

Eton College King's Scholarship Examination, 2009

ENGLISH

(One and a half hours)

Part 1 [60 marks]

Attempt all questions

Murray Bail's novel *Eucalyptus* is set in western New South Wales in Australia and concerns a man named Holland who takes the bizarre decision that he will marry his daughter Ellen to the man who can name all the species of gum tree (eucalyptus) he has planted on his property.

Read the passage from the novel and answer the questions that follow.

- 1 Actually the trouble with our National Landscape is that it produced a certain type of
behaviour which has been given shape in story-telling, all those laconic hard-luck stories,
as many as there are **burrs**¹ on the backs of sheep, and just as difficult to remove. Yes,
yes: there's nothing more dispiriting, *déjà vu*, than to come across another story of
5 disappointment set in the Australian **backblocks**². And now, towards the end of the
century, just when you might think they have reduced to a trickle, the same kind of pale
brown story has appeared in the cities, in disguise! Figures move about between asphalt
and engines, displaying a familiar solemn sentimentality; sometimes it's dressed up in a
poetic mist, a pleasure to read: stories such as the ex-POW with heart of gold, or else we
10 have lovesick young women by the harbour, others **opining**³ on verandahs in the
mountains, and if there are painters in stories naturally they are made to live in the purity
of **squalor**⁴...At regular intervals the stubborn maleness of an unsuspecting father is put
under the inner-city microscope, so to speak, the old peeling away of layers. Not to
mention the many hundreds of stories told in the confessional first person singular, with
15 still more to come. A kind of applied psychology has taken over story-telling, coating it
and obscuring the core.

- 20 What is frail falls away: stories that take root become like things, misshapen things with
an illogical core, which pass through many hands without wearing out or falling to
pieces, remaining in essence the same, adjusting here and there at the edges, nothing
more, as families or forests reproduce ever-changing appearances of themselves: the
geology of fable. In Alexandria, eucalypts were grown in front of houses to ward off evil
spirits, including fatal diseases.

¹ dried seeds

² remote countryside

³ expressing their opinions

⁴ dirty and poor conditions

23 From his front verandah Holland's land went away to the right in the direction of the town. It was the most visible unbroken stretch, although it ended in a purplish blur, and a faint glitter as if someone there was flashing a mirror – a small mystery which Holland would never solve. Along one side a tree line stood up like a haircut, where Holland
27 occasionally emerged, pale flesh against grey wash.

1. Consider each of the following sentences or phrases in the context in which it appears and re-write it in your own words:

- a) "the same kind of pale brown story has appeared in the cities" (lines 6-7)
- b) "sometimes it's dressed up in a poetic mist" (lines 8-9)
- c) "the stubborn maleness of an unsuspecting father is put under the inner-city microscope" (lines 12-13)

[15]

2. "Purity of squalor" is an oxymoron, a figure of speech which combines incongruous and apparently contradictory words for special effect, such as "hot ice", or "wise fool".

Supply the missing word might be (either a noun, adverb or adjective) to create an oxymoron:

- a) "I like a smuggler. He is the only _____ thief".
- b) "I am a _____ superficial person".
- c) "He belongs to the _____ dead".
- d) "The shackles of an old love straiten'd him,
His honour rooted in _____ stood,
And faith unfaithful kept him _____ true".

[10]

3. What point is the author of the passage seeking to make in the first sentence of the second paragraph (lines 17-21)? Explain his ideas in your own words.

[10]

4. What contrasts of style or subject matter can you find between the first two paragraphs (lines 1-22) and the last one (lines 23-27)?

[15]

5. Below are three paragraphs which are possible continuations of the story above. Identify which paragraph you think is the best and which the worst choice, giving the reasons for your decisions.
- a) The land then sloped down plump and smooth, as if patted unevenly by hand, worn in patches to river frontage. It rose and fell along the floor, though less so, broken by outcrops of rock. The rabbits had left erosions of miniature ravines. There were snakes.
 - b) Standing there, a motionless outline, he would slowly turn from the distant haze of urban light to the cooler glow of the trees, bathing his eyes in its soothing grey-blue tones. What thoughts flickered across his mind were never clear to his daughter, for immersion in the hushed landscape seemed always to elicit from him a complementary silence.
 - c) Peering into the distance, his thoughts ran frequently along these lines. *Déjà vu* indeed. He'd had enough of this isolation, these wretched eucalypts he'd stupidly planted all over the property. How on earth would he get his daughter married off? All suitors so far were geriatric tree-bores with an eye for the main chance.

[10]

Part 2 [40 marks]

6. Either

Write an article for a magazine in which you put forward the view that landscape can determine behaviour.

Or

Imagine you are Ellen, Holland's daughter, and have met a series of potential husbands. Write a letter to a friend describing your reaction to this experience.

[End of paper]