Cambridge Assessment International Education

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LITERATURE IN ENGLISH **0475/41**

Paper 4 Unseen **October/November 2021**

1 hour 15 minutes

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You must answer on the enclosed answer booklet.

You will need: Answer booklet (enclosed)

INSTRUCTIONS

- Answer **one** question: **either** Question 1 **or** Question 2.
- Follow the instructions on the front cover of the answer booklet. If you need additional answer paper, ask the invigilator for a continuation booklet.

INFORMATION

- The total mark for this paper is 25.
- All questions are worth equal marks.

This document has **8** pages. Any blank pages are indicated.

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You are advised to spend about 20 minutes reading the question paper and planning your answer.

Answer **either** Question 1 **or** Question 2.

EITHER

1 Read carefully the poem on the opposite page. The poet has recently moved into an old house. He is in the attic trying to fix the electrical wiring and starts to think about the house and the people who have lived there before him.

How does the poet vividly convey his thoughts and feelings while in the attic?

To help you answer this question, you might consider:

- how he portrays the attic as an uncomfortable place
- how he conveys his feelings about the house
- his thoughts about its past inhabitants and the effect these thoughts have on him.

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The House

I lie across the rafters of the loft[1]
Holding the torch. From the junction box
Wires twist into darkness, a crumbling
Skein[2] of red and black under sackcloth
Of webs. For three stifling hours

In the attic's heat I have cursed
This challenge, frustrated by
Electricity – the merciless current
That will not come. And the silence
Of the house offers no clue. Matching

Myself against its fifty years,
The solid rooms and gables[3] of this redbrick
Terrace[4], I must establish my own
Permanence. For territory is not
Bought or sold but fought over: it is

The first instinct, the small, unremarkable
Warfare of our lives. Yet crouched in this
Hot attic room my sweat has turned to ice.
The torchbeam's yellow cylinder
Identifies the dust, shapes from life

That have served their time and been abandoned
By the house. And I stare, fascinated,
At the dead. The faces of those who once called
This house home. Like them, like this frail
Blade of light, the house has swallowed me.

[1] *loft*: attic
[2] *skein*: tangle of threads
[3] *gables*: walls
[4] *terrace*: a type of house

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OR

2 Read carefully the following extract from a novel. Perowne is driving his brand new Mercedes sports car down a side street to avoid a political protest march. Without warning, a BMW car pulls out and the wing mirrors of the two cars hit each other.

How does the writing make this passage so tense for you?

To help you answer this question, you might consider:

- how the writer conveys Perowne's first reactions to the situation
- how the writer makes the situation increasingly tense
- how the setting and the march add to the feeling of suspense.

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The car is a series five BMW, a vehicle Perowne associates for no good reason with criminality, drug-dealing. And there are three men, not one. The shortest is in the front passenger's seat, and the door on that side is opening as he watches, followed immediately by the driver's, and then the rear offside door. Perowne, who does not intend to be trapped into talking from a sitting position, gets out of his car. The half-minute's pause has given the situation a game-like quality in which calculations have already been made. The three men have their own reasons for holding back and discussing their next move. It's important, Perowne thinks as he goes round to the front of his car, to remember that he's in the right, and that he's angry. He also has to be careful. But these contradictory notions aren't helpful, and he decides he'll be better off feeling his way into the confrontation, rather than troubling himself with ground rules. His impulse then is to ignore the men, walk away from them, round the front of the Mercedes to get a better view of the damaged side. But even as he stands, with hands on hips, in a pose of proprietorial[1] outrage, he keeps the men, now advancing as a group, on the edge of vision.

At a glance, there seems to be no damage at all. The wing mirror is intact, there are no dents in the panels; amazingly, the metallic silver paintwork is clean. He leans forward to catch the light at a different angle. With fingers splayed, he runs a hand lightly over the bodywork, as if he really knew what he's about. There is nothing. Not a blemish. In immediate, tactical terms, this seems to leave him at a disadvantage. He has nothing to show for his anger. If there's any damage at all, it is out of sight, between the front wheels.

The men have stopped to look at something in the road. The short fellow in the black suit touches with the tip of his shoe the BMW's shorn-off wing mirror, turning it over the way one might a dead animal. One of the others, a tall young man with the long mournful face of a horse, picks it up, cradling it in both hands. They stare down at it together and then, at a remark from the short man, they turn their faces towards Perowne simultaneously, with abrupt curiosity, like deer disturbed in a forest. For the first time, it occurs to him that he might be in some kind of danger. Officially closed off at both ends, the street is completely deserted. Behind the men, on the Tottenham Court Road, a broken file of protesters is making its way south to join the main body. Perowne glances over his shoulder. There, behind him on Gower Street, the march proper has begun. Thousands packed in a single dense column are making for Piccadilly, their banners angled forwards heroically, as in a revolutionary poster. From their faces, hands and clothes they emanate the rich colour, almost like warmth, peculiar to compacted humanity. For dramatic effect, they're walking in silence to the funereal beat of marching drums.

The three men resume their approach.

[1] *proprietorial*: relating to the owner

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Surname	StemUp Model Solution
Answer booklet	Write the question number in the left-hand margin at the start of each answer.

Question number

1

What begins as a hot, irritating household chore becomes, by the end of the poem, a quietly unnerving meditation on ownership and mortality. The poet vividly conveys a mind that moves from frustration, to defiance, to something close to dread, as he realises that the house he hoped to claim may in fact be claiming him.

The attic is established at once as a cramped, oppressive space. The opening line, "I lie across the rafters of the loft", places the speaker in an awkward, almost helpless position, stretched out with nothing solid beneath him but beams. The wiring is described with images of decay and confusion: the wires "twist into darkness", and the "crumbling / Skein of red and black" suggests something knotted and ageing, like tangled veins. The line break after "crumbling" leaves the word hanging, so the reader feels the instability before the noun arrives. The phrase "sackcloth / Of webs" is particularly rich. Sackcloth is the rough cloth traditionally worn in mourning, so even at this early stage the poet hints at death, as though the house is dressed for a funeral.

His frustration is conveyed through blunt, honest admissions. He has "cursed / This challenge", and the enjambment pushes us on through his irritation without pause. Electricity becomes almost a living opponent, "the merciless current / That will not come", as if it is deliberately refusing him. I find the personification of the house here especially unsettling: "the silence / Of the house offers no clue". The house seems to be watching him struggle and choosing not to help, which prepares us for the sense of rivalry that follows.

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At the centre of the poem, the tone shifts from practical complaint to reflection. The speaker is "Matching / Myself against its fifty years", and the language becomes that of a contest. The house is "solid", with its "gables" and "redbrick / Terrace", words which emphasise its weight and endurance, while he must "establish my own / Permanence". Placing "Permanence" alone at the start of a line gives it emphasis, yet it also exposes how fragile his hope is: a human life is hardly permanent beside fifty years of brick. The poet then widens his thoughts into a general claim: "territory is not / Bought or sold but fought over". Calling home-making "the small, unremarkable / Warfare of our lives" is wryly humorous, but it also suggests that every occupant has fought the same quiet battle, and lost it eventually.

The turning point arrives with "Yet". In the line "my sweat has turned to ice", the poet uses a striking contrast between heat and cold to show fear arriving suddenly. Nothing external has changed, the attic is still "Hot", so the chill must come from within, from his own thoughts.

Its "yellow cylinder" is a precise, almost scientific image, and it "Identifies the dust", as though uncovering evidence. The "shapes from life / That have served their time and been abandoned / By the house" are left deliberately vague: they could be discarded objects, but the phrasing makes them sound like people who have been used up and cast off. The house, not the people, is the active force. When the speaker admits "I stare, fascinated, / At the dead", the commas slow the line and capture his paralysed attention. He imagines "The faces of those who once called / This house home", and the soft repetition of the "h" sounds in "house home" gives a sudden tenderness to these forgotten lives.

The final simile is the poem's most memorable moment. Comparing himself both

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to the past inhabitants and to "this frail / Blade of light", he concedes that "the house has swallowed me". The torch beam, earlier a confident "cylinder", is now "frail", mirroring his own loss of confidence. The verb "swallowed" turns the house into a devouring creature, completing the personification. Ironically, the man who wanted to fight for territory recognises that he is only the latest in a line of temporary occupants, and that the house will outlast him as it outlasted them.

2 McEwan makes this passage tense by placing us inside Perowne's anxious, calculating mind as a trivial collision slowly turns into a possible threat. Yet through precise detail, shifts in pace and an increasingly menacing setting, the writer makes every second feel loaded, and leaves us at the end waiting for violence that has not yet arrived.

Tension is created from the very first sentence through Perowne's instinctive judgements. He associates the BMW "for no good reason with criminality, drug-dealing", and the phrase "for no good reason" is revealing: he knows his prejudice is irrational, yet he cannot shake it, so the reader shares his unease. The short sentence "And there are three men, not one" acts like a jolt. The doors then open one after another, "followed immediately by the driver's, and then the rear offside door", and the long, listing sentence mimics the steady, ominous build-up as each new figure emerges.

Perowne's first reactions are a mixture of pride, anger and caution, and the writer shows his thoughts competing with one another. He gets out because he "does not intend to be trapped into talking from a sitting position", which shows he is already thinking tactically, as if preparing for a fight. The narrator notes the "game-like quality in which calculations have already been made", and this sense

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of a silent contest between two sides is unsettling: we are aware that the men are "discussing their next move", but we are never told what they are saying. Perowne reminds himself that "he's in the right, and that he's angry", then immediately that he "has to be careful". McEwan admits that "these contradictory notions aren't helpful", and this honesty about his confusion makes him seem vulnerable rather than in control.

The second paragraph slows down, and this delay is itself a source of suspense. Perowne inspects his car in careful detail, leaning forward, running a hand "lightly over the bodywork, as if he really knew what he's about". The gentle irony here exposes his pretence. The discovery is given in increasingly short, blunt sentences: "There is nothing. Not a blemish." The minor sentence "Not a blemish" lands with a thud, because the absence of damage is bad news for him. His moral advantage has vanished, and the men's broken mirror means they now have the grievance.

In the final paragraph the men are described in increasingly strange and threatening ways. The short man touches the "shorn-off wing mirror" with his shoe, "the way one might a dead animal", and this simile introduces death into the scene. The tall man with "the long mournful face of a horse" cradles it as if in grief, which seems absurd but also sinister, as though they are mourning something that must be avenged. When they turn "simultaneously" towards Perowne, "like deer disturbed in a forest", the animal imagery becomes ambiguous: deer are usually prey, yet here they seem alert and dangerous, and their unity as a group contrasts with Perowne standing alone. It is at precisely this point that the writer states plainly, "For the first time, it occurs to him that he might be in some kind of danger", so his fear catches up with what the reader has sensed all along.

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The setting deepens the suspense. The street is "Officially closed off at both ends" and "completely deserted", so Perowne is isolated, with no witnesses and no escape. Ironically, thousands of people are close by: the march, a "single dense column" with banners "angled forwards heroically", moves past him. Yet this crowd offers no help. They walk "in silence to the funereal beat of marching drums", and "funereal" again hints at death, while the steady drumbeat sounds like a countdown.

The passage ends with a single, stark sentence on its own line: "The three men resume their approach." After all the observation and delay, the plain, factual statement is chilling, because it denies us any resolution. McEwan leaves both Perowne and the reader suspended at the moment just before the confrontation begins, which is what makes the passage so tense for me.