

General Certificate of Education  
January 2006  
Advanced Level Examination

**ENGLISH LITERATURE (SPECIFICATION B)**  
**Unit 6 Exploring Texts**

**LTB6/PM**



To be issued to candidates on Tuesday 24 January 2006 for examination  
on Tuesday 31 January 2006 1.30 pm to 4.30 pm

**Pre-Release Material**

- To be given out on or after Tuesday 24 January 2006.
- On receipt of this material, you are advised to check carefully that the booklet is complete and that no pages are missing or illegible. There should be 12 pages. If you experience problems you should consult your teacher.
- You should use the time between receiving this material and the examination to familiarise yourself with its contents.
- You are permitted to make **brief** annotations on the pre-release material. Such annotation should amount to no more than cross-references and/or the glossing of individual words or phrases. Highlighting and underlining are permitted.
- You are **not** permitted to bring any additional written material with you into the examination.
- Your teacher is **not** permitted to discuss the pre-release material with you before the examination.
- **You must bring this material with you to the examination.**

**Pre-Release Material**

**Literary Beginnings**

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- Item One**     *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*, Jon McGregor, 2002.
- Item Two**     Extract from *The Art of Fiction*, David Lodge, 1992.
- Item Three**    Extract from *Essays on Fiction*, Frank Kermode, 1983.
- Item Four**    Extract from *The Practice of Reading, Interpreting the Novel*, Derek Alsop and Chris Walsh, 1999.

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**Item One**

The following extract is the opening section of *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things*, by Jon McGregor, published in 2002.

If you listen, you can hear it.

The city, it sings.

If you stand quietly, at the foot of a garden, in the middle of a street, on the roof of a house.

It's clearest at night, when the sound cuts more sharply across the surface of things, when the song reaches out to a place inside you.

It's a wordless song, for the most, but it's a song all the same, and nobody hearing it could doubt what it sings. And the song sings the loudest when you pick out each note.

The low soothing hum of air-conditioners, fanning out the heat and the smells of shops and cafes and offices across the city, winding up and winding down, long breaths layered upon each other, a lullaby hum for tired streets.

The rush of traffic still cutting across flyovers, even in the dark hours a constant crush of sound, tyres rolling across tarmac and engines rumbling, loose drains and manhole covers clack-clacking like cast-iron castanets.

Road-menders mending, choosing the hours of least interruption, rupturing the cold night air with drills and jack-hammers and pneumatic pumps, hard-sweating beneath the fizzing hiss of floodlights, shouting to each other like drummers in rock bands calling out rhythms, pasting new skin on the veins of the city.

Restless machines in workshops and factories with endless shifts, turning and pumping and steaming and sparking, pressing and rolling and weaving and printing, the hard crash and ring and clatter lifting out of echo-high buildings and sifting into the night, an unaudited product beside the paper and cloth and steel and bread, the packed and the bound and the made.

Lorries reversing, right round the arc of industrial parks, it seems every lorry in town is reversing, backing through gateways, easing up ramps, shrill-calling their presence while forklift trucks gas and prang around them, heaping and stacking and loading.

And all the alarms, calling for help, each district and quarter, each street and estate, each every way you turn has alarms going off, coming on, going off, coming on, a hammered ring like a lightning drum-roll, like a mesmeric bell-toll, the false and the real as loud as each other, crying their needs to the night like an understaffed orphanage, babies waawaa-ing in darkened wards.

Sung sirens, sliding through the streets, streaking blue light from distress to distress, the slow wail weaving urgency through the darkest of the dark hours, a lament lifted high, held above the rooftops and fading away, lifted high, flashing past, fading away.

And all these things sing constant, the machines and the sirens, the cars blurting hey and rumbling all headlong, the hoots and the shouts and the hums and the crackles, all come together and rouse like a choir, sinking and rising with the turn of the wind, the counter and solo, the harmony humming expecting more voices.

So listen.

Listen, and there is more to hear.

The rattle of a dustbin lid knocked to the floor.

The scrawl and scratch of two hackle-raised cats.

The sudden thundercrash of bottles emptied into crates. The slam-slam of car doors, the changing of gears, the hobbled clip-clop of a slow walk home.

The rippled roll of shutters pulled down on late-night cafes, a crackled voice crying street names for taxis, a loud scream that lingers and cracks into laughter, a bang that might just be an old car

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backfiring, a callbox calling out for an answer, a treeful of birds tricked into morning, a whistle and a shout and a broken glass, a blare of soft music and a blam of hard beats, a barking and yelling and singing and crying and it all swells up all the rumbles and crashes and bangings and slams, all the noise and the rush and the non-stop wonder of the song of the city you can hear if you listen the song

and it stops

in some rare and sacred dead time, sandwiched between the late sleepers and the early risers, there is a miracle of silence.

Everything has stopped.

And silence drops down from out of the night, into this city, the briefest of silences, like a falter between heart-beats, like a darkness between blinks. Secretly, there is always this moment, an unexpected pause, a hesitation as one day is left behind and a new one begins.

A catch of breath as gasometer lungs begin slow exhalations.

A ring of tinnitus as thermostats interrupt air-conditioning fans.

These moments are there, always, but they are rarely noticed and they rarely last longer than a flicker of thought.

We are in that moment now, there is silence and the whole city is still.

The old tall-windowed mills, staggered across the skyline, they are silent, they are keeping their ghosts and their thoughts to themselves.

The smoked-glass offices, slung low to the ground, they are still, they are blankly reflecting the haze and shine of the night. Soon, they will resume their business, their coy whispers of ones and zeroes across networks of threaded glass, but now, for a moment, they are hushed. The buses in the depot, waiting for a new day, they are quiet, their metalwork easing and shrinking into place, settling and cooling after eighteen hours of heat and noise, eighteen hours of criss-crossing the city like wool on a loom.

And the clubs in the centre, they are empty, the dance-floors sticky and sore from a night's pounding, the lights still turning and blinking, lost shoes and wallets and keys gathered in heaps.

And the night-fishers strung out along the canal, feeling the sing of their lines in the water, although they are within yards of each other they are saying nothing, watching luminous floats hang in the night like bottled fireflies, waiting for the dip and strike which will bring a centre to their time here, waiting for the quietness and calm they have come here to find.

Even the traffic scattered through these streets: the taxis and the cleaners, the shift-workers and the delivery drivers, even they are held still in this moment, trapped by traffic lights which synchronise red as the system cycles from old day to new, hundreds of feet resting on accelerators, hundreds of pairs of eyes hanging on the lights, all waiting for the amber, all waiting for the green.

The whole city has stopped.

And this is a pause worth savouring, because the world will soon be complicated again.

It's the briefest of pauses, with not time enough to even turn full circle and look at all the lights this city throws out to the sky, and it's a pause which is easily broken. A slamming door, a car alarm, a thin drift of music from half a mile away, and already the city is moving on, already tomorrow is here.

The music is coming from a curryhouse near the football ground, careering out of speakers placed outside to attract extra custom. The restaurant is almost empty, a bhindi masala in one corner, a special korma in the other, and the carpark is deserted except for a young couple standing with their arms

around each other's waists. They've not been a couple long, a few days perhaps, or a week, and they are both still excited and nervous with desire and possibility. They've come here to dance, drawn sideways from their route home by the music and by bravado, and now they are hesitating, unsure of how to begin, unfamiliar with the steps, embarrassed.

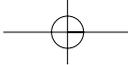
But they do begin, and as the first smudges of light seep into the sky from the east, from the far side of the city and in towards these streets, they hold their heads high and their backs straight and step together in time to the slide and wheel of the music. They dance with a style more suited to the ballroom than to the bollywood movies the music comes from, but they dance all the same, hips swinging, waists touching, eyes fixed on eyes. The waiters have come across to the window, they are laughing, they are calling uncle uncle to the man in the kitchen who is finally beginning to clean up after a long night. They dance, and he steps out of the door to watch, wiping his hands on his apron, licking the weary tips of his fingers, pulling at his long beard. They dance, and he smiles and nods and thinks of his wife sleeping at home, and thinks of when they were young and might still have done something like this.

Elsewhere, across the city, the day is beginning with a rush and a shout, the fast whine of office hoovers, the locked slam of lorry doors, the hurried clocking on of the early shifts.

But here, as the dawn sneaks up on on the last day of summer, and as a man with tired hands watches a young couple dance in the carpark of his restaurant, there are only these: sparkling eyes, smudged lipstick, fading starlight, the crunching of feet on gravel, laughter, and a slow walk home.

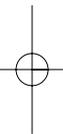
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**Item Two**

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### Item Three

In his essay 'On Reading Novels' (from *Essays on Fiction*, 1983), Frank Kermode also looks at the openings of novels and takes, as his example, George Eliot's novel, *Adam Bede*.

*Adam Bede* was published in 1859. It begins thus:

With a single drop of ink for a mirror, the Egyptian sorcerer undertakes to reveal to any chance comer far-reaching visions of the past. This is what I undertake to do for you, reader. With this drop of ink at the end of my pen, I will show you the roomy workshop of Mr. Jonathan Burge, carpenter and builder, in the village of Hayslope, as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799.

In these few words a considerable number of operations have been carried out with the reader's compliance. A narrator has been inserted into the text ('I undertake'). A reader has been inserted also ('you, reader') and with this figure you, reader, have been identified. The acceptance of the narrator's presence and your own implies on the part of both acceptance of a contract, or, if you prefer, signifies a willingness to play the ensuing game according to rules. Among these rules is one that says that the text is to be regarded as a magical means of making present what is absent. The absent that is to be made present is a past period, which the reader, who has agreed to read the clues accordingly, will not only regard as for certain purposes present, but scan for indications of difference; he will, for example, note that the *mise-en-scène*, the manners and dress of the personages, are different from those of the present. The chapter continues:

The afternoon sun was warm on the five workmen there, busy upon doors and windowframes and wainscoting. A scent of pine-wood from a tent-like pile of planks outside the open door mingled itself with the scent of the elderbushes which were spreading their summer snow close to the open window opposite; the slanting sunbeams shone through the transparent shavings that flew before the steady plane, and lit up the fine grain of the oak panelling which stood propped against the wall. On a heap of those soft shavings a rough grey shepherd-dog had made himself a pleasant bed, and was lying with his nose between his fore-paws, occasionally wrinkling his brows to cast a glance at the tallest of the five workmen, who was carving a shield in the centre of a wooden mantelpiece. It was to this workman that the strong barytone belonged which was heard above the sound of plane and hammer singing –

'Awake, my soul, and with the sun  
Thy daily stage of duty run;  
Shake off dull sloth . . .'

Here some measurement was to be taken which required more concentrated attention, and the sonorous voice subsided into a low whistle; but it presently broke out again with renewed vigour –

'Let all thy converse be sincere,  
Thy conscience as the noonday clear.'

Such a voice could only come from a broad chest, and the broad chest belonged to a large-boned muscular man nearly six feet high, with a back so flat and a head so well poised that when he drew himself up to take a more distant survey of his work, he had the air of a soldier standing at ease. The sleeve rolled up above the elbow showed an arm that was likely to win the prize for feats of strength; yet the long supple hand, with its broad finger-tips, looked ready for works of

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skill. In his tall stalwartness Adam Bede was a Saxon, and justified his name; but the jet-black hair, made the more noticeable by its contrast with the light paper cap, and the keen glance of the dark eyes that shone from under strongly marked, prominent and mobile eyebrows, indicated a mixture of Celtic blood. The face was large and roughly hewn, and when in repose had no other beauty than such as belongs to an expression of good-humoured honest intelligence.

The reality of the pastness is guaranteed (why? how?) by the fact that even then the sun was warm in June, and the elderbushes scented, and planes made shavings. Its differences, which we are expected to remember for future use, are indicated by the fact that the carpenter is singing hymns as he carves a shield on a mantelpiece, wearing all the while 'an expression of good-humoured . . . intelligence'.

The reader – this 'chance comer' who is willing to keep to the rules in return for a certain reward – is in a sense the invention of the author. One thing he will do is forget the elderbushes and shavings as soon as they have done their work; they simply authenticate this expenditure of ink as a representation of reality. Another will be to remember the hymns and the good humour for future use, for they are indices of the type of the honest workman of an earlier age: pious, industrious, dedicated to his master's interests and the accuracy of the work, completely indigenous (Saxon and Celt). Sometimes the reader finds it quite easy to establish such distinctions; but occasionally he must make a choice. The sheepdog lying in the shavings may or may not be simply vouching for the reality of the scene – a detail incorporated merely as a form of reassurance that this is a novel and not, say, a romance. (But perhaps it is important to have the dog in here, he may have a part in the plot). The shield Adam Bede is carving may suggest labour in the service of an institution of some kind, or of an armigerous contemporary; it serves not only to reinforce the registered reality (this is the sort of thing a good carpenter would be doing in the setting proposed) but perhaps also to establish the skilled workman as the essential but lowly instrument of social hierarchy. Before long we see that he has a relationship with a social superior, and that his strength and virtue as well as his social inferiority are germane to the story.

#### Item Four

The following passage is from the opening chapter of *The Practice of Reading, Interpreting the Novel*, by Derek Alsop and Chris Walsh (1999).

What happens when someone reads a novel? What do novel-readers actually do? Is it really possible to generalize about 'the role of the reader' and 'the experience of reading'? How is meaning produced? How far does meaning depend on the reader, and how far on the text of the novel itself? To what extent – if any – should the novelist's stated intentions be taken into account in discussing the process of reading? How important are language and context to reading practices? How significant are various modern developments in literary theory and criticism for our understanding of what is involved in the process of reading novels?

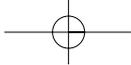
These and other related questions will be explored in the chapters which follow. In this introductory chapter, however, the focus will be on the nature of reading and interpretation, and the relationship between them, in the context of recent critical and theoretical discussions. It is often the practice, in those books which aim to examine and apply the insights of theory to the description of reading, to attempt a kind of catalogue of critical approaches. But if the motive for trying to provide an inclusive, balanced and exhaustive summary of positions is understandable, the result can too easily be an utterly routine and predictable orthodoxy – the re-establishment of the current canon of acceptable theories, rather than an engagement with the realities of the process of reading and understanding literary texts. Our experience might well echo Richard Rorty's feeling when he came to 'slog through' a 'methodical' anthology of readings on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902):

... one psychoanalytic reading, one reader-response reading, one feminist reading, one deconstructionist reading, and one new historicist reading. None of the readers had, as far as I could see, been enraptured or destabilized by *Heart of Darkness*. I got no sense that the book had made a big difference to them, that they cared much about Kurtz or Marlow or the woman 'with helmeted head and tawny cheeks' whom Marlow sees on the bank of the river. These people, and that book, had no more changed these readers' purposes than the specimen under the microscope changes the purpose of the histologist.

Rorty's claim needs qualifying, perhaps: the nature of the specimen will certainly affect the *conclusions* the histologist draws. (An 'histologist' is someone who examines the minute structures of biological tissues.) But the key word above is *purpose*. We shall argue later that every reading of a novel has its own history, and its own context; and that these histories and contexts are locatable in a wider, shared historical context. There is, however, a risk here of emphasizing the general context at the expense of the personal situation of the reader. For all readers read with purpose (with design, with intention). This is so basic a notion that it is easy (even for critics!) to overlook it: it is fundamental – the very ground on which we stand. We read *on purpose*, as the idiom has it. And the purposes of no two readers are quite the same, precisely because of the personal element. Only persons can read. Individual readers read on the basis of different personal motives and, unsurprisingly, different particular readings result. This is what makes the critical discussion of alternative readings interesting: otherwise we would find ourselves not only reading the same texts in the same contexts, we would be producing readings which could only be differentiated on the basis of their ideological positions and associated critical methodologies. And the result would be the kind of bland monotony Rorty describes.

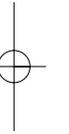
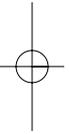
We identify, then, with Rorty's assumption that the critical properly includes the personal, that reading books should, somehow, *make a difference*.

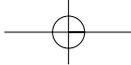
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