HSC English Prescriptions 2015–20

English (Standard)
Module B: Close Study of Text

Oodgeroo Noonuccal
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Municipal Gum
Oodgeroo Noonuccal

Gumtree in the city street,
Hard bitumen around your feet,
Rather you should be
In the cool world of leafy forest halls
And wild bird calls.
Here you seem to me
Like that poor cart-horse
Castrated, broken, a thing wronged,
Strapped and buckled, its hell prolonged,
Whose hung head and listless mien express
Its hopelessness.
Municipal gum, it is dolorous
To see you thus
Set in your black grass of bitumen —
O fellow citizen,
What have they done to us?

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Artist Son
Oodgeroo Noonuccal

To Kabul of the tribe Noonuccal (Vivian Walker)

My artist son,
Busy with brush, absorbed in more than play,
Untutored yet, striving alone to find
What colour and form can say,
Yours the deep human need,
The old compulsion, ever since man had mind
And learned to dream,
Adventuring, creative, unconfined.
Even in dim beginning days,
Long before written word was known,
Your fathers too fashioned their art
Who had but bark and wood and the cave stone.
Much you must learn from others, yes,
But copy none; follow no fashions, know
Art the adventurer his lone way
Lonely must go.
Paint joy, not pain,
Paint beauty and happiness for men,
Paint the rare insight glimpses that express
What tongue cannot or pen;
Not for reward, acclaim
That wins honour and opens doors,
Not as ambition toils for fame,
But as the lark sings and the eagle soars.
Make us songs in colour and line:
Painting is speech, painter and poet are one.
Paint what you feel more than the thing you see,
My artist son.

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The Past

Oodgeroo Noonuccal

Let no one say the past is dead.
The past is all about us and within.
Haunted by tribal memories, I know
This little now, this accidental present
Is not the all of me, whose long making
Is so much of the past.

Tonight here in suburbia as I sit
In easy chair before electric heater,
Warmed by the red glow, I fall into dream:
I am away
At the camp fire in the bush, among
My own people, sitting on the ground,
No walls about me,
The stars over me,
The tall surrounding trees that stir in the wind
Making their own music,
Soft cries of the night coming to us, there
Where we are one with all old Nature's lives
Known and unknown,
In scenes where we belong but have now forsaken.
Deep chair and electric radiator
Are but since yesterday,
But a thousand thousand camp fires in the forest
Are in my blood.
Let none tell me the past is wholly gone.
Now is so small a part of time, so small a part
Of all the race years that have moulded me.

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China…Woman
Oodgeroo Noonuccal

September 17, 1984

High peaked mountains
Stand out against the skyline.
The great Wall
Twines itself
Around and over them,
Like my Rainbow Serpent,
Groaning her way
Through ancient rocks.
I hear the heavy tramp
Of the liberating army,
Shaking the mountains loose,
Of rolling stones.
Falling, crushing,
The weeping wild flowers
In their path.
China, the woman,
Stands tall,
Breasts heavy
With the milk of her labours,
Pregnant with expectation.
The ancient Dynasties
Sleep.
Emperors are entombed
In museums.

The people of China
Are now the custodians of palaces.
And the wise old
Lotus plants
Nod their heads
In agreement.

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Reed Flute Cave
Oodgeroo Noonuccal

Guilin, September 29, 1984

I didn't expect to meet you in Guilin
My Rainbow Serpent,
My Earth Mother,
But you were there
In Reed Flute Cave,
With animals and reptiles
And all those things
You stored in the Dreamtime.
Pools of cool water, like mirrors,
Reflecting your underbelly.

The underground storage place,
Where frogs store water in their stomachs
And mushrooms and every type of fruit,
Vegetable, animal and fish,
Are on display.

Perhaps I have strayed too long
In this beautiful country;
The reed flutes are playing a mournful tune.
The cool air rushing through
The rock cathedral
Reminds me of the sea breezes
Of Stradbroke
And the reed flute seems
To be capturing the scene.
The slippery earth stone floor
Takes me back to mud sea flats,
Where seaweeds communicate with oysters
Fish and crabs.
Have you travelled all this way
To remind me to return home?
Uluru, your resting place in Australia,
Will not be the same without you.

I shall return home,
But I'm glad I came.
Tell me, my Rainbow Spirit
Was there just one of you?
Perhaps, now I have time to think,
Perhaps, you are but one of many guardians
Of earth's peoples,
Just one,
My Rainbow Serpent,
Spirit of my Mother Earth.

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Entombed Warriors
Oodgeroo Noonuccal

Xian, September 20, 1984

Qin Shi Huang
(first Emperor of China)
Plotted his burial,
With careful and clear detail.
Called in his artists
To prepare for his resurrection.
Clay warriors and horses,
A legion of foot soldiers,
Cavalry,
Archers and Generals.
Swords, lances and spears,
And battle axes in bronze,
His artists made for him,
And
All guarded his secret
For 2,000 years
The Earth Mother
Nursed her son,
Until
By chance,
A pick and shovel,
Revealed his secret.
The earth opened up
And exposed to the world,
His fear,
His insecurity.

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Visit to Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall

Oodgeroo Noonuccal

Guangzhou, October 2, 1984

“Curtain going up”
Echoes and re-echoes
Through the theatre.
The ghosts from the past
Push past me
In the dim lit hall.
Lu Yenghi¹ stands
At the back of the theatre,
With arms folded,
Eyes to the ceiling
Of the exquisite dome
He created,
Many, many moons ago.
The past and present
Unite within my mind
And I spare a moment
to dream the impossible.

I am standing on the stage
Presenting a poetry recital.
The hall is packed
And I am in my element.
The spirits of the past
Are applauding my efforts.

¹ Hall architect.

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