

Leaving Certificate Examination, 1999

ENGLISH - ORDINARY LEVEL - PAPER 1

Total Marks: 190

WEDNESDAY, 9 JUNE - MORNING, 9.45 - 11.45

Both sections of this paper (Composition and Unprescribed Prose)

must be attempted.

I. COMPOSITION - (100 marks)

Write a prose composition on **one** of the following:

- (a) Life is good. Do you agree?
- (b) Changes I would like to see in the next century.
- (c) What school has meant to me.
- (d) A speech for or against the view that we Irish are a genuinely caring people.
- (e) My views on the world of politics.
- (f) Your experience (real or imaginary) of **one** of the following:
 - (i) A perfect day.
 - (ii) An occasion when you were deeply embarrassed.
 - (iii) Visiting an elderly relative.
 - (iv) Having to make an important decision.
 - (v) Using a computer.
 - (vi) Telling a lie.

II. UNPRESCRIBED PROSE - (90 marks)

Read the following passage carefully, and then answer **question A and either question B or question C**. (Questions A, B, C carry 45 marks each.)

Back to the future means back to the Middle ages

*Why mankind is looking towards the 21st century
with one eye fixed firmly on the 14th century.*

1. To think of the future is to think of a digital world opening out in front of us, where vast amounts of data are transmitted at the speed of light for the general good (or bad) of humanity. We imagine an unknown future, where limits are broken and things happen that we can't even dream about. Not necessarily so, cry many commentators who say that the nearer we get to the new millennium the more medieval our society is becoming.
2. The argument of these commentators goes like this: there is no order in the Modern World. We are living in what has been called a "chaosmos", a world of confusion and disorder. In the Middle Ages the exact opposite was the case: beneath the surface there was order, a "cosmos" – where everything and everyone had its own place in God's scheme of things. According to these commentators, there is now a longing to return to this happier order. Modern-day progress only causes anxiety, provides no stability and creates divisions between those who have and those who have not.

3. This hankering for a return to the Middle Ages is typical of the thinking of the New Age Movement. This movement believes that the Middle Ages were simpler and somehow better, and that the future depends on us returning to our blissful past when life was easy-going and uncomplicated. New Age Travellers are ideal examples of this alternative anti-middle-class, anti-suburban way of life. Like the begging religious orders of the Middle Ages they tend to live largely on charity. They stand for spiritual renewal, herbal medicine and a new relationship with Mother Earth; and in spite of the fact that their beliefs seem, from the outside, to be a confused tangle of Celtic mythology and Eastern religion, they represent a genuine resistance to the digital future.
4. Oddly enough the most widespread resistance to a technological future is found in that most 20th century medium: film. Director Terry Gilliam (*Jabberwocky*, *The Fisher King*, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*), when asked why he was so fascinated with the Middle Ages, answered: "It seems a simpler, more manageable kind of world, a more direct world where, when there's a problem, you have a knight to go out and slay a dragon". Umberto Eco, author of the book *The Name of the Rose*, the medieval detective story which was made into a film, sees the past as a map of the future: "Every time Europe feels a sense of crisis, of uncertainty about its aims and hopes it goes back to its own roots – and the roots of European society are, without question, in the Middle Ages."
5. That may well be the case, but if we are becoming more medieval it's only a phase we're going through. The best way to gauge the real values of any society has, through the centuries, always been to look at the purpose of the tallest building that *that* society has erected. For people of the Middle Ages it was the Gothic Cathedral. Today, for people in Britain, it's London's Canary Wharf, which contains the biggest building in Europe, built during the 1980's by investors who, inevitably, went bankrupt. The Wharf has been bombed and now contains financial institutions, newspapers and dozens of ludicrous cable TV channels. Not a church spire or a dragon-slaying knight in sight.
- A. Write out briefly the **main points** made by the writer in this passage. (45)
- B. (i) What contrast is made between the Modern World and the Middle Ages in Paragraph 2? (15)
- (ii) What is the writer's purpose in referring to the film director, Terry Gilliam and the author, Umberto Eco, in Paragraph 4? (15)
- (iii) Do you consider that the writer of the passage is a good writer? Give reasons for your answer. (15)
- C. (i) What impressions do you get of the New Age Travellers from your reading of Paragraph 3? (15)
- (ii) Why do you think the writer refers to the Gothic Cathedral and London's Canary Wharf in Paragraph 5? Give reasons for your answer. (15)
- (iii) Do you consider that the heading (title and subtitle) of the passage is a good one? Give reasons for your answer. (15)