

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

Peperiksaan Semester Kedua
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HET 404 - Bahasa Inggeris dalam Kesusasteraan
Serantau Semasa

Masa: [3 jam]

This Examination paper contains FOURTEEN [14] questions in NINE [9] pages.

Answer ALL FOURTEEN [14] questions in Sections A and B.

SECTION A

1. Write as comprehensive a literary study as time permits of Poem For A Birthday by Wong Phui Nam.

POEM FOR A BIRTHDAY

To be most myself is to be
this darkness that pervades the land;
to be, in this foul weather, a climbing up
the turning wooden back-stairs
to a rainless sleep; and in the morning,
in the small hours of the soul,
the cold that comes, making large
the doorways--the body in its spell
is a scatter of small stones beneath the porch.

This then is a country where one cannot wish
to be. The spirit not given its features
festers in the flesh. Incites the year
to come upon it like the tiger. The city's parks,
odd street-corners and the public buildings
bear the stench, the torn fur
of trivial remembrances. Thus in the flesh
I am hunted out, creature of my days.
vocal, perhaps to seem some kind of Job

tending my sores to an emptiness,
the hoarse throat my psaltery to make such sounds
as may breed some hint for the soul's endurance.
Who would be comforters, do not begin to dress
or even touch these scabs--
their peeling leaves
a spreading terrain
where all conclusions, all arguments, are broken down
to miles of running serrations, the soft mud-flats.

Note: psaltery -- harp or lute, a sort of guitar.

(12 marks)

2. Comment on and discuss the following three passages from the conclusion to Amin Sweeney's A Full Hearing (1987).

(a) In a society where the processing of information is an oral operation, knowledge must be woven into distinctive patterns if it is to survive. Mnemonic patterning is one aspect of this schematic structuring, and is employed when a specific word choice--or approximation thereof--is to be recalled, as in the retrieval of adat sayings and in stylized oral composition. However, schematic structuring is found not merely on the level of word choice, but operates on every level of composition up to that of the plot. Furthermore, the use of schematic composition is not restricted to the stylized form. Though specific word choice may be less important in nonstylized storytelling or in the recounting of experiences in the course of the daily round, it should not be thought that this everyday speech is somehow ephemeral. It too, is schematically patterned. The use of schemata is not thus an artificial device peculiar to stylized performance. It reflects rather the general state of mind; indeed, the schematic features of stylized composition may be seen as an intensified form of the schematic features of everyday speech. Of course, in applying terms such as "schematic" or "formulaic" to the discourse of an oral milieu, we are not identifying some objective category. We are merely perceiving that, in comparison to our print-literate standards of what is normal, knowledge in Malay oral tradition was preserved and presented in larger units than those to which we are accustomed. There was much more of a need to preserve wholes, and thus a corresponding hesitation to fragment knowledge.

.../3

(b) Even those highly literate in a Western language who rejected the old modes of expression found themselves in a battle with the past when they wrote in Malay, for the language brought with it the past, a past of radically oral manuscript culture. Though such groups as the Pujangga Baru may not have been aware that their battle was with orality, they clearly understood that a text is a transaction with an audience, and that merely translating their ideas into Malay would not suffice. For the mass of the population, who lacked the yardstick of an education in a Western language, old habits dies much harder. The introduction of print literacy did not cause an immediate change in the general state of mind. The natural tendency was to perceive the new in terms of familiar schemata. The result was that even the educated sector of the populace continued to favor a paratactic, formulaic, copious, repetitive, narrative, and concrete mode of expression. Such a mode was necessary for effective communication in an oral or aurally consuming society; in a print culture, it is not: what became redundant in print now strikes us as mere verbosity.

(c) We come to realize that the apparent woolly-mindedness of many students is in no way a reflection of any lack of intelligence. Rather, it is their strong oral orientation which hinders them from exploiting to the full the possibilities of print literacy. Only by identifying the student's oral habits as such can we help him overcome and discard them. There is no point in telling him to be critical. Rather he must be liberated from having to learn by rote; he must be trained to fragment his formulas, to free himself from the pull of narrative, and confront what he is taught with his own experience.

(12 marks)

3. Using the five passages below as a basis, write a short critical study of Lee Kok Liang's RETURN TO MALAYA.

(a) I then noticed four long haired boys squatting silently on their hunkers in a row by the edge of the gutter I thought they were having a secret game for their eyes were watchful and vivid. I swung my bicycle round to have a closer look at them.

They looked straight into the light of my head-lamp without flinching: but their faces were puckered; and their arms akimbo were tightly pressed against the sides of their waists. They had about them the strained concentrated look of craftsmen at work.

Suddenly they seized hold of some loose paper on the road, gave a few quick rubs to their bottoms, hitched up their shorts without buttoning up, and ran swiftly up the low stone steps and sat down with loud yells among their companions. They did not stop yelling although I had swung my bicycle the other way.

- (b) A few Malay boys were diving off from the banks into the yellowish canal. Their bodies shone like polished rosewood. Their eyes were velvety and dark and their hair hung dripping-wet over their brown foreheads; their features were well-proportioned and smooth; now and then they raised their arms with swan-like grace and plunged neatly into the canal.
- (c) A dark-green military truck crawled warily behind. Sullen-eyed Home Guard boys stood erect in the open back of the truck - like green bottles stacked in the case. Their faces were as wooden as masks; they hardly talked; they seldom changed their positions; and they wore their berets very low over the forehead in a straight line.
- (d) In front of her, about five feet away, was a slight depression on the mud-floor. A puddle glinted in its corner like an evil eye. A tiny shallow drain led the water away but the egress was blocked up with rubbish and cans. She was lying beside the puddle. Her son, a slim young boy with finely cut features and pale transparent complexion, saw me and started towards me, crying out, 'Why, when did you come back?'
- (e) As I rode across the waters, I heard the voices of the children, screaming and laughing on the banks. They must have been born with lusty lungs.

(12 marks)

SECTION B

For questions 4 - 14, first identify the citation by author and title. Then in a few sentences indicate how the passage is typical of the author and characteristic of literary discourse in Malaysian English.

4. on the tabletop the wind
blows up a bouquet of tiny alarms
scattering a glass and some empty smiles.

(5 marks)

5. His father sat in the chair and looked back hard at him. Suddenly without any warning, his father reached out and slapped him on the face, a stinging blow which sent him tottering against the wall. He braced himself up, tears in his eyes. This was the first time his father had ever laid a hand on him cold-bloodedly. He wanted to cry but he checked himself, feeling cold over his face. A little flame sprang up within him. It burnt from the core of his being, a lovely comforting feeling of hatred fed this flame. His tenseness became diffused. From then on he walked about the house, nurturing his secret little flame. He shied away from his servant when he ran out from the room.

(8 marks)

6. The first signs would almost go unnoticed
like the bruised flowers, the crushed stalks
in the chrysanthemum beds discovered mornings
outside the window; in hours of the lightest sleep
there had been something opened the garden gate.
Your coming has always been an unease in the bone.
When the time breaks, the house dog will whine
and whimper upon the hour; there will be those
would sense you behind the wood-pile, among the stand of
trees
in the failing light, waiting. Nothing would help
stanch the gathering smell of our mortality
so excite your horrible ravening at the gate.
For always you have been everywhere about us
taking us in the small of the soul
in its bleakest hour. Yet when the time breaks
we are still to come to terms with loneliness,
look out without terror on the darkness thick behind
you,
as you make your way in by the door.

(8 marks)

7. Do you still remember me, brother,
After these years of parting,
When I am now ten years older than you
And you never return to me, except in dreams,
Still as a child,
Or when we meet again
Could you still recognize me?

(4 marks)

8. And what does it matter if the world suffer violence
since boys must have their fun?
What's the loss of a little grass,
a frog or a toad for a game?

The grass will grow in a day or two,
and the tadpoles lose their tails.

(5 marks)

9. "I know that's wrong," Zulkifli says. "There's something foreign to the tiger's nose. He won't show himself until the smells are gone."
Zulkifli fixes Muthu with a surveying state. Muthu become nervous.
"What smells?" he says.
"Mind and body smells," Zulkifli says.
Muthu is offended and turns away from him.
"Not in the way you can't go near a person," Zulkifli says confronting Muthu. "The clothes you wear, the thoughts you think. Where do they come from?"
"They're just clothes and ideas," Muthu says.
"They must fit into the place where the tiger lives."
"Why must they fit in?" Muthu says. "I only want to break out from my father's hold on me."
"So you brought a purpose with you?" Zulkifli says.
"And a way of thinking. How can you get into the tiger's stripes and spirit?"
"I can make the leap," Muthu says, thinking of the chameleon.
"I didn't make that leap," the old Muthu muttered as he sat up in bed. "Zul - that's what I called him later - tried to make me. He wanted me to think myself like a tiger, to feel myself like one. I refused. Still Zul took me through to the tiger's abode, which was everywhere."
"... This is the dying. Having not lived, this is the dying..."

(7 marks)

10. OUR QUARREL

Because I acted callously,
I left you
widowed upon your doorstep
with your dower of tears
withheld from the indifferent high door
and the suddenly important
wire-netting round the flowering lime.
I left you cradling your hurt,
the snapped ends of old twigs showing blood,
under the dull reality of an electric bulb
lighting the porch. The night pressed in
upon your person, already given
to the pawing of half-men, vestigial in the windy trees.

Because I acted callously,
I woke in the night thinking of you
to the infinite
loneliness of the empty curtains
the yellow room-light picking out
the heap of my soiled clothes
you had piled in the corner.
I heard above the distant stray bark of some dog.
an infant crying behind windows,
discovering the incipient tubers of my pain:
the flesh will yield to their pushing
when the image of your hurt becomes the ghost
bright in the inhospitable terrain growing out of your
absence.

(7 marks)

11. I want to write poetry which is no longer about the sky,
colours, light, voices and clouds.
I want to write poetry for the children running in
schoolyards, playing marbles and hopscotch at
home, crying because they are not being promoted
this year.
I want to write poetry which will make people who are
55 feel as if they are 25, and those who are 24
feel 54, when they read it, however they read it
- lying or sitting down.
I want to write poetry for cigarette sellers, shirt stitchers,
vegetable planters, sampan sailors, computer
programmers and research veterinary scientists,
so that they might stop work for a moment and
say - life's not so bad.

I want to write poetry for retired school-teachers, job-applicants, pawn-shop regulars, freshers and freshettes, asthmatics and diabetics as well as unemployed graduates, so that when they read a line of my poetry they might say - life in Indonsia, maybe there's hope yet.

I want to write poetry which is full of protein, calcium, sulphur and all the main vitamins, so that it could be of some use to general practitioners, veterinarians, agricultural engineers and animal-breeders.

(5 marks)

12. Their walks to the river where rubbish was dumped, to the rich well-stacked provision shop near the road, became memorable events, with Chan beside him. Wherever he went with Chan he saw solidity, straight thick pillars in buildings; certain significant smiles from his relatives and friends.

Stiff, unmoving, a toy wrapped in white cloth. Except for the face. The face was exposed. The eyes were closed. But there was the remote expression he had seen after they had descended the hill. The white sheet exaggerated the dead boy's length, wiping out the sense of balance Chan had given Ganesh. The distortion held up to Ganesh's mind the peculiar, but unexpressed intensity that Chan had only so lightly revealed while he had lived. As he stood there between the two sisters he began to understand the spirit of mathematics. The symbols and figures danced their resolution within his mind. He could already visualize the neat, correct answers he would write down under the double-ruled lines in his exercise book. He smiled.

He did not stay to see the coffin lowered into the grave.

For a week he was absent. When he went back to school he sat at the desk that had been beside Chan's. A new boy with a club-foot had been admitted, and he sat beside Ganesh. Ganesh relieved the boy's discomfort by helping him with his sums. During recess he sat outside the classroom and read a simplified, abridged version of David Copperfield. And he thought of his mother.

(7 marks)

13. I can't hear water running in the bathroom now.
With one stroke, I cross out the word 'Slave'. Then
I write it again. 'Slave'.
We are all noble slaves. But who decides what is
noble?
I run a wavy line through the sentences, for no
reason at all.
The word 'Slave' remains.
There is a sudden flash of lightning and burst of
thunder. A small child screams. Or perhaps it is not a
small child. How could Mrs. Furlonger let her child
play in the yard when it is raining like this? She must
be crazy.

(5 marks)

14. To-night, without preliminaries,
Nakanosan sprawled into bed.
His ear-plugs hang neglected.
His kerchief flutters on the floor.
I ask if anything is wrong.

(3 marks)

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