

95 學年度碩士班甄試入學考試

【筆試試題】

第 1 頁 / 共 4 頁

Directions:

Choose only ONE of the two questions below. Answer the question in essay form. Include a *thesis statement* in your introduction. In the body of the essay, support your thesis with *discussion and analysis of specific examples*. Be sure to respond directly to the question that you choose. Your essay will be evaluated for the quality of the argument *as it pertains to the question*.

1. The first quotation comes from a nineteenth-century social critic who goes on to say that the value of sentimental literature is that it reminds people that life is sorrowful and thereby brings them closer together. The second is from a twentieth-century Marxist critic who has a very different view of the social function of sad feelings we associate with sentimentalism. Begin by briefly describing each of the two positions. Keep in mind that there is a difference between sorrow that is experienced directly (in the loss of a loved one, for example) and that which we feel in reading a sentimental book (or sad newspaper story), watching a movie, listening to music, or singing at KTV, activities that invite us to share the grief of others. Then choose a sentimental text (narrative, lyric, visual, cinematic, etc) in which such feelings are involved, and critique it from first one position (quotation 1), then the other (quotation 2). You may also (meaning, in addition) be critical of the positions themselves, although be sure to ground your claims in your reading of the text you have selected.

Quotation 1: "Sorrow is God's school. Even God's own Son was not made perfect without it; though a son, yet learned he obedience by the things that he suffered. Many of the brightest virtues are like stars; there must be night or they cannot shine. Without suffering, there could be no fortitude, no patience, no compassion, no sympathy. Take all sorrow out of life, and you take away all richness and depth and tenderness. Sorrow is the furnace that melts selfish hearts together in love. Many are hard and inconsiderate, not because they lack capability of feeling, but because the vase that holds the sweet waters has never been broken."

Quotation 2: "The actual function of sentimental music lies ... in the temporary release given to the awareness that one has missed fulfillment. ... Emotional music has become the image of the mother who says, 'Come and weep, my child.' It is catharsis for the masses, but catharsis that keeps them all the more firmly in line. ... Music that permits its listeners the confession of their unhappiness reconciles them, by means of this 'release,' to their social dependence."

95 學年度碩士班甄試入學考試

【筆試試題】

第 2 頁 / 共 4 頁

2. The 1978 African short story below uses irony to shed a critical light on the apparently positive concept of the "modern black family." In your essay demonstrate how the story uses point of view, rhetorical questions, and/or the juxtaposition of contrasting ideas or situations to construct its critical irony. Based on these observations, speculate as to what exactly it is that the author finds problematic about the modern family as a discursive construct. As you write, answer one or more of the following questions: What is the meaning of the title of the story? Why is the final sentence incomplete, ending with a dash instead of naming the object(s) of the verb "cast out"? What types of description are used and why?

Vocabulary key: *Family Planning* = a birth control clinic; *horde of little brutes* = many wild children; *with-it* = up-to-date, sophisticated; *barracks* = like army housing; *seedy tenement* = older, dirty and rundown apartment building; *no respectable publisher would touch it with a pitchfork* = no respectable publisher was interested in it at all; *lobola* = (in parts of Africa) money paid by the prospective groom's family to the bride's family.

'These are very handy, you know. When my husband came home drunk the other day...'

'That will be all, Mrs Sutcliffe-Smith,' Rachel said firmly. The landlady winced; and strode out with great dignity.

Rachel stared down at me and—for the first time since those distant five days looked much older, I mean not much older, than the eighteen-year-old she was.

'It's still not late for an abortion,' she said.

She wrung out the towel and wiped the blood streaming out of my nose.

'Did you hear what I said?'

'I'm having dinner with Michael—you remember him, don't you, from when you were training as a nurse?'

'The one with the stammer?'

I nodded.

I corrected myself:

'We're having dinner with him tonight. He's the best doctor in Oxford. We'll mention it casually to him.'

'Rachel,' I added, 'welcome home.'

Thick white doves' feathers snowed down from the overcast skies. Would my novel be accepted? Would Rachel soon tire of me once again? I was still rather weak; but I knew that deep inside me I had said goodbye to Africa, forever. The illusory dawn of the white white snow gleamed with a desolate brightness. Christchurch struck four o'clock. Once more I paced up and down in my study and tried vainly to drive away the startling refrain that was, like a stuck record player, repeating itself over and over inside my head. When I looked out through the windows, hoping to retrace my life's footsteps, I saw that fresh armfuls of snow had covered up my thought-tracks.

Are There People Living There?

There was a new magazine. Its main emphasis was 'the black family'. This was nothing to do with the old traditional black family—not at all, because that reeked of bride-prices, polygamy, ignorance of Family Planning, lack of time-saving gadgets, primitive environment, and a general suspicion—on the part of anthropologists—of incest, infanticide, fratricide, matricide, and all the other things which the new magazine disapproved of. Now I had heard from quite an authoritative source that this new magazine was offering fantastic high sums of money for stories and articles with a Modern African Family slant; but my informant stressed that in each story the family must be seen to consume the products and manufactures of white civilisation.

I was as usual in debt. My only two friends on whose charity I was living seemed to be losing their grip on decent language the more they talked to me about my monomania for writing. Add to that my wife and my horde of little brutes were becoming more unmanageable. The new magazine offered me the chance to make a decent sum of money and also offered the opportunity to take a long hard look at my own failure to raise a modern African family. I had already decided to write the definitive magazine article on the with-it African family.

The first thing to decide was the kind of house the modern African family would live in. Obviously not a thatched mud-and-pole affair. And obviously they wouldn't be living in these white-washed barracks in which we actually live. It wouldn't be a seedy tenement either. At this point I got up and took a long hard look at my own dwelling-place. The paint was everywhere peeling from the walls. The walls had themselves been rather darkened and enslimed by the lack of a chimney and sink in the kitchen. It was a three-roomed house: kitchen, dining room, bedroom.

But there were eleven of us living in there: the wife, me, the five boys, and the four girls, the three cats and the seven dogs; not to mention a colony of invincible mice which had tunneled everywhere and left their droppings in the mealie-flour and on my books; and on the roof (which we used as a rubbish-dump like people in stories use attics) there lived some rather vicious lizards which looked so unlike lizards that they probably were snakes or maybe a new species of lizard. We were all, in our own way, one big happy family. Not a minute passed night or day but was drowned by the sound of quarrelling, the din of cats and dogs raining down from the sky, and the interminable half-lewd, half-innocent whisperings of my vicious but sweet brood of children. All this meant that I literally did not have anywhere to rest my elbows and stain pain with my inky articles. It was a matter of chance. I and my wife did not in the least care who slept where or under what table or on what bed of nails—it was a matter of first come first served. Sometimes my wife and I would be invaded wholesale in our bed, but usually we found some giggling know-alls already there; and we would have to sleep on the floor somewhere. This was not modern. However, I sometimes did my writing on the kitchen table, where an endless procession of kids would suddenly materialise to demand onions and then proceed, each one of them, to cut them right under my nose. I finished my first novel under those conditions: no wonder no respectable publisher would touch it with a pitchfork. But then how could I complain? After all, kids have to put up with the knowledge that when they were conceived mum and dad were just screwing the shit out of each other. It's only the lack of money which creates order and peace in the house; the kids cannot fight and quarrel forever on an empty stomach. The cats and the dogs are each too fierce for each other and of course they've never been fed by me since they walked in through the door from nowhere and made themselves at home. And my books always seem to just happen to be used for firewood. But all the kids seem to have an exaggerated awe of my manuscripts; my eldest, for instance, only tears off pieces from the margins to roll his cigarettes and dope with.

You could, I suppose, say that the house is in a mess; crockery under chairs, food in odd grimy places, my pipes in yesterday's unwashed pots and pans, and books everywhere but where they ought to be. What would the ideal modern black home be like? A cock-tail bar somewhere in it? Foam rubber seats and cushions and poufs and couches and folding beds? On a use-now-pay-later basis, of course. A television. A giant radiogram. And on all the walls, portraits of such heroes as Cecil Rhodes and Chief Tugela. I would have a complete wardrobe of clean underwear. Clean socks, for once. And we would polish everything with Mr Shine. And eat rice and roast chicken until we felt sick of it. My eldest son would be a credit to the family. Three cars in the garage at the back. And house-servants to clean up after us everywhere we went in the house. Advertisement agencies would desperately want us to pose for photographs recommending Ambi Skin-Lightening Cream, Coca-Cola, Castle and Lion Lagers, Benson and Hedges, Pure Wool Suits, and, yes, Fanta Orange Tastes So Good.

What does the new magazine want?

The head of the house would be—not just a worn-out, penniless hackwriter like me—but something important in the African Department of the Ministry of Information. Information, not ordinary fiction. And my wife would be something overwhelmingly massive in the Federation of Black Housewives and would be the significant voice behind the Black All-Consumers' Society.

We would consume the Christian religion until our jaws ached. We would consume chunks of sermons, chunks of earnest prayers, and consume to the hilt the knowledge of our station in the human hierarchy. (I would have to stock lots of medicines for the constipation, the heartburn, and the inevitable worms.) We would consume every sugared stick of Family Planning and screw each other only when there was a sword between her loins and my loins. We would utter speeches condemning the practise of polygamy, the evils of lobola, the superstitions of magic and witchcraft, and, in short, cast out—