

# AS LEVEL

*Candidate Style Answers with commentary*

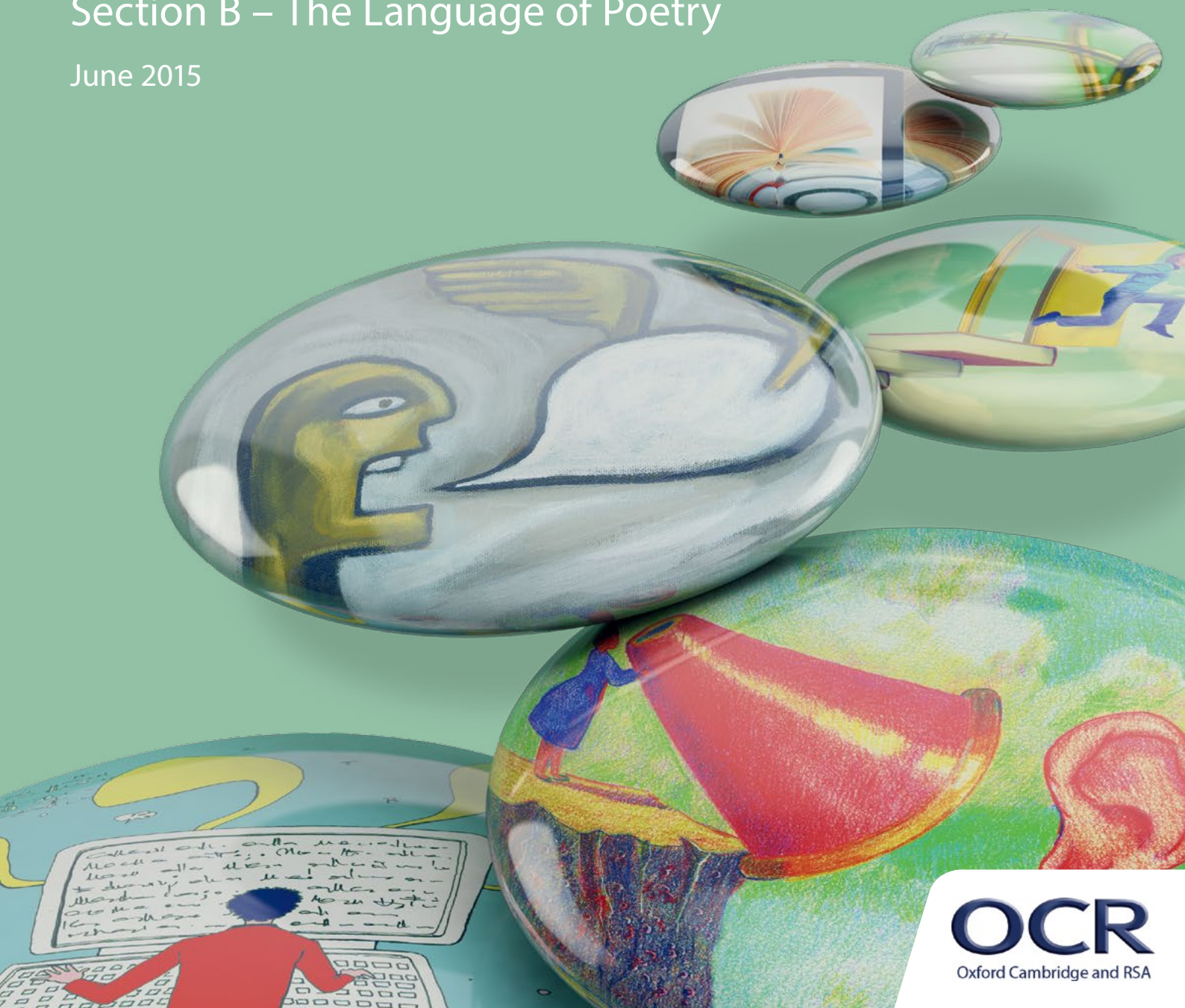
H074/02

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (EMC)

The Language of Literary Texts

Section B – The Language of Poetry

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# INTRODUCTION

These 'candidate style answers' have been written by subject experts to support teachers in interpreting the new OCR AS level Language and Literature (EMC) specification and sample assessment materials. These responses have been written to exemplify a good, or excellent, response to each question, but it is important to note that they were **not** written by AS level candidates. Exemplars of actual examination scripts and non-exam assessment tasks will be provided when they are available after the first examination series.

As these responses have not been through a full standardisation and moderation process, they have not been given a final mark or a grade. Instead they are presented as 'higher level' responses that clearly demonstrate features of a Level 5 and / or Level 6 response. Please also refer to the marking criteria in the AS level Language and Literature Sample Assessment Materials when reading these 'candidate style answers'.

Please note that this resource is provided as guidance only and does not constitute an indication of endorsed answers or grading.



## QUESTION 7: WILLIAM BLAKE

Compare the ways Blake uses language and poetic techniques in 'The Ecchoing Green' and 'The Garden of Love'.

Support your answer with reference to relevant contextual factors.

The differences between these two poems include the tone, the tense, the narrative positions and, perhaps most obviously, the fact that one is in Songs of Innocence and one is in Songs of Experience. **This essay will attempt to show the relationship between the two poems, and to illustrate the way in which the innocence and simplicity of 'The Ecchoing Green' has been suppressed by experience in the form of repressive religion in 'The Garden of Love.'**<sup>1</sup>

In both poems there are the lexical patterns of nature. In many of Blake's poems nature is associated with innocence. In 'The Ecchoing Green' nature is present throughout ("sun" (x2), "skies", "Spring", "sky-lark", "thrush", "birds" (x2), "bush", "Green" (x3), "oak", "nest"), and the repetition of the sun in verses 1 and 3, helps to create the impression of the natural cycle of the day, as the sun rises and descends. This is also emphasised by the repetition of the sentence structure itself: ("the Sun does arise" in verse 1, and the "The sun does descend" in verse 3.) The children, too, are part of this natural world, and the image of the birds of the bush in verse 1 is echoed in verse 3 as the children are described as being "like birds in their nest".

**Repetition is a recurrent feature of Blake's poetry, and here it is evident at the end of the three verses, where the phrase "On the ... Green" recurs. However, in the final verse the adjective is replaced, and "Ecchoing" becomes "darkening". "Ecchoing" suggests the echo of play through the generations, while "darkening" has connotations of finality. The penultimate line of each verse also has an echo, moving from the future tense ("our sports shall be seen") as we anticipate what will happen in the poem, to the past tense ("our youth time were seen") as we see the repeated play through time, to the present tense ("sport no more seen"). The present tense arguably lessens the threat of the darkness, as it implies a temporary condition: that the sport (like the sun rising, or the birds singing) will continue tomorrow, and into the future.**<sup>2</sup>

In contrast, while the lexical patterns in "The Garden of Love" also include nature ("Garden" (x2), "flowers" (x2) "green", "briars") this is a nature that is balanced with (or in competition with) man-made objects ("Chapel", "built", "gates", "door", "graves", "tomb-stones"). In the final verse, for example, the flowers are absent and the nature that remains is the restrictive, thorny briar. **The green that is associated with innocence in 'The Ecchoing Green' and in 'Nurse's Song', does appear once in this poem, but it is attached to the past tense.**<sup>3</sup> The verb phrase "used to play" makes it clear that while the play was once a repeated occurrence, it now no longer happens. There is no present tense of this verb phrase.

**1. A03:** Recognition of relevant literary context, used to further the analysis in the connections between these two poems.

**2. A02/A01:** Sustained poetic and stylistic analysis expressed in a fluent and coherent paragraph.

**3. A04/A03:** Points of connection between the poems - also opened out to a comparison with other poems, demonstrating an ability to use an aspect of wider literary context.



In both of these poems there is a structural development that emphasises the contrasts between positive and negative (the “Ecchoing Green” and the “darkening Green”, for example, and the “green” and the “tomb-stones” in “The Garden of Love”). The structural development in ‘The Ecchoing Green’ is more subtle, with the altered repetitions of the sun, the birds and the green, but in ‘The Garden of Love’ it is more dramatic. The movement from the first verse where the first person persona describes how a place of play has been built on, to a focus in the second verse on the chapel (with the lexical pattern of religion and control: “Chapel”, “built”, “gates” and “door”). These gates and door suggest ways to shut others out, and foreshadow the mood of the final verse. Here, the lexical patterns are linked by death (“graves”, “tomb-stones”, “black”).

Even the rhythm is broken in the last verse. **The ballad meter is used in the rest of the poem, which creates a predictable, song-like feel, and when the rhythm is disrupted by the priests in line 11, therefore, it draws attention to the line. It is longer, and the stresses change, so that two strong stresses fall on the noun phrase “black gowns”, and they seem to echo the priests’ marching feet. The rhythm of the line deviates, and so does the rhyme, with the internal rhyme of “gowns” and “rounds”. The repeated sound “ou” captures the persona’s suffering as the repressive church suffocates his innocence, his “joys & desires.”**<sup>4</sup> Established religion has taken over the public space of the green that represents innocence, freedom and joy in these poems.

**The deviation in rhyme in ‘The Ecchoing Green’ also seems to mark a change in tone. Throughout the poem, the AA, BB, CC, DD, EE rhyming scheme is unbroken, which again creates the impression of a comfortable, predictable song or nursery rhyme, until the third verse. In the first two lines of this verse Blake uses a half rhyme of “weary” and “merry”, which seems to anticipate the end of the children’s sport; the descent of the sun, and the darkening Green.**<sup>5</sup>

What is obvious in the comparison with “The Ecchoing Green” is how quiet “The Garden of Love” is. Even though it is written in the first person, the focus is on what the speaker sees and remembers. In contrast, in ‘The Ecchoing Green’, the third person narration captures the sound of the bells ringing, the birds singing, the laughing of Old John. It is only in the final verse that there is no reference to sound, and even sight is becoming obscured in the darkening Green.

Critics disagree about the relationship between the poems from Songs of Innocence and those from Songs of Experience. They disagree on whether the later poems are a comment on the earlier ones, or whether, even they satirise the poems and show their impossible naivety. **However, what is evident in a comparison of these two particular poems is how an understanding of the joy and innocence and freedom of the play on the green in ‘The Ecchoing Green’, better allows the reader to understand the all-controlling, repressive and negative power of the priests and the church in ‘The Garden of Love’.**<sup>6</sup>

Overall comment:

This is a strong response which offers a coherent interpretation of the two poems, identifying significant features, and explaining how those features help shape the meaning. Knowledge of the two poems is integrated with a knowledge of wider contexts (reference to other poems, to the ballad metre, to critics). Stylistic and poetic terminology and concepts are applied aptly throughout.

**4. A03/A02:** Evidence of knowledge of wider literary context of the ballad metre, and ability to use stylistic terminology of “deviation” effectively, integrating it with a more poetic analysis of rhythm and rhyme.

**5. A01:** The terminology associated with stylistic and poetic analysis is used effectively, with an interpretation of the way in which rhyme may be seen to shape meaning.

**6. A04/A01:** Confident conclusion, returning to elements of the introduction, demonstrating an understanding of the poems’ reception by critics, and an overview of a comparison of these two poems.



## QUESTION 8: EMILY DICKINSON

Compare the ways Dickinson uses language and poetic techniques in 'After great pain' and 'It was not Death for I stood up'.

Support your answer with reference to relevant contextual factors.

The structure of "After great pain" seems to be very different from the structure of "It was not Death". There are similarities in terms of some of the imagery, the use of the quatrain, and even in the punctuation, but one starts from uncertainty and moves to a sort of certainty in its finality, and the other moves from confidence to an ambiguous, tentative end.<sup>1</sup>

The opening line of 'After great pain', for example, seems confident. It is a declarative sentence, and the use of the adjective "formal" gives the impression of detachment and control. The use of the present tense implies that this is a state of mind that is on-going. In contrast, the opening line of "It was not Death, for I stood up" does not give any answers to the reader. The past tense and the use of the first person pronoun tells us that this is a personal experience that happened once in the past, but the pronoun "it" has no identity and the reader cannot guess from the first line what "it" is.<sup>2</sup>

These two poems are thought of as poems of definition<sup>3</sup> and they can both be seen to be using concrete images to attempt to express a state of mind. Starting from the abstract nouns "pain" and "feeling", "After great pain" uses the lexical patterns that connote rigidity or mechanisation. Nerves are compared to "tombs" as they are left as markers for something that was once alive (perhaps the persona's emotions). The heart, that is necessarily constantly moving, is now "stiff" and the feet are now "mechanical", and apparently disconnected from the speaker. The speaker has no control over the emotions (the heart) or the body (the feet). There is no sense of progression either. The heart questions, but has no answers. The feet move, but in circles and with no destination.

It then becomes clear that the persona is also powerfully aware of her lack of control over time, which is a subjective, emotional time, rather than a mechanical, clock time. In 'After great pain', the lexical pattern of heavy, cold objects (tombs, stone) is repeated in the final verse in the metaphor "Hour of Lead". Dickinson's characteristic capitalisation of this metaphor of "Hour of Lead" seems to emphasise its dangerous importance, and this is picked up in the next line, where there is a suggestion that this feeling has the power to kill. The adverb "if" creates a sense of doubt about whether it is possible to survive this feeling.

**1. A01/A04:** Introduction establishes a personal critical voice, that suggests the direction that this essay will take, while also outlining some points of connection between the two poems.

**2. A02:** More stylistic approach clearly demonstrates how the choice of sentence type and tense can be seen to shape the poem's meaning.

**3. A03:** Awareness of wider context of critics' reception/categorisation of these poems.



**The uncertainty in the final verse is also captured in the way in which the punctuation breaks up the lines. Critics disagree about what function the dash has in Dickinson's poetry. Some argue that it is like a comma, and others that it shows a change of thought, or a longer pause that is the same length as a colon. The use of the dash is very heavy here, for example.**<sup>4</sup> In a four line verse, there are six dashes which force the reader to pause, and to make the time pass more slowly as the metaphorical figures in the snow gradually pass into a state of unconsciousness. The final dash increases this uncertainty, as it does not close the poem (as a full stop would), or give the reader an answer about whether this is a positive or negative "letting go". The "letting go" could be interpreted as a release of the "formal feeling" and a move on into the future, or as a letting go of life itself.

In 'It was not Death', until verse five, the poem uses repetition to try and express the state of despair. **The syntactical repetition of "It was not" appears in lines 1, 3, and 5, for example. There are the repeated lexical contrasts as well, as "stood up" contrasts with "lie down", "Night" contrasts with "Noon", "Frost" contrasts with "Siroccos" and "Fire" with "Marble". Each time, the reader is given an image of a concrete noun with the connotations of finality, or darkness, or burning destruction, and is then told that this state of mind is none of these. In contrast to 'After great pain', this speaker can still move in the first verse, still hear the bells and feel the warmth of the winds, for example.**<sup>5</sup> In the first three verses the reader has control over this feeling, but by verse four this control is slipping. The repeated conjunction "and" at the start of every line creates the idea that these things are piling up against the speaker, and the lexis of entrapment and restriction ("shaven", "frame", "key") increase this sense of powerlessness. Her body is being stretched in a frame by a faceless, nameless other and she cannot even breathe without being given a key. Space is personified and the persona no longer has control of the verbs. It is space that "stares" and frosts that "repeal".

The persona has disappeared, and she is not compared to anything here. Instead, emptiness replaces sound, and cold threatens the living ground. The adjective "beating" suggests the last sense of living, and the final verse confirms this idea of giving up. The abstract noun "Chaos" that is described as being both detached ("cool") and uncontrollable ("Stopless") is linked by a dash, to the image of a boat afloat, far out to sea, with no means to steer it. It is not until the last line that the reader is told for certain, what this feeling is. Unlike 'After great pain', this poem ends on a full stop, suggesting, perhaps, that there can be no resolution here. There is no way to navigate back the thinking, feeling identity created in the first three verses.

**'After great pain' may start with an apparent certainty but the uncertainty and lack of resolution captured in the final dash of the poem might suggest an escape from the mental torture. In contrast, the tentative start of "It was not Death" culminates in the certainty and finality of the full stop, suggesting that the persona is powerless in the face of despair.**<sup>6</sup>

**4. A01/A03/A02:** Link back to the introduction, out to the wider context of critics' views of Dickinson's poetry, and back to a detailed analysis of the way that the dash shapes the poem's meaning.

**5.A02/A04:** Significant features of the poem selected to give a sustained poetic and stylistic analysis that demonstrates an ability to use a range of linguistic and literary concepts. Interesting connections are also established between the two poems.

**6. A01/A04:** Conclusion explicitly picks up the lexis of the introduction, emphasising the coherence of this response. The connections between the poems that were discussed at the start of this answer are also reiterated here.

Overall comment:

This answer neatly integrates poetic and stylistic analysis in order to explore the way in which meaning is created in the text. The essay demonstrates a knowledge of Dickinson's poetry generally, as well as an understanding of the wider context of these poems, in a coherent, detailed piece of critical analysis.



## QUESTION 9: SEAMUS HEANEY

Compare the ways Heaney uses language and poetic techniques in 'Strange Fruit' and 'Anahorish'.

Support your answer with reference to relevant contextual factors.

'Strange Fruit' is one of the bog poems that Heaney wrote in the 1970s, having been inspired by the discovery of the bog bodies in Northern Europe. In fact, the opening words seem to imply a tourist's view of the head, almost as though the speaker is showing the reader an exhibit. There is a detachment as the speaker presents it as something that is usual, and compares it to a hard-shelled, bitter gourd. He uses deictic language "Here is" to engage the reader, as he re-creates the vision of the girl's head in the language of the poem. The voice appears almost objective at the start, which contrasts to the voice in 'Anahorish'. This poem starts with the possessive determiner "my", which indicates the speaker's sense of belonging to or ownership of the place. The tone of the poems appears to be very different at the start, and yet they both explore ideas that are characteristic of Heaney about history, identity and place.<sup>1</sup>

In 'Strange Fruit' the poet uses concrete nouns, with lexical patterns of nature ("gourd", "prune-skinned", "prune-stones", "fern", "turf clod", "pools") to describe the head, which makes it seem as though it is part of nature and that it belongs to the land. However, to dig it up is somehow unnatural, like the buried gourd. The use of the third person pronoun "they" in the third line creates the impression of nameless people in control, and the verb "unswaddled" emphasises the vulnerability and the helplessness of the girl's head.

The use of pronouns seems to show that the speaker is becoming more subjective as the poem progresses. In line 1 it is "the" girl's head and "teeth", but between lines 3-8, the pronoun is now "her", as she begins to become more humanised. The speaker captures his engagement in the phrase "perishable treasure". The head is something that is precious, and almost made more precious by its transient nature. **Heaney has chosen to use the form of a fourteen line, unrhymed sonnet for this poem, perhaps because he wanted to emphasise the reverence that the speaker has for the head, in a form that has been traditionally used for love poetry.**<sup>2</sup>

Heaney appears to use echoes of the sonnet to suggest a "beatification", but the title of the poem is the same as a song written by Billie Holiday. This is a protest song that compared the bodies hanging from the trees to "strange fruit". The connection with the subject matter of racial brutality and injustice influences the reading of this poem. The combination of sonnet form and protest song captures the speaker's mixed reactions towards this exhumed head: first reverence, and then horror and determination to never think like that again.<sup>3</sup>

**1. A02/A03:** Ambitious opening paragraph, integrating the wider context of "Strange Fruit" with a detailed, stylistic analysis of, for example, "deictic language".

**2. A03:** Awareness of wider literary context, and how it is relevant to the way in which the poem could be read.

**3. A03:** Useful reference to wider context, demonstrating a knowledge of it might shape the meaning of this poem.





However, the line “Pash of tallow, perishable treasure” indicates a change of tone. The low frequency lexis of “pash of tallow” reinforces the link to the past, as “pash” is an obsolete word for “head”, and “tallow” is the animal fat that was historically used for candles. The tallow foreshadows the vulnerability of the adjective “perishable” as it is something that is easily melted.<sup>4</sup> The adjectives “dark” and “blank” also mark the change of direction that the rest of the poem takes. They are just before the reported speech from Diordorus Siculus which makes the reader realise how the speaker has been objectifying the head, rather than thinking about the brutality of what has happened to the girl.

In some ways, the structure of ‘Anahorish’ is similar, as the speaker begins by describing the physical place, before moving into a more reflective, imagined past of the place. However, while ‘Anahorish’ is made up of three sentences of similar length, in ‘Strange Fruit’ from line 9 onwards, there is a six line sentence with four examples of enjambment.<sup>5</sup> This increases the pace and gives a sense of the speaker’s horror. The adjectives that had previously described the head, now describe the girl herself, and the repetition of five of them is insistent and powerful.

The verb “outstaring” also reinforces this immediacy, as it has no obvious tense. The girl is “outstaring” the axe in the past, and she is “outstaring” the speaker and the objectification of her in the present. The final move into the plu-perfect tense gives a resolution to this poem. It suggests that the speaker realises his complacency about the atrocity of the act against the girl, and that this complacency will never be repeated. In contrast, ‘Anahorish’ has a gentle resolution, with no dramatic Volta or turning point.

The speaker’s reverence for the place is not something to be fought against as it is in ‘Strange Fruit’. This reverence almost seems to be linked to religion at the start of the poem, as the place is described as “the first hill in the world” and like a sort of Eden. There is also the lexical pattern of water and cleansing (“water” “spring” “washed”) as though this is an innocent and spiritually pure place.

Heaney is writing within an Irish tradition where poets write poems to celebrate places. The phonology in the first verse alone supports this idea, with the repeated glide sounds of “W” and the sibilance, which create a positive sense of the place.<sup>6</sup> What also adds to this reflective, peaceful tone is that this poem has a very regular form. The quatrains are made up of almost unbroken, double-stressed, even-length lines, and this gives the impression that the memory is controlled and conscious.

In line 7 the comma after “Anahorish” separates this present reflection on the appearance and sound of the word from the speaker’s imagined past of the people who used to live at ‘Anahorish’. It is at this point in the poem that the tense changes to the present. This creates a sense of immediacy. Unlike ‘Strange Fruit’, where the plu-perfect tense implies that the event is in the past, and will never be repeated, here, the present tense means that the mound-dwellers will always be preserved going about their daily lives in this poem. In both “Strange Fruit” and ‘Anahorish’ the poet examines something in the present, and this leads to a reflection on the past, and to (in ‘Strange Fruit’ in particular), a realisation about his attitude. ‘Strange Fruit’ may start with a more objective tone, and ‘Anahorish’ may start with a personal, nostalgic engagement with the place, but as the poems progress, the speaker makes further connections, with history, with the land, and with the people who once lived there.

Overall comment:

This essay reveals a sound knowledge of these poems, and an ability to weave together stylistic and poetic analysis into what is a convincing argument. The vocabulary is wide, and the selection of the details from the poems is thoughtful and illuminating in terms of what it reveals about the way in which meaning is produced. The majority of the analysis is of ‘Strange Fruit’, although the essay ambitiously attempts to integrate a comparison with ‘Anahorish’ from the start.

**4. A01:** Evidence of a wide vocabulary, referring to a range of linguistic concepts.

**5.A04:** Points of connection made between the poems in terms of the sentence length and enjambment, and how those features shape the meaning of the poems.

**6. A03:** Integration of wider literary context, and a more detailed analysis of the phonology and form of the poem.



## QUESTION 10: EAVAN BOLAND

Compare the ways Boland uses language and poetic techniques in 'Object Lessons' and 'The New Pastoral'.

Support your answer with reference to relevant contextual factors.

Eavan Boland's poetry is often set in a domestic environment and both 'Object Lessons' and 'The New Pastoral' focus on the interior of a room in order to explore wider issues about history and identity.

In 'Object Lessons', the first verse depicts a familiar domestic scene, and the next two verses describe the scene on the mug, and the fourth verse considers the problems of depicting history in this way. However, from the first verse, even though the lexis is focused on the domestic ("coffee mug", "kettle", "unpacked", "house"), the adjective "cruel" foreshadows the less harmonious direction the poem will take. The noun "theatre" also suggests something that is deceptive and not necessarily factual (like the portrayal of pastoral history on the mug.) It becomes clear that even the superficially perfect scene of the mug with its lexical pattern of luxury and consumption ("silk", "linen", "spread out", "pitchers of wine") is either anticipating a disaster, or is just an unrealistic depiction of history. Boland suggests that the process of fixing a single version of history, or a moment in art is problematic, because the artist may leave out the truth. The hunting scene shows a fixed, constructed version of an idyllic past that the speaker does not recognise.

**Boland is an Irish poet, and the "strikes or suffering" (despite the softness of the sibilance) seem to refer to the troubles in Irish history that are not depicted in the scene on the mug. Boland has written about how she feels displaced as an Irish, female poet, and 'The New Pastoral' appears to echo her own concerns about finding a voice in a tradition of male, Irish poets. Additionally, the speaker in 'The New Pastoral' is trying to find a place in a specific tradition of poetry that is particularly male: the pastoral. This was a type of poetry or art that portrayed a rural life, especially in an idealised, romantic way.**<sup>1</sup> The writers were predominantly male, and the women were often depicted as being submissive (waiting to be kissed, in 'Object Lessons', for example), or as nymphs or shepherdesses. The speaker in 'The New Pastoral' has no role in this pastoral scene, as it has no relevance to her in her domestic, urban environment.

The poem starts with the certainty of a complete, declarative sentence that defines the role of man as someone who has the power to change the world with fire and the wheel. In contrast, while 'I'm in the dark' is also a complete, declarative sentence, the position of it on the page, placed away from the first verse, seems to illustrate the speaker's sense of isolation as a female. **The abbreviation of "I'm" makes it appear less formal, as though the speaker might mean it to be read in the more idiomatic sense of "I don't understand". There is a move from the conviction of the first two lines, to the ambiguity about the speaker's role in this tradition, and then the certainty seems to return in the third verse. The speaker's voice becomes more poetic as she writes about her current state of mind: the lexis is low frequency ("inhabitant", "displaced") and the alliterative sibilance ("lost", "last", "displaced", "person", "pastoral", "chaos") seems deliberately poetic.**<sup>2</sup> The internal rhyme of "distress" and "shepherdess" also draws attention to itself as poetry, in a poem that has not featured any rhyme up to this point. As if to emphasise this, the archaic expressions, "make whole" and "crooked suckling", give an impression of a more formal poem being constructed.

**1. A03:** Demonstration of a knowledge of wider literary context of Boland as a poet, and of a particular form of poetry.

**2. A02:** Sustained poetic and stylistic analysis in a coherent interpretation of the way in which lexis and sentence types help to shape the meaning of the poem.



This is a poem about finding a new sort of pastoral poetry, and from line 10, it illustrates the way in which poetry can be made out of the domestic. The speaker is not writing about sheep and plants, but about preparing a meal. The herds of sheep that the (male) pastoral poet would have written about, are replaced with the “switch and tick” of the new herds of domestic appliances. The speaker in ‘The New Pastoral’ attempts to find a way to write poetry about her life. However, in this poem, she is always reminded of the work of the male pastoral poet, and how they fixed women as idealised figures in their writing.

The poem, itself, has a varied stanza length, and an irregular rhyme that is noticeable when it is used in the last six lines. The assonance of “past”, “pastoral”, “chance” provides an internal rhyme, and “sights” and “rite” is the only example of an end, half-rhyme. This could mark the establishment of a poetic voice or identity, although the whole poem ends on a rhetorical question, suggesting that the speaker is not convinced that she has fully achieved that poetic identity.

“I could be happy...” the speaker writes, if the past did not exist, as the knowledge of the past is preventing her from writing. The speaker then returns to the past tense that was in the first line, and the repetition of “there was... There was” has an insistence to it that implies that the past is undeniable.

The tenses in ‘Object Lessons’ are less varied, moving from the past to the present once in the third verse: “the way land looks before disaster ... becomes a habit”. By using the present tense here, the poet gives the impression that this is a commonly accepted truth.

This is a poem about representing history, and representing the two relationships: one mirrored in the other. The scene on the mug is fixed, and will never be resolved, as the thrush will always be “ready to sing”, and the meal will never be eaten. Similarly, the domestic couple are now fixed within this poem, and the domestic chore of sanding and varnishing the floor boards will never be completed.

Both of these poems fail to find a resolution: the mug may be broken, symbolising a destruction of a false history in ‘Object Lessons’, but the poem also concludes with a broken promise.

**Similarly, in ‘The New Pastoral’, having seemed to have found a voice, the speaker ends with a rhetorical question about whether she will ever escape the sense that women should be in poetry and art, rather than actually creating it.<sup>3</sup>**

**5.A01** Returning implicitly to the idea of Boland’s exploration of identity and history, that was raised in the introduction, adding a sense of coherence to this argument.

Overall comment:

This is a strong piece of critical analysis, showing a fully developed understanding of how meanings are shaped in Boland’s poetry. References to wider contexts help to develop a response that is supported by a high level of skill in applying concepts and methods from linguistic and literary study.



## QUESTION 11: CAROL ANN DUFFY

Compare the ways Duffy uses language and poetic techniques in 'Over' and 'You'.

Support your answer with reference to relevant contextual factors.

Rapture is a collection of love poems that tell the story of the various stages of falling in love. Significantly, 'You' and 'Over' are the first and last poems, and capture the powerful infatuation of love early on in a relationship in the "touchable dream" in 'You' and the "death of love" in 'Over'.<sup>1</sup>

Both poems are written in the first person and addressed to the lover with the second person pronoun "you". However, this is no formal apostrophe, and although the form of "You" seems to echo the sonnet form, these poems have an informality that creates the impression of a personal tortuous love.<sup>2</sup> This is partly created through the imitation of the spoken voice. In 'Over' for example, from the first line, Duffy leaves out the conjunction "and" which increases the sense that this is a spoken rather than a written response, as it makes it sound more informal. The second sentence is also elliptical, and the repetition of "no stars ... no moon ... no name or number ... no skelf" are insistent in the way that "no" punctuates the line, creating a sense of the building desperation in the speaker. Duffy's characteristic use of the rhetorical question also emphasises this impression of informality, as it seems as though the speaker is communicating with the reader, and wanting an answer.

The tone and the voice are similar in the two poems, and despite the fact that they focus on the contrasting stages of a relationship, structurally they both move from a negative to a more positive state of mind. It is as though the speaker has used the poem to resolve something. Certainly, in 'You', the opening line that starts with the adjective "uninvited" indicates the lack of control that the speaker experiences. By inverting the syntax, the reader's attention is immediately drawn to the first word, and needs to read on to discover what noun accompanies the adjective "uninvited". As the line unfolds, this sense of lack of power is emphasised four words later in the noun "stayed" which connotes persistence and longevity.<sup>3</sup> Duffy's poems repeatedly use the image of time as something that is subjective, rather than just to do with clocks, and she is vulnerable to the power of time. Here, the adjective "late" picks up this preoccupation. The lexical patterns of time are also seen in 'Over' where "hour" or "hours" is used five times, "time" once and "dawn" appears in the penultimate line. In 'Over' the slowness of time is something to be endured.

These linked lexical patterns of time between the two poems can also be seen to connect to the structural development of 'You' and 'Over'. In 'You' the opening image is of the speaker going to bed and dreaming, and then unremarkable "ordinary days" pass by, until the poem returns to the image of the earth-struck moon and the physical appearance of the love "like a touchable dream". This shows the full cycle of a day. Similarly, in 'Over' the passing of time is captured as the "dark hour" of the first line, becomes the "Christmas dawn" of line 17.<sup>4</sup>

**1. A03/A04:** Introduction places the poems in the context of the collection, highlighting a point of connection.

**2. A01/A03:** Fluent and effective use of vocabulary, and demonstration of knowledge of literary context.

**3. A02:** Sustained stylistic analysis.

**4. A04:** Interesting connections made between the two poems in terms of structural similarities.



Both poems use contrasts, mainly between the past and the present and between hope and despair. One way that Duffy does this is through the use of tenses, so when the tense moves from the past to the present in the second verse in 'You' the pain seems more immediate. It is "glamorous hell" in the present as we read the poem, and the flame still licks: this is something that seems endlessly true. The movement in line 12 in the present tense also suggests a change. The long sentence that starts in the past tense ("You sprawled... door") ends with the speaker opening the bedroom door in the present tense. **The suspense is built further in the following three word sentence "The curtains stir", as the appearance of the lover is held up until the final sentence. 'Over' is a mirror image of this poem in that the speaker is in the present tense, and uses a proleptic reference in the past tenses of her memories.**<sup>5</sup>

In both poems, the move between past and present is positive. Duffy repeats the image of a door opening, and keys unlocking to create this impression of increasing freedom. In both, light and dark also symbolise a development: the dawn replaces the "black sky" in 'Over'; the moon provides the light to see the lover on the bed in 'You'. **It is as though 'Over' refers to 'You' in this respect. The "spell" of the name in 'You', for example, that sounds out in the sibilance of the third line ("soft" "salt" "sound" syllables"), is absent, but mentioned in 'Over'. This speaker hasn't got the reassurance of a name to repeat, and this desperation is emphasised by the number of hard sounds in the repeated "k" in the first three lines ("dark", "black" "sky" "speak" "skelf"). Animals also appear in both: an imagined tiger captures the wildness and power of the love-sick heart in 'You', and it is a bird that "pierces" the hour rather than threatens to kill in 'Over'. The bird symbolises the move from silence to sound, from hours that last forever, to one that is controlled and conquered, from dark to light, and from desperation to hope.**<sup>6</sup>

The similarities continue to the final line where the imagery of "a gift" is repeated. In 'You' the lover is "like a gift", and in 'Over' it is a gift of hope brought about by a positive memory. The image of a gift is only used elsewhere once in 'Grief' and it seems deliberate that it should appear on the final line of the first and last poems in this collection. The simile "like a gift" might, however, create a sense of doubt in the reader's mind. The verbs associated with this lover ("strolled", "sprawled", "staring") suggests a casualness and confrontation, and the reader is left to question whether it is ever a good idea to touch a dream. A dream is something that should be separate from our senses in the real world. In contrast, the metaphor of "a gift" in the final line of 'Over' has a more positive tone. The nouns of the "song" and "dawn" and the verbs "begin" and "bring" imply a new start, and a movement forward. The future of 'You' unfolds throughout the narrative of the collection, while the future of 'Over' is only hinted at.

Overall comment:

This response demonstrates an excellent knowledge of the poems, and of the relevant literary contexts such as the position of the poems in the collection, and a recognition of the relevance of the sonnet form, for example. It also makes interesting connections between the poems, selecting stylistic and poetic features as part of a coherent analysis and interpretation.

**5. A01:** Use of effective vocabulary and terminology, to analyse the connections between the poems.

**6. A04:** Interesting points of connection made between the poems, with apt selection of stylistic and poetic features.



## QUESTION 12: JACOB SAM-LA ROSE

Compare the ways Sam-La Rose uses language and poetic techniques in 'Talk This Way' and 'Speechless V'.

Support your answer with reference to relevant contextual factors.

The title of this collection is *Breaking Silence* and both these poems focus on characters finding a way to express themselves. In 'Talk This Way', the speaker thanks all the things that have helped to form the way he speaks, but he then looks to the future at the end as he states a need to find his own voice. In 'Speechless V' it is the students who learn to articulate feelings in metaphors and poetry. In both poems it is the specific vocabulary of "Guyanese", "guava", "cassava", "casrip" and "Rock Club", "Hangman", "Bangladesh", "red Honda generator" that helps to define the voices and people and to individualise them.

The division between spoken and written word is clear in 'Speechless V'. Again, like many of Sam-La Rose's poems, this is written in the first person. However, unlike 'Talk This Way', there is both direct and reported speech. The abbreviations of "I've" and "they're" and the idioms of "kicks out" etc., and the use of a hyphen in the fourth line, for example, create the impression of an informal voice. However, this seems a similar voice to the one in 'Talk This Way' as the low frequency lexis of "requisite" and "proclaiming", for example, are perhaps more typical of the written word. The formality is also clear in line 6, where the official language of education can be heard in the phrase "a valuable opportunity to learn". Contrasted to this is the informality of the direct speech of the students. The words in italics stand out graphologically from the rest of the poem, and are also exceptional because they are monosyllabic. The colloquial words "man", "dumb", and "kids" mark the difference between the speaker who uses words such as "prerequisite" and the teachers who see the task as a "valuable opportunity."<sup>2</sup>

The difference is also evident in the choice of the verb to describe the girls' speech: "squealing" which connotes a slightly uncontrolled, dehumanised sound. This is emphasised by the speaker admitting that he does not understand what they have said. The sense of separation between the students and the speaker is created, too, in the use of the demonstrative pronoun "that" instead of "who": "The ones that..." "the girl that lacks"). "That" usually refers to a thing, and "who" to a person, but these students are concealing their human qualities, as is clear in the image of the "boy with a desk for a face".<sup>3</sup>

**1. A03/A04:** Successful placing of the poems in a wider context, and finding an initial connection between them.

**2. A02:** Sustained analysis of stylistic features – carefully selected.

**3. A03:** Significant features of the language selected in order to develop a sustained argument about the separation of the speaker from the students.



Many of Sam-La Rose's poems focus on the struggle to express, or to make sense of something, and often it is words that help this process. **The imagery of 'Talk This Way' repeats the idea of constriction and release through words in the adjectives and verbs in the central section of the poem. The verb "pressed" is repeated twice to suggest that these influences are restrictive in some way, as does the verb "smuggled" and "beneath".**<sup>4</sup> In contrast, the freedom of "unfettered" in line 9, is picked up in the adjective "spilt" and the verb "loosed". The sense of release is then developed in the extended metaphor of the music "melting". There is the freedom of the liquid metal, and the connotations of magic are evident in the image of the cauldron. The single sentence builds to the crescendo of a supernatural re-birth of the speaker's voice, finishing with the only reference to sound in the whole poem: "wailing". The "empty spaces" and "silence" then give way to a hyphen, and the break in the stanza illustrates the meaning of the line, forcing the reader to wait for the end of the sentence, and slowing down the pace. The final monosyllabic line therefore seems more dramatic, and the turning point from the past to the future becomes clear.

**4. A02:** Interesting interpretation, although the analysis does not feel entirely controlled, and the connection between the way in which words in "Talk This Way" both help and restrict expression could be further developed.

While 'Talk This Way' is full of metaphor, in 'Speechless V' the metaphors almost exclusively relate to the poetry written by the students. Characteristically, in Sam-La Rose's poetry, objects are personified (the light bulb "guzzles the mains" in 'Song for a Spent 100W Bulb', for example, and in 'Talk this Way', a "brogue" can be "birthed"), but this doesn't happen in 'Speechless V' until the speaker reports on the students' poetry. In verse 7, the girl's image of being like a "broken slot machine" is followed by the speaker's metaphorical use of the word "fissure". When the boy's work is described, the speaker provides a metaphor of the oxymoronic "black and beautiful light" of depression before the boy's image of the "warm, dark pool". It is clear that the language of the speaker and the language of the students are becoming more similar, to the extent that both the speaker and the boy use the lexical echoes of "black" and "dark".

In 'Magnitude' the speaker is teaching how to make the abstract concrete, and both 'Talk This Way' and 'Speechless V' illustrate this process. The formation of the voice is captured in concrete nouns of music, food, clothes etc., and the individuality of the students in 'Speechless V' is captured in the comparison with machines. An important part of this process in 'Speechless V' seems to lie in the need to write down the ideas, rather than just say them. In the poem before this one, the power of the written word is celebrated as a way to communicate things that are otherwise unsaid. **Sam-La Rose is a performance poet as well as a published poet,**<sup>5</sup> and there are lexical contrasts in 'Speechless V' between the written word ("writing" (x2), "write" (x3), "scribe") and the spoken word ("speak" (x2), "said", "ask" (x2), "squealing", "proclaiming", "says", "whispers", "read", "sound" (x2)). In a collection called Breaking Silence it is not surprising that there are more references to the spoken word than to the written word.

**5. A03:** Reference to wider context, linked neatly to the preoccupation of both the spoken and the written word in Sam-La Rose's poetry.

In common with many of the poems in this collection, 'Speechless V' and 'Talk This Way' explore how complicated it is to find a voice. While the boy in 'Speechless V' may refuse to write, 'Talk This Way' suggests that eventually the voice will emerge through music, and sound, and speech, and the silence will be broken.

Overall comment:

This response demonstrates a sound understanding and knowledge of Sam La-Rose's poetry. Vocabulary and terminology are used effectively to support a poetic and stylistic analysis and interesting points of connection are made between the poems discussed. The essay also attempts to make connections between the poems and the wider context of Sam-La Rose's poetry and his role as a performance poet. A coherent interpretation is developed, with significant features fluently analysed.



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