Prose Advanced Criticism, Year 1 - Answer the questions at the end of the selected passage.

Nadia Street was reputed to be the quietest street in Newclare. Not that it is any different from other streets. It has its own dirty water, its own flies, its own horse manure, its own pot-bellied children with traces of urine down the legs. The hawker’s trolley still slogs along in Nadia Street, and the cloppity-clop from the hoofs of the over-fed mare is still part of the street.

Its rows of houses are no different, either. The roofs slant forward as if they were waiting for the next gale to rock them out of their complacency and complete the work it has already started. Braziers still line the rocky pavement, their columns of smoke curling up and settling on everything around. And stray chickens can be seen pecking at the children’s stools with mute relish. Nadia Street has its lean barking mongrels and its share of police beer raids.

Yet the street still clung to the reputation of being the quietest. Things always went on in the next street.

Then something happened. When it did, some of the residents shook their heads dolefully and looked at one another as if they sensed a 100 years’ plague round the corner.

Old Levona down the street laughed and laughed until people feared that his chronic bronchitis was going to strangle him. “Look at it down the street or up the street,” he said, “it’s the same. People will always do the unexpected. Is it any wonder God’s curse remains on the black men?” Then he laughed again.

“You’ll see,” said Keledi, rubbing her breast with her forearm to ease the itching cause by the milk. She always said that, to arouse her listeners’ curiosity. But she hardly ever showed them what they would see.

Manyeu, the widow, said to her audience: “It reminds me of what happened once at Winburg, the Boer town down in the Free State.” She looked wistfully ahead of her. The other women looked at her and the new belly that pushed out from under the clean floral apron.

“I remember clearly because I was pregnant, expecting – who was it now? Yes, I was expecting Lusi, my fourth. The one you sent to the butcher yesterday, Kotu.”

Some people said that it happened when Constable Tefo first came to patrol Nadia Street on Sunday afternoons. But others said the ‘Russians’ – that clan of violent Basotho men – were threatening war. Of course, after it had happened Nadia Street went back to what its residents insisted on calling a quiet life.

If Constable Tefo ever thought that he could remain untouched by Nadia Street gossip, he was jolly well mistaken. The fact that he found it necessary to make up his mind about it indicated that he feared the possibility of being entangled in the people’s private lives.
He was tall and rather good-looking. There was nothing officious about him, nothing police-looking except for the uniform. He was in many ways one of the rarest of the collection from the glass cage at Headquarters. His bosses suspected him. He looked to them too human to be a good protector of the law. Yes, that’s all he was to the people, that’s what his bosses had hired him for.

The news spread that Tefo was in love. “I’ve seen the woman come here at the end of every month. He always kisses her. The other day I thought he was kissing her too long.” That was Manyeu’s verdict.

It did not seem to occur to anyone that the woman who was seen kissing Tefo might be his wife. Perhaps it was just as well, because it so happened that he did not have a wife. At 40 he was still unmarried.

(from ‘Down the Quiet Street’, by Es’kia Mphahlele)

In answering these questions, make sure your ideas are clearly elucidated and that your arguments are substantiated via references to the text. Short, sketchy answers should be avoided. Overall, the expected minimum word count is 400.

1. The first two paragraphs set the scene and are rich in imagery and descriptive detail. Consider what specific words, phrases and images reveal about Nadia street and its people’s lifestyle. (3 marks)

2. Why is direct speech used profusely in this passage and what do the characters’ remarks reveal about themselves and their community? (2 marks)

3. What kind of narrative perspective does the writer adopt and what attitude does the narrator have towards the inhabitants of Newclare? Your answer should take register, tone and the role played by humour into consideration. (2 marks)

4. Discuss the effectiveness of the following metaphors. (N.B. you are not being asked for a literal explanation of the phrases in question.) (1 mark)
   (a) ‘looked at one another as if they sensed a 100 years’ plague round the corner’
   (b) ‘He was in many ways one of the rarest of the collection from the glass cage at Headquarters.’

5. What techniques has the writer made use of in order to grasp the readers’ attention? Your answer should take the stylistic features of the sentences and paragraphs into consideration. (2 marks)