

# RAFFLES INSTITUTION

## 2025 YEAR 6 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION

### HIGHER 2

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#### LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

9539/02

Paper 2 Reading Literature *featuring* the English Romantic Period (1785–1832)

Wednesday 17 September 2025

3 hours

1330-1630

No Additional Materials are required.

Set texts may be taken into the examination room. Pages may be flagged with paper clips or by folding the page corners. Page numbers can be highlighted, underlined, or marked out with vertical lines. Any other kind of folding or flagging of pages in texts (for example, use of sticky notes or tape flags) is not permitted.

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#### READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

Writing paper will be provided. If you need additional paper ask the invigilator.  
Write your name and CT group on all the work you hand in.

Answer **three** questions: one question from Section A, one question from Section B, and one question from Section C.

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

At the end of the examination tie your answer sheets to each section securely.  
Hand in your answers **separately**.

All questions in this paper carry equal marks.

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This document consists of **8** printed pages.

[Turn over

## Section A

Answer **one** question in this section.

1

**Either (a)** The following passage is taken from a novel called *The Bee Sting* (2023) by Paul Murray.

Write a critical appreciation of the passage, considering in detail ways in which your response is shaped by the writer's uses of form, style and language.

Cass and Elaine first met in Chemistry class, when Elaine poured iodine on Cass's eczema during an experiment. It was an accident; she'd cried more than Cass did, and insisted on going with her to the nurse. They'd been friends ever since. Every morning Cass called to Elaine's house and they walked to school together. At lunchtime, they rolled up their long skirts and wandered around the supermarket, listening to music from Elaine's phone, eating croissants from the bakery section that were gone by the time they got to the checkout. In the evening, they went to each other's houses to study. 5

Cass felt she'd known Elaine for ever; it made no sense that they had not always been friends. Their lives were so similar it was almost eerie. Both girls came from well-known families in the town: Cass's father, Dickie, owned the local Volkswagen dealership, while Elaine's dad, Big Mike, was a businessman and cattle farmer. Both girls were of slightly above-average height; both were bright, in fact they were consistently at the top of their class. Both intended to leave here some day and never come back. 10 15

Elaine had golden hair, green eyes, a perfect figure. When she bought clothes online, they always fitted perfectly, as if they'd been made with her in mind. Writing about her in her journal, Cass used words like *grace* and *style*. She had what the French called *je ne sais quoi*<sup>1</sup>. Even when she was clipping her toenails, she looked like she was eating a peach. 20

When Cass came round to Elaine's house, they would sit in her bedroom with the carousel lamp on and look at the Miss Universe Ireland website. Elaine was thinking seriously about entering, though not for the title itself so much as the opportunities it might offer. The previous year's winner was now brand ambassador for a juice company. 25

Cass thought Elaine was prettier than any of the contestants pictured online. But it was tricky. Each of the girls competing to be Miss Universe Ireland, and from there to be Miss Universe for the world/universe overall, had an adversity they had overcome. One had been a refugee from a war in Africa. Another had needed surgery when she was a small girl. A very thin contestant had once been very fat. The adversity had to be something bad, like a learning disability, but not really bad, like being chained up in a basement for ten years by a paedophile. Cass's eczema would be a perfect adversity; they wondered, if she held her skin up against Elaine's long enough, whether she could pass it on to her. But it didn't seem to work. Elaine said the adversity requirement was unfair. When you think about it, it's almost like a kind of discrimination, she said. 30 35

<sup>1</sup> *je ne sais quoi* – an appealing quality that cannot be described or named easily.

The housekeeper knocked on the door to say it was time for Elaine's swimming lesson. Elaine rolled her eyes. The swimming pool was always full of Band-Aids and old people. Coming from *here*, she said. If that isn't an adversity, I don't know what is.

Elaine hated their town. Everyone knew everyone, everybody knew your business; when you walked down the street people would slow down their cars to see who you were so they could wave at you. There were no proper shops; instead of McDonald's and Starbucks, they had Binchy Burgers and Mangan's Café, where the owners worked behind the counter and asked after your parents. You can't even buy a sausage roll without having to tell someone your life story, she complained.

The smallness wouldn't have been so bad if the townsfolk had had a little more sophistication. But their only interest, besides farming and the well-being of the microchip factory, was Gaelic games. Football, hurling<sup>2</sup>, camogie<sup>3</sup>, the county, the Cup, the under-21s – that was all anyone ever talked about. Elaine hated GAA<sup>4</sup>. She was bad at sports, in spite of her grace. She was always the last up the rope in gym class; in games, she confined herself to the sidelines, where she scowled, flicked her hair, and wafted reluctantly back and forth with the general direction of play, like a lovely frond at the bottom of a noisy, grunting ocean.

The Tidy Towns Committee, of which Cass's mother was a member, was always shiteing<sup>5</sup> on about the natural beauty of the area, but Elaine did not accept this. Nature in her eyes was almost as bad as sports. The way it kept *growing*? The way things, like crops or whatever, would die and then next year they *came back*? Did no one else get how creepy that was?

I'm not being negative, she said. I just want to live somewhere I can get good coffee and not have to see nature and everyone doesn't look like they were made out of mashed potato.

Cass didn't care for GAA either, and she agreed about the general lack of *je ne sais quoi*. For her, though, the presence of Elaine was enough to cancel out the town's faults.

She had never felt so connected to someone. When they messaged each other at night – sometimes they'd stay up till two in the morning – they got so in synch it was almost like they were the same person. If Elaine texted Cass to say WTF was up with that jumper today, she would know immediately whose jumper she was talking about; a single, unexplained word, like *bagatelle*, could make her laugh so loud that her dad would hear from across the landing and come in and tell her to go to sleep. In some ways, that was the best time of all – better even than being together. As she lay in bed, messages flying back and forth between them, Cass would feel like she was flying too, far above the town, in a pure space that belonged completely to her and her best friend.

<sup>2</sup> hurling – a sport of ancient Irish origin similar to football, played by both men and women.

<sup>3</sup> camogie – Irish stick-and-ball team sport played by women

<sup>4</sup> GAA – Irish or Gaelic football

<sup>5</sup> shiteing – curse word for expressing disapproval

**Or (b)** The following is an extract from a play *The Art of Sacrifice* (published in 2005) by Anthony Clarvoe.

Aron, a chess master, returns home to see his father, who years ago coached him to success.

Write a critical appreciation of the passage, considering in detail ways in which your response is shaped by the writer's uses of form, style and language.

WILL        So who died?  
(*They look at each other.*)

Quite the suit.

ARON This is how I dress now. Didn't know if you'd be up.

WILL I don't sleep much anymore.

ARON      You never slept much.

(Both are aware of the trophy. Neither acknowledges it.)

WILL You haven't taken some money job, have you?

ARON No.

WILL        The suit. You had me worried.

*(They watch each other.)*

## Why aren't you at the Nationals?

ARON I am at the Nationals.

WILL What happened? They haven't posted today's results.

ARON They're probably still playing.

WILL Wait a minute.

ARON      It's fine.

WILL Why aren't you playing? You didn't lose, did you?

ARON No.

WILL You did, you lost, you've lost, Jesus Christ, I don't see you since God knows when, and this is why you show up?

ARON No. I had a rest day coming, I asked to take it early.

WILL      Why?

ARON I told them I had a family emergency.

WILL What family emergency?

ARON Well, my father thought I lost and he fell down dead.

WILL That's not funny.

ARON      It's a little funny.

WILL No, because you're trying to make jokes. You only do that when you're worried.

(They watch each other.)

Do they know where you are? The tournament people?

ARON They send their best.

WILL They hate my guts. You told them you were coming to see me? I bet that put fear in their hearts.

ARON I bet it did.

(Beat.)

(Nodding to the trophy.) So that's from last year?

ARON Which? (Looking at the trophy in his hand.) Huh! What have we here?

WILL Come on, come on –

ARON Oh, this?

WILL What have you got for me?

ARON You want this?  
 WILL Give it here, give it here.  
*(ARON hands over the trophy. WILL sets it on his lap and dandles it like a grandchild.)* 50  
 Hello shiny guy! Look at you! *(To ARON.)* It's beautiful.  
 ARON Got your eyes.  
 WILL You made me wait long enough! *(To the trophy.)* Oh, I've been thinking about you. You are even bigger than I expected. So much bigger than the last one. 55  
 ARON The prize funds get smaller, the trophies get bigger.  
 WILL It's gorgeous. Welcome! Come meet the family! I've been saving a special place for you. Right here. *(Setting the trophy on an empty spot on a shelf, rearranging some of the older trophies.)* Everybody bunch up a bit. Make room, make room. That looks great, doesn't it? 60  
 ARON Sure.  
 WILL *(Taking down the trophy again.)* Oh, but I've got to hold on to you for a while before you go to bed. Shiny guy, this makes my year, seeing you.  
 ARON So, Dad. Hally called me.  
 WILL Really. 65  
 ARON About the last time you guys talked?  
*(WILL is silent.)*  
 WILL He was really upset. He paged me in the middle of the Nationals.  
 He paged you at the Nationals, he broke your focus to tell you that we talked on the phone? He calls me every week. What possessed him? 70  
 ARON He said you weren't making any sense.  
 WILL I have never made sense to Hally.  
 ARON He said you were incoherent. You told him you were coming unglued.  
 WILL Unglued? Unglued. Like I was glued before? And now I'm not, and that's a bad thing? 75  
 ARON Then he said the line went dead. And he couldn't get through to you again.  
 WILL I don't know what that's about.  
 ARON I didn't know what I was going to find here.  
*(They watch each other.)*  
 WILL So when you face the unknown, this is what you wear? 80  
 ARON I thought I might have to make funeral arrangements.  
 WILL This is what you're going to wear to my funeral?  
 ARON No, this is what I want to be buried in, I'm showing you 'cause you're going to outlast us all.  
 WILL God forbid. So you want to call Hally, tell him false alarm? 85  
 ARON I'll wait a little.  
 WILL I'm fine.  
 ARON Till I figure out what's going on.  
 WILL Nothing's going on. False alarm.

**Section B**

Answer **one** question in this section, using **two** texts you have studied.

**2**

- Either** (a) With reference to the work of **two** writers from the English Romantic period, compare their use of intense emotions.
- Or** (b) Compare some of the ways in which **two** writers from the English Romantic period, explore escape and refuge in their works.

## Section C

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *King Lear*

Answer **one** question in this section.

3

- Either** (a) "In *King Lear*, the good suffer because they are virtuous." Discuss.
- Or** (b) Write a critical commentary on the following passage, relating it to the presentation of women, here and elsewhere in the play.

|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |          |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>KENT</b>      | Did your letters pierce the queen to any demonstration of grief?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |          |
| <b>GENTLEMAN</b> | Ay, sir. She took them, read them in my presence,<br>And now and then an ample tear trilled down<br>Her delicate cheek. It seemed she was a queen<br>Over her passion, who, most rebel-like,<br>Sought to be king o'er her.                                                                                                                                                                                                | 5        |
| <b>KENT</b>      | O, then, it moved her?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |          |
| <b>GENTLEMAN</b> | Not to a rage; patience and sorrow strove<br>Who should express her goodliest. You have seen<br>Sunshine and rain at once, her smiles and tears<br>Were like a better way. Those happy smilets<br>That played on her ripe lip seemed not to know<br>What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence<br>As pearls from diamonds dropped. In brief,<br>Sorrow would be a rarity most beloved<br>If all could so become it. | 10<br>15 |
| <b>KENT</b>      | Made she no verbal question?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |          |
| <b>GENTLEMAN</b> | Faith, once or twice she heaved the name of father<br>Pantingly forth as if it pressed her heart;<br>Cried 'Sisters, sisters, shame of ladies, sisters!<br>Kent, father, sisters! What, i'the storm, i'the night?<br>Let pity not be believed!' There she shook<br>The holy water from her heavenly eyes,<br>And clamour mastered her; then away she started,<br>To deal with grief alone.                                 | 20<br>25 |
| <b>KENT</b>      | It is the stars,<br>The stars above govern our conditions,<br>Else one self mate and make could not beget<br>Such different issues. You spoke not with her since?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 30       |
| <b>GENTLEMAN</b> | No.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |          |
| <b>KENT</b>      | Was this before the King returned?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |          |
| <b>GENTLEMAN</b> | No, since.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |          |
| <b>KENT</b>      | Well, sir, the poor distressed Lear's i'the town,<br>Who sometime in his better tune remembers<br>What we are come about, and by no means<br>Will yield to see his daughter.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 35       |
| <b>GENTLEMAN</b> | Why, good sir?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |          |
| <b>KENT</b>      | A sovereign shame so elbows him. His own unkindness                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |          |

|                  |                                                    |    |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------|----|
|                  | That stripped her from his benediction, turned her |    |
|                  | To foreign casualties, gave her dear rights        | 40 |
|                  | To his dog-hearted daughters, these things sting   |    |
|                  | His mind so venomously that burning shame          |    |
|                  | Detains him from Cordelia.                         |    |
| <b>GENTLEMAN</b> | Alack, poor gentleman.                             |    |
| <b>KENT</b>      | Of Albany's and Cornwall's powers you heard not?   | 45 |
| <b>GENTLEMAN</b> | 'Tis so; they are afoot.                           |    |
| <b>KENT</b>      | Well, sir, I'll bring you to our master, Lear,     |    |
|                  | And leave you to attend him. Some dear cause       |    |
|                  | Will in concealment wrap me up awhile.             |    |
|                  | When I am known aright, you shall not grieve,      | 50 |
|                  | Lending me this acquaintance.                      |    |
|                  | I pray you, go along with me.                      |    |
|                  | <i>Exeunt</i>                                      |    |

(from Act 4 scene 3)