**Extract from ‘The Woman in White’ by Wilkie Collins**

*In this extract from the beginning of the novel, the narrator is describing a meeting with an Italian, Professor Pesca.*

It was the last day of July. The long hot summer was drawing to a close; and we, the weary pilgrims of the London pavement, were beginning to think of the cloud-shadows on the corn-fields, and the autumn breezes on the sea-shore.

For my own poor part, the fading summer left me out of health, out of spirits, and, if the truth must be told, out of money as well. During the past year I had not managed my professional resources as carefully as usual; and my extravagance now limited me to the prospect of spending the autumn economically between my mother's cottage at Hampstead and my own chambers in town.

The evening, I remember, was still and cloudy; the London air was at its heaviest; the distant hum of the street-traffic was at its faintest; the small pulse of the life within me, and the great heart of the city around me, seemed to be sinking in unison, languidly and more languidly, with the sinking sun. I roused myself from the book which I was dreaming over rather than reading, and left my chambers to meet the cool night air in the suburbs. It was one of the two evenings in every week which I was accustomed to spend with my mother and my sister. So I turned my steps northward in the direction of Hampstead.

The quiet twilight was still trembling on the topmost ridges of the heath; and the view of London below me had sunk into a black gulf in the shadow of the cloudy night, when I stood before the gate of my mother's cottage. I had hardly rung the bell before the house door was opened violently; my worthy Italian friend, Professor Pesca, appeared in the servant's place; and darted out joyously to receive me, with a shrill foreign parody on an English cheer. The Professor merits the honour of a formal introduction.

I had first become acquainted with my Italian friend by meeting him at certain great houses where he taught his own language and I taught drawing. Without being actually a dwarf Pesca was, I think, the smallest human being I ever saw. He was still further distinguished among the rank and file of mankind by the harmless eccentricity of his character, doing his utmost to turn himself into an Englishman. Not content with paying the nation in general the compliment of invariably carrying an umbrella, and invariably wearing gaiters and a white hat, the Professor further aspired to become an Englishman in his habits and amusements, as well as in his personal appearance. The little man, in the innocence of his heart, devoted himself impromptu to all our English sports and pastimes whenever he had the opportunity of joining them; firmly persuaded that he could adopt our national amusements of the field by an effort of will precisely as he had adopted our national gaiters and our national white hat.

We had met at Brighton, and were swimming together. Soon after we had both struck out from shore, I stopped, finding my friend did not gain on me, and turned round to look for him. To my horror and amazement, I saw nothing between me and the beach but two little white arms which struggled for an instant above the surface of the water, and then disappeared from view. When I dived for him, the poor little man was lying quietly coiled up at the bottom, in a hollow of shingle, looking by many degrees smaller than I had ever seen him look before. During the few minutes that elapsed while I was taking him in, the air revived him.

He overwhelmed me with the wildest expressions of affection—exclaimed passionately, in his exaggerated Italian way, that he would hold his life henceforth at my disposal—and declared that he should never be happy again until he had found an opportunity of proving his gratitude.

**Glossary**

Gaiters – Shoe coverings worn by Englishmen

Impromptu – Unplanned

Henceforth – From now on

Q1. Read lines 9-15. List four things the writer tells the reader about the narrator. [4]

Q2. Read through lines 16-34. How does the writer use language to present the Professor as a comical and ridiculous character? You may wish to comment on how the writer chooses:

* Words and phrases
* Language features and techniques
* Sentence forms [8]

Q3. You now need to think about the whole of the extract.

How has the writer structured to the text to make it clear to the reader that the Professor is going to play a crucial role in the novel?

You could write about:

* What the writer chooses to focus on in what order
* How the writer changes the focus on the extract
* Any other structural features you notice [8]

Q4. Focus your answer on the second half of the source, from line 34 to the end.

A student, having read this section of the text said: “The writer changes the tone of this part of the extract completely, making the reader care about the Professor.”

To what extent do you agree?

In your response, you could:

* Write about your own impression of the character
* Evaluate how the writer has created that impression
* Support your opinions with reference to the text **[20 ]**

**END OF QUESTIONS**