

Answer **either** Question 1 **or** Question 2.

EITHER

1 Read carefully the poem opposite about a group of prisoners the poet sees during a train journey.

How do the words of the poem express the poet's feelings about the prisoners?

To help you answer, you might consider:

- how the poet describes the prisoners
- how he presents their reactions to their situation
- the impact of the final stanza (lines 18–26) of the poem.

Men in Chains

The train stopped
at a country station.

Through sleep curtained eyes
I peered through the frosty window,
and saw six men:
men shorn
of all human honour
like sheep after shearing,
bleating at the blistering wind,
'Go away! Cold wind! Go away!
Can't you see we are naked?'

They hobbled into the train
on bare feet,
wrists handcuffed,
ankles manacled¹
with steel rings like cattle at the abattoirs²
shying away from the trapdoor.

One man with a head
shaven clean as a potato
whispered to the rising sun,
a red eye wiped by a tattered
handkerchief of clouds,
'Oh! Dear Sun!
Won't you warm my heart
with hope?'
The train went on its way to nowhere.

¹ *manacled*: chained

² *abattoirs*: slaughter houses

OR

- 2 Read carefully the following extract from a novel. In it Clare is acting in a school play, *Macbeth*, by William Shakespeare. (In the play she has the non-speaking part of a guest at a banquet. At this banquet a ghost appears but is seen only by Macbeth. Those acting the guests have to act as though they cannot see the ghost.)

How does the writing vividly convey Clare's feelings of discomfort?

To help you answer, you might consider:

- the description of Clare's feelings on the journey to school and before she goes on stage
- how these feelings develop once she is on stage
- her reactions when her performance has finished.

The audience steamed a little in the warmth of the school building. It must have started snowing again: moisture glistened on people's hair and shoulders. Clare, cycling up from home in the darkness, had seen the glow of light from the city reflected in a heavy, orange-looking sky that seemed oppressively close, lurking somehow just above the tops of houses and trees. There was a feeling of suspense, as though, off-stage, something waited.

And Clare, off-stage in the gym, waited for her first scene. People milled around her. Mrs Cramp rushed to and fro, inspiring an atmosphere of crisis. Someone had lost part of her costume. The curtains kept threatening to stick. Macduff¹ had a nose-bleed. Clare, costumed for the banquet scene, sat on a pile of mats while people came and went – ordinary, familiar faces and shapes oddly translated into the shadow of something else. Not the substance, because in no way were these really Shakespeare characters, or even actors, but the shadow of such a thing faintly cast upon faces seen every day, talking, eating, singing, yawning. Faces distorted by make-up, but perfectly recognizable beneath, familiar voices inexpertly proclaiming thoughts and beliefs that could hardly be more inappropriate to a lot of people aged about fourteen leading uneventful lives in the South Midlands². In rehearsal, it had usually seemed funny. Now, for some reason that Clare could not isolate, it no longer was. It was vaguely sinister, as though the pretence might really distort people in some way, unhinge things, as it were, so that you would no longer be sure what was, and what was not.

'Clare! Come on!'

Filing on to the stage, with the audience only dimly visible as motionless shapes in the darkened hall, intensified the feeling. Which was real, us or them? Us, up here, all got up in greasepaint³ and funny clothes, or them, down there, in winter coats and macs and umbrellas hung on the backs of the school chairs? The stage lights isolated the actors, shouldered the audience aside into darkness, made them the unreal observers.

The guests, seated at the table, murmured among themselves. Clare's neighbour, mouthing nonsense, was not Jennie Sanders, who lived in Eynsham and was good at Art, but a stranger, with lined and painted face. Other faces swam in the glare of the lights, haloed and somehow duplicated by an effect of spotlighting. Voices boomed. The ghost arrived, sat at the table, and was studiously ignored by the other guests. 'Rhubarb, rhubarb⁴,' said the stranger who was Jennie Sanders.

Clare said conversationally, 'Good heavens! there is the ghost.' The neutral murmurs around turned to murmurs of reproof. Someone said, whispered, 'Shut up, you idiot, we're not supposed to be able to see her – him.'

'It would be much more interesting if we did,' said Clare. 'Then there'd really be something to talk about.' Beyond her, in the wings, she could see Mrs Cramp making curious gestures, soothing the air with her hands like a conductor restraining an over-active orchestra. She mouthed something: 'Don't talk so loud,' it looked like. Jennie Sanders, under her paint, was registering alarm. 'Or perhaps they did,' said Clare thoughtfully. 'Perhaps that's the whole point. They all saw it, Lady Macbeth specially, but they pretended not to so Macbeth would get in a proper old state.' Around her, the guests were gabbling feverishly. Macbeth raved at the ghost and the ghost got up and left the stage while the guests politely looked the other way. It loitered in the wings, stripping off cheesecloth and becoming Liz again. A disastrous dinner party drew to a close. The guests filed off the stage.

Behind the scenes, Clare was accused by some of frivolity and others treachery. She hardly heard them: their painted faces, saying things, floated around her. Mrs Cramp appeared and said, 'You were a very convincing guest, I must say, Clare. A bit overconvincing, maybe, but never mind,' and then, 'Are you feeling all right?'

Clare said, 'Can I go home? Would it matter if I didn't come on in the last scene?'
'Of course you can go, if you're not feeling well.'

'I'm all right.'

It was snowing hard. She could hardly see where she went, standing up on the pedals of the bike and pushing forward into the whirling darkness. When she got home she threw the bike down on the gravel anyhow and left it, wheels still spinning, running up the steps and into the house.

¹ *Macduff*: a character in the play

² *South Midlands*: area in the centre of England

³ *greasepaint*: theatrical make up

⁴ *Rhubarb, rhubarb*: meaningless words actors say in crowd scenes to pretend they are having a conversation

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