



TONBRIDGE SCHOOL

Scholarship Examination Sample Paper

English I

Time allowed: 1 hour 30 minutes

SECTION A – Poetry Comprehension

Read the following poem carefully and answer the questions that follow. Make sure to use quotation in all your answers.

The Last Astronaut

The Last Astronaut watches
the cream curdle in the Milky Way,
the blank tattoo of a black hole empty,
the moons of Pluto –
Kerberos, Charon, Hydra and Styx – 5
bounce like marbles in a smashed jar.
And the bloodshot eye of Jupiter weeps
and the rings of Saturn crazily spin
to the broken Music of the Spheres.*

The Last Astronaut hears 10
the screams of the shooting stars
and the great howling 'O' of the
Man in the Moon. Feels the solar
flares whip the spaceship, the static
crack on his screen. Spinning, as if a 15
great beast had caught it by the feet,
the Constellation of Cygnus*
goes squawking past the triply
re-inforced glass.

And now light and time themselves 20
are trapped and the universe boils
and erupts to its end, and just as all things
implode, a tiny blue light spins, silent.
Like a beginning: like the colour of hope.

James Steadman

Glossary:

* *Music of the Spheres*: an ancient idea that the universe, in harmony, makes music

* *Constellation of Cygnus*: stars that were thought to be in the shape of a swan

Questions

- (1) Re-read lines 1- 6. What impression of the universe emerges here? [5 marks]
- (2) How does the author employ word choice, imagery and sound to convey the chaos of the universe in the middle stanza (lines 10 – 19)? [10]
- (3) Again, looking carefully at language and imagery, explain what you think seems to happen in the final stanza of the poem. [10]

Total for this section: 25 marks

SECTION B – Prose Comprehension

Read the following prose extract carefully and answer the questions that follow. You are advised to pay close attention to the marks available for each question. The extract is taken from the novel 'Orbital' by Samantha Harvey, which depicts the lives of six astronauts, from different countries, living on a space station.

The orbit hunts northwards. They're approaching Central America when the twilight zone rushes beneath, dragging morning behind. When the sun rises for the seventh time this day, swift and total, the light reaches them before it reaches earth and the craft is a burning bullet.

Somehow, Nell thinks, once you've been on a spacewalk, looking at space through a window is never the same. It's like looking through bars at an animal you once ran with. An animal that could have devoured you yet chose instead to let you into the flank-quivering pulse of its exotic wildness. At first, on her spacewalk last week, she'd felt that she was falling. When the hatch is released, when you emerge into the airlock and struggle free, when you let go, there are two objects you can see in the universe – the space station and the earth. Don't look down, you're told – focus on your hands, on your task, until you've adjusted. She looked down, how could she not? The earth was tumbling beneath her at speed. The naked startling earth. From out there it doesn't have the appearance of a solid thing, its surface is fluid and lustrous. Then she looked at her hands which were spectral white in their gloves ...

You have no idea of the passing of time. Dusk steals upon you and the earth is a bruising of azure and purple and green, and you remove your sun visor and turn on your light and darkness brings out the stars and Asia passes by bejewelled and you work in your light pool until the sun comes up once more and burnishes an ocean you can't identify. Daylight spills on a snowy landmass and the rim of the earth is a light bright mauve that brings a pale elation to the gut.

Nell had dreams of flying when she was a child and then later as a teenager. Short dreams of surging flight or long and languid dreams of discovery, in any case dreams of breaking or being free ... If Nell had ever been afraid of nothingness, once she was in it she was consoled by it inexplicably and yearned to drift into it and for her tether to reel out some thousands of miles.

Questions

- (1) Re-read the first paragraph. How does the writer portray the strangeness of life on the space-station?

Refer to the effects of individual words and phrases in your answer.

[5]

- (2) Re-read paragraph two. How does the author vividly portray Nell's experience of walking in space?

Refer to the effects of individual words and phrases in your answer.

[10]

- (3) In the third paragraph ('You have no idea'), how does the author effectively portray the experience of working through the night and sunrise?

Refer to the effects of individual words and phrases in your answer.

[5]

- (4) Looking at the passage as a whole, especially the final paragraph, what sense do you get of Nell's character and personality?

Remember to use quotations to support your ideas and refer to the effects of individual words and phrases in your answer.

[5]

Total for this section: 25 marks