

English A: literature – Higher level – Paper 1
Anglais A : littérature – Niveau supérieur – Épreuve 1
Inglés A: literatura – Nivel superior – Prueba 1

Monday 4 May 2015 (morning)
Lundi 4 mai 2015 (matin)
Lunes 4 de mayo de 2015 (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 de **[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.

Girls were getting up all over London. In striped pyjamas, in flowered Viyella¹ nightgowns, in cotton shifts they had made themselves and unevenly hemmed, or in sheer nylon to which an old cardigan had been added for warmth, girls were pushing back bedclothes and groping for slippers. They were tying the cords of dressing-gowns and pulling pins from their hair, they
5 were putting the shilling in the meter² and the kettle on the gas ring. Those who shared were nudging each other out of the way and saying, “And it’s only Tuesday.” Those who lived alone were moaning and switching on radio or television. Some said prayers; one sang.

It is hard to say what they had least of—past, present, or future. It is hard to say how or why they stood it, the cold room, the wet walk to the bus, the office in which they had no
10 prospects and no fun. The weekends washing hair and underwear, and going in despondent pairs to the pictures³. For some, who could not have done otherwise, it was their fate, decreed by Mum, Dad, and a lack of funds or gumption. Others had come from the ends of the earth to do it—had arrived from Auckland or Karachi or Jo’burg, having saved for years to do just this, having wrung or cajoled the wherewithal out of tear-stained parents. Not all were very young,
15 but all, or nearly all, wished for a new dress, a boyfriend, and eventual domesticity. No two, however, were identical: which was the victory of nature over conditioning, advertising, and the behavioural sciences—no triumph, but an achievement against the odds.

Among the awakening women, that New Year, was Caroline Bell.

Caro had passed another examination and moved to another flat, where there were high
20 ceilings, and draughts at long windows. Learning the address, Christian had remarked, “I didn’t know there was anything cheap round there.”

“It’s over a shop,” Caro told him, by way of reassurance.

For the first time she had a table and two chairs of her own, and a gold-coloured rug from India.

25 In the morning she was closing one of the windows, had drawn it down and was leaning both hands on the hasps⁴. On the inside sill there was a sprinkling of soot and flaked white paint. A branch of quince blossom, brought by Ted Tice the week before, was propped in a glass vase. Caro was standing at her second-floor window in a green dressing-gown and thinking of the women, of whom she was one—the women, waking yet dormant, who were
30 getting up all over London.

Across the street a man on the curb looked up at her; looked up in the same swift, focusing way that she looked down. He appeared to have arrived at a destination, and might have been a figure in a spy story keeping watch on a fateful house: a wide, tall, motionless man in a dark-blue coat, who held a black stick and stood with feet apart and his bare dark head
35 raised, confident that the house, or the world, would yield to siege.

She leaned, he looked. From her arched figure to his inexorable one was no great distance, and their eyes now met as they might have done in a room. There was momentary, complex stillness until, with a show of normality, Caro lifted her hands and dissolved the spell.

40 He slightly bowed as if he came from a graceful nation, France or Italy. They resumed their motions of interruption, crossing roads or rooms, Caro’s bare feet on the yellow carpet, Caro’s thin fingers yanking a dress from a hanger; the man’s wide hand raised for a cab.

All the girls of London shuddered, waiting for the bus. Some had knitted themselves unbecoming brown Balaclavas⁵, with worse mittens to match. Some held a boiled egg, still hot, in their glove—which warmed the hand, and could be eaten cold at lunchtime in the
45 ladies’ room. At that hour all London was ashudder, waiting for the bus.

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- ¹ Viyella: a soft, warm cotton/wool blended fabric very popular in the first part of the twentieth century
- ² shilling in the meter: at this time it was normal, in rented accommodation, for supplies of gas and electricity to be paid for by means of inserting coins into a meter – a type of pay-as-you-go in advance method. A shilling was a relatively low-value coin.
- ³ pictures: an informal British term for the cinema
- ⁴ hasps: metal window fasteners
- ⁵ Balaclavas: knitted woollen head-coverings in which the head, ears and neck are covered and only the face exposed

2.

Meditation on a Bone

A piece of bone, found at Trondhjem in 1901, had the following runic inscription (about 1050 CE) cut on it: "I loved her as a maiden; I will not trouble Erlend's detestable wife; better she should be a widow."*

Words scored upon a bone,
Scratched in despair or rage—
Nine hundred years have gone;
Now, in another age
5 They burn with passion on
A scholar's tranquil page.

The scholar takes his pen
And turns the bone about,
And writes those words again.
10 Once more they seethe and shout,
And through a human brain
Undying hate rings out.

"I loved her when a maid;
I loathe and love the wife
15 That warms another's bed:
Let him beware his life!"
The scholar's hand is stayed;
His pen becomes a knife

To grave in living bone
20 The fierce archaic cry.
He sits and reads his own
Dull sum of misery.
A thousand years have flown
Before that ink is dry.

25 And, in a foreign tongue,
A man, who is not he,
Reads and his heart is wrung
This ancient grief to see,
And thinks: When I am dung,
30 What bone shall speak for me?

A D Hope, *Quadrant* (1957)

* runic: an early medieval northern European alphabet
