

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

1. (a)

Somewhere, my father is teaching us the names of the constellations. We lie in the cold, out in the dark backyard, on our backs against the hard November ground. We children distribute ourselves over his enormous body like so many spare handkerchiefs. He does not feel our weight. My father points a dime-store¹ six-volt flashlight beam at the holes in the enclosing black shell.

5 We lie on the frozen earth while all in front of us spreads the illustrated textbook of winter sky. The six-volt beam creates the one weak warm spot in the entire world.

My father is doing what he does best, doing the only thing he knew how to do in this life. He is quizzing us, plaguing his kids with questions. Where is the belt of Orion? What is the English for Ursa Major? Who knows the story behind the Twins? How big is a magnitude?

10 He talks to us only in riddles. We climb out of the crib and learn to speak: he warns us about language with "When is a door not a door?" We grow, we discover the neighborhood. He is there, quizzing us on the points of the compass. We fall, we bruise ourselves. He makes the wound a lesson on the capillaries.² Tonight we learn, in the great square of Pegasus, how far things are from one another. How alone.

15 He points his way with the flashlight, although the beam travels only a few feet before it is swallowed up in the general black. Still, my father waves the pointer around the sky map as if the light goes all the way out to the stars themselves. "There," he says to us, to himself, to the empty night. "Up there." We have to follow him, find the picture by telepathy. We are all already expert at second-guessing. The five of us are fluent, native speakers of the condensed sign language, the

20 secret code of family.

We lie all together for once, learning to see Taurus and Leo as if our survival depends on it. "Here; this dim line. Imagine a serpent, a dragon: can you all see Draco?" My older sister says she can, but the rest of us suspect she is lying. I can see the Dipper, the big one, the obvious one. And I think I can make out the Milky Way. The rest is a blur, a rich, confusing picture book of too

25 many possibilities.

But even if we can't see the images of myth, all of us, even my little brother, can hear in my father's quizzes the main reason for his taking us out under the winter lights: "If there is one thing the universe excels at, it's empty space." We are out here alone, on a sliver of rock under the black vacuum, with nothing but his riddles for our thin atmosphere. He seems to tell us that the more we

30 know, the less we can be hurt. But he leaves the all-important corollary, the how-to-get-there, up to us, the students, as an exercise.

Impressed with the truth he has just spoken, the one about the place's one prejudice, he gives us a final glimpse of that closet romantic he will keep so perfectly hidden in later years: "For all must into Nothing fall," he recites, the poetry lost on me until I see it in an anthology, decades later,

35 "If it will persist in Being." He recovers quickly, remembers the lesson at hand, and asks, "Why do you think people need to fill the sky with pictures?"

We have a few questions of our own to ask him in return. What are we running from? How do we get back? Why are you leaving us? What happens to students who fail? I have one urgent issue to pick with him before he flicks off the beam. But I have already learned, by example, to

40 keep the real questions for later. I hold my retaliation until too late.

I feel cold, colder than the night's temperature, a cold that carries easily across the following years. Only the sight of my mother in the close glow of kitchen window, the imagined smell of cocoa, blankets, and hot lemon dish soap, keeps me from going stiff and giving in. I pull closer to my father, but something is wrong. He has thought himself into another place. He has already left
45 us. He is no longer warm.

Richard Powers, *Prisoner's Dilemma* (1988)

¹ dime-store: shop that sells inexpensive goods

² capillaries: thin blood vessels

SECTION A

Write a commentary on ONE of the following passages:

- 1.(a) Oscar hurried after the black, umbrella-humped figure. He waved back. And he made such a comic figure, his hat pushed back on his head, as he leaped across a puddle, waved an umbrella, jumped to avoid some oxen droppings, that the men all laughed, but not maliciously. They walked back to their barrel smiling and shaking their heads. Their new master was an odd bird, but not a knave.
- 5 Oscar felt he had opened a door into her life. He would like to sit somewhere, a place with marble tables. If it had been London they would go to the Café Lux in Regent Street. A glass of port wine for the lady. Or merely China tea, and then they could talk about this glass business of hers.
- 10 It had never occurred to him that a process of manufacture could be beautiful. Had you, an hour before, asked him to tell you what he would call beautiful he would have drawn on the natural world, and named the species along the lanes of Devon,¹ or brought up for you, plunging his hands into the rock pools of memory, the anemone his father had drawn and named, these fine soulless creatures which had, just the same, been made by
- 15 God. He would have shown you the Stratton's harvest stooks² (and forgotten they had scratched his arms and made them itch all night) or the rolling, dangerous sea seen through a familiar window with a two-foot-thick sill. He would never have led you into a building with a rusting, corrugated roof, or taken you between lanes made from bottle crates, or littered with glittering shards. In these places you expected foulness, stink, refuse, and not, certainly not, wonder.
- 20 But it was wonder that he had found, and he had felt it in his water, before he saw anything to wonder at, that this dry, swept place—he knew this the minute he was inside the door—contained something exceptional.
- 25 They led him to a glory-hole,³ had him look in, into the protean world where you could not distinguish between the white of pure heat, the white of the crucible, and the white of the molten glass which they named 'metal'. When Arthur had said 'metal', Oscar had understood 'tin' or 'silver' or 'gold'. And when the gatherer drew out the substance it could have been all of these things. The red-hot orb at the end of the long rod which he watched, passing from man to man, from glory-hole to glory-hole, acquiring more metal, being
- 30 blown a little, swung, handed on, until it came to that largest, most slovenly of all of them. And then he who dubbed himself (privately, whispered it in Oscar's ear) to be none other than the famous knight Sir Piss-and-Wind, took the long rod and was, at once, drum major, bagpipe master, trumpeter, transmuter, as he transformed the metal into a tankard. He sat himself at last on his wooden throne and rolled the long rod back and forth across
- 35 its arms whilst he smoothed a base with wet pear wood which hissed and steamed in clouds around his tea-and-ale-stained whiskers. He took a snake of red elastic glass from the third gatherer and, lifting it high—where it looked as angry as a snake in an eagle's claws—made it, with a flourish, into a question mark, and thence, a handle. It was all so fine, so precise, and it was a wonder that this miracle was wrought by a whiskered Falstaff with a fat belly
- 40 and a grubby singlet showing through the layers of wet, sour hessian.
- 'I am a human bellows, sir,' Arthur claimed, waving his hand for someone to come and take his creation from him. 'That is what I have made of myself.'
- But it was not this that thrilled Oscar about glass, that a man had made his body to comply with the needs of manufacturing, but that a man so obviously gross and imperfect
- 45 could produce something so fine.
- Glass. Blinding white. Glowing red. Elastic. Protean. Liquid. Vessel for light.

Peter Carey, *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988)

¹ Devon: a rural county in South-West England.

² stooks: bundles of straw.

³ glory-hole: an opening in the wall of a blast-furnace.

Prose 1995

SECTION A

Write a commentary on ONE of the following passages:

1. (a)

Up on the Hill Carnival Monday morning breaks upon the backs of these thin shacks with no cock's crow, and before the mist clears, little boys, costumed in old dresses, their heads tied, holding brooms made from the ribs of coconut palm leaves, blowing whistles and beating kerosene tins for drums, move across the face of the awakening Hill, sweeping yards in a ritual, heralding the masqueraders' coming, that goes back centuries for its beginnings, back across the Middle Passage, back to Mali and to Guinea and Dahomey and Congo, back to Africa when Maskers were sacred and revered, the keepers of the poisons and heads of secret societies, and such children went before them, clearing the ground, announcing their coming to the huts before which they would dance and make their terrible cries, affirming for the village, the tribe, warriorhood and femininity, linking the villagers to their ancestors, their Gods, remembered even now, so long after the Crossing, if not in the brain, certainly in the blood; so that every Carnival Monday morning, Aldrick Prospect, with only the memory burning in his blood, a memory that had endured the three hundred odd years to Calvary Hill felt, as he put on his dragon costume, a sense of entering a sacred mask that invested him with an ancestral authority to uphold before the people of this Hill, this tribe marooned so far from the homeland that never was their home, the warriorhood that had not died in them, their humanness that was determined not by their possession of things. He had a desire, a mission, to let them see their beauty, to uphold the unending rebellion they waged, huddled here on this stone and dirt hill hanging over the city like the open claws on a dragon's hand, threatening destruction if they were not recognized as human beings.

But this Carnival, putting on his costume now at dawn, Aldrick had a feeling of being the last one, the last symbol of rebellion and threat to confront Port of Spain.* Fisheye was under orders not to misbehave, Philo had given up on his own calypsos of rebellion to sing now about the Axe Man. Once upon a time the entire Carnival was expressions of rebellion. Once there were stickfighters who assembled each year to keep alive in battles between themselves the practice of a warriorhood born in them; and there were devils, black men who blackened themselves further with black grease to make of their very blackness a menace, a threat. They moved along the streets with horns on their heads and tridents in hand. They threatened to press their blackened selves against the well dressed spectators unless they were given money. And there were the jab jabs, men in jester costumes, their caps and shoes filled with tinkling bells, cracking long whips in the streets, with which they lashed each other with full force, proclaiming in this display that they could receive the hardest blow without flinching at its coming, without feeling what, at its landing, must have been burning pain. Suddenly they were all gone, outlawed from the city or just died, gone, and he felt alone. The dragon alone was left to carry the message. He felt that now, alone, with even Philo and Fisheye gone, it was too great to carry. It would be lost now among the clowns, among the fancy robbers and the fantasy presentations that were steadily entering Carnival; drowned amidst the satin and silks and the beads and feathers and rhinestones. But bothering him even more than this was the thought that maybe he didn't believe in the dragon any more.

Earl Lovelace *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979)

*The capital of the Caribbean island of Trinidad

English A1 – Higher Level – Paper 1
Monday 2 May 2000

SECTION A

Write a commentary on *one* of the following:

1. (a)

Our house is high up on the Yorkshire coast, and close by the sea. We have got beautiful walks all round us, in every direction but one. That one I acknowledge to be a horrid walk. It leads, for a quarter of a mile, through a melancholy plantation of firs, and brings you out between low cliffs on the loneliest and ugliest little bay on all our coast.

The sand-hills here run down to the sea, and end in two spits of rock jutting out opposite each other, till you lose sight of them in the water. One is called the North Spit, and one the South. Between the two, shifting backwards and forwards at certain seasons of the year, lies the most horrible quicksand on the shores of Yorkshire. At the turn of the tide, something goes on in the unknown deeps below, which sets the whole face of the quicksand shivering and trembling in a manner most remarkable to see, and which has given to it, among the people in our parts, the name of The Shivering Sand. A great bank, half a mile out, nigh the mouth of the bay, breaks the force of the main ocean coming in from the offing¹. Winter and summer, when the tide flows over the quicksand, the sea seems to leave the waves behind it on the bank, and rolls its waters in smoothly with a heave, and covers the sand in silence. A lonesome and a horrid retreat, I can tell you! No boat ever ventures into this bay. No children from our fishing-village, called Cobb's Hole, ever come here to play. The very birds of the air, as it seems to me, give the Shivering Sand a wide berth. That a young woman, with dozens of nice walks to choose from, and company to go with her, if she only said 'Come!' should prefer this place, and should sit and work² or read in it, all alone, when it's her turn out, I grant you, passes belief. It's true, nevertheless, account for it as you may, that this was Rosanna Spearman's favorite walk, except when she went once or twice to Cobb's Hole, to see the only friend she had in our neighborhood, of whom more anon. It's also true that I was now setting out for this same place, to fetch the girl in to dinner, which brings us round happily to our former point, and starts us fair again on our way to the sands.

I saw no sign of the girl in the plantation. When I got out, through the sand-hills, on to the beach, there she was, in her little straw bonnet, and her plain gray cloak that she always wore to hide her deformed shoulder as much as might be - there she was, all alone, looking out on the quicksand and the sea.

She started when I came up with her, and turned her head away from me. Not looking me in the face being another of the proceedings which, as head of the servants, I never allow, on principle, to pass without inquiry - I turned her round my way, and saw that she was crying. My bandanna handkerchief - one of six beauties given to me by my lady - was handy in my pocket. I took it out, and I said to Rosanna, 'Come and sit down, my dear, on the slope of the beach along, with me. I'll dry your eyes for you first, and then I'll make so bold as to ask what you have been crying about.'

When you come to my age, you will find sitting down on the slope of a beach a much longer job than you think it now. By the time I was settled, Rosanna had dried her own eyes with a very inferior handkerchief to mine - cheap cambric. She looked very quiet, and very wretched; but she sat down by me like a good girl, when I told her. When you want to comfort a woman by the shortest way, take her on your knee. I thought of this golden rule. But there! Rosanna wasn't Nancy, and that's the truth of it!

'Now, tell me, my dear,' I said, 'what are you crying about?' 'About the years that are gone, Mr. Betteredge,' says Rosanna quietly. 'My past life style comes back to me sometimes.'

'Come, come, my girl,' I said, 'your past life is all sponged out. Why can't you forget it?'

She took me by one of the lappets³ of my coat. I am a slovenly old man, and a good deal of my meat and drink gets splashed about on my clothes. Sometimes one of the women, and sometimes another, cleans me of my grease. The day before, Rosanna had taken out a spot for me on the lappet of my coat, with a new composition, warranted to remove anything. The grease was gone, but there was a little dull place left on the nap of the cloth where the grease had been. The girl pointed to that place and shook her head.

'The stain is taken off,' she said. 'But the place shows, Mr. Betteredge - the place shows!'

from Wilkie Collins *The Moonstone* (1868), chapter 4.

¹ A position in the sea some distance from the shore

² Sew, embroider, or the like

³ lapels

Dulce Et Decorum Est

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
5 Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling,
10 Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime . . .
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

15 In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
20 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
25 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

BM has two drafts, the earlier of which gives, beneath the title, *To Jessie Pope etc* (cancelled), and *To a certain Poetess*. HO has two drafts, one subscribed *To Jessie Pope etc*, the other, *To a certain Poetess*.

In a letter to his mother, dated August 1917, Owen wrote *Here is a gas poem, done yesterday*.

1. 8: BM (a) has *tired, outstripped* { *gas-shells* deleted, and the line reads *Of gas-shells dropping softly that dropped behind*. EB amended to *Of gas-shells dropping softly behind*. The earlier BM draft shows two alternatives for this line, both of ten syllables. HO (a) gives *Of tired, outstripped five-nines that dropped behind*. HO (b) gives *Of disappointed shells that dropped behind*. After line 8, BM (b) has four lines which in the later version were first altered a little, then cancelled—

Then somewhere near in front: Whew . . . sup sup fop fop

Gas-shells or duds? We loosened masks, in case—

And listened . . . Nothing . . . Far rumouring of Krupp
Then stinging poison hit us in the face.

1. 20: HO (b) *His hanging face, tortured for your own sin*

1. 23: EB omits *Obscene as cancer*

11. 29-4: these were substituted, at a late stage of composition, for
And think how, once, his head was like a bud,
Fresh as a country rose, and keen, and young,—

Write a commentary on *one* of the following:

1. (a)

Household Gods

“I mirrored their breaking lives, I saw their pale
Distraught coming and going, lined despair,
His shaken bulk, her calm pose in the doorway—
I saw them. I was there.”

5 “I have so long been silent, even now
Hardly at all remember how her slim
Long fingers once caressed me—was that how
At one time she touched him?”

10 “His lips on mine in the morning, or, in darkness,
After a happy embrace, warmed my clay.
Where is the firm mouth now, where the kiss?
Broken and swept away.”

15 “They lay me down to serve their steady feet,
How many times they strode over my pile!
Of late those steps were tentative. Now, a street
For strangers, I am so much jute and wool.”

20 “Bit by bit they painted my walls, the ceiling,
Made me in terms of their vision—I was glad.
But signs of time flake down, the walls are peeling,
What is a house when occupants are fled?”

“My hands repeat themselves, so does not time.
The climactical moment is past, whoever will come.
I gather myself to cough one cautious chime,
But the works are rusted. Henceforth I am dumb.”

25 “I mirrored their coming here, I see their going,
Together once, now separately. Their outer
Semblance concerns me. I have no way of knowing
Their motives, or their reasons for departure.”

30 “Dust settles in the fireplace, and the curtains
Hang without a purpose in neat folds.
The books are stacked, chairs not to be sat on
Grouped over-nicely in a house grown cold.”

“I see no more. Their life gave our lives meaning,
But broken homes will not set again.
35 Their parting was our dissolution, they
Will never know their household gods are slain.”

Philip Hobsbaum, *The Pattern of Poetry* (1962)

1. (b)

Night Wind

Tonight the wind blows through
all the worlds I have known and
through all the lives I have led.
The wind blows in the trees,
5 deeper into each.
The wind blows forever,
strains like something
endlessly departing.
Restless, impatient,
10 it races without burden.

The night wind implores me through walls,
claims me inside buildings.
The night wind is an empire
in exodus, a deliverance
15 beside the dark shape of trees. Oaks
that wrestle the gusty twilight
under starry skies.

The wind takes
me in its giddy rush and
20 gathers me into a storm of longing,
rising on wings of darkness.
There is a music in the wind.
The thrum of guy wires¹
of a thousand branches.
25 Muffled percussion
of banging doors, the
, sibilous clamour of rushing leaves.

Above me the Milky Way
and leaping, striding, I am the
30 bloodrun of the atmosphere.
Racing with leaves and newspapers
down deserted streets,
over fields and playgrounds.

35 I pace the wind
through forests and beside highways.
Along oceans and rivers
the gale's mysterious, unspoken imperative
is a joyous delirium with
nothing at its end.

Christopher Dewdney, from *Demon Pond* (1984)

¹ guy wires: cables used in steadying masts or buildings

The Heron

1997 1. (b)

The cloud-backed heron will not move;
He stares into the stream.
He stands unfaltering while the gulls
And oyster-catchers scream.

5 He does not hear, he cannot see
The great white horses of the sea,
But fixes eyes on stillness
Below their flying team.

How long will he remain, how long
10 have the grey woods been green?
The sky and the reflected sky,
their glass he has not seen,
But silent as a speck of sand
Interpreting the sea and land,
15 His fall pulls down the fabric
Of all that windy scene.

Sailing with clouds and woods behind,
Pausing in leisured flight,
He stepped, alighting on a stone,
20 Dropped from the stars of night.
He stood there unconcerned with day,
Deaf to the tumult of the bay,
Watching a stone in water,
A fish's hidden light.

25 Sharp rocks drive back the breaking waves,
Confusing sea with air.
Bundles of spray thrown mountain-high
Have left the shingle bare.
A shipwrecked anchor wedged by rocks,
30 Loosed by the thundering equinox,
Divides the herded waters,
The stallion and his mare.

Yet no distraction breaks the watch
Of that time-killing bird.
35 He stands unmoving on the stone:
Since dawn he has not stirred.
Calamity about him cries,
But he has fixed his golden eyes
On water's crooked tablet,
40 On lights reflected word.

4 person group presentation on a commentary passage

The Narrator who gives:

- Organizing/Umbrella/Argumentative Statement (Thesis)
- Explain the Core Thematic Aspects or Main Issues of the passage (give some overview on WHAT is happening in the passage)
- General/Formal Outline of Your Oral Presentation (guides through the stages & sequence of the presentation; provides transition between the other speakers)
- ** How the written commentary would look / be structured

The Personal Reactions person:

- Discuss the differences of opinions among the group on the passage
- Explain a) the Most Significant Line and/or b) the Significant Shifts or Progressions in the passage
- Author Purpose ; What role has the author/speaker taken? (philosopher, voice of protest, an objective reporter, to warn, to comfort, to reflect person experience, etc)
- Desired emotional and intellectual effect on the reader
- Tone and tone shifts (*or let details person do it*)
- Senses engaged
- What is the overall value of the literary piece? Its overall significance? Greatest weakness or strength of the passage?

The Bigger Techniques Person:

- Setting
- Action or the conflicts in the passage (external and/or internal)
- Narrator
- Protagonist
- Relationships between characters (and or with the narrator) AKA Characterization
- Imagery and image patterns/shifts
- Symbols
- Literal vs. figurative (or symbolic) levels
- Social Commentary (on what)
- Gender or class roles/positioning
- Prose: location/function in the overall plot of the larger work (how it fits with the imagined larger text)

The Details person:

- Explain Significant Literary Features and Their Effect (minimum of 3 of the little devices like personification, metaphor, irony, foreshadowing, repetitions, hyperbole, allusions, etc)
- Language Features (diction) – be detailed ; Sentence lengths (syntax); Sound Effects
- Poem: Rhyme/meter/structure/overall poetic style OR Prose: Paragraph divisions, prose style, type of genre of the writing

You certainly are not limited to these lists or these divisions of roles, you must adapt based on your passage and your interpretation of the passage!! Don't be stiff/formulaic...

GUIDING QUESTIONS (from the formal orals) THAT COULD BE USEFUL TO ASK YOURSELF:

- ❑ What is established by this passage? By what means has it been achieved?
- ❑ How is our perception of the relationship between X and Y developed in this passage?
- ❑ What is the primary significance of this passage?
- ❑ What are the dominant images used? What effects do they have?
- ❑ Discuss the poetic devices used to develop the tone of the excerpt. How does the tone help develop X?
- ❑ What is the progression or movement of thought and feeling (or the details) in the passage?
- ❑ What are the effects of imagery on the mood/atmosphere of this passage?
- ❑ What stylistic devices, including images, are used to help convey X's (the narrator, protag, etc) state of mind?
- ❑ How is meaning constructed in this passage?