**It is London, 1837, the dead of night and Jack Maggs a returned convict from Australia is secretly visiting the house of the writer, Tobias Oates.**

***Jack Maggs* by Peter Carey**

In the place Jack Maggs had most recently come from, the houses had been, for the most part, built from wood. They strained and groaned in the long hot nights, crying out against their nails, contracting, expanding, tugging at their bindings as if they would pull themselves apart.

Tobias Oates’s house in Lamb’s Conduit Street was built from London brick. It was newly painted, newly furnished. Everything in it glistened and was strong and bright and solid. This was a house that would never scream in the dark, nor did it reek of sap or creosote. Its smells were English smells—polished oak, coal dust, Devon apples. The intruder breathed these strange yet familiar odours for as long as it took the master to get himself to bed.

Then he crept up the stairs and, on the upper landing, drew his long arms around his chest. It was an action such as the Devil might make when surrounding himself with his cape. It might also have been by a mortal man wishing to cloak himself in Night, and if the latter were the case, Jack Maggs might be said to have succeeded, for a moment later he appeared, a slow and smudgy phantom, in a small room off the landing. Here he stooped over the small wooden crib in which lay Tobias Oates’s firstborn son.

Maggs’s inky shadow flooded the crib. He leaned very close, so close indeed he might have bitten the child. Instead, he brought his wide nostrils almost up against that soapy skin and, with his arms clenched behind his back, inhaled John Marshall Oates’s breath. This act he repeated three times, and when he was done he straightened himself and placed his hands deep in his pockets. In the next room, the child’s father turned in his bed and coughed a most wide-awake cough. The intruder removed his hands from his pockets and moved slowly back into the shadow by the tall cupboard, and there his breathing became very slow and deep.

In other circumstances, Maggs had been known to act violently, but in Tobias Oates’s house he was a sloth[[1]](#footnote-1). His heavy limbs bled into the darkness and as the clock ticked loudly in the downstairs hallway, he seemed to flow from room to room as slow as a moon-made shadow.

He stood above the bed of a young spinster[[2]](#footnote-2). The vigour of her dreams had served to push her night cap from her head. Her hair was loose, floating like seaweed around her sleeping face. One bare white arm was flung out across the sheet, the other held between her knees beneath the covers. Beside her bed was a dresser where the intruder found a piece of jewellery, a necklace. He picked it up and ran it through his three fingers, before quietly laying it down again.

Two o’clock found him in another room, his severe hawk-nosed face an inch away from Mary Oates’s small down-turned mouth. He stood over Tobias Oates who was sleeping on his stomach in a perfect imitation of his son.

As the hall clock struck the quarter-hour, he reluctantly retreated to the kitchen. There he took a draught of cold water, and splashed a little on his face. The extreme agitation which had hitherto[[3]](#footnote-3) marked his face and body was no longer to be seen.

He sat himself at the kitchen table with his glass of water, and rested his eyes.

**Question 1.**

Read again the first part of the source – lines **4-8.** List four things we learn about Tobias Oates’ house:

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**[4 marks]**

**Question 2.**

Look in detail at this extract, **lines 9 to 17** of the source:

“Then he crept up the stairs and, on the upper landing, drew his long arms around his chest. It was an action such as the Devil might make when surrounding himself with his cape. It might also have been by a mortal man wishing to cloak himself in Night, and if the latter were the case, Jack Maggs might be said to have succeeded, for a moment later he appeared, a slow and smudgy phantom, in a small room off the landing. Here he stooped over the small wooden crib in which lay Tobias Oates’s firstborn son.

Maggs’s inky shadow flooded the crib. He leaned very close, so close indeed he might have bitten the child. Instead, he brought his wide nostrils almost up against that soapy skin and, with his arms clenched behind his back, inhaled John Marshall Oates’s breath.”

How does the writer use language here to describe Maggs’ movements in the house?

You could include the writer’s choice of:

• words and phrases

• language features and techniques

• sentence forms.

**[8 marks]**

**Question 3.**

You now need to think about the **whole** of the **source**.

This text is from the middle of a novel.

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader?

You could write about:

• what the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning

• how and why the writer changes this focus as the source develops

• any other structural features that interest you.

**[8 marks]**

**Question 4.**

Focus this part of your answer on the second part of the source, **from line 13 to the** end.

A student, having read this section of the text, said: “This part of the text, describing Maggs’ surveillance of the entire family, makes me feel very tense and nervous about what he might do to them and why he is in the house. It reminds me that he is a dangerous character - an ex-convict.”

To what extent do you agree?

In your response, you could:

• consider your own impressions of Maggs

• evaluate how the writer creates a tense atmosphere

• support your opinions with quotations from the text.

**[20 marks]**

1. Sloth : a slow moving mammal [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Spinster: an unmarried woman [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hitherto: up to this time/until now [↑](#footnote-ref-3)