



Oxford Cambridge and RSA

Monday 19 May 2025 – Morning

AS Level English Language and Literature (EMC)

H074/02 The language of literary texts

Time allowed: 1 hour 30 minutes



You must have:

- the OCR 12-page Answer Booklet

INSTRUCTIONS

- Use black ink.
- Write your answer to each question in the Answer Booklet. The question numbers must be clearly shown.
- Fill in the boxes on the front of the Answer Booklet.
- Answer **one** question in Section A and **one** in Section B.

INFORMATION

- The total mark for this paper is **50**.
- The marks for each question are shown in brackets [].
- This document has **24** pages.

ADVICE

- Read each question carefully before you start your answer.

Section A

The language of prose

Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*
 F Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*
 Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*
 Arundhati Roy: *The God of Small Things*
 Ian McEwan: *Atonement*
 Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

Answer **one** question from **this section** on your **chosen prose text**.

You should spend about **45 minutes** on this section.

1 Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

Write about the ways in which Charlotte Brontë tells the story in this extract.

In your answer you should:

- explore the narrative techniques used in the extract
- consider the extract in the context of the novel as a whole and its genre.

[25]

I hardly know whether I had slept or not after this musing; at any rate, I started wide awake on hearing a vague murmur, peculiar and lugubrious, which sounded, I thought, just above me. I wished I had kept my candle burning: the night was drearily dark; my spirits were depressed. I rose and sat up in bed, listening. The sound was hushed.

I tried again to sleep; but my heart beat anxiously: my inward tranquillity was broken. The clock, far down in the hall, struck two. Just then it seemed my chamber-door was touched; as if fingers had swept the panels in groping a way along the dark gallery outside. I said, 'Who is there?' Nothing answered. I was chilled with fear.

All at once I remembered that it might be Pilot, who, when the kitchen-door chanced to be left open, not unfrequently found his way up to the threshold of Mr Rochester's chamber: I had seen him lying there myself in the mornings. The idea calmed me somewhat: I lay down. Silence composes the nerves; and as an unbroken hush now reigned again through the whole house, I began to feel the return of slumber. But it was not fated that I should sleep that night. A dream had scarcely approached my ear, when it fled affrighted, scared by a marrow-freezing incident enough.

This was a demoniac laugh – low, suppressed, and deep – uttered, as it seemed, at the very keyhole of my chamber door. The head of my bed was near the door, and I thought at first the goblin-laugh stood at my bedside – or rather, crouched by my pillow: but I rose, looked round, and could see nothing; while, as I still gazed, the unnatural sound was reiterated: and I knew it came from behind the panels. My first impulse was to rise and fasten the bolt; my next, again to cry out, 'Who is there?'

Something gurgled and moaned. Ere long, steps retreated up the gallery towards the third-storey staircase: a door had lately been made to shut in that staircase; I heard it open and close, and all was still.

'Was that Grace Poole? and is she possessed with a devil?' thought I. Impossible now to remain longer by myself: I must go to Mrs Fairfax. I hurried on my frock and a shawl; I withdrew the bolt and opened the door with a trembling hand. There was a candle burning just outside, and on the matting in the gallery. I was surprised at this circumstance: but still more was I amazed to perceive the air quite dim, as if filled with smoke; and, while looking to the right hand and left, to find whence these blue wreaths issued, I became further aware of a strong smell of burning.

Something creaked: it was a door ajar; and that door was Mr Rochester's, and the smoke rushed in a cloud from thence. I thought no more of Mrs Fairfax; I thought no more of Grace Poole, or the laugh: in an instant, I was within the chamber. Tongues of flame darted round the bed: the curtains were on fire. In the midst of blaze and vapour, Mr Rochester lay stretched motionless, in deep sleep.

'Wake! wake!' I cried. I shook him, but he only murmured and turned: the smoke had stupefied him. Not a moment could be lost: the very sheets were kindling, I rushed to his basin and ewer; fortunately, one was wide and the other deep, and both were filled with water. I heaved them up, deluged the bed and its occupant, flew back to my own room, brought my own water-jug, baptized the couch afresh, and, by God's aid, succeeded in extinguishing the flames which were devouring it.

2 F Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*

Write about the ways in which F Scott Fitzgerald tells the story in this extract.

In your answer you should:

- explore the narrative techniques used in the extract
- consider the extract in the context of the novel as a whole and its genre.

[25]

‘Well, that’s funny,’ I exclaimed.

‘What’s funny?’

She turned her head as there was a light dignified knocking at the front door. I went out and opened it. Gatsby, pale as death, with his hands plunged like weights in his coat pockets, was standing in a puddle of water glaring tragically into my eyes.

With his hands still in his coat pockets he stalked by me into the hall, turned sharply as if he were on a wire, and disappeared into the living room. It wasn’t a bit funny. Aware of the loud beating of my own heart I pulled the door to against the increasing rain.

For half a minute there wasn’t a sound. Then from the living room I heard a sort of choking murmur and part of a laugh, followed by Daisy’s voice on a clear artificial note:

‘I certainly am awfully glad to see you again.’

A pause; it endured horribly. I had nothing to do in the hall so I went into the room.

Gatsby, his hands still in his pockets, was reclining against the mantelpiece in a strained counterfeit of perfect ease, even of boredom. His head leaned back so far that it rested against the face of a defunct mantelpiece clock, and from this position his distraught eyes stared down at Daisy, who was sitting, frightened but graceful, on the edge of a stiff chair.

‘We’ve met before,’ muttered Gatsby. His eyes glanced momentarily at me, and his lips parted with an abortive attempt at a laugh. Luckily the clock took this moment to tilt dangerously at the pressure of his head, whereupon he turned and caught it with trembling fingers, and set it back in place. Then he sat down, rigidly, his elbow on the arm of the sofa and his chin in his hand.

‘I’m sorry about the clock,’ he said.

My own face had now assumed a deep tropical burn. I couldn’t muster up a single commonplace out of the thousand in my head.

‘It’s an old clock,’ I told them idiotically.

I think we all believed for a moment that it had smashed in pieces on the floor.

‘We haven’t met for many years,’ said Daisy, her voice as matter-of-fact as it could ever be.

‘Five years next November.’

The automatic quality of Gatsby’s answer set us all back at least another minute. I had them both on their feet with the desperate suggestion that they help me make tea in the kitchen when the demoniac Finn brought it in on a tray.

3 Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*

Write about the ways in which Chinua Achebe tells the story in this extract.

In your answer you should:

- explore the narrative techniques used in the extract
- consider the extract in the context of the novel as a whole and its genre.

[25]

Okonkwo's neighbours heard his wife crying and sent their voices over the compound walls to ask what was the matter. Some of them came over to see for themselves. It was unheard of to beat somebody during the sacred week.

Before it was dusk Ezeani, who was the priest of the earth goddess, Ani, called on Okonkwo in his *obi*. Okonkwo brought out kola nut and placed it before the priest.

'Take away your kola nut. I shall not eat in the house of a man who has no respect for our gods and ancestors.'

Okonkwo tried to explain to him what his wife had done, but Ezeani seemed to pay no attention. He held a short staff in his hand which he brought down on the floor to emphasize his points.

'Listen to me,' he said when Okonkwo had spoken. 'You are not a stranger in Umuofia. You know as well as I do that our forefathers ordained that before we plant any crops in the earth we should observe a week in which a man does not say a harsh word to his neighbour. We live in peace with our fellows to honour our great goddess of the earth without whose blessing our crops will not grow. You have committed a great evil.' He brought down his staff heavily on the floor. 'Your wife was at fault, but even if you came into your *obi* and found her lover on top of her, you would still have committed a great evil to beat her.' His staff came down again. 'The evil you have done can ruin the whole clan. The earth goddess whom you have insulted may refuse to give us her increase, and we shall all perish.' His tone now changed from anger to command. 'You will bring to the shrine of Ani tomorrow one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries.' He rose and left the hut.

Okonkwo did as the priest said. He also took with him a pot of palm-wine. Inwardly, he was repentant. But he was not the man to go about telling his neighbours that he was in error. And so people said he had no respect for the gods of the clan. His enemies said his good fortune had gone to his head. They called him the little bird *nza* who so far forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenged his *chi*.

4 Arundhati Roy: *The God of Small Things*

Write about the ways in which Arundhati Roy tells the story in this extract.

In your answer you should:

- explore the narrative techniques used in the extract
- consider the extract in the context of the novel as a whole and its genre.

[25]

By the time the twins were two years old their father's drinking, aggravated by the loneliness of tea estate life, had driven him into an alcoholic stupor. Whole days went by during which he just lay in bed and didn't go to work. Eventually, his English manager, Mr Hollick, summoned him to his bungalow for a 'serious chat.'

Ammu sat in the verandah of her home waiting anxiously for her husband to return. She was sure the only reason that Hollick wanted to see him was to sack him. She was surprised when he returned looking despondent but not devastated. Mr Hollick had proposed something, he told Ammu, that he needed to discuss with her. He began a little diffidently, avoiding her gaze, but he gathered courage as he went along. Viewed practically, in the long run it was a proposition that would benefit both of them, he said. In fact *all* of them, if they considered the children's education.

Mr Hollick had been frank with his young assistant. He informed him of the complaints he had received from the labour as well as from the other assistant managers.

'I'm afraid I have no option,' he said, 'but to ask for your resignation.'

He allowed the silence to take its toll. He allowed the pitiful man sitting across the table to begin to shake. To weep. Then Hollick spoke again.

'Well, actually there *may* be an option... perhaps we could work something out. Think positive, is what I always say. Count your blessings.' Hollick paused to order a pot of black coffee. 'You're a very lucky man, you know, wonderful family, beautiful children, such an attractive wife...' He lit a cigarette and allowed the match to burn until he couldn't hold it anymore. 'An *extremely* attractive wife...'

The weeping stopped. Puzzled brown eyes looked into lurid, red-veined, green ones. Over coffee, Mr Hollick proposed that Baba go away for a while. For a holiday. To a clinic perhaps, for treatment. For as long as it took him to get better. And for the period of time that he was away, Mr Hollick suggested that Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be 'looked after'.

Already there were a number of ragged, lightskinned children on the estate that Hollick had bequeathed on tea-pickers whom he fancied. This was his first incursion into management circles.

Ammu watched her husband's mouth move as it formed words. She said nothing. He grew uncomfortable and then infuriated by her silence. Suddenly he lunged at her, grabbed her hair, punched her and then passed out from the effort. Ammu took down the heaviest book she could find in the bookshelf – *The Reader's Digest World Atlas* – and hit him with it as hard as she could. On his head. His legs. His back and shoulders. When he regained consciousness, he was puzzled by his bruises. He apologized abjectly for the violence, but immediately began to badger her about helping with his transfer. This fell into a pattern. Drunken violence followed by post-drunken badgering. Ammu was repelled by the medicinal smell of stale alcohol that seeped through his skin, and the dry, caked vomit that encrusted his mouth like a pie every morning. When his bouts of violence began to include the children, and the war with Pakistan began, Ammu left her husband and returned, unwelcomed, to her parents in Ayemenem.

5 Ian McEwan: *Atonement*

Write about the ways in which Ian McEwan tells the story in this extract.

In your answer you should:

- explore the narrative techniques used in the extract
- consider the extract in the context of the novel as a whole and its genre.

[25]

Robbie said tersely, 'I suppose we are,' and then, to make amends for him, added for general consideration, 'Has England ever been hotter?'

Leaning away from the field of Cecilia's body warmth, and averting his eyes from Briony's, he found himself pitching the end of his question into the frightened gaze of Pierrot diagonally to his left. The boy gaped, and struggled, as he might in the classroom, with a test in history. Or was it geography? Or science?

Briony leaned over Jackson to touch Pierrot's shoulder, all the while keeping her eyes on Robbie. 'Please leave him alone,' she said in a forceful whisper, and then to the little boy, softly, 'You don't have to answer.'

Emily spoke up from her end of the table. 'Briony, it was a perfectly bland remark about the weather. You'll apologize, or go now to your room.'

Whenever Mrs Tallis exercised authority in the absence of her husband, the children felt obliged to protect her from seeming ineffectual. Briony, who in any case would not have left her sister undefended, lowered her head and said to the tablecloth, 'I'm very sorry. I wish I hadn't said it.'

The vegetables in lidded serving dishes, or on platters of faded Spode, were passed up and down, and such was the collective inattention or the polite desire to conceal a lack of appetite, that most ended with roast potatoes and potato salad, Brussels sprouts and beetroot, and lettuce leaves foundering in gravy.

'The Old Man's not going to be too pleased,' Leon said as he got to his feet. 'It's a 1921 Barsac, but it's open now.' He filled his mother's glass, then his sister's and Marshall's, and when he was standing by Robbie he said, 'And a healing draught for the good doctor. I want to hear about this new plan.'

But he did not wait for a reply. On his way back to his seat he said, 'I love England in a heat wave. It's a different country. All the rules change.'

Emily Tallis picked up her knife and fork and everyone did likewise.

Paul Marshall said, 'Nonsense. Name a single rule that changes.'

'All right. At the club the only place one's allowed to remove one's jacket is the billiard room. But if the temperature reaches ninety degrees before three o'clock, then jackets can be taken off in the upstairs bar the following day.'

'The following day! A different country indeed.'

'You know what I mean. People are more at ease – a couple of days' sunshine and we become Italians. Last week in Charlotte Street they were eating dinner at pavement tables.'

'It was always the view of my parents,' Emily said, 'that hot weather encouraged loose morals among young people. Fewer layers of clothing, a thousand more places to meet. Out of doors, out of control. Your grandmother especially was uneasy when it was summer. She would dream up a thousand reasons to keep my sisters and me in the house.'

6 Jhumpa Lahiri: *The Namesake*

Write about the ways in which Jhumpa Lahiri tells the story in this extract.

In your answer you should:

- explore the narrative techniques used in the extract
- consider the extract in the context of the novel as a whole and its genre.

[25]

He is particularly mute when he and Moushumi get together for dinners with groups of her French friends, drinking Pernods and feasting on couscous or choucroute, smoking and arguing around paper-covered tables. He struggles to grasp the topic of conversation – the euro, Monica Lewinsky, Y2K – but everything else is a blur, indistinguishable from the clatter of plates, the drone of echoing, laughing voices. He watches them in the giant gilt-framed mirrors on the walls, their dark heads leaning close.

Part of him knows this is a privilege, to be here with a person who knows the city so well, but the other part of him wants simply to be a tourist, fumbling with a phrase book, looking at all the buildings on his list, getting lost. When he confesses his wish to Moushumi one night as they are walking back to the apartment, she says, 'Why didn't you tell me that in the first place?' and the next morning she instructs him to walk to the Métro station, have his photo taken in a booth, get a Carte Orange. And so Gogol goes sightseeing, alone, while Moushumi is off at her conference, or as she sits at the table in the apartment and puts the final touches on her paper. His only companion is Moushumi's *Plan de Paris*, a small red guide to the arrondissements, with a folded map attached to the back cover. On the last page, Moushumi writes in a few phrases for his benefit: '*Je voudrais un café, s'il vous plaît.*' '*Où sont les toilettes?*' And she warns as he's walking out the door, 'Avoid ordering a café crème unless it's morning. The French never do that.'

Though the day is bright for a change, it is particularly cold, brisk air stinging his ears. He remembers his first lunch with Moushumi, the afternoon she'd dragged him to the hat store. He remembers the two of them crying out in unison as the wind blasted their faces, a time too soon for them to cling to each other for warmth. He walks now to the corner, decides to get another croissant at the boulangerie where he and Moushumi go every morning to buy breakfast. He sees a young couple standing in a patch of sunlight on the sidewalk, feeding each other pastries from a bag. Suddenly he wants to go back to the apartment, climb into the loft bed and forget about sightseeing, hold Moushumi in his arms. He wants to lie with her for hours, as they did at the beginning, skipping meals, then wandering the streets at odd hours, desperate for something to eat. But she must present her paper at the end of the week, and he knows she will not be roused from her task of reading it aloud, timing its duration, making small marks in the margin. He consults his map and for the next few days he follows the routes she has charted for him with a pencil.

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Section B

The language of poetry

William Blake
Emily Dickinson
Malika Booker
Fatimah Asghar
Carol Ann Duffy
Jacob Sam-La Rose

Answer **one** question from **this section** on your **chosen poetry text**.

You should spend about **45 minutes** on this section.

7 William Blake

Compare the ways Blake uses language and poetic techniques in 'Introduction' (*Innocence*) and 'Holy Thursday' (*Experience*).

Support your answer with reference to relevant contextual factors.

[25]

Introduction

Piping down the valleys wild
Piping songs of pleasant glee
On a cloud I saw a child.
And he laughing said to me.

Pipe a song about a Lamb:
So I piped with merry chear,
Piper pipe that song again –
So I piped, he wept to hear.

Drop thy pipe thy happy pipe
Sing thy songs of happy chear,
So I sung the same again
While he wept with joy to hear.

Piper sit thee down and write
In a book that all may read –
So he vanish'd from my sight,
And I pluck'd a hollow reed.

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs,
Every child may joy to hear

Holy Thursday

Is this a holy thing to see,
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine.
And their fields are bleak & bare.
And their ways are fill'd with thorns
It is eternal winter there.

For where-e'er the sun does shine,
And where-e'er the rain does fall:
Babe can never hunger there,
Nor poverty the mind appall.

8 Emily Dickinson

Compare the ways Dickinson uses language and poetic techniques in 'There's a certain Slant of Light' and 'Going to Heaven!'

Support your answer with reference to relevant contextual factors.

[25]

'There's a certain Slant of Light'

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons –
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes –

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the Meanings, are –

None may teach it – Any –
'Tis the Seal Despair –
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air –

When it comes, the Landscape listens –
Shadows – hold their breath –
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death –

‘Going to Heaven!’

Going to Heaven!
I don’t know when –
Pray do not ask me how!
Indeed I’m too astonished
To think of answering you!
Going to Heaven!
How dim it sounds!
And yet it will be done
As sure as flocks go home at night
Unto the Shepherd’s arm!

Perhaps you’re going too!
Who knows?
If you should get there first
Save just a little space for me
Close to the two I lost –
The smallest “Robe” will fit me
And just a bit of “Crown” –
For you know we do not mind our dress
When we are going home –

I’m glad I don’t believe it
For it would stop my breath –
And I’d like to look a little more
At such a curious Earth!
I’m glad they did believe it
Whom I have never found
Since the mighty Autumn afternoon
I left them in the ground.

9 Malika Booker

Compare the ways Booker uses language and poetic techniques in 'Brixton Market' and 'Faith'.

Support your answer with reference to relevant contextual factors.

[25]

Brixton Market

I would stand at market stalls
and watch her take days to pick,
how she would test the okra,
bending their tips, placing only
the ones that snapped into a brown paper bag;
the way she scrutinised the yam,
feeling and weighing it in her palm;
plantains picked one by one
like an artist selecting her tools.
Flawed produce would be haggled
to the last, and sometimes
she would turn her back and walk
to make her point and get her way.
I pulled that shopping trolley
into the stench of meat shops,
waiting as she pointed to red slabs
she wanted. How many times
would she point and weigh
to change her mind!
I would stare at the goose-bumped
boiling chicken hanging from ceiling,
the cow-foot, and severed pig tails.
I tried to hold my breath at the fish stall
as she chose the kippers, and we waited
for the snapper to be cleaned.
At Kwik Save, each can of baked beans
was vetted for dents, each egg
delicately lifted, searched for cracks.
I would learn that this is how my grandmother
taught her, kneeling in the bush uprooting dasheen
on the family land. She, too, hawk-eyed,
tested each provision to know
what was ripe, ready and good to cook.

Faith

1

The museum is an empty house, a dead lifestyle.
 In the living room, pictures of Jesus forlorn,
 an old rosary hanging over the bed.
This how we lived in old days, they tell me.

I understand old ones die, like you did, Aunty,
 the way your soul left your body, blank
 on bleached sheets, the way these people
 left their home. I look at this old bed now;
 did a mother die here, choking on her spit too?
 Is this her rosary? Did she lose it all?

I visit the hospital a month before you die,
 your left big toe is a blackening cherry.
Cut it, we beg, but our pleas are moot;
 you are Taurus. Stoic. Resolute.

That day you lost your rosary for two days;
 we search under beds and in fruit bowls.
 You cry nonstop all night. Nurses sift mountains
 of soiled sheets until the rosary is found nestled
 in your dirty pillow case. When they give it to you,
 your fingers continue rolling as if it had not strayed.
 Then you, who clutched your faith like a second skin,
 whisper to me, *I have lost faith in my Lord.*

2

I want to write a hymn for you
 where voices lift and southern Black choirs rock.

I want to write a hymn for you
 where the sinners writhe, weeping bitter tears.

I want to write a hymn for you
 where Baptist priests fling words at the congregation like fire
 and Catholic priests throw holy water into the sky.

I want to write a classic hymn all harps and harmonicas,
 a hymn where our slave grandmas lift up their long frocks
 and trample the earth to sounds of tambourines.

I want to write calypso hymns, folk hymns,
 reggae hymns, joyous hymns.
 I want to write sweet hymns for you.

10 Fatima Asghar

Compare the ways Asghar uses language and poetic techniques in 'Ghareeb' and 'WWE'.

Support your answer with reference to relevant contextual factors.

[25]

Ghareeb

Meaning: stranger, one without a home and thus, deserving of pity. Also: westerner.

on visits back your english sticks to everything.
your own auntie calls you ghareeb. stranger

in your family's house, you: runaway dog turned wild.
your little cousin pops gum & wears bras now: a stranger.

black grass swaying in the field, glint of gold in her nose.
they say it so often, it must be your name, stranger.

when'd the west set in your bones? you survive
each winter like you were made for snow, a stranger

to each ancestor who lights your past. your parents,
dead, never taught you their language – stranger

to everything that tries to bring you home. a silver sun
& blood-soaked leaves, everything a little strange

& a little the same – like the hump of a deer on the busy
road, headless, chest propped up as the cars fly by. strange

no one bats an eye. you should pray but you're a bad muslim
everyone says. the Qur'an you memorized turns stranger

in your mouth, sand that quakes your throat. gag & ache
even your body wants nothing to do with you, stranger.

how many poems must you write to convince yourself
you have a family? everyone leaves & you end up the stranger.

WWE

Here's your cousin, in her best gold-threaded shalwaar
kameez, made small by this land of American men.

Every day she prays. Rolls attah. Pounds the keema,
at night watches the bodies of these glistening men.

Big & muscular, neck full of veins, bulging in the pen.
Her eyes kajaed, wide, glued to sweaty American men.

She smiles guilty as a bride without blood, her love
of this new country, cold snow & naked American men.

"Stop living in a soap opera" yells her husband, fresh
from work, demanding his dinner: American. Men

take & take & yet you idolize them still, watch
your cousin as she builds her silent altar to them –

her knees fold on the rundown mattress, a prayer to the pen
Her tasbeeh & TV: the only things she puts before her husband.

She covers bruises & never lets us eat leftovers: a good wife.
It's something in their nature: what America does to men.

They can't touch anyone without teeth & spit
unless one strips the other of their human skin.

Now that you're older she calls to say he hit
her again. This didn't happen before he became American.

Even now, you don't get it. But whenever it's on you watch
them snarl like mad dogs in a cage – these American men.

You know its true & try to help, but what can you do?
You, Fatimah, who still worships him?

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12 Jacob Sam-La Rose

Compare the ways Sam-La Rose uses language and poetic techniques in 'Song for a Spent 100w Bulb' and 'Speechless I'.

Support your answer with reference to relevant contextual factors.

[25]

Song for a Spent 100w Bulb

Too bright to live long,
 too costly, my mother feared
 your appetite, guzzling the mains,
 hung from the ceiling, little sun
 I rhymed into, close as I could stand,
 imagining the bulbed head of a mic,
 searing fistful of feverish light
 against my face – suddenly emptied,
 plinked out, no longer able to beat back
 the dark, capable only of cooling
 after-image, of dying
 memory, milky glass shell
 and filament jangle, capable
 of being held, of being rolled
 in a boy's hot palm, singing
 one soft, blind note.

Speechless

I

At 15, she has a voice like ripe Jamoon wine
 and her name is on everyone's lips.
 1950. Uruguay beats Brazil 2-1

to win the World Cup, China invades Tibet,
Truth or Consequences debuts on American
 television, and her father forbids her

from playing her guitar, hoists it up
 on a wall between pictures of Ella Fitzgerald,
 King George and a poster proclaiming

that Britain needs you. It will hang there, souvenir
 of the freedom she enjoyed since she was nine
 and spent three months learning to play

My Home Is Heaven Just Waiting For Me,
 three simple gospel chords, in secret,
 taught by her Sunday School teacher,

before unveiling her voice one evening
in front of the family. Her father stayed silent then,
but he's Police Sergeant on the Demerara's

west bank, with a sharp, black serge uniform
and standards to match. And I'd like to know how
the cogs and wheels turn in his head,

how the decision is made, whether
he weighs her tears and pleas against
the notion that a father knows best,

that his word is law, that a proper young
Guyanese woman belongs to the home
behind curtains, not music. I'd like to know

if it's just that easy. Easy as lifting
a gramophone's needle from a groove,
closing a door, or blowing out a candle.

He forbids her from playing guitar,
forbids her from singing, orders her
to fold her voice down into a small,

pocketable silence. Hangs the guitar from a nail
on a wall like a trophy or stuffed animal,
like something he's hunted and killed.

Weeks will pass, before whatever's left inside her
rises, claws its way out – before she stands on a chair,
unhooks that guitar from its resting place, brings it down

with an overhead swing that cracks the frame,
again and again, until it's broken wood, tangled nylon,
a few snagged keys.

The girl will be my mother.

When she tells the story, it's just a guitar.
You don't have to make it sound so bad, she'll say –

he loved us in his own, stiff way.

END OF QUESTION PAPER

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