'll be all right. The governor prides himself on being a good judge of port. I don't pretend to know much about it.
- SHEILA [*gaily, possessively*]: I should jolly well think not, Gerald. I'd hate you to know all about port – like one of these purple-faced old men. 5
- BIRLING: Here, I'm not a purple-faced old man.
- SHEILA: No, not yet. But then you don't know all about port – do you?
- BIRLING [*noticing that his wife has not taken any*]: Now then, Sybil, you must take a little tonight. Special occasion, y'know, eh? 10
- SHEILA: Yes, go on, Mummy. You must drink our health.
- MRS BIRLING [*smiling*]: Very well, then. Just a little, thank you. [*To EDNA, who is about to go, with tray*] All right, Edna. I'll ring from the drawing-room when we want coffee. Probably in about half an hour.
- EDNA [*going*]: Yes, ma'am. 15
- [*EDNA goes out. They now have all the glasses filled. BIRLING beams at them and clearly relaxes.*]
- BIRLING: Well, well – this is very nice. Very nice. Good dinner too, Sybil. Tell cook from me.
- GERALD [*politely*]: Absolutely first-class. 20
- MRS BIRLING [*reproachfully*]: Arthur, you're not supposed to say such things –
- BIRLING: Oh – come, come – I'm treating Gerald like one of the family. And I'm sure he won't object.
- SHEILA [*with mock aggressiveness*]: Go on, Gerald – just you object!
- GERALD [*smiling*]: Wouldn't dream of it. In fact, I insist upon being one of the family now. I've been trying long enough, haven't I? [*As she does not reply, with more insistence*] Haven't I? You know I have. 25
- MRS BIRLING [*smiling*]: Of course she does.
- SHEILA [*half serious, half playful*]: Yes – except for all last summer, when you never came near me, and I wondered what had happened to you. 30
- GERALD: And I've told you – I was awfully busy at the works all that time.
- SHEILA [*same tone as before*]: Yes, that's what you say.
- MRS BIRLING: Now, Sheila, don't tease him. When you're married you'll realize that men with important work to do sometimes have to spend nearly all their time and energy on their business. You'll have to get used to that, just as I had. 35
- SHEILA: I don't believe I will. [*Half playful, half serious, to GERALD*] So you be careful.
- GERALD: Oh – I will, I will.

[ERIC suddenly guffaws². His parents look at him.]

- SHEILA [*severely*]: Now – what's the joke?
- ERIC: I don't know – really. Suddenly I felt I just had to laugh.
- SHEILA: You're squiffy³.
- ERIC: I'm not.
- MRS BIRLING: What an expression, Sheila! Really, the things you girls pick up these days! 45
- ERIC: If you think that's the best she can do –
- SHEILA: Don't be an ass, Eric.
- MRS BIRLING: Now stop it, you two. Arthur, what about this famous toast of yours? 50
- BIRLING: Yes, of course. [*Clears his throat.*] Well, Gerald, I know you agreed that we should only have this quiet little family party. It's a pity Sir George and – er – Lady Croft can't be with us, but they're abroad and so it can't be helped. As I told you, they sent me a very nice cable – couldn't be nicer. I'm not sorry that we're celebrating quietly like this – 55
- MRS BIRLING: Much nicer really.
- GERALD: I agree.
- BIRLING: So do I, but it makes speech-making more difficult –
- ERIC [*not too rudely*]: Well, don't do any. We'll drink their health and have done with it. 60
- BIRLING: No, we won't. It's one of the happiest nights of my life. And one day, I hope, Eric, when you've a daughter of your own, you'll understand why. Gerald, I'm going to tell you frankly, without any pretences, that your engagement to Sheila means a tremendous lot to me. She'll make you happy, and I'm sure you'll make her happy. You're just the kind of son-in-law I always wanted. Your father and I have been friendly rivals in business for some time now – though Crofts Limited are both older and bigger than Birling and Company – and now you've brought us together, and perhaps we may look forward to the time when Crofts and Birlings are no longer competing but are working together – for lower costs and higher prices. 65 70
- GERALD: Hear, hear! And I think my father would agree to that.
- MRS BIRLING: Now, Arthur, I don't think you ought to talk business on an occasion like this. 75
- SHEILA: Neither do I. All wrong.
- BIRLING: Quite so, I agree with you. I only mentioned it in passing. What I did want to say was – that Sheila's a lucky girl – and I think you're a pretty fortunate young man too, Gerald. 80
- GERALD: I know I am – this once anyhow.
- BIRLING [*raising his glass*]: So here's wishing the pair of you – the very best that life can bring. Gerald and Sheila.
- MRS BIRLING [*raising her glass, smiling*]: Yes, Gerald. Yes, Sheila darling. Our congratulations and very best wishes! 85
- GERALD: Thank you.
- MRS BIRLING: Eric!

- ERIC [*rather noisily*]: All the best! She's got a nasty temper sometimes – but she's not bad really. Good old Sheila!
- SHEILA: Chump! I can't drink to this, can I? When do I drink?
- GERALD: You can drink to me.
- SHEILA [*quiet and serious now*]: All right then. I drink to you, Gerald.
[*For a moment they look at each other.*]
- GERALD [*quietly*]: Thank you. And I drink to you – and hope I can make you as happy as you deserve to be. 95
- SHEILA [*trying to be light and easy*]: You be careful – or I'll start weeping.
- GERALD [*smiling*]: Well, perhaps this will help to stop it. [*He produces a ring case.*]
- SHEILA [*excited*]: Oh – Gerald – you've got it – is it the one you wanted me to have? 100
- GERALD [*giving the case to her*]: Yes – the very one.
- SHEILA [*taking out the ring*]: Oh – it's wonderful! Look – Mummy – isn't it a beauty?
Oh – darling – [*She kisses GERALD hastily.*]
- ERIC: Steady the Buffs⁴!
- SHEILA [*who has put ring on, admiringly*]: I think it's perfect. Now I really feel engaged. 105
- MRS BIRLING: So you ought, darling. It's a lovely ring. Be careful with it.
- SHEILA: Careful! I'll never let it go out of my sight for an instant.
- MRS BIRLING [*smiling*]: Well, it came just at the right moment. That was clever of you, Gerald. Now, Arthur, if you've no more to say, I think Sheila and I had better go into the drawing-room and leave you men – 110

¹Port – a kind of wine

²Guffaws – laughs loudly

³Squiffy – drunk

⁴Steady the Buffs – 'Steady on there'/'Take it easy'

2 Write a critical commentary on the following poem.

Taxing the Rain

When I wake the rain's falling
and I think, as always, it's for the best,

I remember how much I love rain,
the weakest and strongest of us all;

as I listen to its yesses and no's,
I think how many men and women

5

would, if they could,
against all sense and nature,

tax the rain for its privileges;

make it pay for soaking our earth
and splashing all over our leaves;

10

pay for muddying our grass
and amusing itself with our roots.

Let rain be taxed, they say,
for riding on our rivers
and drenching our sleeves;

15

for loitering in our lakes
and reservoirs. Make rain pay its way.

Make it pay for lying full length
in the long straight sedate green waters

20

of our city canals,
and for working its way through processes

of dreamy complexity
until this too-long untaxed rain comes indoors

and touches our lips,
bringing assuagement – for rain comes

25

to slake all our thirsts, spurting
brusque and thrilling in hot needles,

showering on to anyone naked;
or balming our skins in the shape of scented baths.

30

Yes, there are many who'd like to tax the rain;
even now they whisper, it can be done, it must be done.

Penelope Shuttle (born 1947)

3 Write a critical commentary on this short story by Kate Chopin, published in 1892

The Story of an Hour

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death.

It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed". He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message.

She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her.

There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul.

She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves.

There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window.

She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams.

She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought.

There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the colour that filled the air.

Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will – as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been.

When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: "free, free, free!" The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body.

She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial.

She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome.

There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature. A kind intention or a cruel intention made the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination.

And yet she had loved him – sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the strongest impulse of her being! 55

“Free! Body and soul free!” she kept whispering.

Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. “Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door – you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven’s sake open the door.” 60

“Go away. I am not making myself ill.” No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window.

Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long. 65

She arose at length and opened the door to her sister’s importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister’s waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom. 70

Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine’s piercing cry; at Richards’ quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife. 75

But Richards was too late.

When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease – of joy that kills.

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