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ENGLISH A: LITERATURE – HIGHER LEVEL – PAPER 1
ANGLAIS A : LITTÉRATURE – NIVEAU SUPÉRIEUR – ÉPREUVE 1
INGLÉS A: LITERATURA – NIVEL SUPERIOR – PRUEBA 1

Tuesday 4 November 2014 (morning)
Mardi 4 novembre 2014 (matin)
Martes 4 de noviembre de 2014 (mañana)

2 hours / 2 heures / 2 horas

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Write a literary commentary on one passage only.
- The maximum mark for this examination paper is *[20 marks]*.

INSTRUCTIONS DESTINÉES AUX CANDIDATS

- N'ouvrez pas cette épreuve avant d'y être autorisé(e).
- Rédigez un commentaire littéraire sur un seul des passages.
- Le nombre maximum de points pour cette épreuve d'examen est *[20 points]*.

INSTRUCCIONES PARA LOS ALUMNOS

- No abra esta prueba hasta que se lo autoricen.
- Escriba un comentario literario sobre un solo pasaje.
- La puntuación máxima para esta prueba de examen es *[20 puntos]*.

Write a literary commentary on **one** of the following:

1.

Her mother had given her the name Agnes, believing that a good-looking woman was even more striking when her name was a homely one. Her mother was named Cyrena and was beautiful to match but had always imagined her life would have been more interesting, that she herself would have had a more dramatic, arresting effect on the world and not ended up in Cassell, Iowa¹, if she had been named Enid or Hagar or Maude. And so she named her first daughter Agnes, and when Agnes turned out not to be attractive at all but puffy and prone to a rash between her eyebrows, her hair a flat and bilious² hue, her mother back-pedaled and named her second daughter Linnea Elise (who turned out to be a lovely, sleepy child with excellent bones, a sweet, full mouth and a rubbery mole above her lip which later in life could be removed without difficulty, everyone was sure).

Agnes herself had always been a bit at odds with her name. There was a brief period in her life, in her mid-twenties, when she had tried to pass it off as French—she had put in the *accent grave*³ and encouraged people to call her “On-yez”. This was when she was living in New York City and often getting together with her cousin, a painter who took her to parties in TriBeCa⁴ lofts or at beach houses or at mansions on lakes upstate. She would meet a lot of not very bright rich people who found the pronunciation of her name intriguing. It was the rest of her they were unclear on. “On-yez, where are you from, dear?” asked a black-slacked, frosted-haired woman whose skin was papery and melanomic with suntan. “Originally.” She eyed Agnes’s outfit as if it might be what in fact it was: a couple of blue things purchased in a department store in Cedar Rapids.

“Where am I from?” Agnes said it softly. “Iowa.” She had a tendency not to speak up.

“Where?” the woman scowled, bewildered.

“Iowa.” Agnes repeated loudly.

The woman in black touched Agnes’s wrist and leaned in confidentially. She moved her mouth in a concerned and exaggerated way, like an exercise. “No, dear,” she said. “*Here* we say *0-hi-o*.”

That had been in Agnes’s mishmash decade, after college. She had lived improvisationally then, getting this job or that, in restaurants or offices, taking a class or two, not thinking too far ahead, negotiating the precariousness and subway flus and scrimping for an occasional facial or a play. Such a life required much expendable self-esteem. It engaged gross quantities of hope and despair and set them wildly side by side, like a Third World country of the heart. Her days grew messy with contradictions. When she went for walks, for her health, cinders would spot her cheeks, and soot would settle in the furled leaf of each ear. Her shoes became unspeakable. Her blouses darkened in a breeze, and a blast of bus exhaust might linger in her hair for hours. Finally her old asthma returned and, with a hacking, incessant cough, she gave up. “I feel like I’ve got five years to live,” she told people, “so I’m moving back to Iowa so that it’ll feel like fifty.”

When she packed up to leave she knew she was saying goodbye to something important, which was not that bad in a way because it meant that at least you had said hello to it to begin with, which most people in Cassell, Iowa could not claim to have done.

40 A year later she married a boyish man twelve years her senior, a Cassell realtor⁵ named Joe, and
together they bought a house on a little street called Birch Court. She taught a night class at the
Arts Hall and did volunteer work on the Transportation Commission in town. It was life like a
glass of water: half-full, half-empty, half-full; oops, half-empty. Over the next six years she and
Joe tried to have a baby, but one night at dinner, looking at each other in a lonely way over the
meat loaf, they realized with a shock that they probably never would. Nonetheless they still tried,
45 vandalizing what romance was left in their marriage.

Lorrie Moore, *Birds of America* (1998)

¹ Cassell, Iowa: Fictional small town in midwestern USA

² bilious: pale and sickly

³ *accent grave*: French punctuation mark above the letter “e”, for example, Agnès, changing the pronunciation

⁴ TriBeCa: fashionable New York City neighbourhood

⁵ realtor: an agent for the purchase and sale of land and buildings

2.

The Hug

A woman is reading a poem on the street
and another woman stops to listen. We stop too,
with our arms around each other. The poem
is being read and listened to out here
5 in the open. Behind us
no one is entering or leaving the houses.

Suddenly a hug comes over me and I'm
giving it to you, like a variable star shooting light
off to make itself comfortable, then
10 subsiding. I finish but keep on holding
you. A man walks up to us and we know he hasn't
come out of nowhere, but if he could, he
would have. He looks homeless because of how
he needs. "Can I have one of those?" he asks you,
15 and I feel you nod. I'm surprised,
surprised you don't tell him how
it is – that I'm yours, only
yours, etc., exclusive as a nose to
its face. Love – that's what we're talking about, love
20 that nabs you with "for me
only" and holds on.

So I walk over to him and put my
arms around him and try to
hug him like I mean it. He's got an overcoat on
25 so thick I can't feel
him past it. I'm starting the hug
and thinking, "How big a hug is this supposed to be?
How long shall I hold this hug?" Already
we could be eternal, his arms falling over my
30 shoulders, my hands not
meeting behind his back, he is so big!

I put my head into his chest and snuggle
in. I lean into him. I lean my blood and my wishes
into him. He stands for it. This is his
35 and he's starting to give it back so well I know he's
getting it. This hug. So truly, so tenderly
we stop having arms and I don't know if
my lover has walked away or what, or
if the woman is still reading the poem, or the houses –
40 what about them? – the houses.

Clearly, a little permission is a dangerous thing.
But when you hug someone you want it
to be a masterpiece of connection, the way the button
on his coat will leave the imprint of
45 a planet in my cheek
when I walk away. When I try to find some place
to go back to.

Tess Gallagher, *My Black Horse: New and Selected Poems* (1995)
