



Cambridge International AS & A Level

LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

9695/72

Paper 7 Comment and Appreciation

May/June 2020

2 hours



You must answer on the enclosed answer booklet.

You will need: Answer booklet (enclosed)

INSTRUCTIONS

- Answer **two** questions.
- Follow the instructions on the front cover of the answer booklet. If you need additional answer paper, ask the invigilator for a continuation booklet.
- You are reminded of the need for good English and clear presentation in your answers.

INFORMATION

- The total mark for this paper is 50.
- All questions are worth equal marks.

This document has **8** pages. Blank pages are indicated.

1 Write a critical commentary on the following passage from the novel *The Thorn Birds* (published in 1977) by Colleen McCullough.

On December 8th, 1915, Meggie Cleary had her fourth birthday. After the breakfast dishes were put away her mother silently thrust a brown paper parcel into her arms and ordered her outside. So Meggie squatted down behind the gorse bush next to the front gate and tugged impatiently. Her fingers were clumsy, the wrapping heavy; it smelled faintly of the Wahine general store, which told her that whatever lay inside the parcel had miraculously been *bought*, not homemade or donated.

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Something fine and mistily gold began to poke through a corner; she attacked the paper faster, peeling it away in long, ragged strips.

'Agnes! Oh, Agnes!' she said lovingly, blinking at the doll lying there in a tattered nest.

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A miracle indeed. Only once in her life had Meggie been into Wahine; all the way back in May, because she had been a very good girl. So, perched in the buggy beside her mother, on her best behaviour, she had been too excited to see or remember much. Except for Agnes, the beautiful doll sitting on the store counter, dressed in a crinoline of pink satin with cream lace frills all over it. Right then and there in her mind she had christened it Agnes, the only name she knew elegant enough for such a peerless creature. Yet over the ensuing months her yearning after Agnes contained nothing of hope; Meggie didn't own a doll and had no idea little girls and dolls belonged together. She played happily with the whistles and slingshots and battered soldiers her brothers discarded, got her hands dirty and her boots muddy.

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It never occurred to her that Agnes was to play with. Stroking the bright pink folds of the dress, grander than any she had ever seen on a human woman, she picked Agnes up tenderly. The doll had jointed arms and legs which could be moved anywhere; even her neck and tiny, shapely waist were jointed. Her golden hair was exquisitely dressed in a high pompadour¹ studded with pearls, her pale bosom peeped out of a foaming fichu² of cream lace fastened with a pearl pin. The finely painted bone china face was beautiful, left unglazed to give the delicately tinted skin a natural matte texture. Astonishingly lifelike blue eyes shone between lashes of real hair, their irises streaked and circled with a darker blue; fascinated, Meggie discovered that when Agnes lay back far enough, her eyes closed. High on one faintly flushed cheek she had a black beauty mark, and her dusky mouth was parted slightly to show tiny white teeth. Meggie put the doll gently on her lap, crossed her feet under her comfortably, and sat just looking.

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She was still sitting behind the gorse bush when Jack and Hughie came rustling through the grass where it was too close to the fence to feel a scythe. Her hair was the typical Cleary beacon, all the Cleary children save Frank being martyred by a thatch some shade of red; Jack nudged his brother and pointed gleefully. They separated, grinning at each other. Meggie would not have heard them anyway, so engrossed was she in Agnes, humming softly to herself.

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'What's that you've got, Meggie?' Jack shouted, pouncing. 'Show us!'

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'Yes, show us!' Hughie giggled, outflanking her.

She clasped the doll against her chest and shook her head. 'No, she's mine! I got her for my birthday!'

'Show us, go on! We just want to have a look.'

Pride and joy won out. She held the doll so her brothers could see. 'Look, isn't she beautiful? Her name is Agnes.'

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'Agnes? Agnes?' Jack gagged realistically. 'What a soppy name! Why don't you call her Margaret or Betty?'

'Because she's Agnes!'

Hughie noticed the joint in the doll's wrist, and whistled. 'Hey, Jack, look! It can move its hand!'

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'Where? Let's see.'

'No!' Meggie hugged the doll close again, tears forming. 'No, you'll break her! Oh, Jack, don't take her away – you'll break her!'

'Pooh!' His dirty brown hands locked about her wrists, closing tightly. 'Want a Chinese burn? And don't be such a crybaby, or I'll tell Bob.' He squeezed her skin in opposite directions until it stretched whitely, as Hughie got hold of the doll's skirts and pulled. 'Gimme, or I'll do it really hard!'

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'No! Don't, Jack, please don't! You'll break her, I know you will! Oh, please leave her alone! Don't take her, please!' In spite of the cruel grip on her wrists she clung to the doll, sobbing and kicking.

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'Got it!' Hughie whooped, as the doll slid under Meggie's crossed forearms.

Jack and Hughie found her just as fascinating as Meggie had; off came the dress, the petticoats and long, frilly drawers. Agnes lay naked while the boys pushed and pulled at her, forcing one foot round the back of her head, making her look down her spine, every possible contortion they could think of. They took no notice of Meggie as she stood crying; it did not occur to her to seek help, for in the Cleary family those who could not fight their own battles got scant aid or sympathy, and that went for girls, too.

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The doll's golden hair tumbled down, the pearls flew winking into the long grass and disappeared. A dusty boot came down thoughtlessly on the abandoned dress, smearing grease from the smithy across its satin. Meggie dropped to her knees, scrabbling frantically to collect the miniature clothes before more damage was done them, then she began picking among the grass blades where she thought the pearls might have fallen. Her tears were blinding her, the grief in her heart new, for until now she had never owned anything worth grieving for.

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¹ *pompadour* – an elaborate hair style

² *fichu* – a scarf

2 Write a critical commentary on the following passage from the novel *Aurora Floyd* (published in 1863) by Mary Elizabeth Braddon.

Captain Talbot Bulstrode has received some shocking news, which means that he has to urgently leave the woman he loves – Aurora Floyd – even though dinner is about to be served.

The jangling, jarring sound of the second dinner-bell clanged out as he went from the semi-obscurity of the corridor into the glaring gas-light of the billiard-room. He met Lucy Floyd coming toward him in her rustling silk dinner-dress, with fringes, and laces, and ribbons, and jewels fluttering and sparkling about her, and he almost hated her for looking so bright and radiant. Lucy recoiled at the aspect of the young man's face.

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"What is it?" she asked; "what has happened, Captain Bulstrode?"

"Nothing; I have received a letter from Cornwall which obliges me to —"

His hollow voice died away into a hoarse whisper before he could finish the sentence.

"Lady Bulstrode — or Sir John — is ill, perhaps?" hazarded Lucy.

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Talbot pointed to his white lips and shook his head. The gesture might mean anything. He could not speak. The hall was full of visitors and children going into dinner. The little people were to dine with their seniors that day, as an especial treat and privilege of the season. The door of the dining-room was open, and Talbot saw the grey head of Archibald Floyd dimly visible at the end of a long vista of lights, and silver, and glass, and evergreens. The old man had his nephews and nieces, and their children grouped about him, but the place at his right hand, the place Aurora was meant to fill, was vacant. Captain Bulstrode turned away from that gaily-lighted scene and ran up the staircase to his room, where he found his servant waiting with his master's clothes laid out, wondering why he had not come to dress.

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The man fell back at the sight of Talbot's face, ghastly in the light of the wax candles on the dressing-table.

"I am going away, Philman," said the captain, speaking very fast, and in a thick, indistinct voice. "I am going down to Cornwall by the express to-night, if I can get to town in time to catch the train. Pack my clothes and come after me. You can join me at the Paddington Station. I shall walk up to Beckenham, and take the first train for town. Here, give this to the servants for me, will you?"

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He took a confused heap of gold and silver from his pocket, and dropped it into the man's hand.

"Nothing wrong at Bulstrode, I hope, sir?" said the servant. "Is Sir John ill?"

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"No, no; I've had a letter from my mother — I — you'll find me at the Great Western¹."

He snatched up his hat, and was hurrying from the room; but the man followed him with his great-coat.

"You'll catch your death, sir, on such a night as this," the servant said, in a tone of respectful remonstrance².

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The banker was standing at the door of the dining-room when Talbot crossed the hall. He was telling a servant to look for his daughter.

"We are all waiting for Miss Floyd," the old man said; "we cannot begin dinner without Miss Floyd."

Unobserved in the confusion, Talbot opened the great door softly, and let himself out into the cold winter's night. The long terrace was all ablaze with the lights in the high, narrow windows, as upon the night when he had first come to Felden; and before him lay the park, the trees bare and leafless, the ground white with a thin coating of snow, the sky above grey and starless — a cold and desolate expanse, in dreary contrast with the warmth and brightness behind. All this was typical of the crisis of his life. He was leaving warm love and hope for cold resignation or icy despair. He went down the terrace-steps, across the trim garden-walks, and out into that wide, mysterious park. The long avenue was ghostly in the grey light, the tracery of the interlacing branches above his head making black shadows, that flickered to and fro upon the whitened ground beneath his feet. He walked for a quarter of a mile before he looked back at the lighted windows behind him. He did not turn until a wind in the avenue had brought him to a spot from which he could see the dimly-lighted bay-window of the room in which he had left Aurora. He stood for some time looking at this feeble glimmer, and thinking — thinking of all he had lost, or all he had perhaps escaped — thinking of what his life was to be henceforth without that woman — thinking that he would rather have been the poorest ploughboy in Beckenham parish than the heir of Bulstrode, if he could have taken the girl he loved to his heart, and believed in her truth.

¹ *the Great Western* — a large hotel

² *remonstrance* — criticism

3 Write a critical commentary on the following poem (published in 1997) by Kwesi Brew.

The Dry Season

The year is withering; the wind
Blows down the leaves
Men stand under eaves
And overhear the secrets
Of the cold dry wind, 5
Of the half-bare tree.

The grasses are tall and tinted,
Straw-gold hues of dryness
And the contradicting awryness¹, 10
Of the dusty roads a-scatter
With the pools of colourful leaves
With ghosts of the dreaming year.

And soon, soon the fires,
The fires will begin to burn,
The hawk will flutter and turn 15
On its wings and swoop for the mouse,
The dogs will run for the hare,
The hare for its little life.

¹ awryness – untidy messiness

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