

Write a commentary on one of the following:

1. (a)

He got off at the next stop, and stood, looking up and down a country lane. He didn't know what to do at first, it was so long since he'd been anywhere alone. Raindrops dripped from the trees, big, splashy, persistent drops finding the warm place between his collar and neck. He looked up and down the lane again. Somewhere further along, a wood pigeon cooed monotonously. He

5 crossed over and began climbing the hill between the trees.

Up, up, until his way was barred by a fence whose wire twitched in the wind. A tuft of grey wool had caught on one of the barbs. Burns blinked the rain out of his eyes. He pressed two strands of wire apart and eased himself through, catching his sleeve, and breaking into a sweat as he struggled to free it.

10 Trembling now, he began to scramble along the edge of the ploughed field, slipping and stumbling, his mud-encumbered boots like lead weights pulling on the muscles of his thighs. His body was cold inside the stiff khaki, except for a burning round the knees where the tight cloth chafed the skin.

He was walking up the slope of a hill, tensing himself against the wind that seemed to be trying to scrape him off its side. As he reached the crest, a fiercer gust snatched his breath. After

15 that he kept his head bent, sometimes stopping to draw a deeper breath through the steeple of his cupped hands. Rain beat onto his head, dripping from the peak of his cap, the small bones of nose and jaw had started to sing. He stopped and looked across the field. The distance had vanished in a veil of rain. He didn't know where he was going, or why, but he ought to take shelter, and

20 began to run clumsily along the brow of a hill towards a distant clump of trees. The mud dragged at him, he had to slow to a walk. Every step was a separate effort, hauling his mud-clogged boots out of the sucking earth. His mind was incapable of making comparisons, but his aching thighs remembered, and he listened for the whine of shells.

When at last he reached the trees, he sat down with his back to the nearest, and for a while

25 did nothing at all, not even wipe away the drops of rain that gathered on the tip of his nose and dripped into his open mouth. Then, blinking, he dragged his wet sleeve across his face.

After a while he got to his feet and began stumbling, almost blindly, between the trees, catching his feet in clumps of bracken. Something brushed against his cheek, and he raised his hand to push it away. His fingers touched slime, and he snatched them back. He turned and saw

30 a dead mole, suspended, apparently, in air, its black fur spiked with blood, its small pink hands folded on its chest.

Looking up, he saw that the tree he stood under was laden with dead animals. Bore them like fruit. A whole branch of moles in various stages of decay, a ferret, a weasel, three magpies, a fox, the fox hanging quite close, its lips curled back from bloodied teeth.

35 He started to run, but the trees were against him. Branches clipped his face, twigs tore at him, roots tripped him. Once he was sent sprawling, though immediately he was up again, and running, his coat a mess of mud and dead leaves.

Out in the field, splashing along the flooded furrows, he heard Rivers's voice, as distinctly as he sometimes heard it in dreams: *If you run now, you'll never stop.*

ANSWER SHEET
FEUILLE DE RÉPONSES
HOJA DE RESPUESTAS

Sheet number Feuille n° Hoja núm.	01
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AB02

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Question
Question
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The passage 'Regeneration' is centred around one particular character, Burns, and follows his journey from sheer panic and desperation ~~after~~ to a calmer state when he assesses his situation, ^{more logically} and regains a sense of perspective through a return of memory. Barker portrays nature initially as very hostile in a world of the unknown, but also shows that it can also be both accommodating and forgiving.

Burns' vulnerability and lack of familiarity with his surroundings ~~his~~ highlighted in the opening paragraph, 'He didn't know what to do... it was so long since he'd been anywhere alone.' The setting of the passage intensifies this sense of the unknown and the repetition of the action of 'looking up and down' the lane underlines Burns' uncertainty and vulnerability. Barker uses tripling to underline the ~~vastness~~ power of nature in the phrase, 'big, splashy, persistent', describing the raindrops, which is juxtaposed to the apparent fragility and vulnerability of Burns.



This fragility is further reinforced by the softness of the 'tuft of grey wool' compared to the fence whose wire twitched in the wind. The personification of the wire highlights the hostility of the environment at this point and is juxtaposed to the fragile image of Burns created by the soft sound of the word 'tuft'. The connotations of lightness of this word and the alliteration of the letter 's' in the phrase 'slipping and stumbling' suggests Burns' weakness and also the fact that he is struggling against nature.

At this point in the passage Burns appears to have no sense of direction or logic and the phrase 'a burning round the knees where the tight cloth chafed the skin' suggests that he has been a prisoner and is perhaps an escapee. Barker writes in the third person, as the omniscient narrator, and although the passage is centred around Burns, the reader has no insight into his thoughts or his confused state of mind, and is somewhat detached ~~from~~^{by} Burns' lack of organisation in his actions.

The tempo of the passage increases as Barker emphasises the aggression of nature. The 'rain beat' against Burns and the phrase 'the wind that seemed to be trying to scrape him off its side' particularly highlights Burns' insignificance and lack of power in comparison to the environment. The word 'scrape' especially





ANSWER SHEET
FEUILLE DE RÉPONSES
HOJA DE RESPUESTAS

Sheet number Feuille n° Hoja núm.	0	2
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AB02

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Question
Pregunta

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highlights the futility of fighting against nature. The use of short sentences, 'He stopped and looked across the field,' ^{combined} ~~combined~~ with long descriptions of action, 'He didn't know where he was going... but he ought to take shelter, and began to run clumsily' also increase the pace of the passage. There is a definite sense of panic in Burns actions, although the use of alliteration and onomatopoeia to slow the tempo again highlight nature's resistance to his actions. The alliteration of the phrase 'the mud dragged' creates a long drawn out, ^{rather} ~~quite~~ blunt sound which underlines the effort of Burns to escape the hostility of his environment.

An ominous threatening atmosphere is created with the faster pace of the passage ^{at the point at} which Burns is 'stumbling, almost blindly,' which creates a heightened sense of panic. The defensive actions of Burns at this point as 'he snatched' back his fingers from 'the slime' also increases the sense of the unknown and the anticipation of the reader. Barker centres the action of the passage



around the image of 'the tree... laden with dead animals' by building up to a crescendo for the revelation of this image. The phrase 'something brushed against his cheek' heightens the anticipation for this revelation, but the panic of Burns prevents him from discovering the tree calmly, in a ^{composed,} logical manner.

Barker manipulates the reader's response to the confronting image both through language and Burns' reaction to the tree. The repulsive simile 'bore them like fruit' juxtaposes the connotations of growth and life associated with fruit with the rather harrowing ~~un~~ description of the 'dead animals'. The fox 'its lips curled back from bloodied teeth' ^{at this point,} elicits not sympathy from the reader, but revulsion. Fear dominates the reaction of Burns to the tree and again the use of personification, 'twigs tore at him' highlights his panic. However, ~~this~~ it is not the power of nature, but the abuse and destruction of nature that confronts both ~~Burns,~~ the persona, Burns, and the reader.

The introduction of the ominous and threatening character of Rivers is the catalyst, or the turning point of the passage which marks the overcoming of sheer panic by Burns. There is a sense of danger in the fact that Burns 'heard River's voice, as distinctly as he sometimes heard it in dreams' suggesting that Rivers is a haunting figure of fear for Burns. However the





ANSWER SHEET
FEUILLE DE RÉPONSES
HOJA DE RESPUESTAS

Sheet number
Feuille n°
Hoja núm. 0 3



AB02

Please complete the boxes/Veuillez remplir les cases/Llene los recuadros

Question
Question
Pregunta

Examiner
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return of a memory and some sense of familiarity for Burns highlights a change in his state of mind and in his perception of nature. The word 'calmer' conveys this familiarity and the ~~return~~^{beginning} of a logical assessment of the situation. Barker emphasises the courage of Burns in his determination and insistence that 'the voice was only a voice in his head.' ~~Barker~~^{The} overcoming of panic is reinforced in the passage by an ease of tension, ^{previously} created by the desperation in Burns' desire 'to run' from the dead animals.

The maltreatment of the animals, that were 'not nailed to ^[the tree] it... but tied by wings or paws' is emphasised by the fact that Burns 'had seen trees like this before.' Barker suggests Burns' tenderness as he 'releases a magpie' because 'his teeth' were 'chattering' as a wing came away in his hand, showing a repulsion not of the animals, but of the cause of their suffering. Barker, at the end of the passage, portrays also nature's vulnerability and fragility, because the animals are



shown as part of nature. It is the final paragraph of the passage that encapsulates the softening of nature and its vulnerability to abuse by man, as well as its capacity to destroy. The threat that surrounds the character of Rivers suggests that he is linked to the 'corpses' of the animals, and perhaps inflicted such cruelty on them. The calculated action of tying the animals 'by wings or paws or tails' and leaving them in 'various stages of decay' is almost sadistic, but most definitely repulsive. However the ambivalence of the character of Rivers makes it unclear of his culpability for the tree, but does not detract from the cruelty and thus the vulnerability of nature.

Burns, who even with 'the roughness of the bark against his knobly spine' seems much calmer and more comfortable ^{at this point in the passage,} in the presence of the animals' corpses, ^{which contrasts to his initial reaction to the tree,} is able to work with nature through the cruelty. The phrase 'the circle of his companions' suggests the extent of the comfort that they provide Burns and shows that nature ^{also} can be accommodating and forgiving.

The final line of the passage reflects the cyclical nature of life and natural processes and makes a reference to the title of the extract 'Regeneration'. Despite the cruelty that they have endured the animals can now 'dissolve into the earth as they were meant to do'. Burns seems much clearer on this point than





ANSWER SHEET
FEUILLE DE RÉPONSES
HOJA DE RESPUESTAS

Sheet number Feuille n° Hoja núm.	0	4
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A802

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Question
Question
Pregunta

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with regards to his surroundings in the beginning of the passage, which highlights his journey from sheer panic to a calmer more reflective state. This line also alludes to the ability of nature to recover from adversity and in doing so highlights that it too can be fragile and vulnerable. The parallels between the tied animals, representative of the more fragile elements of nature, and Burns, further underlines ^{the importance of} Barker's suggestion of working in harmony with nature, rather than fighting it.





ANSWER SHEET
FEUILLE DE RÉPONSES
HOJA DE RESPUESTAS

Sheet number Feuille n° Hoja núm.	05
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AB02

Please complete the boxes/Veuillez remplir les cases/Llene los recuadros

Question
Question
Pregunta

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<u>Plan</u> repetition
SCAS I :
Setting : intensifies sense of unknown / panic 'a country lane' 'He didn't know what to do'
Character : - seems to have been kept prisoner
- Rivers : ominous charac. - Burns seems fearful of him
- threatening
- throughout passage - develops from panic, unplanned, lack of organisation
to more settled / calmer : sense of logic
memory : conquers fear, stops fighting nature
Action : 'blindly' running : hostile conditions
tree with wild animals, repulses reader initially
confronting / harrowing
↳ however as Burns begins to overcome panic
'circle of companions'
↳ dead animals become at least a comfort



Style : Varying pace of passage reflects Burns' state of mind

Final two paragr. slower pace suggests a return of logic/memory - sense of familiarity

'he remembered that he had seen trees like this before'

- stops fighting nature and it becomes less hostile

FOCUS : Journey of Burns from sheer panic, desperation to a calmer state with the return of some memory and a sense of perspective. Nature is portrayed initially as very hostile in world of unknown but on closer inspection is more accommodating and forgiving.

crescendo crescendo





ANSWER SHEET
FEUILLE DE RÉPONSES
HOJA DE RESPUESTAS

Sheet number Feuille n° Hoja núm.	05
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AB02

Please complete the boxes/Veuillez remplir les cases/Llene los recuadros

Question
Question
Pregunta

Examiner
Examinateur
Examinador

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