

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

Wednesday 3 May 2017 (afternoon)  
Mercredi 3 mai 2017 (après-midi)  
Miércoles 3 de mayo de 2017 (tarde)

2 hours / 2 heures / 2 horas

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**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.

In Bermondsey the shop windows were dusty. When you put your face close and peered, you saw old flypapers, pale cuts of meat, powdery cakes, strings of onions flaking onto yellowing newsprint. In the Highway the shops were full of birds. Cage upon cage piled high, each full of clustering creatures like sparrows but bright as sweets, red and black, white and  
5 yellow, purple and green, and some as gently lavender as the veins on a baby's head. It took the breath away to see them so crowded, each wing crushed against its fellows on either side. In the Highway green parakeets perched upon lamp posts. Cakes and tarts shone like jewels, tier on tier behind high glass windows. A black man with gold teeth and white eyes carried a snake around his neck.

10 How could I know what was possible and what was not? And when the impossible in all its beauty came walking towards me down the very middle of Ratcliffe Highway, why would I know how to behave?

Of course, I'd seen a cat before. You couldn't sleep for them in Bermondsey, creeping about over the roofs and wailing like devils. They lived in packs, spiky, wild-eyed, stalking the  
15 wooden walkways and bridges, fighting with the rats. But this cat...

The Sun himself came down and walked on earth.

Just as the birds of Bermondsey were small and brown, and those of my new home were large and rainbow-hued, so it seemed the cats of Ratcliffe Highway must be an altogether superior breed to our scrawny south-of-the-river mogs\*. This cat was the size of a small horse,  
20 solid, massively chested, rippling powerfully about the shoulders. He was gold, and the pattern painted so carefully all over him, so utterly perfect, was the blackest black in the world. His paws were the size of footstools, his chest snow white.

I'd seen him somewhere, his picture in a poster in London Street, over the river. He was jumping through a ring of fire and his mouth was open. A mythical beast.

25 I have no recall of one foot in front of the other, cobblestones under my feet. He drew me like honey draws a wasp. I had no fear. I came before the godly indifference of his face and looked into his clear yellow eyes. His nose was a slope of downy gold, his nostrils pink and moist as a pup's. He raised his thick, white dotted lips and smiled, and his whiskers bloomed.

30 I became aware of my heart somewhere too high up, beating as if it was a little fist trying to get out.

Nothing in the world could have prevented me from lifting my hand and stroking the broad warm nap of his nose. Even now I feel how beautiful that touch was. Nothing had ever been so soft and clean. A ripple ran through his right shoulder as he raised his paw – bigger than my head – and lazily knocked me off my feet. It was like being felled by a cushion. I hit the ground  
35 but was not much hurt, only winded, and after that it was a dream. There was, I remember, much screaming and shouting, but from a distance, as if I was sinking underwater. The world turned upside down and went by me in a bright stream, the ground moved under me, my hair hung in my eyes. There was a kind of joy in me, I do know that – and nothing that could go by the name of fear, only a wildness. I was in his jaws. His breath burned the back of my neck.

40 My bare toes trailed, hurting distantly. I could see his feet, tawny orange with white toes, pacing the ground away, gentle as feathers.

Carol Birch, Jamrach's *Menagerie*, CANONGATE BOOKS LIMITED (2011)

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\* mogs: slang word for cats

2.

### Blaze

The unfunny irony of it became a family joke:  
how she'd stood gossiping at the door with  
– of all people at that fatal moment –  
the insurance man.

5 Beyond the Providential<sup>1</sup> shoulder  
half her attention's on her white border:  
cool blooms, shades of everything cold.  
She waves to a neighbour sailing out with her pram.  
Behind her, the dull safety of the house,  
10 the half-known caverns of her children's bedrooms.

She chats, smiles at nothing much,  
until the mordant reek of smoke  
from the kitchen reaches him, then her.  
Next, the clutch of panic checking all responses.  
15 She watches flames run lovingly over everything,  
brightness, then black, patterning her eyes.

What to save for whom.  
Photographs, toys or letters?  
She scoops the cat and his one last little life  
20 from the bathtub upstairs.

She tells of the heat, describes the hungry fire  
to her stony-faced husband,  
the raging beauty of it, the glorious energy –  
*You should have seen. It was like drowning in light!*  
25 but he finds no excuses for her.  
Does her survival mean a thing to him?

Next day, her children laugh  
at shapes of melted Tupperware<sup>2</sup> and glass.  
They eat cold meals from the garage freezer  
30 and whisper their relief.  
She's still trembling.  
Everything in the kitchen's gone,  
the treacherous toaster killed.  
Time for a re-fit.  
35 Time to re-think her life.

Christine West, [www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org) (2006)

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<sup>1</sup> Providential: the Provident, a financial services organization

<sup>2</sup> Tupperware: plastic containers used for storing food

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