

Edexcel IGCSE

English Language B

Paper 1

Wednesday 15 June 2011 – Afternoon

Source Booklet

Paper Reference

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Text One

This is a piece of humorous travel writing from *Neither Here Nor There*, by Bill Bryson, about a visit to Naples in Italy.

I awoke to a gloomy day. The hillsides behind the town were obscured by a wispy haze and Naples across the bay appeared to have been taken away in the night. There was nothing but a plane of dead sea and beyond it the sort of tumbling fog that creatures from beyond the grave stumble out of in B-movies¹. I had intended to walk to the hilltop ruins of Tiberius's² villa, where the old rascal used to have guests who displeased him hurled over the ramparts onto the rocks hundreds of feet below, but when I emerged from the hotel a cold, slicing rain was falling, and I spent the morning wandering from café to café, drinking cappuccinos³ and scanning the sky. Late in the morning, out of time to see the villa unless I stayed another day, which I could scarce afford to do, I checked reluctantly out of the Hotel Capri and walked down the steep and slippery steps to the quay where I purchased a ticket on a slow ferry to Naples. 5 10

Naples looked even worse after Sorrento and Capri than it had before. I walked for half a mile along the waterfront, but there was no sign of happy fishermen mending their nets and singing 'Santa Lucia'⁴, as I had fervently hoped there might be. Instead there were just menacing-looking derelicts and mountains – and I mean mountains – of rubbish on every corner and yet more people selling lottery tickets and trinkets from cardboard boxes. 15

I had no map and only the vaguest sense of the geography of the city, but I turned inland hoping that I would blunder onto some shady square lined with small but decent hotels. Surely even Naples must have its finer corners. Instead I found precisely the sort of streets that you automatically associate with Naples – mean, cavernous, semi-paved alleyways, with plaster peeling off walls and washing hung like banners between balconies that never saw sunlight. The streets were full of overplump women and unattended children, often naked from the waist down, in filthy T-shirts. 20

I felt as if I had wandered onto another continent. In the centre of Naples some 70,000 families live even now in cramped bassi – tenements without baths or running water, sometimes without even a window, with up to fifteen members of an extended family living together in a single room. The worst of these districts, the Vicaria, where I was now, is said to have the highest population density in Europe, possibly in the world now that the Forbidden City in Hong Kong is being demolished. And it has crime to match – especially the pettier crimes like car theft (29,000 in one year) and muggings. Yet I felt safe enough. No one paid any attention to me, except occasionally to give me a stray smile. I was clearly a tourist with my rucksack, and I confess I clutched the straps tightly, but there was no sign of the scippatori, the famous bag snatchers on Vespas, who doubtless sensed that all they would get was some dirty underpants, half a bar of chocolate and a tattered copy of H. V. Morton's *A Traveller in Southern Italy*. 25 30 35

¹ *B-movies* – low-budget films, often horror

² *Tiberius* – a Roman emperor

³ *cappuccino* – coffee with a frothy milk foam

⁴ *Santa Lucia* – a traditional song from Naples

Text Two

This is an extract from the novel *Slumdog Millionaire* by Vikas Swarup, in which Ram, a young boy, sees the Taj Mahal¹ for the first time.

I walk along a winding dusty road, and suddenly I see a river. It is yellowish green and muddy. Its receding water level is a pointer to the fact that the monsoons have still not arrived. Pieces of driftwood and plastic debris float on its eddying currents. In another place I would have traced its meandering route with my eyes, bent down to see its high-water mark on the bank, craned to catch a glimpse of a dead body floating on its surface. But not here, not now. Because my eyes are transfixed by something I have seen on the opposite bank. It is a gleaming white structure which rises up from a square base like a swelling dome, with pointed arches and recessed bays. It is flanked on all four sides by spear-like minarets². It glitters in the sunlight against the turquoise sky like an ivory moon. Its beauty overpowers me. 5 10

After an eternity, I turn to the first passer-by I see, a middle-aged man carrying a tiffin box³. 'Excuse me, can you tell me what that building is on the other side of the river?'

He looks at me as if I'm a lunatic. 'Arrey, if you don't know that, what are you doing in Agra? That is the Taj Mahal, idiot.'

The Taj Mahal. The Eighth Wonder of the World. I had heard about it, but never seen its picture. I stand mesmerized by the monument as the clouds drifting in the sky cast shadows on its dome, the change of light turning the smooth marble from pale cream to ochre to alabaster. The loss of my fifty thousand rupees⁴, the worries about where I will eat next, sleep next, the fear of being caught by the police, pale into insignificance against the purity of its perfection. I decide then and there that I must see the Taj Mahal today. From up close. 15 20

Thirty minutes of brisk walking along the embankment brings me to an enormous red-sandstone entrance gate. A large white board says: TAJ MAHAL ENTRY FEES: INDIANS RS.20 FOREIGNERS \$20. MONDAYS CLOSED, FRIDAYS FREE. I look at my Kasio day-date wristwatch. It says Friday, 12 June. Looks like today is my lucky day. 25

I pass through the metal detector, cross the red-sandstone courtyard with its arched gateway and there, in front of me, the Taj Mahal rises in all its beauty and splendour, shimmering in the afternoon haze. I take in the landscaped garden with fountains and wide paths, the reflecting pool with a glassy image of the Taj dancing in its water, and only then do I notice the overflowing crowds. The Taj is swarming with tourists, young and old, rich and poor, Indian and foreign. There are flashbulbs popping everywhere, a babble of voices rises in the courtyard, while stern-faced, baton-wielding policemen try to restore order. 30

After half an hour of aimless exploration, I notice a group of prosperous Western tourists armed with camcorders and binoculars, listening intently to an elderly guide at the base of the dome. I join them discreetly. The guide is pointing towards the marble dome and speaking in a rasping voice. 'I have explained to you the architectural features of the red-sandstone courtyard, the Chowk-I Jilo Khana, which we have just passed. Now I will tell you a little bit about the history of the Taj Mahal.' 35

¹ *Taj Mahal* – a famous building in India

² *minarets* – tall, slender towers attached to mosques

³ *tiffin box* – lunch box

⁴ *rupees (RS)* – Indian currency

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