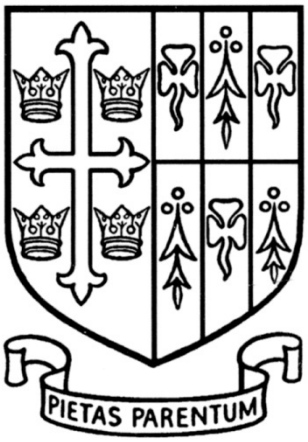
ST EDWARD'S OXFORD



16+ ENTRANCE EXAMINATION
For entry in 2018

ENGLISH

Time: 1 hour

Candidate's name: .....

Answers should be written on lined paper.

The first **10 minutes** should be spent reading the texts in Section A and Section B.

- Section A asks you to analyse a prose passage.
- Section B asks you to respond to a poem in any way you wish.

You are advised to spend just under **25 minutes** on each section. Use the last few minutes to read over what you have written and correct any mistakes. The quality of your writing will be assessed in both sections.

SECTION A: PROSE

The following passage is a complete short story from *Mr Palomar*, a collection by the Italian author Italo Calvino.

In the Barcelona zoo there exists the only example known in the world of the great albino ape, a gorilla from equatorial Africa. Mr Palomar picks his way through the crowd that presses into the animal's building. Beyond a sheet of plate glass, "Snowflake", is a mountain of flesh and white hide. Seated against a wall, he is taking the sun. The facial mask is a human pink, carved by wrinkles; the chest also reveals a pink and glabrous skin, like that of a human of the white race. With its enormous features, a sad giant's, face turns every now and then towards the crowd of visitors beyond the glass, less than a meter from him, a slow gaze charged with desolation and patience and boredom, a gaze that expresses all the resignation at being the way be is, sole exemplar in the world of a form not chosen, not loved, all the effort of bearing his own singularity, and the suffering at occupying space and time with his presence so cumbersome and evident.

The glass looks on to an enclosure surrounded by high masonry walls, which give it the appearance of a prison yard but actually it is the "garden" of the gorilla's house-cage; from its soil rises a short, leafless tree and an iron ladder like those in a gymnasium. Farther back in the yard there is the female, a great black gorilla carrying a baby in her arms: the whiteness of the coat cannot be inherited, "Snowflake" remains the only albino of all gorillas.

White and motionless, the great ape suggests to Mr Palomar's mind an immemorial antiquity, like mountains or like the pyramids. In reality the animal is still young and only the contrast between the pink face and the short snow coat that frames it and, especially, the wrinkles all around the eyes give him the look of an old man. For the rest, the appearance of "Snowflake" shows fewer resemblances to humans than that of other primates: in place of a nose, the nostrils dig a double chasm; the hands, hairy and - it would seem - hot very highly articulated, at the end of the very long and stiff arms, are actually still paws, and the gorilla uses them as such when he walks, pressing them to the ground like a quadruped.

Now these arm-paws are pressing a rubber tire against his chest. In the enormous void of his hours, "Snowflake" never abandons the tire. What can this object be for him? A toy? A fetish? A talisman? Palomar feels he understands the gorilla perfectly, his need for something to hold tight while everything eludes him, a thing with which to allay the anguish of isolation, of difference, of the sentence to being always considered a living phenomenon, not only by the visitor to the zoo but also by his own females and his children.

The female also has an old tire, but for her it is an object of normal use, with which she has a practical relationship, without problems: she sits in it as if it were an easy chair, sun-bathing and de-lousing her infant. For "Snowflake", on the contrary, the contact with the tire seems to be something affective, possessive, somehow symbolic. Looking at it, you would not say that much could be derived from it. And yet what, more than an empty circle, can contain all the symbols you might want to attribute to it? Perhaps identifying himself with it, the gorilla is about to reach, in the depths of silence, the springs from which language burst forth, to establish a flow of relationships between his thoughts and the unyielding, deaf evidence of the facts that determine his life . . .

Leaving the zoo, Mr Palomar cannot dispel the image of the albino gorilla from his mind. He tries to talk about him with people he meets, but he cannot make anyone listen to him. At night, both during the hours of insomnia and during his brief dreams, the great ape continues to appear to him. "Just as the gorilla has his tire, which serves as tangible support for a raving, wordless speech, he thinks, so I have this image of a great white ape. We all tum in our hands an old, empty tire through which we would like to reach the final meaning, at which words do not arrive."

Answer the following questions in full sentences written in clear, precise English. Spend about **25 minutes** altogether on this section.

1. Without using quotation, summarise what the author is saying about the gorilla's facial expression in the second half of the first paragraph. [5]

2. How else does the author present the physical appearance of the gorilla in the first and third paragraphs? Comment on details of the language chosen by the author. [10]

3. What can you deduce about the character of Mr Palomar, both from what he observes and from his response to it? [10]

[Total for Section A: 25 marks]

TURN OVER FOR SECTION B ➤

SECTION B: POETRY

The following poem is adapted from a longer work by Sujata Bhatt published in *Monkey Shadows* (1991).

The Stare

There is that moment
when a human child
stares
at the young monkey child
who stares back -

Innocence facing
innocence in a space
where the young monkey child
is not in captivity

There is purity
clarity
there is a transparence
in this stare
which lasts a long time ...

eyes of water
eyes of the sky

the soul can fall through

because the monkey
has yet to learn fear
and the human
has yet to learn fear -
let alone arrogance.

Witnessing it all
one can count eyelashes
one can count snails
in the grass
while waiting
for eyes to blink
waiting to see who
will look away first.

Still the monkey looks
at the human not in the same way
he would look at leaves
or at his own siblings.

And the human looks
at the monkey knowing
this is some totally other being.

And yet, there is such good will
such curiosity brightening
their faces
tilting towards each other,
the monkey face
and the human face,
absorbing each other
with intense gentleness …

Respond to this poem in any way you wish.
You may, for instance
- write a literary analysis, exploring the poem's thought, character and poetic qualities;
- write a poem on a similar theme; or
- use the poem, or certain lines from the poem, as a stimulus for a piece of reflective writing.

Spend about **25 minutes** on this task.

[Total for Section B: 25 marks]