



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION, 2021

English - Higher Level - Paper 1

Total Marks: 140

Wednesday, 9 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 **REFLECTIONS ON TIME**.
- Candidates should familiarise themselves with each of the texts before beginning their answers.
- Both sections of this paper (COMPREHENDING and COMPOSING) must be attempted.
- Section I, Comprehending, carries 40 marks.
- Section II, Composing, carries 100 marks.

SECTION I – COMPREHENDING

- Two Questions, A and B, follow each text.
- Candidates must answer **ONE** question in Section I:
either one Question A **OR one** Question B on **ONE** text.

SECTION II – COMPOSING

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

TEXT 1 – TIME PIECES

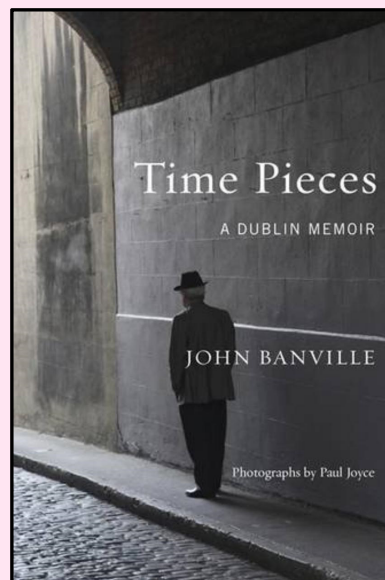
Text 1 is based on edited extracts from *Time Pieces – A Dublin Memoir* by John Banville. In this text the writer reflects on some childhood memories and shares his thoughts on the past.

Dublin was never my Dublin, which made it all the more alluring. I was born in Wexford, a small town that was smaller and more remote then, sequestered in its own past. My birthday falls on 8 December. The eighth used to be both a Holy Day and a day when people from the provinces flocked to the capital to do their Christmas shopping and marvel at the Christmas lights. So my birthday treat on successive years in the first half of the 1950s was a trip by train to Dublin, a thing I looked forward to for months beforehand.

We would leave from the town's North Station in the wintry darkness of early morning.

I believe there were still steam trains then, although diesel was the coming thing. How thrilling it was to walk through the sombre, deserted streets, my head still fuzzy from sleep, with the long day's adventure all before me. The train would arrive from Rosslare Harbour, carrying bleary-eyed passengers off the overnight ferry from Fishguard in Wales. Away we would chug, the window beside me a black glass mirror in which I could study my menacingly shadowed reflection and imagine myself a confidential agent – as spies used to be called in the espionage novels of a previous age – on board the Orient Express and bound on a top-secret mission to the dusky and dangerous East.

We would have been somewhere in the approaches to Arklow when the dawn came up, turning the frost-white fields to a shade of sharply glistening mica-pink. Certain moments in certain places, apparently insignificant, imprint themselves on the memory with improbable vividness and clarity – improbable because, so clear and so vivid are they, the



suspicion arises that one must have imagined them. Of those December journeys I recall, or am convinced I recall, a certain spot where the train slowed at a river bend – the Avoca river, it must have been – a spot I can still see clearly in my memory's eye, and which I have returned to repeatedly in my novels.

Dublin, of course, was the opposite of ordinary. Dublin was, for me, a place of magical promise towards which my starved young soul endlessly yearned. That the city itself, the real Dublin, was, in those poverty-stricken 1950s, mostly a grey and graceless place, did not mar my dream of it – and I dreamed of it even when I was present in it, so that mundane reality was being constantly transformed before my eyes into high romance.

When does the past become the past? How much time must elapse before what merely happened begins to give off the mysterious, sacred glow that is the mark of true pastness? After all, the resplendent vision we carry with

us in memory was once merely the present, wholly unremarkable, except in those moments when one has just fallen in love or won the lottery. What is the magic that is worked upon experience, when it is consigned to the laboratory of the past, there to be shaped and burnished to a finished radiance? Let us say, the present is where we live, while the past is where we dream. Yet if it is a dream, it is substantial, and sustaining. The past buoys us up, a tethered and ever-expanding hot-air balloon. What transmutation must the present go through in order to become the past? Time's alchemy works in a bright abyss.

Westland Row Station – it did not become Pearse Station until years later – was mostly a vast soot-blackened glass dome, a couple of grim platforms, and a ramp leading down to the street. It seems to me now that on every one of those eighths of December we arrived in rain. This was not the driving, pounding rain

of the provinces, but a special urban variety, its drops as fine and as penetrating as neutrinos, those teeming showers of subatomic, indeed sub-subatomic, particles that flash through you and me and all things at every instant. The rain turned the pavements greasy, so that one had to make one's way over them with caution in one's slippery leather soles.

At the station exit we turned left on to Westland Row. At the top of the street, turning left and immediately right, we would come up into Merrion Square, where, at number one, a fine example, at least in its exterior, of a terraced Georgian townhouse, Oscar Wilde was born. I need hardly say I knew none of these things at the time of which I am writing. I doubt I had even heard of poor Oscar, who today is commemorated by a hideous and garishly painted statue, representing him asprawl on a rock at the corner of the square opposite his birthplace. What indignities we consider ourselves free to visit upon the famous dead!

N.B. Answer only **ONE** question in Section I, either **one** Question A OR **one** Question B on **one** text.

QUESTION A – 40 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of TEXT 1, explain three insights you gained into the impact of time on memories. Support your answer with reference to the text. (10)
- (ii) In paragraph 5, John Banville observes, “the present is where we live, while the past is where we dream.” Give your personal response to this observation by the writer. (10)
- (iii) Identify four features of the language of narration, evident in the above text, and discuss how effectively these features are employed by John Banville to tell the story of his childhood trips to Dublin. Support your response with reference to the text. (20)

QUESTION B – 40 Marks

You have been invited to write **a feature article**, entitled *Monumental Matters – The Story of Statues*, to appear in the magazine supplement of a weekend newspaper. In your article you should: reflect on the long-established tradition of erecting statues to celebrate or memorialise people, explore some of the reasons why commemorative statues may be controversial, and give your views on continuing this tradition into the future.

TEXT 2 – DAYDREAMING BACK IN TIME

This text is adapted from poet Doireann Ní Ghríofa's award-winning prose debut, *A Ghost in the Throat*. In this edited extract the writer reflects on how the past and the present come together in her garden.

I love the garden and the garden loves me, but it isn't mine, not really. I will always share it with the woman who began it, who arrived in a sun-dress to a newly built council house and cared for this garden all her life. I don't know where she is now, but her bulbs are buried here. The very first morning that I walked through her garden, her daffodils' buttery hellos were easily translated: they nodded. I nodded back.

To work this soil is to sift an archaeology of a stranger's thought. Each time I find an old bulb or the splinters of a broken cup planted for drainage, I am thankful for her labour. With every month, more of her flowers lift their heads from the soil, waving polite hellos in pinks and yellows and blues. I don't know their names, but I think of her in every small act of weeding and pruning, of watering and fertilising. I pat the earth with gentleness. My nails are always dirty, my palms shovel-blistered, my knees drenched, but I don't care. I am happy here. In mapping my own additions to this small plot, I choose with care, because I hold a specific desire for this place: I want to lure the bees to me.

Plastic seed-trays soon proliferate all along our windowsills, each square of soil brimming with a velvet darkness from which tiny seedlings peek. I love the sprouting of their infant limbs, how they wear their seedcases like jaunty bonnets.

Of the many species of bumblebee in Ireland, I've read that one third may be extinct within a decade. The cat watches from the wall as I set to work, a clumsy gardener who digs not by trowel or spade but by dented soup spoon. Every day, I am digging and grunting and raking, heaving compost from the shed, setting



plump armfuls of plants and bulbs, and patting them down. Each new plant I choose is both nectar and pollen-heavy, every clump of colour designed to bloom as a lure. Here will be sunflowers and snowdrops, I tell my husband, holding his hand tight, and over there, lavender and fuchsia. Our peripheries will hold hedges of hawthorn and hazel, I'll lure honeysuckle along the walls, and we'll abandon a fat ribbon of untouched wilderness beyond, in which brambles and dandelions will flourish. It will be so beautiful, I say, and press my smiling lips to his in excitement. I am determined to rewrite the air here until it sings the songs of long ago; I want it rewound and purring with bees.

We may imagine that we can imagine the past, but this is an impossibility. As a child I was so enchanted by history that I would sometimes sit by a stream and try to daydream myself back in time. To the hurry-burble of water, my mind set to work, forgiving first the distant buzz of traffic, and then, through clumsy acts of further deletion, trying to subtract all the other resonances of modernity. This, I told my ears, this soundscape, yes, but minus cars, minus tractors, minus airplanes, minus the sad cow-howl of industrial farming, minus it all, until only stream-lilt and bird-chirp remain. Now, I would tell myself, this, *this* must have

been what the past really sounded like. I was wrong. Long ago, the air was never as quiet as I presumed. It was alive, strumming the tune of those sisters so accustomed to drudgery, the background chorus of those who always hum as they work.

As the new plants unfurled into sunlight, the bees began to arrive. I dragged a cobwebbed lawn-chair from the garage and spied on their busy rumps as they browsed the gifts I'd grown for them. I watched the bees and thought of the poet Paula Meehan. I'd heard her describe how cherished bees were in medieval Ireland, when entire tracts of our Brehon laws provided a legal framework for their behaviour. Bees flew through the law and into folklore.

They are only bees, it's true. In the absence of the neurological embellishments that make moral beings of humans, we assume other creatures' lives are somehow lesser by comparison with our own. However, a bee, being a bee, will accept her own death to let her sister bees live, a decision with which any human would surely struggle. The opposite of selfishness; if she stings, it is to protect others from danger, donating her life so that others may survive.

How lonesome I'd be, if the bees left the sweet-shop I've built for them. I've done all I can to hearten them, I have hummed to them, I have fed and sheltered and loved them. I want to keep them here at all costs.

N.B. Answer only **ONE** question in Section I, either **one** Question A OR **one** Question B on **one** text.

QUESTION A – 40 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of TEXT 2, explain three insights you gained into what links the past and the present in the writer's life. Support your answer with reference to the text. (10)
- (ii) In paragraph 5, Doireann Ní Ghríofa observes, "We may imagine that we can imagine the past, but this is an impossibility." Give your personal response to this observation by the writer. (10)
- (iii) Identify four features of the aesthetic use of language, evident in the above text, and discuss how effectively these features are employed by Doireann Ní Ghríofa to convey her personal experiences, hopes and dreams. Support your response with reference to the text. (20)

QUESTION B – 40 Marks

An assertion that other creatures' lives are somehow lesser than human life has prompted extensive debate on social media. In order to join in this online debate, write **an open letter** to be shared on social media, in which you: state your position in relation to animal rights, explore some of the issues associated with our current engagement with animals and outline what you see as the major challenges we face as we share the planet with animals in the future.

TEXT 3 – THIS IS YOUR TIME

TEXT 3 is based on edited extracts from the transcript of a graduation speech delivered in 2018 by American actor, Chadwick Boseman, at Howard University. In this text Mr Boseman reflects on the time he spent at Howard and how it influenced him.

It is a great privilege, graduates, to address you on your day, a day marking one of the most important accomplishments of your life to date. This is a magical place. I remember walking across this yard on what seemed to be a random day, my head down lost in my own world of issues, like many of you do daily. I raised my head and Muhammad Ali was walking towards me. He raised his fist to a quintessential guard. I was game to play along with him, to act as if I was a worthy opponent. What an honour to be challenged by the greatest of all time for a brief moment. His security let the joke play along for a second before they ushered him away, and I walked away floating like a butterfly, light and ready to take on the world. That is the magic of this place. Almost anything can happen here.

Howard University has many names, the Mecca, the Hilltop. It only takes one tour of the physical campus to understand why we call it the Hilltop. Almost every day I would walk the full length of the hill to Fine Arts where most of my classes were. Throughout ancient times, institutions of learning have been built on top of hills to convey that great struggle is required to achieve degrees of enlightenment.

For some of you, the challenge was actually academics. You worked hard. You did your best, but you didn't make As or Bs, sometimes Cs. That's okay, you are here on top of the hill. Sometimes your grades don't give a real indication of what your greatness might be. For others the challenge was financial. You and your family struggled to make ends meet, but you are here. For a lot of you, your hardest struggle was social. You were never as cool and as popular as you wanted to be and it bothered you, but you are here. Most of you



graduating here today struggled against one or more of the obstacles I mentioned in order to reach this hill-top. I urge you to invest in the importance of this moment and cherish it.

Early in my career I got an audition for a soap-opera on a major network. I was promised more money than I had ever seen before. When I saw the role I was playing – that of a young man in his formative years with a violent streak pulled into the allure of gang involvement – I found myself conflicted. That's somebody's real story. Any role, played honestly, can be empowering, but I was conflicted because this role seemed to be wrapped up in assumptions about us as black folk. Howard had instilled in me a certain amount of pride and for my taste this role didn't live up to those standards.

After filming the first two episodes, I had an opportunity to bring my concerns to the executives of the show. I asked them some questions about the background of my character. Question one: where is my father? The exec answered, "Well, he left when you were younger." Okay. Question two: in this script, it alluded to my mother not being

equipped to operate as a good parent, so why exactly did my little brother and I have to go into foster care? Matter-of-factly, he said, “Well, of course she is on heroin.” I queried whether some of the assumptions around characterisation were stereotypical. That word lingered. I was let go from that job on the next day. My agents told me it might be a while before I got a job acting on screen again.

But what do you do when the principles and the standards that were instilled in you here at Howard closed the doors in front of you? I thought of Ali in the middle of the yard in his elder years, drawing from his victories and his losses. I realised that he was transferring something to me on that day. He was transferring the spirit of the fighter to me.

Graduating class hear me well this day. This day,

when you have reached the hill top and you are deciding on next jobs, next steps, careers, you should rather find purpose than a job or a career. Purpose is an essential element of you. It is the reason you are on the planet at this particular time in history. Remember, the struggles along the way are only meant to shape you for your purpose.

I don’t know what your future is, but if you are willing to take the harder way, the one with more failures at first than successes, the one that is ultimately proven to have more meaning, more victory, more glory, then you will not regret it. Now, this is your time. Howard’s legacy is not wrapped up in the money that you will make, but the challenges that you choose to confront. As you commence on your paths, press on with pride and press on with purpose.

N.B. Answer only **ONE** question in Section I, either **one** Question A OR **one** Question B on **one** text.

QUESTION A – 40 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of TEXT 3, explain three insights you gained into how Chadwick Boseman was influenced by his time at Howard University. Support your answer with reference to the text. (10)
- (ii) In paragraph 7, Chadwick Boseman observes, “Purpose is an essential element of you.” Give your personal response to this observation by the writer. (10)
- (iii) Identify four features of the language of persuasion evident in the above text, and discuss how effectively these features are employed by Chadwick Boseman to craft an emotional and inspiring speech. Support your response with reference to the text. (20)

QUESTION B – 40 Marks

You have decided to apply for the position of editor of your school’s Graduation Yearbook. Each year, the Yearbook has a different theme, chosen by the editor. An article by a celebrity contributor is also included annually. To be considered for the post, you must make **a verbal pitch*** to the graduation committee members in which you: promote your preferred theme for the 2021 Graduation Yearbook, impress the committee with your ideas for its content, and nominate your ideal celebrity contributor, explaining your choice to the committee members. Write the text for the verbal pitch that you would make.

***A spoken promotional presentation**

SECTION II

COMPOSING

(100 marks)

Write a composition on **any one** of the assignments that appear in **bold print** below.

Each composition carries 100 marks.

The composition assignments are intended to reflect language study in the areas of information, argument, persuasion, narration, and the aesthetic use of language.

1. In TEXT 1, John Banville tells us of the annual childhood trip to Dublin to celebrate his birthday.

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on the significance of birthdays, your own and those of others, sharing your thoughts on this annual personal milestone.

2. Bees, whose lives depend on the community of the hive, feature prominently in Text 2.

Write a discursive essay in which you consider the meaning and importance of community.

3. In TEXT 1, John Banville recalls seeing, “blear-eyed passengers off the overnight ferry from Fishguard in Wales” as he waited at the railway station.

Write a short story, set in a railway station, in which a passenger off the overnight ferry from Fishguard in Wales plays an important role. Your short story may be amusing or menacing in tone.

4. In TEXT 3, Muhammad Ali’s security personnel play along with a joke between the boxer and Chadwick Boseman.

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on the role of humour, fun and laughter in life.

5. In TEXT 2, Doireann Ní Ghríofa alludes to the importance of bees in medieval Ireland.

Write a fable or fairy-tale, set in ancient Ireland, in which a bee or bees feature prominently.

6. In TEXT 2, Doireann Ní Ghríofa celebrates the colours in her garden, the sounds of the past and the “purring” of bees.

Write an article, for publication in a popular magazine, about the many and varied colours and sounds that punctuate and surround our daily lives and the impact they have on us.

7. In TEXT 3, Chadwick Boseman draws attention to the dangers of stereotyping.

You have been asked to speak, as a representative of a national youth organisation, at the launch of a major campaign against stereotyping. Write the speech you would deliver.

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Acknowledgements

Images and texts that appear on this examination paper were sourced as follows:

Text 1: Time Pieces, A Dublin Memoir, John Banville, Hachette Books Ireland, Dublin, 2016

Image: Cover image – Paul Joyce

Text 2: A Ghost in the Throat, Doireann Ní Ghríofa, Tramp Press, Dublin & Glasgow, 2020

Image: <https://publicdomainpictures.net/pictures/220000/velka/pollinating-bee-149451888900p.jpg>

Text 3: <https://washingtonpost.com/education/2020/08/29/chadwick-boseman-praised-student-protesters-2018-commencement-speech-howard-university-watch-video/>

Image: Actor Chadwick Boseman attends The 2018 ESPYS at Microsoft Theater in Los Angeles on July 18, 2018 (Axelle / Bauer-Griffin/FilmMagic/Getty Images file) <https://www.nbcnews.com/pop-culture/celebrity/hollywood-remembers-chadwick-boseman-superstar-screen-life-n1238779>

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Leaving Certificate – Higher Level

English

Wednesday 9 June

Morning 9.30 – 12.20