

CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH LITERATURE ADMISSIONS TEST – SAMPLE PAPER

1 hour 30 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

Please read this page carefully before starting your test.

This question paper contains five texts, (a) to (e). Select two of the passages, and compare/contrast them in any manner that seems interesting to you, paying particular attention to distinctive features of structure, language and style. There is no word limit, but markers reward quality over quantity. You are advised (though not required) to spend at least 30 minutes reading the paper, and the remaining 60 minutes writing your answer.

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. The task does not require you to do any research. Answers should be typed and uploaded in a format readable in Microsoft Word. Please save your answer with the file name UCAS number_College_Surname_First Name

No texts, dictionaries or sources of reference should be used in the examination. Other than a word-processing application you should not use any other resources. The answer you provide must be your own. Papers will be checked using anti-plagiarism software, and you should not discuss your answers or the paper with anyone else.

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

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 dance. They are arranged chronologically by date of publication. Read all the material carefully, and then complete the task.

- (a) From *Evelina* (1778), a novel by Frances Burney page 4
- (b) 'Javanese Dancers' (1892), a complete poem by Arthur Symons page 5
- (c) From *Nervous Conditions* (1988), a novel by Tsitsi Dangarembga page 6
- (d) From *Arcadia* (1993), a play by Tom Stoppard page 8
- (e) 'Learning to Dance' (2010), the preface to a poetry collection by Alice Walker page 10

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(a) **From *Evelina* (1778), a novel by Frances Burney**

Another gentleman, who seemed about six-and-twenty years old, gaily but not foppishly dressed, and indeed extremely handsome, with an air of mixed politeness and gallantry, desired to know if I was engaged, or would honour him with my hand. So he was pleased to say, though I am sure I know not what honour he could receive from me; but these sort of expressions, I find, are used as words of course, without any distinction of persons, or study of propriety.

Well, I bowed, and I am sure I coloured; for indeed I was frightened at the thoughts of dancing before so many people, all strangers, and, which was worse, with a stranger: however, that was unavoidable; for, though I looked round the room several times, I could not see one person that I knew. And so he took my hand, and led me to join in the dance.

The minuets¹ were over before we arrived, for we were kept late by the milliners² making us wait for our things.

He seemed very desirous of entering into conversation with me; but I was seized with such a panic, that I could hardly speak a word, and nothing but the shame of so soon changing my mind prevented my returning to my seat, and declining to dance at all.

He appeared to be surprised at my terror, which I believe was but too apparent: however, he asked no questions, though I fear he must think it very strange, for I did not choose to tell him it was owing to my never before dancing but with a school-girl.

His conversation was sensible and spirited; his air, and address were open and noble; his manners gentle, attentive, and infinitely engaging; his person is all elegance, and his countenance the most animated and expressive I have ever seen.

In a short time we were joined by Miss Mirvan, who stood next couple to us. But how I was startled when she whispered me that my partner was a nobleman! This gave me a new alarm: how will he be provoked, thought I, when he finds what a simple rustic he has honoured with his choice! One whose ignorance of the world makes her perpetually fear doing something wrong!

That he should be so much my superior in every way, quite disconcerted me; and you will suppose my spirits were not much raised, when I heard a lady, in passing us, say, "This is the most difficult dance I ever saw."

"O dear, then" cried Maria to her partner, "with your leave, I'll sit down till the next."

"So will I too, then," cried I, "for I am sure I can hardly stand."

"But you must speak to your partner first," answered she; for he had turned aside to talk with some gentlemen. However, I had not sufficient courage to address him; and so away we all three tript, and seated ourselves at another end of the room.

¹ *minuet* - A dance, fashionable during the eighteenth century

² *milliners* - Hatmakers

(b) 'Javanese Dancers' (1892), a complete poem by Arthur Symons

Twitched strings, the clang of metal, beaten drums,
Dull, shrill, continuous, disquieting:
And now the stealthy dancer comes
Undulantly with cat-like steps that cling;

Smiling between her painted lids a smile,
Motionless, unintelligible, she twines
Her fingers into mazy lines,
The scarves across her fingers twine the while.

One, two, three, four glide forth, and, to and fro,
Delicately and imperceptibly,
Now swaying gently in a row,
Now interthreading slow and rhythmically,

Still, with fixed eyes, monotonously still,
Mysteriously, with smiles inanimate,
With lingering feet that undulate,
With sinuous fingers, spectral hands that thrill

In measure while the gnats of music whirr,
The little amber-coloured dancers move,
Like painted idols seen to stir
By the idolators in a magic grove.

(c) **From *Nervous Conditions* (1988), a novel by Tsitsi Dangarembga**

For the first ten minutes I was sure I was going to have an awful time. The sound, when we entered, blasted my whole body from my hair to my toenails. It must have been something to do with the dominant frequencies of that particular song, because it felt like several hundred volts frolicking through my nerve-endings. Distantly, I was aware of Nyaradzo and brothers, all flowing hair, grinning teeth in nebulous faces, and outstretched hands, bearing down on us. When I recovered, I was alone. Andy, having appropriated Nyuha, was jerking his shoulders and stamping his feet in enthusiastic counterpoint to her undulating movements. Nyaradzo and Chido were swaying in a rhythmic and sedate manner, while Brian, who had sensed that I was a non-starter, was doing his own thing beside them. Spotting Jocelyn and Maidei on the other side of the hall, I reeled over to them, weaving my way through the beat-conscious bodies and only narrowly avoiding losing an eye as one athletic and energetic dancer snatched the rhythm out of the air. I was sweating by the time I reached them, because everybody else was warmly moist from their exertions and the whole hall had grown hot and humid. But I was glad that I had found my friends. They were as surprised as I was to find me at this sort of gathering and insulated me from its more orgiastic, sinister aspects. Dancing discreetly in a group, we laughed and pointed out heterosexual couples who had recklessly moved too close together. Within the security of the group I could listen to the music and found that it was definitely contagious. My feet began to slide and glide and tap of their own accord. The rest of my body followed suit. To my surprise I discovered I could dance quite well. I had to show off. Flitting over to Nyasha and Andy I demonstrated a few intricate steps and boogeyed on to Nyaradzo, Chido and Brian.

After that I danced with hundreds of people. Three young men came up to me and told me they fancied me, but I could see from the way they talked that they really fancied themselves. I was content. My social bit came off very well and I enjoyed myself immensely, but by ten o'clock I was so exhausted I was only too glad to leave when Chido called. Nyasha, as usual, wanted to begin again and go on dancing all night. Reluctantly she dragged herself away, with Andy walking her home, or rather dancing her there, because the pair of them capered and cavorted and yodelled all the way down the road.

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(d) From *Arcadia* (1993), a play by Tom Stoppard

(Septimus and Thomasina are now waltzing freely. She is delighted with herself)

Thomasina: Am I waltzing?

Septimus: Yes, my lady.

(He gives her a final twirl, bringing them to the table where he bows to her. He lights her candlestick.)

Hannah goes to sit at the table, playing truant from the party. She pours herself more wine. The table contains the geometrical solids, the computer, decanter, glasses, tea mug, Hannah's research books, Septimus's books, the two portfolios, Thomasina's candlestick, the oil lamp, the dahlia, the Sunday papers. . .

Gus appears in the doorway. It takes a moment to realize that he is not Lord Augustus; perhaps not until Hannah sees him.)

Septimus: Take your essay, I have given it an alpha in blind faith. Be careful with the flame.

Thomasina: I will wait for you to come.

Septimus: I cannot.

Thomasina: You may.

Septimus: I may not.

Thomasina: You must.

Septimus: I will not.

(She puts the candlestick and the essay on the table.)

Thomasina: Then I will not go. Once more, for my birthday.

(Septimus and Thomasina start to waltz together.)

Gus comes forward, startling Hannah.)

Hannah: Oh! - you made me jump.

*(Gus looks resplendent. He is carrying an old and somewhat tattered stiff-backed folio¹ fastened with a tape tied in a bow. He comes to **Hannah** and thrusts this present at her.)*

Oh...

*(She lays the folio down on the table and starts to open it. It consists only of two boards hinged, containing **Thomasina's** drawing.)*

'Septimus holding Plautus'.

*(To **Gus**)*

I was looking for that. Thank you.

(Gus nods several times. Then, rather awkwardly, he bows to her. A Regency bow, an invitation to dance.)

Oh, dear, I don't really . . .

*(After a moment's hesitation, she gets up and they hold each other, keeping a decorous distance between them, and start to dance, rather awkwardly. **Septimus and Thomasina** continue to dance, fluently, to the piano.)*

END

¹ *folio* – Hard covers protecting a document, roughly A3. Contents may be bound or loose

(e) **'Learning to Dance' (2010), the preface to a poetry collection by Alice Walker**

I am the youngest of eight siblings. Five of us have died. I share losses, health concerns, and other challenges common to the human condition, especially in these times of war, poverty, environmental devastation, and greed that are quite beyond the most creative imagination. Sometimes it all feels a bit too much to bear. Once a person of periodic deep depressions, a sign of mental suffering in my family that affected each sibling differently, I have matured into someone I never dreamed I would become: an unbridled optimist who sees the glass as always full of something. It may be half full of water, precious in itself, but in the other half there's a rainbow that could exist only in the vacant space.

I have learned to dance.

It isn't that I didn't know how to dance before; everyone in my community knew how to dance, even those with several left feet. I just didn't know how basic it is for maintaining balance. That Africans are always dancing (in their ceremonies and rituals) shows an awareness of this. It struck me one day, while dancing, that the marvellous moves African Americans are famous for on the dance floor came about because the dancers, especially in the old days, were contorting away various knots of stress. Some of the lower-back movements handed down to us that have seemed merely sensual were no doubt created after a day's work bending over a plow or hoe on a slave driver's plantation.

Wishing to honor the role of dance in the healing of families, communities, and nations, I hired a local hall and a local band and invited friends and family from near and far to come together, on Thanksgiving, to dance our sorrows away, or at least to integrate them more smoothly into our daily existence. The next generation of my family, mourning the recent death of a mother, my sister-in-law, created a spirited line dance that assured me that, though we have all encountered our share of grief and troubles, we can still hold the line of beauty, form, and beat — no small accomplishment in a world as challenging as this one.

Hard times require furious dancing. Each of us is the proof.

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