Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION, 2013

English – Higher Level – Paper I

Total Marks: 200

Wednesday, 5th June – Morning, 9.30 – 12.20

- This paper is divided into two sections,
  Section I COMPREHENDING and Section II COMPOSING.
- The paper contains **three** texts on the general theme of STORY-TELLING.
- Candidates should familiarise themselves with each of the texts before beginning their answers.

- Both sections of this paper (COMPREHENDING and COMPOSING) must be attempted.
- Each section carries 100 marks.

SECTION I – COMPREHENDING

- Two Questions, A and B, follow each text.
- Candidates must answer a Question A on one text and a Question B on a different text. Candidates must answer only one Question A and only one Question B.
- **N.B.** Candidates may NOT answer a Question A and a Question B on the same text.

SECTION II – COMPOSING

- Candidates must write on **one** of the compositions 1 – 7.

TEXT 1

This edited text is based on an article, entitled, *Tune in Next Week – The Curious Staying Power of the Cliff-hanger*. It was written by Emily Nussbaum for *The New Yorker* magazine.

Narrowly defined, a cliff-hanger is a climax cracked in half: the bomb ticks, the screen goes black. A lady wriggles on train tracks – will anyone save her? Italics on a black screen: "To be continued…" More broadly, it's any strong dose of "What happens next?"– the question that hovers in the black space between episodes. In the digital age, that gap is an accordion: it might be a week or eight months; it might arrive at the end of an episode or as a season finale. Cliff-hangers are the point when the audience decides to keep buying. They are sensational in every sense of the word. Historically there's something suspect about a story told in this manner, the way it tugs the customer to the next ledge. Nobody likes needy.

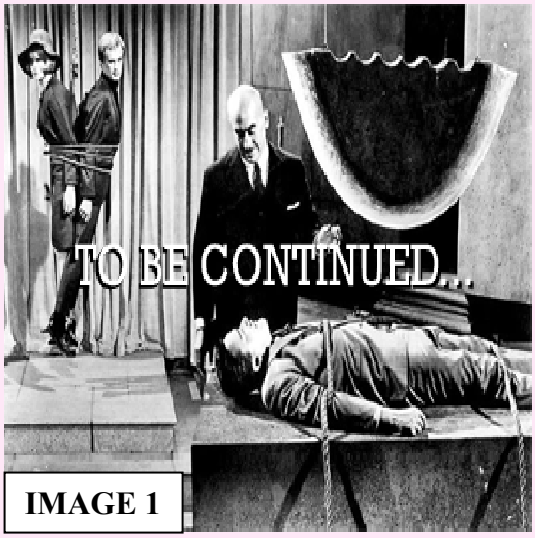

IMAGE 1

But there is also something to celebrate about the cliff-hanger. It makes visible the storyteller's connection to his audience – like a bridge made out of lightning. Primal and unashamedly manipulative, cliff-hangers are the signature gambit of serial storytelling. They reveal that a story is artificial, then dare you to keep believing. If you trust the creator, you take that dare, and keep going.

Television is just a Johnny-come-lately when it comes to episodic storytelling. The great nineteenth-century novels were famous for their cliff-hangers. Many people associate the form with Charles Dickens, who wrote serial novels so complex, yet so rewarding, that one might even say they resemble the TV show, *The Wire.* Printed episodically in magazines, Dickens' cliff-hangers triggered desperation in his readers and in 1841 fans rioted on the dock of New York Harbour, as they waited for a British ship carrying the next instalment, screaming, "Is little Nell dead?" (Spoiler: she was.)

In Victorian novelist, Thomas Hardy's day, novels were very much like TV. Fiction was the medium decried for leaving "the mind collapsed and imbecile", the half-commercial enterprise that inspired alarmist essays about addiction. Once novels began to be published in blocks, they became art, perhaps in part because the author and the reader were held at a more dignified distance. But by then the cliff-hanger – that viral sneak – had jumped into fresh formats. Radio programmes conventionally featured thrill-packed endings. And then there were the movies. The true pioneer of the genre was *The Adventures of Kathlyn*, which arrived in 1913. Each instalment concluded with a titillating disaster, as Kathlyn evaded lions, tigers, leopards, wolves, baboons and elephants (the producer owned a zoo), fled a volcano and subdued her enemies.

In 1980 the first great TV cliff-hanger emerged. Initially, *Dallas*, was a slow-moving soap opera about a family of Texan oil and cattle tycoons. In an episode called "A House Divided" J.R.Ewing, (actor Larry Hagman) was plugged in the gut. The nation had a new catchphrase: "Who shot J.R.?" By the time the resolution aired eight months had elapsed and *Dallas* was a global phenomenon. It became the highest-rated episode in TV history, watched by an estimated three hundred and fifty million people worldwide. The show's success spawned endless imitators: a plane crashing into Wisteria Lane in *Desperate Housewives*, Ross saying "I take thee, Rachel," in *Friends*, the illumination of the Hatch on *Lost*, and so on. In the late nineties, television took a great leap forward. This story could be told in many ways: by focusing on the quality dramas, starting with *The Sopranos*; by emphasising genre myths like

IMAGE 2

Buffy the Vampire Slayer; or by highlighting experimental sitcoms such as *The Office*. The result was one innovation after another: juggled chronologies, the rise of antiheroes and a new breed of challenging, tangled, ambitious serial narrative. In this changing landscape, it's worth acknowledging how cliff-hangers link disparate genres: they echoed through the finales of the smart TV thriller *Homeland*, the exquisite dark comedy *Enlightened* and the delirious melodrama *Revenge*. These shows may have different aims, but each of them uses the gap between episodes in a deliberate manner: they make manipulation a virtue.

Besides, there's another aspect of cliff-hanger history: joy. When done poorly, the cliff-hanger is all about shoddy craftsmanship, the creepy manipulation by a storyteller who has run out of tricks. When done well, however, it can be about much more: surprise, shock, outrage and pleasure – the sort of thing that might send you dancing off the sofa. The cliff-hanger is part of some of the silliest shows on TV; it's also key to understanding many of the greatest ones.

This text has been adapted, for the purpose of assessment, without the author's prior consent.

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

Questions A and B carry 50 marks each.

QUESTION A

(i) What evidence does the writer offer to suggest that readers or viewers can find cliff-hangers fascinating or alluring? Support your answer with reference to the written text. (15)

(ii) Discuss how effectively each of the visual images (IMAGE 1 and IMAGE 2) helps to develop your understanding of the cliff-hanger as a storytelling device. In your answer refer to both of the visual images that illustrate the text. (15)

(iii) *The New Yorker* has been described as a magazine that informs, entertains and comments. Based on your reading of the written extract above, would you agree with this description? Support your answer with reference to both the content and style of the written text. (20)

QUESTION B

You have been asked to give a talk to your class entitled: *Television and radio in the lives of young people today*. Write the text of **the talk** you would deliver in which you consider the role of television and radio in the lives of young people today. (50)

TEXT 2

This edited text is based on an interview with Irish writer, William Trevor, on *The Art of Fiction*, conducted for the *Paris Review* by Mira Stout.

What is your definition of a short story?

I think it is the art of the glimpse. If the novel is like an intricate Renaissance painting, the short story is the impressionist painting. It *should* be an explosion of truth. Its strength lies in what it leaves out just as much as what it puts in, if not more. It is concerned with the total exclusion of meaninglessness. The novel imitates life, where the short story is bony, and cannot wander. It is essential art.

You have never created a hero. Why is that?

Because I find them dull. Heroes don't belong in short stories. As Frank O'Connor said, "Short stories are about little people", and I agree. I find the un-heroic side of people much richer and more entertaining than black-and-white success.

Time plays a part in your stories – how important is the past?

A huge amount of what I write about is internal, a drifting back into childhood, based on a small event or a moment. By isolating an encounter and then isolating an incident in the past you try to build up an actual life. I think of a short story very much as a portrait. Time is like air; it is there always, changing people, and forming character. Memory also forms character – the way you remember things makes you who you are. People struggle to share a very private side of themselves with other people. It is that great difficulty that I often write about.

I've always wondered how you came to understand a character.

It does seem to me that the only way you can get there is through observation. And what you observe is not quite like just meeting someone on a train, having a conversation and then going away. I mean, really, it's a kind of adding up of people you notice. I think there's something *in* writers of fiction that makes them notice things and store them away all the time. Writers of fiction are collectors of useless information. A face comes back after years and years, as though you've taken a photograph. It is as though you have, for the moment, thought: I know that person very well. You could argue that you have some extraordinary insight, but actually it's just a very hard-working imagination. It's almost like a stress in you that goes on nibbling and nibbling, gnawing away at you, in a *very* inquisitive way, wanting to know. And of course while all that's happening you're stroking in the colours, putting a line here and a line there, creating something that moves further and further away from the original. The truth emerges, the person who is created is a different person altogether – a person in his or her own right.

William Trevor

You've said that when you start a story, it often begins with a physical event, something you see or overhear which ignites something in you.

Often it does occur like that, but the truth is that stories begin in all kinds of ways. With a remembered schoolteacher, or someone who might later have had something to do with your life, or some unimportant occurrence. You begin to write and in the process of writing it is often the case that whatever it was that started you off gets lost. On other occasions stories simply come out of nowhere. You never discover the source. I remember being on a train and I was perhaps walking down to the bar when I noticed a woman and a boy travelling together. He was in his school uniform and she was clearly in charge of him. I can remember now the fatigue on her face. Afterwards – probably years afterwards – I wrote a story called "Going Home".

Do you know how a story is going to end before you write it?

I can see approximately – but only very approximately – how it will be. With a novel I can't even do that. A novel is like a cathedral and you really can't carry in your imagination the form a cathedral is going to take. I like the inkling, the shadow, of a new short story. I like the whole business of establishing its point, for although a story need not have a plot it must have a point.

Do you think that literature has been much diminished by the glare of TV, cinema, video, and by entertainment hunger?

I think there is a danger of that. There's now the pressure of fashion in literature, and I imagine that is something that's demanded by your entertainment-hungry public. Fashion belongs on a coat-hanger. In literature – in any art – it's destructive. Prizes and bestseller lists and fashion tend to *tell* people what to read, and it's discovering what to read for yourself that lends reading half its pleasure. Glamour and glossiness are not what literature is about. Nowadays, books tend to be shovelled into a chat-show wheelbarrow, more talked about than read.

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N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

Questions A and B carry 50 marks each.

QUESTION A

(i) Outline three aspects of William Trevor's approach to story writing, revealed in the above interview. Support your answer with reference to the text. (15)

(ii) William Trevor expresses strong views in his answer to the interviewer's final question. To what extent do you agree with what he has to say? Explain your answer. (15)

(iii) Do you agree that William Trevor's responses to the questions in the interview are rich in language and imagery? Support your answer with reference to the written text. (20)

QUESTION B

Your class has decided to produce a book about "un-heroic" or ordinary people as a fund-raiser for a local charity. Write the **text for the introduction** of this book, in which you explain the purpose of the book and why your class thinks it is important to celebrate ordinary people. (50)

TEXT 3

This edited text is based on an article from *The Irish Times* by Belinda McKeon entitled: "New York Stories on a Perfect Platform". It celebrates the hundredth anniversary of the opening of New York's Grand Central Station.

For many New Yorkers, it was the photographs of an evacuated Grand Central Station that drove home the realisation that Hurricane Sandy was on its way. Without people on its marble concourse, the city's huge rail terminal was a place that looked, somehow, lost. It was never meant to be empty. It was designed not just to be full of people but to be given form by people. It was not one of those architectural marvels whose creator secretly wished that visitors would stay away and leave it to its perfection of proportion and line. The vision of Grand Central's chief architect, Whitney Warren, was for a terminal that would be all about the crowd. Turn-of-the-century New York was a human maelstrom, teeming and diverse. Warren sought to offer a more ordered idea of urban existence. What had been an unpredictable stampede elsewhere in the city became, in Warren's carefully engineered spaces, a graceful dance. The passengers wove their way around the concourse, they people-watched from the galleries and they gazed up to the ceiling, arching high overhead, painted with all the stars and signs of the zodiac. It was a seemingly spontaneous choreography.

Unsurprisingly, this daily dance of spectacle and observation has proven irresistible for photographers and film-makers over the years. Perhaps the most iconic images of Grand Central are the black-and-white shots by John Collier. They show the concourse pinioned by great shafts of sunlight. Who wouldn't want to turn a camera on the place? Whether you push in from 42nd Street or trudge up from the grime and ruckus of the subway, the sight of Grand Central's concourse does something to the soul.

And the sounds: the call to the trains, the spry voice of the announcer seeming as though it's addressed to you alone: "Your 4.45 to Poughkeepsie is now on track 102". The inimitable echo: 1,000 footsteps on marble every minute of every day. After all, there are the stories of a city, and there are the stories that a city tells itself about itself, and in many ways Grand Central has been one of those stories. Fiction set there is often the fiction of characters who are unable to see certain realities; who are dazzled by the glow of the things in which they fervently want to believe.

So John Cheever's teenage narrator in *Reunion* (1962) arranges to meet his estranged father here; his young hopes stacked as high as the vaulted ceiling, can only go one way. In another Cheever story, *O City of Broken Dreams* (1948) the Malloy family come to New York in search of fame; as she steps off the train, Alice wonders if the "frosty glitter" of the platform is the dust of trodden diamonds.

Image 1
John Collier's iconic photograph of the concourse of Grand Central Station

In the early Richard Yates' story *A Glutton for Punishment*, a businessman readying for a date uses a "gleaming subterranean dressing room" at Grand Central; washed, shaved and with his suit pressed, he emerges a more polished version of his usual self, but also a little poorer, for in the heady gladness of it all he has tipped the attendant more than he can afford. If there is a poet of Grand Central it must be Yates, whose novels and stories are born out of the very tension between that place's everyday treadmill and its gilded promises.

And in homage to Cheever, Richard Ford's story *Reunions* (2000) is another study in self-

delusion at Grand Central, an account of a wrong-headed attempt at reconciliation, during which the narrator allows himself to be unwisely reassured by the "eddying currents" of the crowd. "I had been wrong", he chides himself at the story's end, "about the linkage of moments". Because in Grand Central, we may all of us seem linked for a moment, but who knows really what is going on in any one of those glimpsed lives?

The last time I passed through the terminal was on a Friday in December, going to the Bronx for the funeral of my husband's uncle. As we headed for our track, the arriving trainloads from Connecticut were spilling out on to the concourse, weaving themselves into its choreography, doing their steps of that every-morning dance. It was 9.15 a.m. Hours later, as news too horrific to countenance came out of a Connecticut school, on the train back to Grand Central that evening, a young woman opposite me read something on her phone, and her face twisted with sorrow. Our eyes met and I shook my head – I didn't need a translation – and she shook hers.

In the Biltmore room, an old chalkboard schedule lists the cross-country trains that once arrived at 42nd Street: the Knickerbocker, the Missourian, the 20th Century Limited. Once known as the Kissing Room because of the many welcomes bestowed here, not least upon returning troops, this space houses little activity now, apart from some shoe-shining and newspaper buying. Still, there's a nook here that is perhaps my favourite of all in Grand Central: the little windowed booth where the dozens of pairs of shoes resoled by Eddie's Shoe Repair sit, in their brown paper bags, all fixed up and ready to go. Ready to echo across that marble again.

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Image 2
The concourse of Grand Central Station

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

Questions A and B carry 50 marks each.

QUESTION A

(i) What evidence does the writer offer to suggest that Grand Central Station has gripped people's imaginations since its opening in 1913? Support your answer with reference to the written text. (15)

(ii) Both the written and visual elements of Text 3 contain many striking images that capture the grandeur and atmosphere of Grand Central Station. Identify three images that you find particularly striking and explain why you find them to be so. The images may be taken solely from the written text or from a combination of the written and visual texts. (15)

(iii) In the above extract, Belinda McKeon effectively communicates both knowledge of, and affection for, Grand Central Station. Discuss this statement with reference to both the content and style of the written text. (20)

QUESTION B

Write **an opinion piece,** for inclusion in a series of newspaper articles entitled: *Must-see Attractions for Tourists*, in which you identify one place or public building in Ireland that, in your opinion, tourists should visit and explain your choice. (50)

SECTION II COMPOSING (100 marks)

Write a composition on **any one** of the following.

Each composition carries 100 marks.

The composition assignments (in **bold print** below) are intended to reflect language study in the areas of information, argument, persuasion, narration, and the aesthetic use of language.

1. In Text 2, William Trevor expresses his views on heroes.

Write a speech in which you argue for or against the motion, *We live in an un-heroic age*.

2. "...the storyteller's connection to his audience." (TEXT 1)

Write a personal essay in which you explore the storytelling evident in music and song and its impact on you as a listener.

3. "...they make manipulation a virtue." (TEXT 1)

Write a short story in which a central character is either manipulated or is manipulative.

4. In TEXT 2, William Trevor mentions "the art of the glimpse".

Write a descriptive essay based on a variety of glimpsed moments.

5. In TEXT 3, Belinda McKeon refers to the tension between the everyday treadmill and the gilded promises of Grand Central Station.

Write a personal essay about the tension you find between the everyday treadmill and the gilded promises of life.

6. "...a more ordered idea of urban existence." (TEXT 3)

Write a feature article for a popular magazine in which you discuss the competing attractions of both urban and rural lifestyles.

7. In TEXT 3, the writer refers to two short stories on the theme of reunion.

Write a short story about a reunion.

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