

ENGLISH LITERATURE A

(7712/2B)

Paper 2B: Texts in shared contexts: Modern Times: Literature from 1945 to the present day

Insert

Instructions to candidates

The material in this insert is for use with Section B of the question paper.

Section B: Answer both Question 1 and Question 2.

Recommended time for Section B: approximately 100 minutes.

Total marks for Section B: 50 marks (25 marks per question).

The Distance Between Us

Sarah Connelly

First published 2019 by Meridian Press

Extract context: *This extract is taken from the opening chapter of the novel. Margaret, the protagonist, is a retired schoolteacher living alone in the house she shared with her husband for over three decades.*

She still set two cups out in the morning. She noticed herself doing it -- the muscle memory of thirty-one years -- and would stand with both hands on the counter looking at the second cup as though it had said something she had not heard clearly. Then she would put it back. This happened every day for four months. She did not think of it as grief. Grief was a word other people used, people who cried at funerals and kept photographs on mantelpieces. Margaret did not keep photographs. She had his voice still, or thought she did, somewhere at the back of her mind where she was afraid to look too directly in case it was not really there.

The house made sounds at night that it had always made. She had simply never been the one awake to hear them.

Her daughter telephoned every Sunday at eleven. The calls lasted precisely as long as politeness required and no longer, which Margaret found she preferred. Helen meant well. Helen had always meant well, in the particular exhausting way of people who have decided what you need before asking. She sent casseroles in labelled containers. She forwarded articles about bereavement groups that met in church halls on Thursday evenings. Margaret read them and put them in the recycling. She was not, she told herself, the kind of person who talked to strangers about private things. She was not sure, in any case, what she would say. That she missed him more in the afternoons than in the mornings. That she had stopped watching the evening news because he used to shout at it and the silence where the shouting had been was a specific and particular kind of unbearable. That she had found, last Tuesday, one of his handkerchiefs in the pocket of her winter coat, and had stood in the hallway for a long time doing nothing at all.

In March she drove to the coast without deciding to. She sat in the car park for two hours watching the tide and did not get out. The sea was the colour of old pewter. A man walked a dog along the waterline and the dog ran into the waves and out again and the man stood watching it with his hands in his pockets. Margaret watched them until they disappeared around the headland, and then she watched the empty beach.

On the way home she stopped at the supermarket and bought, without thinking, the brand of coffee he had preferred. It was too strong for her. She had always thought so. She drank it standing at the kitchen window watching the garden he had tended, in the light that was not quite morning and not quite anything else, and found that she could not remember a single thing she had meant to say to him and had not. She had said everything. It occurred to her, slowly, the way cold comes into a room, that this was the worst of it. Not the silence, not the second cup, not the handkerchief folded small in her coat pocket. The worst of it was that she had no unfinished business with him. They had been, by any measure, enough for each other. She had not known until now that this too could be a thing to grieve.

Section B

Answer both Question 1 and Question 2.

0 1

How does Connelly present the experience of grief in this extract?

In your response you should:

- analyse the methods the writer uses to shape meanings
- include relevant subject terminology
- consider the contexts in which the text was written and received.

[25 marks]

Recommended time: 40 minutes

0 2

In this extract, Connelly presents loss as something that exists in the smallest, most ordinary details of daily life. Compare how loss or absence is presented in this extract and in one or two other texts you have studied.

In your response you should:

- make connections across the texts you have studied
- include relevant subject terminology
- consider the contexts in which texts were written and received.

[25 marks]

Recommended time: 35-40 minutes