

1. The passage below describes the writer's memories of learning to drive.

(a) Comment on the style and language of the passage.

[15]

I dreaded my driving test. I have not forgotten the gloom and horror of my endless lessons, though they took place over 30 years ago. I was instructed by a man who, in some previous existence, must have been a Regimental Sergeant-Major. Following him from his office to his car, I lost confidence even as a pedestrian. His kerb-drill, shoes gleaming one inch from the pavement's edge, eyes swivelling right then left, was a fearsome spectacle. When he turned sharply into other streets he made strange gestures like hand-signals. Struggling behind him, I began colliding with people. As pedestrians, my instructor and I did not fraternise with each other and only when, slightly bruised, I caught up with him at the car itself did he address me.

5

10

"This," he said, "is the car."

The first lesson, I remember, was a very preliminary affair. Like dogs, we circled the waiting vehicle, while my instructor pointed out features of interest to me: windows, doors, lights, bumpers and so on. Then we came to the soul of the lesson: entering, and exiting from, the car. I got in, I got out, and in again and out again. I did this on the near side and on the off side. I also locked and unlocked these doors from inside and out. It was laborious work. As a mere passenger, I had never realised before what a complex business this getting in and out of a car should be. After an hour of it I was exhausted.

15

"DSM next," my instructor said as we marched back to his office. It sounded dangerous work to me, an acquired taste, and I looked forward to my next lesson with some apprehension.

20

DSM the following week turned out to be door, seat and mirror. I repeated all I had performed with the doors, I manipulated endlessly, up and down, the windows and, like a dentist, I adjusted the seats to their extremities, sitting to attention next to my instructor one minute, then lying adjacent to him the next, and strapping myself in vigorously at his command. Between these exercises we allowed ourselves short rest periods during which we would discuss distilled water, tyres and other interesting matters.

25

After four lessons, though I had mastered the milometer, speedometer, windscreen wipers, horn, oil-gauge and (rather unnecessarily I thought) the brakes; we still had not moved. The dust was gathering on us. We were road furniture, never traffic. I seemed to have no destination.

30

We did eventually move the car backwards at first (it was hardly progress) and then forwards at last. Milk-floats overtook us, bicycles, old ladies and gentlemen from a previous century, but I was on my way.

35

I had booked my test even before my first lesson and when the day eventually arrived I knew what to do. All I had suffered over those long weeks, all that agony, humiliation and academic pointlessness threaded over 20 lessons, I concentrated into 20 minutes and gave back.

40

My examiner was a mild, moustached man. He did not know what he had done wrong. But I came to his help. As I was able to show, he did everything wrong. He got into the car wrong, he sat wrong, he was an altogether unskilful passenger. At every move I put him scrupulously right, bundling him in and out and up and down. Before we could start, I took it upon myself to prove that his car was worthy of the road. I checked everything from the boot to the bumpers. When asked to drive forwards, I did so – but only after violently adjusting the mirror, operating the window and giving a display of hand-signals any conjuror would have envied. There was so

45

much to do, I doubt whether we had time to move more than 30 yards along the crowded London streets over the next 30 minutes. But it was an aging experience. I had been well-drilled and it was my examiner who cracked. His hand was trembling as he signed my certificate. I was now equipped, I felt, to advance my career.

50

[Turn over