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TOP SCHOLAR



Mana Tohu Mātauranga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Qualifications Authority

Scholarship 2024 English

Time allowed: Three hours
Total score: 24

ANSWER BOOKLET

Check that the National Student Number (NSN) on your admission slip is the same as the number at the top of this page.

You should write THREE essays in this booklet, one from each section in Question Booklet 93001Q.

Begin each essay on a new page. Write the section, and the number of your chosen statements in Sections B and C, at the top of the page.

Check that this booklet has pages 2–20 in the correct order and that none of these pages is blank.

Do not write in the margins (). This area will be cut off when the booklet is marked.

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Note: Order of Essays- C, B, A

Section C- 13. It's under the mask of fiction that you can tell the truth

Fiction inhabits a unique niche in our world view, having just enough plausible deniability that it can push the boundaries of what we might otherwise be willing to accept. The 'mask' worn by fiction can be understood as a layer of abstraction or misdirection that allows fiction to slip unimpeded through our defences, and reveal to us new ways of seeing the world.

Where this becomes exclusive to fiction, is the ability to indicate 'moral' truths that question orthodox ways of viewing the moral truth- whether that be the deontological frameworks favoured by religion, or the utilitarian ones often put forward in secular spheres. However, the role of fiction as challenging orthodox truths already reveals to us a flaw in the statement- the idea that there is one single truth to be told, as implied by the usage of 'the'. Fiction can guide us to *notions* of truth, but what is 'true' is a subjective, and relative. It is more accurate then, to think of fiction as a signpost lying at crossroads, each path a truth, and the signs themselves not dictating that truth, but rather indicating the direction in which the audience may find it, should they wish to do so.

Ursula Le Guin's *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*, riffs off *The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life*, by William James (1891). Both texts challenge utilitarianism as a moral 'truth', through which we can begin to see how fiction can be *suggestive* of moral truths, without *telling* the audience directly what they should believe. *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*, outlines a utopia, in which the necessary condition of "the goodness and grace of every [other] life in Omelas", is the eternal, unmitigated suffering of an innocent child, to whom not even a "kind word" can be spoken. Le Guin uses this thought experiment, a layer of separation from reality, as it is never possible to undertake the real world, as a mask, an oblique angle from which to criticise utilitarianism. In *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas*, it is ambiguous as to whether utilitarianism is a truly justifiable moral code- there are those who eschew the child's suffering and walk away, but it is unclear whether they are narratively rewarded as the alternative they are searching for "may not even exist". This ambiguity could indicate that a society grounded in the utilitarian principle of maximising good for the most people is the only one that exists, and therefore indicate a sort of moral 'truth' about the ethical frameworks on which we build our lives- that utilitarianism is the only viable option. However, it seems more likely that Le Guin is using the 'mask' of literature to criticise this widely accepted moral framework, as the reader constructs the world alongside the narrator, ensuring the utopia exists "as [they] like it". This process of construction implicates the reader in the suffering of the child- perhaps we cannot wash our hands clean of the suffering we cause simply by pointing to a higher utilitarian good. The deliberately opaque ending allows the reader to choose either moral truth, supporting or rejecting utilitarian worldviews; which demonstrates not only that Le Guin is not *instructing* the reader, so much as indicating several possible truths, but also that multiple conceptions of the truth can and do exist.

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James' work however, does seem to 'tell' at first glance. He states plainly that accepting our happiness as the "fruit" of a utilitarian bargain that causes others to suffer, is a "hideous" thing to do. He instead advocates for a different kind of moral 'truth'. James suggests that "the nobler thing tastes better, and that is all that we can say" in what is an early precursor to ethical emotivism. Ethical emotivism is another kind of moral 'truth' that would later be developed by A J Ayers beginning in 1936- that posits what is 'good' is not based on a utility maximising calculus, or a set of moral rules, but rather a 'feeling' that we have innately- much like James' "taste" for the right thing. James' treatise is interesting because it is an even vaguer schematic for truth than Le Guin's work- we are not *told* what things could be considered *truly* good or evil, only given an indicator of how we may go about discerning this for ourselves. Thus we see that the use of the word 'tell' is reductive to the relationship of the author and audience. The mark of an author's respect for a reader is that they do not dictate truths to us, but rather lay out a path, or many paths, through which we may find our own conceptions of truth.

Fiction's mask is at its most powerful when it allows a text to go head to head with a 'traditional' arbiter of truth- and there is no more conventional arbiter of truth than the Christian Bible. Colm Toibin's *The Testament of Mary* (2003), and Geoff Ryman's *Him* (2023) are both reinterpretations of the life of Jesus, which use the plausible deniability they are afforded by their fictitious nature to question the morality of the Jesus' sacrifice. *Him*'s most revealing line, spoken by Yeshua (Jesus)'s mother Maryam (Mary), is "we should live lives free from scripture". Maryam rages against the prescriptive nature of the life set out for her and her son at the hand of God. By portraying the conventionally righteous, saintly and docile Mary as full of anger and doubt at her Son's fate Ryman points us towards a question about the moral 'truth' of scripture- we begin to doubt whether it is just to play with the lives of men. We are not told explicitly that this is 'truly' wrong, but we are instead pointed down a path of questioning orthodox spiritual 'truth'. This is similarly explored in *The Testament of Mary*. We once again see a Mary who is full of rage, who questions whether the sacrifice of her son was 'truly' moral- "when they say he died to redeem the world, I will say it was not worth it". Mary's grief and anger is so familiar, so human, that it grounds a divine story concretely in the human experiences with which we are most intimately acquainted. We relate so deeply to her that we cannot help but question the morality of sacrificing one man for the sake of all- simultaneously brining into question utilitarian frameworks of maximum good as the moral 'truth' but also the Christian deontological framework of the righteousness of revering God's designs. Where these two texts both diverge from the statement is in the operative word 'tell'- they do not tell, nor even indicate to us, an alternative moral truth that we should believe in. Instead they question truths that the audience may already hold dear.

The Tao Te Ching, the central text of Taoism imparts upon its audience that "the finger pointing to the moon is not the moon" "the name that you can name is not the eternal name" "and the way that you can go is not the eternal way" (Le Guin translation). These lines point to an idea present also in the work of turn of the century linguist and cultural critic Sassure,

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that "the signifier is not the signified". The meaning that can be captured on the page is not the essence of that thing, only a signpost that guides the audience in that direction. Thus we come to an additional problem with the statement *under the mask of fiction you can tell the truth*. Fiction, while able to indicate the shape of an idea, is not ever able to impart it upon us with the precision implied by 'tell'. There is always some slippage of meaning between author, work, and audience. The 'truth' as an absolute will never exist on the page in its entirety in the way that the statement implies. It eludes us everywhere we try to capture. The flicker of shadow in the corner of the eye; it will disappear the second we turn our heads.

Section B. 6. Non Fiction must stick to the facts.

Over the past half century the subset of the nonfiction genre which has surpassed all others in its accumulation of cultural currency is true crime. Since Truman Capote created the first 'nonfiction novel' with his work *In Cold Blood* in 1966, non-fiction depictions of crime have constantly pushed and redefined the boundaries of what can be considered 'nonfiction'. The boundary on which they have learned the most heavily is the extent to which artistic liberty may be taken, the extent to which one must 'stick to the facts'. To say that non-fiction 'must' stick to the facts is to be intentionally ignorant to the genres development- non-fiction today does *not* stick to the facts, and has not even felt obliged to do so for at least 50 years. The imperative 'must' invites a discussion of not whether it is *best* for nonfiction to adhere to fact, which would be denoted by 'should', but rather an interrogation of whether nonfiction must stick to fact in order to earn its genre title. The answer to this, as demonstrated through the true crime works *In Cold Blood*, *Capturing the Friedmans* and *This is the Zodiac Speaking* is simple and emphatic. No.

Capote's *In Cold Blood* emerged as a turning point for the nonfiction genre- not just because it marked the invention of a new kind of nonfiction, what Elliot Friedman Smith dubbed the 'nonfiction novel', but because it revealed for perhaps the first time how much artistic license a creator could take within the confines of 'nonfiction'. When converting the serialised New Yorker publication into a novel for Harper Collins, Capote made over 5,000 edits in just 10 months. At least 1,000 of these edits changed factual details or quotations relating to the murder of the Cutter family. Yet, he peddled both iterations of his work as the absolute truth. Already, we begin to see that the creators of nonfiction works do not feel that they 'must stick to the facts'- the facts appear to be changeable. An excellent example of this is Capote's depiction of the sale of Nancy's beloved horse Babe, following her death- a sale that did not occur in actuality. Babe's sale creates pathos, further heightens the emotional stakes of the text, but it undercuts the work's claims of realism. Capote's work emerged before the age of instant fact checking- in more modern true crime we see less outright lies, and far more intentional misdirection. In both cases though, it seems the "narrativization" of "far less stable realities" (S. Bruzzic) has led to a departure from fact- creators of this particular subset of nonfiction prefer to sublimate truth for an engaging story. Netflix's 2023

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documentary *This is the Zodiac Speaking* serves as an excellent modern example of this. While careful to avoid outright lies, the work exaggerates the presence of inculpatory evidence against Allen, who it puts forward as a suspect for the serial murders carried out by the eponymous Zodiac in California throughout the 1960's. Using the same disingenuous relationship with fact, it hides potentially exculpatory evidence. DNA and fingerprint evidence seem to point away from Allen as the suspect, yet these facts are never included in the documentary. However, much is made of a knife that was found in his possession- it is mentioned multiple times across all three episodes. We are told the knife was 'sent away for DNA testing' but never hear the results of these tests. This typifies the presumptive nature of true crime- we extrapolate from the emphasis on the knife that it indeed implicates Allen, extrapolation that is enabled by the withholding of exculpatory DNA results. This is guesswork, not fact. While these presumptive practices are extremely pervasive in true crime, they are endemic to the wider nonfiction genre- the constraints of any medium mean that not every fact available can be included, and so engaging with nonfiction is necessarily an act of interpolation. We draw lines between the facts that we are given, but those lines of meaning are not fact in and of themselves.

Moral judgement is a process that, while perhaps grounded in fact, necessarily departs from it. Any time a work invites the audience to make such a judgement, or makes one itself, it fails to 'stick to the facts' and yet, such judgements are a staple of true crime. *This is the Zodiac Speaking's* key pivot point is a series of open interviews with the Seaward children, who were taught and later babysat by Allen. The first line we hear in the first of this series of interviews is "Mr Allen always paid special attention to the little girls", and this suggestion is quickly compounded on by the Seaward's testimonies of sexual abuse perpetrated against them by Allen, and later, Allen's convictions for paedophilia and sexual assault. This informational is all factual and yet, its purpose is not just to inform. We are given this information in order to encourage us to make a moral judgement on Allen that will indict him for the crimes of the Zodiac as well. A set of facts is presented that encourages us to view Allen as a monster, and from there, we are encouraged to go *beyond* fact, making the a-factual judgement that Allen is also the Zodiac (without giving any regard to the fact that while Allen's crimes are vile, they are not particularly similar in offense pattern to those of the Zodiac, not to mention that if paedophilia is an indicator of guilt, then there would be hundreds of other men in Northern California throughout this period whom we should be equally suspect of.) *The Staircase* features the same problem of moral judgements extrapolated from fact. We are presented with three facts of particular interest. 1. Peterson was bisexual. 2. Peterson had extramarital affairs with male prostitutes. 3. These affairs became central to his trial (and to the documentary). The documentary then implies homophobic motivation on the part of the jury (not proven factually)- and we are called to make a moral judgement- was Peterson sexuality evidence of a pattern of secretive and deviant behaviour, as the jury 'decides', or was Peterson unfairly persecuted on the basis of his sexuality? Depending on the call the viewer makes, we are led down the path of either indicting or exonerating Peterson. But, much like *Zodiac* this is a judgement we make

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inherently by departing from fact. This instance of going *beyond* the facts is one that true crime, and nonfiction writ large cannot escape from- the author and the audience, if only implicitly makes value judgements about the facts as they are presented. We become lawyer, judge, and jury to the accused by the simple act of engaging with this media, and from the moment we enter the courtroom of consumption, nonfiction ceases to be solely about fact.

Even the inclusion of raw, unadulterated depiction of an event, with no commentary from the creator at all, is not able to measure up to the bar of 'sticking to the facts'. The 2004 documentary *The Staircase* which centres on Michael Peterson, accused and later convicted of the murder of his wife Kathleen Peterson, relies heavily on employing archival material and crime scene photos. This technique is repeated constantly throughout the documentary series- most reliably in the title sequence, which revisits the same photo of Kathleen's crumpled body at the foot of the stairs over and over again. This act of repetition may seem like an emphasis of fact, a judicious choice to avoid insertion of the filmmakers into the 'truth' that they are relating. However, this is incredibly misleading. Repetition is a displacement activity- by its very nature a substitute for truth and accurate recollection. This is best elucidated by Sigmund Freud in his 1914 essay "Remembering, Repeating and Walking Through". Freud argues that when a patient "acts out" an event, they are doing so in an attempt to "repress and forget" the occurrence of a traumatic event. In the same way, when a documentary like *the Staircase* returns almost obsessively to piece of evidence, it is doing so a substitute for fact. We see Kathleen's mangled body at the bottom of the stairs over and over and over, because the documentary makers themselves don't know what happened- there are no facts to stick to. Instead, there is an *attempt* to emulate the truth through reconstruction, but make no mistake, this is not the truth. The "forensic, almost fetishistic obsession" (E. Johnson) that true crime, and the wider nonfiction genre has with evidence is proof positive of its *inability* to stick to fact- there is simply too much missing or impossible to include, and thus we repeat the same pieces of evidence over and over again – as symbols or representations of a truth that we are fundamentally unable to access when there are insufficient facts to 'stick to'.

In order to 'stick to the fact' non-fiction would have to excise the process of interpretation and interpolation entirely. True crime is a microcosm of the genre in which adhering fact is particularly loosely treated- both intentionally and unintentionally. But, the process of interpretation and judgement is reflexive, both for creator and audience, so in any work of nonfiction, we give grace for some departure from fact- we simply cannot help ourselves. If nonfiction must 'stick to the facts' the genre will cease to become literature, trading in narrative for an Excel spreadsheet of only what is known for certain.

Section A-

Perseverance is a necessary fact of the human condition. If we are to live, we must continue moving forward- there is no possibility of moving backward through our lives. *On any walk* and *Heading Back by Tram* both acknowledge this fact, fronting up to the reality that perseverance is a perpetual process, but where *On any walk* views this task as one that we shoulder together and insists that we are *better off continuing*, *Heading back by tram* is individualistic- we are alone in our perpetual drive onwards and onwards.

Pronoun choice immediately separates the two texts, the starkest indicator of the collectivist/individualistic dichotomy. A invites the reader into the world, collectivising the experience through the use of the pronoun 'we'. Dissent, or a desire to cease persevering is voiced with the individualistic "I really think we should turn back", but the rest of the text employs 'we'. This juxtaposition serves two purposes. It firstly sets up the desire to relent as an anomaly- one voice against the strength of many. Moreover, it does well to convey the universal nature of perseverance, and the way in which it is somewhat automatic- we cannot help but to preserve, because we are caught up in the tide of all those around us perpetually moving forward. This collectivist sentiment is typified by "there is at least a solidarity in walking... we keep our eyes on the person in front of us". Conversely Text B employs mostly singular pronouns- predominantly 'you', which then becomes 'I' in the last two lines of the text. This immediately individualises the experience of carrying on- like Sisyphus, one must carry the boulder alone "no one can help you". In B, juxtaposition of pronoun usage occurs twice- the first time it engages with the collectivist/individualist divide. The sudden appearance of "we" in the line "if only we could sweep aside such days", serves not to collectivise, but rather to universalise the feeling that perseverance is an individual task. It directly follows the stanza which lays out how the passers-by's are "strangers". We have no connection with these people, and thus they will not help us in our task of keeping on. This experience is contained within the unit of a day- such a day as 'we' wish to be able to sweep aside- an experience of isolation that is universal, but self-contained. The second usage of pronoun juxtaposition in B is the switch from 'you' to 'I' in the last two lines. This reveals the poet's misdirection. The 'you' throughout the poem is not the reader, but the author, displacing their experience. This misdirection further serves to universalise the authors experience of isolation- we find that it applies both to ourselves, and now to them, but it also betrays the loneliness of the individualistic world view. Unable to share the burden of momentum through connection like the author of A, the author of B has shared their burden with us by displacement. This displacement though, is a hollow form of sharing- we cannot help the author, nor can they help us.

Setting in each text further enhances our perception of connection versus isolation. A employs a walk through the bush as an extended metaphor for perseverance, constructing a semantic cloud of mixed connotation. We are told both of the positive natural characteristics of "very blue" patches of sky and the 'marvel' of the koura, but also of negative, unfriendly aspects- the "thorny branches" and uncomfortably "sticky wash of leaves". The extended metaphor of

the natural setting in A serves to portray perseverance as a mixed bag of experiences- providing discomfort and payoff hand and hand, but it also reinforces our perception of collectivism in the task of perseverance, through the interconnectedness connoted by natural settings. The imagery brings to mind ecosystems and the web of life, indirect invocations of connectivity, not only with the people who drive us to continue to persevere, but also the task itself. Conversely, text B employs an urban environment, that is colder, more brutalist in nature. Even where connection is connoted through the "arterial connections" of the railway, there is also a sense of separation- the rails fan out from one nexus at the heart of the city, rather than interacting. The noise of the city haunts the author "forever you recall the bang and slap of the seats of every terminus" but the *people* who are the genesis for this noise are conspicuously omitted- creating a sense once again of isolation, of the author as an island in a vast sea, left to persevere all on their own.

Both texts suggest that it is not possible to ever cease to persevere, stagnation is not a genuine option, or not for long. In B, the author is never able to truly set aside their burden of perseverance because even when they return to their apartment and their physical motion stops, the noise of the city is inescapable. Even when they cease moving, the noises of the movement of the city reverberate in their head "the piercing clanging of a bell, the iron wheels shrieking in their tracks". These noises are grating and deeply unpleasant, creating the sense that when the author is set in motion again, which seems to be inevitable, it is not so much because there is merit in perseverance, but because the discomfort of not moving forward is worse. A takes rather a different tack- stagnation simply can't exist, because even when one is not walking themselves, not actively persevering, there is a internal walking "like a spinning beach ball on a computer", because one is still thinking about walking- still thinking about persevering. Therefore, we might as well do the sort of persevering that will actually get us somewhere, given that any rest will be a "false one". A is able to take comfort in the fact that even though we can never truly rest, we undertake this perpetual motion together. The past selves who have stopped preserving and are utterly still, are unenviable, because they are no longer a collective, not a "forward facing line" but a "stagnant scattering"- these two spatial formations reveal how it is only by keeping moving that we can enjoy the merits of a groups support- when we stop, that social formation seems to disintegrate. B's isolationism leaves room for no such comfort- the author is alone, straining to "peer into the coming dark"- even when they move forward eventually, they are isolated- the darkness a metaphor for the totality of this solitude.

Perhaps, had Sisyphus had companions to shoulder his burden alongside him, his continual march up the hill would not have been quite such a hellish punishment. It is the sense of isolation and disconnect endemic to text B that makes the continual drive onwards seems so crushing and foreboding. Text A is able to lighten the burden of an admittedly unpleasant, or at least not wholly pleasant fate of perpetual motion by assuring us that perseverance is an activity that we undertake not just simultaneously but together. The burdens we must carry as we forge into the future are eased when we lean on each other. No man is an island.