



OXFORD UNIVERSITY

OXFORD ENGLISH LITERATURE ADMISSIONS TEST

November 2022

Time allowed: 1 hour 30 minutes



INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

Please read this page carefully, but do not open the question paper until you are told that you may do so.

A separate answer booklet with 8 lined pages is provided. Please check you have one.

You should allow at least 30 minutes for reading this question paper, making notes and preparing your answer.

Your answer should only be written on the lined pages inside the answer booklet. No extra paper is allowed for this purpose. The blank inside front and back covers of the answer booklet should be used to plan your answer and for any rough working or notes.

At the end of the examination, you must hand in both your answer booklet and this question paper.

No texts, dictionaries or sources of reference may be brought into the examination.

This paper consists of 8 printed pages and 4 blank pages.

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Time allowed: 1 hour 30 minutes

You should spend at least 30 minutes reading and annotating the passages and preparing your answer.

The following passages are all linked by the theme of sleep. They are arranged chronologically by date of publication. Read all the material carefully, and then complete the task below.

- (a) From 'Sleep and Poetry' (1816), a poem by John Keats *page 4*
- (b) 'Serenade' (1825), a poem by Letitia Landon *page 5*
- (c) From *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), a novel by Walter Pater *page 6*
- (d) From *The Shadowy Waters* (1911), a play by W B Yeats *page 7*
- (e) From *A Fine Balance* (1995), a novel by Rohinton Mistry *page 8*
- (f) 'Sleep Suite' (1996), a poem by Sharon Olds *page 9*

Task:

Select two of the passages (a) to (f) and compare and contrast them in any ways that seem interesting to you, paying particular attention to distinctive features of structure, language and style.

This task is designed to assess your responsiveness to unfamiliar literary material and your skills in close reading. Marks are not awarded for references to other texts or authors you have studied.

(a) From 'Sleep and Poetry' (1816), a poem by John Keats

What is more gentle than a wind in summer?
What is more soothing than the pretty hummer
That stays one moment in an open flower,
And buzzes cheerily from bower to bower?
What is more tranquil than a musk-rose blowing
In a green island, far from all men's knowing?
More healthful than the leafiness of dales?
More secret than a nest of nightingales?
More serene than Cordelia's countenance?
More full of visions than a high romance?
What, but thee Sleep? Soft closer of our eyes!
Low murmurer of tender lullabies!
Light hoverer around our happy pillows!
Wreather of poppy buds, and weeping willows!
Silent entangler of a beauty's tresses!
Most happy listener! when the morning blesses
Thee for enlivening all the cheerful eyes
That glance so brightly at the new sun-rise.

(b) Serenade' (1825), a poem by Letitia Landon

Sleep, ladye! for the moonlit hour,
Like peace, is shining on thy bower;
It is so late, the nightingale
Has ended even his love tale.

Sleep, ladye! 'neath thy turret grows,
Cover'd with flowers, one pale white rose;
I envy its sweet sighs, they steep
The perfumed airs that lull thy sleep.

Perchance, around thy chamber floats
The music of my lone lute notes,—
Oh, may they on thine eyelids fall,
And make thy slumbers musical!

Sleep, ladye! to thy rest be given
The gleamings of thy native heaven,
And thoughts of early paradise,
The treasures of thy sleeping eyes.

(c) From *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), a novel by Walter Pater

Then it was that Jupiter¹ formed the design of creating Sleep; and he added him to the number of the gods, and gave him the charge over night and rest, putting into his hands the keys of human eyes. With his own hands he mingled the juices wherewith Sleep should soothe the hearts of mortals – herb of Enjoyment and herb of Safety, gathered from a grove in Heaven; and, from the meadows of Acheron², the herb of Death; expressing from it one single drop only, no bigger than a tear one might hide. 'With this juice,' he said, 'pour slumber upon the eyelids of mortals. So soon as it hath touched them they will lay themselves down motionless, under thy power. But be not afraid: they shall revive, and in a while stand up again upon their feet.' Thereafter, Jupiter gave wings to Sleep, attached, not, like Mercury's³, to his heels, but to his shoulders, like the wings of Love. For he said, 'It becomes thee not to approach men's eyes as with the noise of chariots, and the rushing of a swift courser⁴, but in placid and merciful flight, as upon the wings of a swallow – nay! with not so much as the flutter of the dove.' Besides all this, that he might be yet pleasanter to men, he committed to him also a multitude of blissful dreams, according to every man's desire. One watched his favourite actor; another listened to the flute, or guided a charioteer in the race: in his dream, the soldier was victorious, the general was borne in triumph, the wanderer returned home. Yes! – and sometimes those dreams come true!

¹ *Jupiter*: the king of the gods in ancient Roman mythology.

² *Acheron*: in Greek mythology, the newly-dead are ferried across the Acheron to enter the Underworld.

³ *Mercury*: a Roman god of messages, often depicted with winged shoes.

⁴ *courser*: a fast, strong breed of horse, often used in medieval times as a warhorse.

(d) **From *The Shadowy Waters* (1911), a play by W B Yeats**

A mast and a great sail, a large tiller, a poop rising several feet above the stage, and from the overhanging stern a lanthorn hanging. The sea or sky is represented by a semicircular cloth of which nothing can be seen except a dark abyss. The persons move but little. Some sailors are discovered crouching by the sail. Forgael is asleep and Aibric standing by the tiller on the raised poop.

FIRST SAILOR. It is long enough, and too long, Forgael has been bringing us through the waste places of the great sea.

SECOND SAILOR. We did not meet with a ship to make a prey of these eight weeks, or any shore or island to plunder or to harry. It is a hard thing, age to be coming on me, and I not to get the chance of doing a robbery that would enable me to live quiet and honest to the end of my lifetime.

FIRST SAILOR. We are out since the new moon. What is worse again, it is the way we are in a ship, the barrels empty and my throat shrivelled with drought, and nothing to quench it but water only.

FORGAEL [*in his sleep*]. Yes; there. There; that hair that is the colour of burning.

FIRST SAILOR. Listen to him now, calling out in his sleep.

FORGAEL [*in his sleep*]. That pale forehead, that hair the colour of burning.

FIRST SAILOR. Some crazy dream he is in, and believe me it is no crazier than the thought he has waking. He is not the first that has had the wits drawn out of him through shadows and fantasies.

SECOND SAILOR. That is what ails him. I have been thinking it this good while.

FIRST SAILOR. Do you remember that galley we sank at the time of the full moon?

SECOND SAILOR. I do. We were becalmed the same night, and he sat up there playing that old harp of his until the moon had set.

FIRST SAILOR. I was sleeping up there by the bulwark, and when I woke in the sound of the harp a change came over my eyes, and I could see very strange things. The dead were floating upon the sea yet, and it seemed as if the life that went out of every one of them had turned to the shape of a man-headed bird – grey they were, and they rose up of a sudden and called out with voices like our own, and flew away singing to the west. Words like this they were singing: ‘Happiness beyond measure, happiness where the sun dies’.

SECOND SAILOR. I understand well what they are doing. My mother used to be talking of birds of the sort. They are sent by the lasting watchers to lead men away from this world and its women to some place of shining women that cast no shadow, having lived before the making of the earth. But I have no mind to go following him to that place.

FIRST SAILOR. Let us creep up to him and kill him in his sleep.

SECOND SAILOR. I would have made an end of him long ago, but that I was in dread of his harp.

(e) **From *A Fine Balance* (1995), a novel by Rohinton Mistry**

It was late evening when Maneck reached the hostel. At the warden's office he was given his room number, keys, and a list of rules: Please always keep room locked. Please do not write or scratch on walls with sharp instruments. Please do not bring female visitors of the opposite sex into rooms. Please do not throw rubbish from windows. Please observe silence at night time ...

He crumpled the cyclostyled list and tossed it on the little desk. Too enervated to eat or wash, he unpacked a white bedsheet and went to sleep.

Something crawling along his calf woke him. He rose on one elbow to deliver a furious swat below the knee. It was dark outside. He shivered, and his heart thumped wildly with the panic of not being able to remember where he was. Why had his bedroom window shrunk? And where was the valley that should lie beyond it, with pinpoint points of light dancing in the night, and the mountains looming darkly in the distance? Why had everything vanished?

Relief covered him like a blanket as his eyes were able to trace the outline of his luggage on the floor. He had travelled. By train. Travelling made everything familiar vanish. How long had he slept – hours or minutes? He peered at his watch to unravel the puzzle, pondering the glowing numbers.

He started, suddenly remembering what it was that had woken him. The crawling thing on his leg. He jumped out of bed, kicked the suitcase, knocked into the chair, and felt around frantically on the wall. The switch. Click. His finger gave life to the naked ceiling bulb, and the bed-sheet gleamed like a fresh, dazzling snowfield. Except for the side where he had slept, smudged by the dust from his face and clothes.

Then he saw it on the edge of the white expanse. Under the glare of the light it scuttled towards the gap between bed and wall. He grabbed a shoe and smacked wildly in its general direction.

It was a very poor shot; the cockroach disappeared. Chagrined, he fought off his fatigue and tackled the problem with more determination. He pulled the bed away from the wall, slowly, not to alarm the fugitive, till there was a space for him to squeeze in.

The exposed bit of floor revealed a conference of cockroaches. He crouched stealthily, raised his arm, and unleashed a flurry of blows.

(f) 'Sleep Suite' (1996), a poem by Sharon Olds

To end up in a little hotel suite
with one's nearly-grown children, who are sleeping, is a
kind
of Eden¹. The one in the second bed
holds a pillow to her torso — I did not know that —
as she sleeps. The one on the couch, under candlewick
chenille², has, here and there, as he turns,
the stuffed animal his sister just gave him
for his twentieth birthday. I roam in the half
dark, getting ready for bed, I stalk
my happiness. I'm like someone from the past
allowed to come back, I am with our beloveds,
they are dreaming, safe. Perhaps it's especially like
Eden because this is my native coast,
it smells something like my earliest life,
fog, plumeria³, eucalyptus, it is
broken, the killership of my family,
it is stopped within me, the complex gear
that translated its motion. When I turn out the light
and lie down, I feel as if I'm at the apex
of a triangle, and then, with a Copernican
swerve⁴, I feel that the apex is my daughter,
and then my son — I am that background figure, that
source figure, the mother. We are not,
strictly speaking, mortal. We cast
beloveds into the future. I fall
asleep, gently living forever
in the room with our son and daughter.

¹ *Eden*: the Biblical garden in Genesis inhabited by Adam and Eve, here used to suggest 'paradise' or 'perfection'.

² *candlewick chenille*: cotton fabric generally used for bedspreads

³ *plumeria, eucalyptus*: strong-smelling vegetation

⁴ *Copernican swerve*: a radical change of perspective, such as that created by Copernicus's theory that the sun, not the earth, is at the centre of the universe.

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