

LITERATURE (ENGLISH)

0486/11

Paper 1 Poetry and Prose

October/November 2017

1 hour 30 minutes

No Additional Materials are required.

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

An answer booklet is provided inside this question paper. You should follow the instructions on the front cover of the answer booklet. If you need additional answer paper ask the invigilator for a continuation booklet.

Answer **two** questions: **one** question from Section A and **one** question from Section B.

All questions in this paper carry equal marks.



This document consists of **24** printed pages, **4** blank pages and **1** Insert.

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SECTION A: POETRY

Answer **one** question from this section.

SONGS OF OURSELVES VOLUME 1: from Part 5

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

Either 1 Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

Cold In The Earth

Cold in the earth, and the deep snow piled above thee!
Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave!
Have I forgot, my Only Love, to love thee,
Severed at last by Time's all-wearing wave?

Now, when alone, do my thoughts no longer hover 5
Over the mountains on Angora's shore;
Resting their wings where heath and fern-leaves cover
That noble heart for ever, ever more?

Cold in the earth, and fifteen wild Decembers 10
From those brown hills have melted into spring –
Faithful indeed is the spirit that remembers
After such years of change and suffering!

Sweet Love of youth, forgive if I forget thee 15
While the World's tide is bearing me along:
Stern desires and darker hopes beset me,
Hopes which obscure but cannot do thee wrong.

No other Sun has lightened up my heaven;
No other Star has ever shone for me:
All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given – 20
All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee.

But when the days of golden dreams had perished
And even Despair was powerless to destroy,
Then did I learn how existence could be cherished,
Strengthened and fed without the aid of joy;

Then did I check the tears of useless passion, 25
Weaned my young soul from yearning after thine;
Sternly denied its burning wish to hasten
Down to that tomb already more than mine!

And even yet, I dare not let it languish, 30
Dare not indulge in Memory's rapturous pain;
Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish,
How could I seek the empty world again?

(by *Emily Brontë*)

How does Brontë's writing make the memories described in this poem so moving?

- Or 2 How does Dickinson vividly portray the figure of Death in *Because I Could Not Stop For Death*?

Because I Could Not Stop For Death

Because I could not stop for Death —
He kindly stopped for me —
The Carriage held but just Ourselves —
And Immortality.

We slowly drove — He knew no haste 5
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For his Civility —

We passed the School, where Children strove 10
At Recess — in the Ring —
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain —
We passed the Setting Sun —

Or rather — He passed Us —
The Dews drew quivering and chill —
For only Gossamer, my Gown — 15
My Tippet — only Tulle —

We paused before a House that seemed 20
A Swelling of the Ground —
The Roof was scarcely visible —
The Cornice — in the Ground —

Since then — 'tis Centuries — and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity —

(by *Emily Dickinson*)

SONGS OF OURSELVES VOLUME 2: from Part 1**Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.****Either 3** Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:*Love (III)*

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
 But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack
 From my first entrance in,
 Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lacked anything. 5

A guest, I answered, worthy to be here:
 Love said, You shall be he.
 I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee. 10
 Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marred them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
 And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame? 15
 My dear, then I will serve.
 You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
 So I did sit and eat.

FINIS.

Glory be to God on high, and on earth 20
peace, good will towards men.

(by George Herbert)

How does Herbert's writing vividly convey the speaker's thoughts and feelings in this poem?

Or 4 In what ways does Wroth amusingly convey her thoughts in *Song*?

Song

Love a child is ever crying;
 Please him, and he straight is flying;
 Give him he the more is craving,
 Never satisfied with having.

His desires have no measure; 5
 Endless folly is his treasure;
 What he promiseth he breaketh.
 Trust not one word that he speaketh.

He vows nothing but false matter, 10
 And to cozen you he'll flatter.
 Let him gain the hand, he'll leave you,
 And still glory to deceive you.

He will triumph in your wailing, 15
 And yet cause be of your failing.
 These his virtues are, and slighter
 Are his gifts, his favours lighter.

Feathers are as firm in staying, 20
 Wolves no fiercer in their preying.
 As a child then leave him crying,
 Nor seek him so given to flying.

(by *Lady Mary Wroth*)

GILLIAN CLARKE: from *Collected Poems*

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

Either 5 Read this poem, and then answer the question that follows it:

Catrin

<p>I can remember you, child, As I stood in a hot, white Room at the window watching The people and cars taking Turn at the traffic lights.</p>	5
<p>I can remember you, our first Fierce confrontation, the tight Red rope of love which we both Fought over. It was a square Environmental blank, disinfected Of paintings or toys. I wrote All over the walls with my Words, coloured the clean squares With the wild, tender circles Of our struggle to become Separate. We want, we shouted, To be two, to be ourselves.</p>	10
<p>Neither won nor lost the struggle In the glass tank clouded with feelings Which changed us both. Still I am fighting You off, as you stand there With your straight, strong, long Brown hair and your rosy, Defiant glare, bringing up From the heart's pool that old rope, Tightening about my life, Trailing love and conflict, As you ask may you skate In the dark, for one more hour.</p>	15
<p>Neither won nor lost the struggle In the glass tank clouded with feelings Which changed us both. Still I am fighting You off, as you stand there With your straight, strong, long Brown hair and your rosy, Defiant glare, bringing up From the heart's pool that old rope, Tightening about my life, Trailing love and conflict, As you ask may you skate In the dark, for one more hour.</p>	20
<p>Neither won nor lost the struggle In the glass tank clouded with feelings Which changed us both. Still I am fighting You off, as you stand there With your straight, strong, long Brown hair and your rosy, Defiant glare, bringing up From the heart's pool that old rope, Tightening about my life, Trailing love and conflict, As you ask may you skate In the dark, for one more hour.</p>	25

How does Clarke movingly convey the mother's feelings about her relationship with her daughter in this poem?

Or 6 Explore the ways in which Clarke creates such a vivid impression of the bat in *Pipistrelle*.

Pipistrelle

Dusk unwinds its spool
among the stems of plum-trees,
subliminal messenger
on the screen of evening,
a night-glance as day cools
on the house-walls. 5

We love what we can't see,
illegible freehand
fills every inch of the page.
We sit after midnight
till the ashes cool
and the bottle's empty. 10

This one, in a box, mouse
the size of my thumb in its furs
and sepia webs of silk
a small foreboding,
the psalms of its veins
on bible-paper, 15

like a rose I spread once in a book
till you could read your future
in the fine print. 20

SECTION B: PROSE

Answer **one** question from this section.

CHINUA ACHEBE: *No Longer at Ease*

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

Either 7 Read this extract, and then answer the question that follows it:

While he waited for the result of his interview, Obi paid a short visit to Umuofia, his home town, five hundred miles away in the Eastern Region.

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For the rest of the journey the driver said not a word more to him.

[from Chapter 5]

How does Achebe make this a revealing and significant moment in the novel?

Or 8 How does Achebe's novel memorably portray the way women are treated in Nigeria?

JANE AUSTEN: *Mansfield Park*

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

Either 9 Read this extract, and then answer the question that follows it:

Fanny was almost stunned. The smallness of the house, and thinness of the walls, brought every thing so close to her, that, added to the fatigue of her journey, and all her recent agitation, she hardly knew how to bear it. *Within* the room all was tranquil enough, for Susan having disappeared with the others, there were soon only her father and herself remaining; and he taking out a newspaper—the accustomed loan of a neighbour, applied himself to studying it, without seeming to recollect her existence. The solitary candle was held between himself and the paper, without any reference to her possible convenience; but she had nothing to do, and was glad to have the light screened from her aching head, as she sat in bewildered, broken, sorrowful contemplation. 5

She was at home. But alas! it was not such a home, she had not such a welcome, as—she checked herself; she was unreasonable. What right had she to be of importance to her family? She could have none, so long lost sight of! William’s concerns must be dearest—they always had been—and he had every right. Yet to have so little said or asked about herself—to have scarcely an enquiry made after Mansfield! It did pain her to have Mansfield forgotten; the friends who had done so much—the dear, dear friends! But here, one subject swallowed up all the rest. Perhaps it must be so. The destination of the Thrush must be now pre-eminently interesting. A day or two might shew the difference. *She* only was to blame. Yet she thought it would not have been so at Mansfield. No, in her uncle’s house there would have been a consideration of times and seasons, a regulation of subject, a propriety, an attention towards every body which there was not here. 10 15 20 25

The only interruption which thoughts like these received for nearly half an hour, was from a sudden burst of her father’s, not at all calculated to compose them. At a more than ordinary pitch of thumping and hallooing in the passage, he exclaimed, “Devil take those young dogs! How they are singing out! Aye, Sam’s voice louder than all the rest! That boy is fit for a boatswain. Holla—you there—Sam—stop your confounded pipe, or I shall be after you.” 30

This threat was so palpably disregarded, that though within five minutes afterwards the three boys all burst into the room together and sat down, Fanny could not consider it as a proof of any thing more than their being for the time thoroughly fagged, which their hot faces and panting breaths seemed to prove—especially as they were still kicking each other’s shins, and hallooing out at sudden starts immediately under their father’s eye. 35

[from Chapter 38]

How does Austen vividly convey Fanny’s feelings about her home in Portsmouth at this moment in the novel?

Or 10 To what extent does Austen depict Henry Crawford as a villain?

Turn to page 14 for Question 11.

WILLA CATHER: *My Ántonia*

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

Either 11 Read this extract, and then answer the question that follows it:

Those girls had grown up in the first bitter-hard times, and had got little schooling themselves. But the younger brothers and sisters, for whom they made such sacrifices and who have had ‘advantages,’ never seem to me, when I meet them now, half as interesting or as well educated. The older girls, who helped to break up the wild sod, learned so much from life, from poverty, from their mothers and grandmothers; they had all, like Ántonia, been early awakened and made observant by coming at a tender age from an old country to a new. 5

I can remember a score of these country girls who were in service in Black Hawk during the few years I lived there, and I can remember something unusual and engaging about each of them. Physically they were almost a race apart, and out-of-door work had given them a vigour which, when they got over their first shyness on coming to town, developed into a positive carriage and freedom of movement, and made them conspicuous among Black Hawk women. 10 15

That was before the day of high-school athletics. Girls who had to walk more than half a mile to school were pitied. There was not a tennis-court in the town; physical exercise was thought rather inelegant for the daughters of well-to-do families. Some of the high-school girls were jolly and pretty, but they stayed indoors in winter because of the cold, and in summer because of the heat. When one danced with them, their bodies never moved inside their clothes; their muscles seemed to ask but one thing — not to be disturbed. I remember those girls merely as faces in the schoolroom, gay and rosy, or listless and dull, cut off below the shoulders, like cherubs, by the ink-smearred tops of the high desks that were surely put there to make us round-shouldered and hollow-chested. 20 25

The daughters of Black Hawk merchants had a confident, unenquiring belief that they were ‘refined,’ and that the country girls, who ‘worked out,’ were not. The American farmers in our county were quite as hard-pressed as their neighbours from other countries. All alike had come to Nebraska with little capital and no knowledge of the soil they must subdue. All had borrowed money on their land. But no matter in what straits the Pennsylvanian or Virginian found himself, he would not let his daughters go out into service. Unless his girls could teach a country school, they sat at home in poverty. 30 35

The Bohemian and Scandinavian girls could not get positions as teachers, because they had had no opportunity to learn the language. Determined to help in the struggle to clear the homestead from debt, they had no alternative but to go into service. Some of them, after they came to town, remained as serious and as discreet in behaviour as they had been when they ploughed and herded on their father’s farm. Others, like the three Bohemian Marys, tried to make up for the years of youth they had lost. But every one of them did what she had set out to do, and sent home those hard-earned dollars. The girls I knew were always helping to pay for ploughs and reapers, brood-sows, or steers to fatten. 40 45

One result of this family solidarity was that the foreign farmers in our county were the first to become prosperous. After the fathers were out of debt, the daughters married the sons of neighbours — usually of like

nationality — and the girls who once worked in Black Hawk kitchens are to-day managing big farms and fine families of their own; their children are better off than the children of the town women they used to serve.

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[from Book 2 Chapter 9]

What does Cather's writing make you feel about the hired girls at this moment in the novel?

Or **12** In what ways does Cather make Jim's grandparents so significant in the novel?

GEORGE ELIOT: *Silas Marner*

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

Either 13 Read this extract, and then answer the question that follows it:

The Squire's life was quite as idle as his sons', but it was a fiction kept up by himself and his contemporaries in Raveloe that youth was exclusively the period of folly, and that their aged wisdom was constantly in a state of endurance mitigated by sarcasm. Godfrey waited, before he spoke again, until the ale had been brought and the door closed – an interval during which Fleet, the deer-hound, had consumed enough bits of beef to make a poor man's holiday dinner. 5

'There's been a cursed piece of ill-luck with Wildfire,' he began; 'happened the day before yesterday.'

'What! broke his knees?' said the Squire, after taking a draught of ale. 'I thought you knew how to ride better than that, sir. I never threw a horse down in my life. If I had, I might ha' whistled for another, for *my* father wasn't quite so ready to unstring as some other fathers I know of. But they must turn over a new leaf – *they* must. What with mortgages and arrears, I'm as short o' cash as a roadside pauper. And that fool Kimble says the newspaper's talking about peace. Why, the country wouldn't have a leg to stand on. Prices 'ud run down like a jack, and I should never get my arrears, not if I sold all the fellows up. And there's that damned Fowler, I won't put up with him any longer; I've told Winthrop to go to Cox this very day. The lying scoundrel told me he'd be sure to pay me a hundred last month. He takes advantage because he's on that outlying farm, and thinks I shall forget him.' 10 15 20

The Squire had delivered this speech in a coughing and interrupted manner, but with no pause long enough for Godfrey to make it a pretext for taking up the word again. He felt that his father meant to ward off any request for money on the ground of the misfortune with Wildfire, and that the emphasis he had thus been led to lay on his shortness of cash and his arrears was likely to produce an attitude of mind the most unfavourable for his own disclosure. But he must go on, now he had begun. 25

'It's worse than breaking the horse's knees – he's been staked and killed,' he said, as soon as his father was silent, and had begun to cut his meat. 'But I wasn't thinking of asking you to buy me another horse; I was only thinking I'd lost the means of paying you with the price of Wildfire, as I'd meant to do. Dunsey took him to the hunt to sell him for me the other day, and after he'd made a bargain for a hundred and twenty with Bryce, he went after the hounds, and took some fool's leap or other that did for the horse at once. If it hadn't been for that, I should have paid you a hundred pounds this morning.' 30 35

The Squire had laid down his knife and fork, and was staring at his son in amazement, not being sufficiently quick of brain to form a probable guess as to what could have caused so strange an inversion of the paternal and filial relations as this proposition of his son to pay him a hundred pounds. 40

'The truth is, sir – I'm very sorry – I was quite to blame,' said Godfrey. 'Fowler did pay that hundred pounds. He paid it to me, when I was over there one day last month. And Dunsey bothered me for the money, and I let him have it, because I hoped I should be able to pay it you before this.' 45

The Squire was purple with anger before his son had done speaking,

and found utterance difficult. ‘You let Dunsey have it, sir? And how long have you been so thick with Dunsey that you must *collogue* with him to embezzle my money? Are you turning out a scamp? I tell you I won’t have it. I’ll turn the whole pack of you out of the house together, and marry again. I’d have you to remember, sir, my property’s got no entail on it; – since my grandfather’s time the Casses can do as they like with their land. Remember that, sir. Let Dunsey have the money! Why should you let Dunsey have the money? There’s some lie at the bottom of it.’ 50

‘There’s no lie, sir,’ said Godfrey. ‘I wouldn’t have spent the money myself, but Dunsey bothered me, and I was a fool, and let him have it. But I meant to pay it, whether he did or not. That’s the whole story. I never meant to embezzle money, and I’m not the man to do it. You never knew me do a dishonest trick, sir.’ 55

‘Where’s Dunsey, then? What do you stand talking there for? Go and fetch Dunsey, as I tell you, and let him give account of what he wanted the money for, and what he’s done with it. He shall repent it. I’ll turn him out. I said I would, and I’ll do it. He shan’t brave me. Go and fetch him.’ 60

‘Dunsey isn’t come back, sir.’

‘What! did he break his own neck, then?’ said the Squire, with some disgust at the idea that, in that case, he could not fulfil his threat. 65

[from Part 1 Chapter 9]

How does Eliot vividly portray the unpleasantness of Squire Cass at this moment in the novel?

- Or 14 In what ways does Eliot make the Rainbow Inn such a vivid and important setting in the novel?

MICHAEL FRAYN: *Spies*

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

Either 15 Read this extract, and then answer the question that follows it:

I try to slip into the house without drawing attention to myself.

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Silence.

[from Chapter 10]

How does Frayn make this such a powerfully dramatic moment in the novel?

Or 16 In what ways does Frayn give you particularly vivid impressions of life during war time?

KATE GRENVILLE: *The Secret River*

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

Either 17 Read this extract, and then answer the question that follows it:

The First Branch angled off to starboard, and just after, the river swung hard to port, almost doubling back on itself, as if around a hinge. The long spit of land it swung around rose from the water, a sweet place with scattered trees and grass, as green and tender as a gentleman's park even in this summer season. Thornhill found himself looking for the manor house in among the trees with its windows winking, but there was only a kangaroo watching them pass, its forepaws held up to its chest and its ears twitching towards them. As the *Queen* swept around the point, he saw the rounded tip where sand had collected to form a curve of beach, and a bulge along the side. 5

He almost laughed aloud, seeing it as just the shape of his own thumb, nail and knuckle and all. 10

A chaos opened up inside him, a confusion of wanting. No one had ever spoken to him of how a man might fall in love with a piece of ground. No one had ever spoken of how there could be this teasing sparkle and dance of light among the trees, this calm clean space that invited feet to enter it. 15

He let himself imagine it: standing on the crest of that slope, looking down over his own place. Thornhill's Point. It was a piercing hunger in his guts: to own it. To say *mine*, in a way he had never been able to say *mine* of anything at all. He had not known until this minute that it was something he wanted so much. 20

But the picture of Thornhill's Point seemed too frail to be exposed to the air in anything as blunt as words. It was hardly to be thought of, even in the privacy of his own mind. He said nothing, turned away with no interest on his face, no surprise. Certainly no desire. 25

But Blackwood knew what was in his mind. *Any amount a good land*, he said, so quick that Thornhill had to think to make sense of it. Blackwood shot him one of his direct looks. *I seen you looking*, he said. He gazed out at where the bush stirred. *That back there*. He spat astern as if to get the taste of Smasher out of his mouth. *That ain't no good*. There was something he wanted to establish between them, some important thought that had to be conveyed. *Give a little, take a little, that's the only way*. He stared out across the water, then turned and spoke close in Thornhill's face, quite calm. *Otherwise you're dead as a flea*. 30

He was matter-of-fact. 35

Thornhill nodded, stared away upriver to where another headland was swinging around to reveal another reach of shining water. *Got no argument with that*, he said. He resisted the urge to glance back at the piece of land in the shape of his own thumb. 40

Blackwood watched him, reading his thoughts. *Well then*, he said, but with a doubt in his tone. The words hung between them like an unanswered question.

As the First Branch and the long point fell astern they felt the tide turning, and went ashore for the night on a low island, lying beside the fire on the sand with the forest at their backs. Before dawn they were up again, catching the tide upriver. 45

Now there were more triangles of flat land, like the one Smasher

Sullivan had made his own, where creeks came down in folds between the cliffs. Shelves of grass and trees bordered the river in places, and rounded hills began to take the place of the rearing buttresses of stone. The personality of the river was beginning to change into something softer, kinder, on a more human scale. Approaching Green Hills, river flats stretched away on both sides, squared off into fenced fields of corn and wheat, and orchards of glossy orange trees. Behind the fields the forest was pushed back like a blanket. 50

All that day, watching the river change, Thornhill thought about the long point of land. He had heard the preachers mouthing about the Promised Land. He had taken it as being another thing in the world that was just for gentry. Nothing had ever been promised to him. 55

He knew that this was not what the preachers meant, but he took pleasure in remembering the phrase. That point of land was by way of being promised: not by God, but by himself, to himself. 60

[from Part Two]

How does Grenville's writing vividly convey the significance of this moment to Thornhill?

Or **18** How does Grenville make **one** moment in the novel particularly disturbing for you?

R K NARAYAN: *The English Teacher*

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

Either 19 Read this extract, and then answer the question that follows it:

The boys were making too much noise. I tapped the table lightly and said: 'Ramaswami, here is your notebook. See the corrections on it. There are more corrections on it than on any other paper... .' It was a paraphrase of the poem beginning 'My days among the dead are past ...' He hadn't understood a line of that poem, yet he had written down two pages about it. According to Ramaswami (though not according to Southey) the scholar when he said, 'My days among the dead are past' meant that he was no longer going to worry about his dead relations because wherever his eyes were cast he saw mighty minds of old (he just copies it down from the poem), and so on and on. I enjoyed this paraphrase immensely. I called, 'Ramaswami, come and receive your notebook... .' My comments on the work could not be publicly shown or uttered. When he came near, I opened the notebook and pointed to my remark at the end of the notebook: 'Startling!' I put my finger on this and asked: 'Do you see what I mean?' 5

'Yes, sir ...' whispered Ramaswami. 10

'You are very bad in English.'

'I am sorry, sir... .' 15

'Does this poem make no sense as far as you are concerned?'

'No, sir... .' 20

'Then why do you write so much about it?'

'I do not know, sir... .' 25

'All right, go back to your seat... . Come and see me sometime... .' 30

'Yes, sir, when?'

I couldn't answer this question, because I visualized all my hours so thoroughly allotted for set tasks that I was at a loss to know when I could ask him to see me. So I replied: 'I will tell you, go to your seat.' I spent the rest of the period giving a general analysis of the mistakes I had encountered in this batch of composition – *rather very, as such* for *hence*, split infinitives, collective nouns, and all the rest of the traps that the English language sets for foreigners. I then set them an exercise in essay-writing on the epigram 'Man is the master of his own destiny'. 'An idiotic theme,' I felt, 'this abstract and confounded metaphysic,' but I could not help it. I had been ordered to set this subject to the class. I watched with interest how the boys were going to tackle it. As a guidance it was my duty to puff up this theme, and so I wrote on the blackboard – 'Man, what is man? What is destiny? How does he overcome destiny? How does destiny overcome him? What is fate? What is free will?' – a number of headings which reduced man and his destiny and all the rest to a working formula for these tender creatures to handle. 35

By the afternoon I had finished three hours of lecturing, and was, with a faintly smarting throat, resting in a chair in the common room. There were a dozen other teachers. As each of them sat looking at a book or at the ceiling vacantly, there was a silence which seemed to me oppressive. I never liked it. I had my own technique of breaking it. I remarked to no one in particular: 'We have to decide an important issue before the examinations begin.' The others looked up with bored half-expectancy. 'We will have to call a staff meeting to decide how many marks are to be deducted for spelling honours without the middle u.' 40

45

‘No, no, I don’t think it is necessary,’ said Sastri, the logic lecturer, who had a very straightforward, literal mind, looking up for a moment from the four-day-old newspaper which he was reading. Gajapathy looked over his spectacles, and remarked from the farthest end of the room: ‘You are joking over yesterday’s meeting, I suppose?’ I replied, ‘I am not joking, I am very serious.’

50

[from Chapter 1]

How does Narayan vividly portray Krishna’s life as a teacher at this moment in the novel?

Or **20** How does Narayan strikingly depict doctors in the novel?

from *Stories of Ourselves*

Remember to support your ideas with details from the writing.

- Either 21** Read this extract from *Sredni Vashtar* (by Saki), and then answer the question that follows it:

Conradin was ten years old, and the doctor had pronounced his professional opinion that the boy would not live another five years. The doctor was silky and effete, and counted for little, but his opinion was endorsed by Mrs De Ropp, who counted for nearly everything. Mrs De Ropp was Conradin's cousin and guardian, and in his eyes she represented those three-fifths of the world that are necessary and disagreeable and real; the other two-fifths, in perpetual antagonism to the foregoing, were summed up in himself and his imagination. One of these days Conradin supposed he would succumb to the mastering pressure of wearisome necessary things – such as illnesses and coddling restrictions and drawn-out dullness. Without his imagination, which was rampant under the spur of loneliness, he would have succumbed long ago. 5

Mrs De Ropp would never, in her honestest moments, have confessed to herself that she disliked Conradin, though she might have been dimly aware that thwarting him 'for his good' was a duty which she did not find particularly irksome. Conradin hated her with a desperate sincerity which he was perfectly able to mask. Such few pleasures as he could contrive for himself gained an added relish from the likelihood that they would be displeasing to his guardian, and from the realm of his imagination she was locked out – an unclean thing, which should find no entrance. 10

In the dull, cheerless garden, overlooked by so many windows that were ready to open with a message not to do this or that, or a reminder that medicines were due, he found little attraction. The few fruit-trees that it contained were set jealously apart from his plucking, as though they were rare specimens of their kind blooming in an arid waste; it would probably have been difficult to find a market-gardener who would have offered ten shillings for their entire yearly produce. In a forgotten corner, however, almost hidden behind a dismal shrubbery, was a disused tool-shed of respectable proportions, and within its walls Conradin found a haven, something that took on the varying aspects of a playroom and a cathedral. He had peopled it with a legion of familiar phantoms, evoked partly from fragments of history and partly from his own brain, but it also boasted two inmates of flesh and blood. In one corner lived a ragged-plumaged Houdan hen, on which the boy lavished an affection that had scarcely another outlet. Further back in the gloom stood a large hutch, divided into two compartments, one of which was fronted with close iron bars. This was the abode of a large polecat-ferret, which a friendly butcher-boy had once smuggled, cage and all, into its present quarters, in exchange for a long-secreted hoard of small silver. Conradin was dreadfully afraid of the lithe, sharp-fanged beast, but it was his most treasured possession. Its very presence in the tool-shed was a secret and fearful joy, to be kept scrupulously from the knowledge of the Woman, as he privately dubbed his cousin. And one day, out of Heaven knows what material, he spun the beast a wonderful name, and from that moment it grew into a god and a religion. The Woman indulged in religion once a week at a church near by and took Conradin with her, but to him the church service was an alien rite in the House of Rimmon. Every Thursday, in the dim and musty silence 15
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of the tool-shed he worshipped with mystic and elaborate ceremonial before the wooden hutch where dwelt Sredni Vashtar, the great ferret. Red flowers in their season and scarlet berries in the wintertime were offered at his shrine, for he was a god who laid some special stress on the fierce impatient side of things, as opposed to the Woman's religion which, as far as Conradin could observe, went to great lengths in the contrary direction. And on great festivals powdered nutmeg was strewn in front of his hutch, an important feature of the offering being that the nutmeg had to be stolen. These festivals were of irregular occurrence, and were chiefly appointed to celebrate some passing event. On one occasion, when Mrs De Ropp suffered from acute toothache for three days, Conradin kept up the festival during the entire three days, and almost succeeded in persuading himself that Sredni Vashtar was personally responsible for the toothache. If the malady had lasted for another day the supply of nutmeg would have given out.

The Houdan hen was never drawn into the cult of Sredni Vashtar. Conradin had long ago settled that she was an Anabaptist. He did not pretend to have the remotest knowledge as to what an Anabaptist was, but he privately hoped that it was dashing and not very respectable. Mrs De Ropp was the ground plan on which he based and detested all respectability.

In what ways does Saki build up sympathy for Conradin in this extract?

- Or 22 How does Shadbolt vividly convey the impact of the Maoris' visit on the narrator in *The People Before*?

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