



UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE INTERNATIONAL EXAMINATIONS  
General Certificate of Education  
Advanced Subsidiary Level and Advanced Level

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**LITERATURE IN ENGLISH**

**9695/72**

Paper 7 Comment and Appreciation

**May/June 2011**

**2 hours**

Additional Materials: Answer Booklet/Paper

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**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

If you have been given an Answer Booklet, follow the instructions on the front cover of the Booklet.

Write your Centre number, candidate number and name on all the work you hand in.

Write in dark blue or black pen.

Do not use staples, paper clips, highlighters, glue or correction fluid.

Answer **two** questions.

You are reminded of the need for good English and clear presentation in your answers.

At the end of the examination, fasten all your work securely together.

All questions in this paper carry equal marks.



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This document consists of **7** printed pages and **1** blank page.



- 1 Write a critical commentary on the following extract from *The Birthmark*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864), paying particular attention to the ways in which the writer portrays Aylmer and his wife.

One day, very soon after their marriage, Aylmer sat gazing at his wife with a trouble in his countenance that grew stronger until he spoke.

‘Georgiana,’ said he, ‘has it never occurred to you that the mark upon your cheek might be removed?’

‘No, indeed,’ said she, smiling; but perceiving the seriousness of his manner, she blushed deeply. ‘To tell you the truth it has been so often called a charm that I was simple enough to imagine it might be so.’ 5

‘Ah, upon another face perhaps it might,’ replied her husband; ‘but never on yours. No, dearest Georgiana, you came so nearly perfect from the hand of Nature that this slightest possible defect, which we hesitate whether to term a defect or a beauty, shocks me, as being the visible mark of earthly imperfection.’ 10

‘Shocks you, my husband!’ cried Georgiana, deeply hurt; at first reddening with momentary anger, but then bursting into tears. ‘Then why did you take me from my mother’s side? You cannot love what shocks you!’

To explain this conversation it must be mentioned that in the centre of Georgiana’s left cheek there was a singular mark, deeply interwoven, as it were, with the texture and substance of her face. In the usual state of her complexion – a healthy though delicate bloom – the mark wore a tint of deeper crimson, which imperfectly defined its shape amid the surrounding rosiness. When she blushed it gradually became more indistinct, and finally vanished amid the triumphant rush of blood that bathed the whole cheek with its brilliant glow. But if any shifting motion caused her to turn pale there was the mark again, a crimson stain upon the snow, in what Aylmer sometimes deemed an almost fearful distinctness. Its shape bore not a little similarity to the human hand, though of the smallest pygmy size. Georgiana’s lovers were wont to say that some fairy at her birth hour had laid her tiny hand upon the infant’s cheek, and left this impress there in token of the magic endowments that were to give her such sway over all hearts. Many a desperate swain would have risked life for the privilege of pressing his lips to the mysterious hand. It must not be concealed, however, that the impression wrought by this fairy sign manual varied exceedingly, according to the difference of temperament in the beholders. Some fastidious persons – but they were exclusively of her own sex – affirmed that the bloody hand, as they chose to call it, quite destroyed the effect of Georgiana’s beauty, and rendered her countenance even hideous. But it would be as reasonable to say that one of those small blue stains which sometimes occur in the purest statuary marble would convert the Eve of Powers<sup>1</sup> to a monster. Masculine observers, if the birthmark did not heighten their admiration, contented themselves with wishing it away, that the world might possess one living specimen of ideal loveliness without the semblance of a flaw. After his marriage, – for he thought little or nothing of the matter before, – Aylmer discovered that this was the case with himself. 15 20 25 30 35

Had she been less beautiful, – if Envy’s self could have found aught else to sneer at, – he might have felt his affection heightened by the prettiness of this mimic hand, now vaguely portrayed, now lost, now stealing forth again and glimmering to and fro with every pulse of emotion that throbbed within her heart; but seeing her otherwise so perfect, he found this one defect grow more and more intolerable with every moment of their united lives. It was the fatal flaw of humanity which Nature, in one shape or another, stamps ineffaceably on all her productions, either to imply that they are temporary and finite, or that their perfection must be wrought by toil and pain. The crimson hand expressed the ineludible gripe in which mortality clutches the highest and purest of earthly mould, degrading them into kindred with the lowest, and even with the very brutes, like whom their visible frames return to dust. 40 45 50

In this manner, selecting it as the symbol of his wife's liability to sin, sorrow, decay, and death, Aylmer's sombre imagination was not long in rendering the birthmark a frightful object, causing him more trouble and horror than ever Georgiana's beauty, whether of soul or sense, had given him delight.

<sup>1</sup> The Eve of Powers: a famously beautiful statue of Eve, by the sculptor Hiram Powers

2 Write a critical commentary on the following passage, from the short story “Possessing the Secret of Joy” by Chike Unigwe (2005).

As she listened to the man beside her snore, like an airplane revving its engine for take off, she thought that she should never have allowed her mother to blackmail her into marrying him. She should have plugged her ears with her fingers or stuffed them with pieces of cloth when her mother – headscarf going awry on her head – had told her in a pained voice, ‘Chief Okeke is our only hope. Don’t you want to see me in nice clothes? And you, don’t you want to be a madam? Have a driver? A big house? Servants? Don’t you want to enjoy your life, *nwa m?*’<sup>1</sup> 5

‘But I don’t love him, Mother. How can I marry a man I do not love? I can’t.’ Her voice was sharp, confident, daring her mother to contradict her. But her mother had contradicted her. ‘Love does not matter, my daughter. There are things more important than love.’ The older woman’s voice was firmer, solid. It knocked the confidence of hers. As Chief’s snore enveloped the entire room and kept her from sleeping, she whispered, ‘Love does matter, Mother. You are so very wrong. It really does matter.’ Her voice was weightless, floating like a ghost, hovering above her head. She would not have known she was crying if she had not felt the tears scarify her face. 10 15

Her mother had been persistent. She had been at it day after day, sometimes even crying, until she had eaten into Uju’s reserves, corroding her confidence like acid on paper; until there was nothing left but consent. A heavy heart, a slight nod of the head, and a voice as still as the night. ‘Yes. I will marry Chief. I will marry him.’ Chief. 20

Uju had just turned seventeen. Chief said he was forty-six. He looked older, closer to sixty. His stomach wobbled and preceded him whenever he walked into a room. It was like that of a woman on the verge of delivering quadruplets, but without the firmness of a pregnant stomach. The hair on his head was sparse and white, like cotton wool that had been haphazardly glued on by a child. His lips were huge and drooped as if they were implanted with lead that weighed them down. And when he spoke, he tended to send a saliva shower on those closest to him. 25

People said Chief had never married because he was too ugly to find a wife. She and her friends had made fun of Chief, laughing at his hair, his lips, his stomach. Yet now she was going to be Chief’s wife. What fate could possibly be worse than that? She wished she could die. She desired, more than anything else, to just lie down and never wake up. To disappear. Vanish. Dissolve. Like salt in water. 30

Her mother threw herself into the wedding preparations with a ferocity that was not commensurate with her skinny frame. She whirled around the town, organising the caterers, the music band, her daughter’s wedding dress. She settled herself in one of Chief’s cars and sat in the owner’s corner at the back while the driver called her ‘Madam’ and asked where she needed to be taken to. 35

Tonson’s Supermarket  
Fanny’s Bridal Shop  
Kenyatta market  
Love is Blind Bakery  
Your One Stop Tiara Shop  
Wedding Specials  
Mau’s Cakes and More 40 45

She always came back, a huge smile on her face, her eyes shiny with new-found wealth and her mouth full of praises for her daughter who had made the right choice.

'Uju, you are a daughter to be proud of. You do not know what a relief it is that you are marrying a man as rich as Chief. Poverty is not something to be proud of. 50  
*Afufu ajoka!*<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> nwa m: my child

<sup>2</sup> Afufu ajoka: an expression meaning 'very bad suffering'.





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*Copyright Acknowledgements:*

- Question 2           © Chike Unigwe; 'Possessing the Secret of Joy' in *African Love Stories*; Ayebia Clarke Publishing Ltd; 2006.  
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