



ATAR course examination, 2022

LITERATURE

TEXT BOOKLET

Text A Drama
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Text A Drama

This extract is from the 2015 play *1915: The Untold Story*, by Australian playwright Karen Houghton.

Staging

Stage left, the Green's kitchen/dining room is situated. Tables, chairs, sideboard, fireplace, rugs, armchairs delineate the two spaces. If space permits, Stage right, the Green boy's bedroom – single beds, a dresser etc. A sheer full-length curtain runs across the front of the sets and is pulled back by the actors as their scenes demand. At all times, the Green family will be on-stage, reading, knitting, drawing, rocking the baby, silent, but present.

Stage right and left will house two tall timber columns that will serve to separate the action from the Green's house and every other scene. They will carry the bunting at the carnival, the washing line and act as a visual barrier to the Green's house.

All other scenes (the cheer-up hut, the school, the footy oval etc) will use two long timber benches that will be positioned on stage in blackouts.

Blackout

Voice over like a newsreel. Radio crackle is heard. A lone soldier enters and stands at attention, centre stage.

Voice Over: Australia joins! Her fleet and 20 000 men is offered by Federal Cabinet.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Cook last evening made the following announcement: The Government has decided in the event of war, to place the Australian vessels under the control of the British Admiralty. We will offer the Imperial Government an expeditionary force of 20 000 men to any destination. The preparations are indicative of Australia's determination to take her share in any demand which may be made upon the Empire.

Music: Sombre, deep, heartfelt. Low blue light. Three soldiers/nurses enter, cross the stage and address the audience as if they are writing letters. Voices echo and repeat. Underlined dialogue indicates when voices echo/repeat the text.

Voice: Dear Lil. Landed at Gallipoli last night. The censors check our letters so I must be mindful not to let on too much.

Voice: The march out was hard. Five miles with a full pack but at least the weather was on-side. I know I've got it better than most but I can't help but be a little worried about what lies ahead.

Voice: The Sarge said we'd be going over at dawn. I've seen enough here to know that this letter may be my last to you – at least for a while. I'm sorry my darling. But you must know that I could not live with myself if I was to turn away from this.

Voice: It takes every effort to stay positive and know that perhaps one day, this filthy war will finally conclude and I can return home to you.

Nurse: The casualties have been horrific. Never in all of my training back home could I prepare for this.

Nurse: We're working around the clock taking stretcher cases to the beach to be shipped back to Egypt.

Voice: Chook took a hit in the arm and he's being shipped out. We dragged him in.

Nurse: These men, these poor, poor men all valiantly fighting the good fight. And all we can do is patch them up and send them back. It's not just the wounds to the flesh but the damage done to their soul that I pray for.

Voice: Now it's just me from our original group. This war is not what we imagined.

Lights fade down and the sombre mood is replaced by a carnival atmosphere. The stage is flooded with people and pageantry. Propaganda posters are hung on the uprights. Streamers, flags of the UK and Australia are waved by the guests. There is lots of excitement. Those already on stage mingle into the background. As the stage fills, we alternate between tableaux and movement. [Stage left] enters three young men – Charlie, Roy and Marty. They are dressed in long pants, collarless shirts and braces. Charlie has a cap on. Merriment from all, until the boys are in position. Then tableaux.

Charlie: Jeez Roy, isn't this grand? The town's never seen anything like it!

Roy: It's nearly as good as the Mount Barker Show! Who knew we could put on this kind of a bash? It's got everything! The band. The flags. The tucker.

Marty: The girls! Let's not forget those pretty little things!

Charlie: Pa said the Lighthorse were even coming up. I can't wait to see them.

Marty: You can have your Lighthorse men, Charlie. I'm here for the two leg variety, not the four!

As the last words are said, the tableaux is broken as three young women walk by the three men. Marty unashamedly stares after them. The girls move into the throng of the gathering, lost to the boys. The Mayor steps up to the podium and calls for quiet.

Mayor: Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls! Welcome friends! As the Mayor of this fine town, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all. I thank you for the privilege, nay, the honour, to represent our municipality and I once again stand firm knowing that our hard working citizens trust in my abilities to get the job done. *(Polite applause)*

Tableaux on all, except for Jack, Henry and Eddie who are gathered at the foot of the podium.

Jack: *(To the other boys)* Fellas, whaddaya reckon after this we go to the local and see about sneaking out some booze, eh?

Eddie: The last time that happened I got a hiding from my pa. You're on your own with that one, mate.

Henry: Oh come on lads! With this circus in town, no one will ask! There's a whole raft of oldies here I don't know, which means they don't know us, eh?

Jack: Let alone that the party's in town. They won't even know...

Eddie: Give it a rest, would ya Henry?

Henry: I'm in. I don't give a rat's arse. I'm in!

Tableaux breaks

Text B Prose fiction

This extract begins the novel *The Performance*, by Australian author Claire Thomas. It was published in 2021.

Margot is shuffling in a balletic first position along the strip of carpet between the legs of the already-seated people in the theatre and the chair backs of the row in front. She is almost late, and only some of the seated legs are shifting sideways to enable her to pass.

Excuse me, Margot says to no one in particular. Excuse me.

She is holding her handbag in front of her, moving it carefully over the row of heads. She is determined not to bump anyone with her bag or her body as she watches her feet in her sandals on the carpet, step step stepping.

As she reaches the centre of the row, she looks up to see a young man in the seat next to hers. He stands, nodding his head, all chivalrous and patient.

Thank you, she says, squeezing past him. That's very kind.

Margot sits down and drops her bag onto her lap.

The young man also sits. He presses his forearm on the red velvet armrest between them. His flesh spreads out along the length of the armrest, his fingers hanging towards the floor.

Margot considers asserting her own claim with her own presumptuous arm, but she doesn't want to touch him. His skin is covered in tattoos and pale ginger hairs. He has goosebumps from the air conditioning. A parrot is inked onto his arm. Primary colours and a neat, sharp beak. Is he thinking of pirates, perhaps?

You're not usually here on a Friday evening, Margot says.

He frowns at her – an arrow between his eyes.

I'm a subscriber, she explains. You get to know the people around you. She didn't mean to sound territorial. He looks annoyed.

But he replies. A whole sentence. We're doing a bit of Beckett at uni.

Beckett, says Margot. I didn't know that's what we were seeing until I got here. Just grabbed my ticket and fled. I was worried about being late. The traffic is always absolutely dire in the heat, don't you find? People seem to drive very strangely in the heat. And that smoke haze. I thought my windows were dirty for much of the drive until I realised it was just the smoke haze.

I got the tram, the young man says. No air con. That was absolutely dire.

I see, says Margot, turning her face forward. She has an expensive, unobstructed view of the stage.

Margot coughs, more loudly than she would like. She clears her throat.

She is conscious of her bare arms in her shift dress. Her bare legs and sandals. Her bare toenails, unpainted. Her father, many years ago when he was still alive and she wasn't old, told her she shouldn't expose her elbows if she could help it. Wrinkly elbows are ageing on a woman, he said. And for decades, Margot wore sleeves. More recently, they've been useful with the bruises. But this summer – this unusually oppressive, stinking season – she decided she was tired of sleeves. She was sick of the cling and the pull. When it is hot, she will have bare arms. And it's been very hot today – still forty degrees at 7p.m.

The false cold of the theatre makes it hard to imagine the heavy wind outside in the real world, the ash air pressing onto the city from the nearby hills where bushfires are taking hold.

Margot loosens her wristwatch from her cooled skin and slides its face back and forth around her arm. Her legs are stretched straight with her ankles crossed beneath the chair in front.

The house lights lower.

The auditorium feels hopeful in the darkness.

Text C Poetry

'The Runner' by American poet Nina Nyhart was published in the June 1988 edition of *Poetry*.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Text A** Houghton, K. (2015). *1915* [Playscript]. Australian Plays Transform, pp. 2–4. Retrieved January, 2022, from <https://apt.org.au/product/1915-4>
- Text B** Thomas, C. (2021). *The performance*. Hachette. Retrieved May, 2022, from <https://cdn.hachette.com.au/resources/9780733644542-read-an-extract.pdf>
- Text C** Nyhart, N. (1988, June). The runner [Poem]. *Modern Poetry Association*, p. 141. Retrieved May, 2022, from <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/browse?contentId=37154>

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