

ENGLISH

LEAVING CERTIFICATE HIGHER LEVEL

PAPER 2 SAMPLE ANSWERS



**THE DUBLIN
ACADEMY OF
EDUCATION**

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Option 1

Uncertainty is something we as humans must deal with on a daily basis in every aspect of our lives. We are faced with uncertainty every time we are faced with a choice. We are also faced with uncertainty each and every time we interact with others because as much as we may want to, we never truly can know what others are thinking. We can never know with one hundred percent certainty how people perceive us, what they are thinking, or what they might be planning in their heads. But uncertainty is what makes life interesting and colourful. Ironically, it is what adds drama to the otherwise mundane world. It is exciting not knowing what might come next, and it would appear that the great master playwright, William Shakespeare, was acutely aware of this. From the ambiguity surrounding the existence of the ghost, to the dubious nature of Hamlet's sanity, uncertainty is irrevocably one of the main elements that permeates every facet of the play, "Hamlet". The clever use of the questionable and unclear contributes significantly to the dramatic aspect of the play, enthralling the audience and making us question every moment.

It is clear even from the opening line in the very first scene of the play that the story will be fraught with doubt and uncertainty. In this scene we see one of the foot soldiers, Barnardo, on watch duty in the Castle of Elsinore. He opens the play by calling out to some unknown, unseen character "who's there?". The effect this single question has on the audience is evident if you have ever seen this play live. The tension in the theatre is palpable and everyone feels as much alertness as the characters. However, we are quickly lured into a false sense of security when we realise it is just another foot soldier coming to take over the shift. So, when the Ghost enters, we feel uncertainty and even fear. The characters are unsure of what this "apparition" really is and enlist Horatio, a friend of Hamlet's, to "question it". Unfortunately, it refuses to speak and leaves the characters and the audience in an even worse state of unknowing and unease. The fact that we are unsure of this "portentous figure's" intentions and whether they are benevolent and innocent or malign and evil is frightening and has a gripping effect on the audience. However, we also learn that Hamlet himself does not even trust the Ghost and is uncertain if it is being truthful or telling lies. He cannot tell if what the ghost is saying about Claudius having murdered his father is true. In fact, it is only after Claudius' clear, visceral reaction to the Mouse Trap play, orchestrated by Hamlet, that Hamlet actually believes the Ghost. All of this doubt and uncertainty adds immensely to the dramatic aspect of the play and is one of the main reasons the audience remains engaged throughout.

One of the primary sources of uncertainty in this play surrounds the eponymous character, Hamlet. By nature, Hamlet is intelligent and extremely cerebral. His over-analysis of situations and possible outcomes in fact frequently leads to a total lack of action on his part. This could not be more evident than when he promises to avenge his father "with wings as swift as meditation or the thoughts of love", but only follows through with this vow at the very end of the play. Even when Hamlet comes across Claudius in the chapel and notices that the perfect opportunity to strike is right in front of him, he decides not to go through with his plan. He feels uncertain as to whether this might actually send the "villain" who killed his father to

“heaven”. This uncertainty and worry is ironic considering Claudius will most definitely not be going to heaven since he has already committed regicide. However, the ambiguity around Hamlet’s actions also contribute significantly to the play as we are constantly left wondering if and when he might act and finally avenge his father.

The uncertainty surrounding Hamlet’s character is further compounded when we suddenly see a stark juxtaposition in his character later on in the play. Sure, considering Hamlet was worried that Claudius might end up in heaven if he died whilst praying, it could be said that Hamlet, in this moment, had good reason to leave Claudius and kill him some other time. However, he never expressed any thought let alone worry when he stabbed impulsively at a tapestry behind which Polonius was hiding. When Hamlet goes to speak to Gertrude, he is unaware of the fact that Polonius is hiding behind the arras. When things become heated and Gertrude calls out “help!”, so too does Polonius. Upon hearing this intruder behind the tapestry, Hamlet, in a moment of reactivity and recklessness, stabs the arras, unaware of who is behind it. Until this point in the play, Hamlet had been nothing but passive and overly cerebral, thinking everything through, and certainly not making any sudden movements. This sudden change of character into a rash, impulsive man surprises the audience and engages us further. We now feel incredible uncertainty around the character of Hamlet and therefore, around the direction which the play may take. The dramatic impact that this contrast and inconsistency in character has on the audience, is that we begin to wonder what he might do next. We strongly feel unease and excitement simultaneously!

Another major origin of uncertainty in Hamlet’s dubious character, is his ambivalent mental state. One of the most interesting elements of this dynamic character is the controversy surrounding whether he truly did go mad, or, if he was feigning it all along. From the very outset, Hamlet says that he “perchance hereafter shall think meet to put an antic disposition on”. However, we begin to wonder over the course of the play whether all his “antics” really are fake or not. It may appear that he goes over the top sometimes in his attempt to seem mentally unstable for example when he speaks to Ophelia in Act 3 Scene 1 and intentionally wears “his doublet all unbraced, no hat upon his head”. However, we have to wonder whether his talking to Yorick’s skull is really the action of a man feigning madness, or really, a man feigning sanity. On the one hand, we could say that he is simply playing the role of the mad man as he initially said he would. However, the display of madness he puts on in the beginning of the play and his actions towards the end (even with regards to his sudden irrational state resulting in Polonius’ death), cause uncertainty to be felt and we cannot help but question, has he really gone insane? This has the effect of provoking the audience to question his mental stability. But it also raises the daunting question, if we act in a certain way for long enough, do we ultimately become this character we conjured up in the first place?

Hamlet and Ophelia's relationship is complex and tense to say the least. First, we hear directly from Ophelia that he "hath made honourable tenders as of late". This leads us to believe he is in love with Ophelia and therefore, contextually speaking, he had plans to marry her. However, the first seed of doubt is planted in the minds of the audience when Ophelia's father, Polonius, and her elder brother, Laertes, suggest that his professions of love are empty because as a prince he cannot just marry whomever he likes. Polonius urges Ophelia to confront Hamlet about his "love" for her which she dutifully does. However, by this stage Hamlet has already decided he will feign madness and so, turns up in an unkempt, wild state with "his stockings foul'd". He begins to rant and rave about life and the morality of men, as well as going on a diatribe against women, his hatred for them crystal clear. He even goes so far as to say that women make "monsters" of men. Now we begin to feel uncertain about the love he felt for Ophelia despite the fact that he says he "loved [her] once". The ambiguity of whether he ever really loved her and simply fell out of love with her, or, whether he was feigning his hatred for Ophelia, causes a whirlwind of questions to flood our minds. It adds a dash of romance to an already fascinating, enthralling play.

Paragraph 7: Hamlet's relationship with Gertrude... is he simply angry she married Claudius and so soon?... Or is there an element of incest... Oedipus complex...

Paragraph 8: the famous soliloquy "To be or not to be" ... raises questions around suicide... sin... religion... morality etc

Conclusion

W.B. Yeats once said “there is another world, but it is in this one”, I feel this phrase is apt when reading Yeats’s poetry. He has a remarkable ability to immerse the reader in his writings. His use of carefully selected language that paint striking images about topics such as history, particularly in ‘September 1913’, end up absorbing the reader so much that it almost feels like we are witnessing the events of the poem first hand. Yeats’ continues this theme of absorption in the ‘Lake Isle of Innisfree’, he imparts the comforting sense of coming home, that the majority of us are familiar with, with the biblical legend the ‘Prodigal Son’. His choice of soft syllables and onomatopoeia create a sense of home. Yeats’ often draws on familiar yet fascinating ideas to engage his readers, he reflects on the history of his love life, particularly the loss of love, in his poem ‘The Wild Swans at Coole’, using melancholic symbolism. Yeats’ is consistently trying to connect his readers to his poetry through what is recognizable in order for them to relate, ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ and ‘Under Ben Bulbin’ do just that through their incorporation of Irish and Greek history and mythology that constructs vivid images using metaphor. Yeats’ is a skilful yet delicate poet, who not only undertakes to confer his ideas but immerse his readers into his world of poetry.

Yeats’ lived through such a prominent time in Irish history, that it is no surprise many of his poems include these historic events. In his poem ‘September 1913’, he expresses his views on the 1913 lockout and the state that Ireland is in at this point in time. The poem opens with a sarcastic and bitter tone suggesting Yeats is disgusted with Ireland. He plays on the word ‘save’, ‘for men were born to pray and save’, suggesting that he isn’t happy with how the rich people of Ireland are controlling his beloved country. The play on the word ‘save’ hints that Yeats observes the rich man saving all his money but his soul won’t be saved because of his greed. Yeats refers to the idea that that the prayers these men pray are not out of spirituality but out of fear for their selfish actions, ‘prayer to shivering prayer’. Yeats has no fear voicing his aversion of Ireland’s state, he repeats the phrase ‘romantic Irelands dead and gone, it’s with O’Leary in the grave’. The reference to John O’Leary who fought so hard for an independent Ireland and who was someone that Yeats admired reinforces his frustration with the situation in Ireland. Yeats creates a striking image of a defeated and bloody Ireland and he questions the people, did the likes of Wolfe Tone and Fitzgerald die in vain? ‘That all that blood was shed’. Yeats creates an atmosphere that 1913 Ireland was a selfish and cynical time and the great war heroes died ‘for this’. It’s evident that Yeats is a true patriot of his country but that he is struggling to overcome how much Ireland has fallen. There is no mention of the future or hope within the final stanza, indicating that Yeats has become quite disheartened, he doesn’t see any way forward for his beloved country.

Despite the troublesome state that Ireland was in, Yeats still adores his homeland. In his poem 'Lake Isle of Innisfree', Yeats draws on the biblical legend of the 'Prodigal son' to express his longing to be home. When he wrote this poem, Yeats was living in London and his admiration for his homeland was apparent. He opens the poem with the phrase 'I will arise and go no'. The repetition of the simple word 'go' conveys the stress and anxiety that Yeats so much wishes to be at home, much like the Prodigal son. He creates a comforting, peaceful atmosphere through his use of sibilance and onomatopoeia, 'sounds by the shore'. Yeats has a proficient skill of constructing an image within the readers mind, that it feels so much like we are experiencing what he is expressing. He constructs a scene of comfort and relaxation that the lake isle of Innisfree has to offer in comparison to the hustle and bustle of a busy city. His return to his homeland will be wonderful much like the Prodigal son's return, he establishes that even nature will be joyous with his return with the 'midnights all a glimmer'. It's evident, despite the grievances he defines in other poems, that Yeats has a desire to be at home. The imagery he has created through his harmonious language appeals to us readers as well. He creates a desire within us to be at the lake isle.

When we think of history, we think of events in the past. While Yeats explores political and social history within his poetry, he dives into reflecting on the history of his love life in his poem 'The Wild Swans at Coole'. The poem is set at dusk and the reference to 'Autumn beauty' and 'October twilight' suggests that Yeats is at the later stages of his life and reflecting back on his choices in the matter of the heart. He draws on the symbol of the swan to do so. Swans are an elegant creature and symbolise love and romance. Yeats observing the swans says 'nine and fifty swans', which is unusual because swans more often travel in pairings. We can divulge that the swans represent Yeats and that he is lonely with no one to love. This idea is reinforced when he says 'the heart is sore'. His word choice is quite sombre and encourages an idea of what could have been. His use of short harsh vowels in the words 'trod' and 'tread' suggest he has lost love and he is feeling a sense of animosity. This idea is reinforced with the reference to 'broken rings', hinting that a marriage or serious relationship has broken down. Reflecting on the history of his love life is quite a mournful task for Yeats, however he is such an exhilarating poet because he does not shy away from the harsh realities of life.

Paragraph 5: 'Sailing to Byzantium'

- Yeats is growing older and confronting the harsh realities of aging.
- Reference to biblical legend/myth of the three wise men
- Use of metaphors to depict aging
- Rhyme – creates a rhythm of a decreasing heart rate

Paragraph 6: 'Under Ben Bulbin'

- Yeats' valediction to Irish poetry.
- Strong themes of Irishness and Irish History
- Untraditional form – Yeats encouraging creativity and originality of them poem
- Imagery of Irish life

Paragraph 7: Conclusion

- Link main points back to thesis

As a poet who once said that “The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt”, Sylvia Plath shows no fear in confronting a myriad of issues that stretch far outside the public conversation in her poetry. Her poems show that she had the courage to write about feelings of powerlessness and lack of hope alongside those of optimism and love. In my opinion, her mastery of language is shown impeccably through her use of stylistic features in an innovative way to convey both overwhelming wonder and unsettling menace in her work. She successfully challenges traditional poetry through various different stylistic features to display to us a spectrum of different themes of both awe and peril in her work. She displays these feelings of both overwhelming wonder and unsettling menace through the lens of her own opinions of herself as a mother, a wife, and a poet. Her poetry journeys from being locked into convention to a much freer form as she moves from fear of menace and creativity to an adoration for the absurd. Her stylistic features serve to highlight the interesting, innovative topics dealt with in her work as we will see through the dissection of her poetry.

Commencing first with her opinions of herself as a mother, we see Plath use stylistic features, in an innovative and complex way, as she criticizes her parenting ability. The imagery she creates evoked contrasting emotions of both unease and warmth within me. Firstly in “Child”, we observe an extremely unconventionally structured poem as Plath wrote with an overwhelming sense of urgency, clambering together her final thoughts only weeks before she took her life. The intensity of this poem is evident throughout as we feel almost a part of a very personal, direct, and desperate communication between Plath and the child she was unable to care for. The title and opening line suggest innocence, control, and certainty, as Plath creates a superlative image of overwhelming wonder for us, “your clear eye is the one absolutely beautiful thing”. This image stands alone, punctuated from the rest of the poem's continuous enjambment, as I feel Plath wanted us to meditate on the positivity of this line before delving into the intense emotional imagery of this poem. The unique enjambment within this poem is an innovative way for Plath to control the emotions of the audience. Similarly, the word “little” stands on its own in the poem, as the pause accentuates the highly emotional tone of this moment. Plath urges us to experience the inner turmoil and menace she feels as a mother in this exact moment.

Following from this positive opening of wonder and awe, we see an innovative juxtaposition in the tone of this poem where Plath uses startling imagery to grip the audience and display her unsettling emotions. She describes her child as a “little stalk without wrinkle”, an “April snowdrop”, her “beautiful thing” untouched by the harmful reality of life. Someone who deserves “the zoo of the new”, a world filled with “colours and ducks”, memorable and undamaged. However, in stark, dark contrast to this she imagines herself as an “Indian pipe” a flower which parasitically eats and destroys all that surrounds it, surviving in the darkest of environments as it requires no light to live. This provocative image clearly demonstrates to us the intense struggle and insufficiency Plath feels as a mother. She feels trapped and isolated in this role, like a “dark ceiling without a star”, she sees no possibility for change or hope. This morbid imagery highlights the mental anguish and fragility of the poet and displays the intense emotions of this poem. Plath uses a myriad of symbols from nature as a stylistic feature in this poem to convey a moment of overwhelming

wonder, followed by a tirade of unsettling menace and horror. It is clear to see why this poignant poem is arguably Plath's masterpiece.

Similar to this poem, in "Morning Song", Plath gives us an insight into the overwhelming wonder of her role as a mother in a more positive poem. Unlike "Child", this poem follows a convention, uniform structure displaying to us Plath has control in this moment. Plath immediately commences with lots of superlative, precious language to display to us the importance of this new baby in her life, "love set you going like a fat gold clock". However, slowly through the poem Plath uses various stylistic features in an innovative way to demonstrate to us that while she celebrates the joy of this child she feels uncomfortable, and possibly slight inadequate, in the role. We begin to see a slightly unsettling element to the poem as I felt Plath was reminded that as this new baby takes its "place among the elements" in the world, she herself is transient and mortal. I personally found the image in the poem "your nakedness shadows our safety. We stand around blankly as walls" had a very unsettling menace about it as the oxymoronic, bizarre simile felt very distant and emotionless. The image created is detached from what one would expect a family with a new baby to act. This may possibly be Plath efforts to show us that while she longs to display the overwhelming wonder of these moments, the overwhelming menace of her fear and vulnerability "shadows" that hope for her.

In the third stanza of this poem, we are met with another jarring moment as Plath states "I am no more your mother than the cloud that distils a mirror to reflect its own slow effacement at the wind's hand". This line gripped me by the unsettling nature of it, as Plath feels she has lost a part of herself and her poetic ability to this child, and the innovation of this line is seen in the stylistic feature of the word "effacement". Plath shows her mastery of language as she uses this double entendre having a meaning as a pregnancy term but also to dissipate and be left with nothing. This line explores the contradictions of parenthood brings, that while the child is born of love, its birth means losing part of oneself. The poem ends on the final image of "the clear vowels rise like balloons", leaving us with a beautiful, positive tone that every noise this child makes encapsulates her happiness. Plath writes this poem with a sense of distance yet also intimacy and joy as she attempts to use stylistic features in an innovative way to convey both overwhelming wonder and unsettling menace in relation to motherhood.

Following from Plath's views of herself as a mother, we move to her personal image as a wife. In both "Poppies in July" and "Arrival of the Bee Box" we witness Plath's use of stylistic features in an innovative way to convey both overwhelming wonder and unsettling menace of her experience as a wife. In "Poppies in July", we observe a confessional, arresting poem about her feelings of obtundation after Ted Hughes' infidelity. Although the title has positive, wonderous connotations, there is a stark juxtaposition with the intensely negative, menacing content of the poem. through intelligent stylistic features, Plath describes her emptiness as she exists but doesn't live following the pain of her break up with Hughes. Plath explains her longing to experience physical pain of any kind rather than her emotional torment, "little hell flames ,do you do no harm...I put my hands among the flames. Nothing burns". Plath longs for her better time of

wonder in the past as she relates back to the first time her and Ted met when she bit him, “clear, red, like the skin of a moth. A mouth just bloodied” “if my mouth could marry a hurt like that!”. This sad, stylistic comparison left a feeling poignant devastation in me as a reader, as I felt the unsettling menace of Plath’s nostalgic pain as she longs to escape the intolerable psychological strain she is currently feeling. At this moment, the underlying, unsettling menace of the title became apparent to me as Plath is exhausted by the vividness of her thoughts like she is by the constant, clambering motion of the Poppies, “it exhausts me to watch you”, and Plath longs to detach from the world and lose her pain and suffering, possibly using opiates (the drug derived from opium in Poppies). The poem concludes on the most ominous and unsettling line “but colourless, colourless”, Plath leaves us to ponder the meaning of this line, with possible relation to the gas fumes from her cause of death, the obtundation of her meaningless existence, or the black, nothingness of death. This foreshadowing conclusion and intense poem encapsulates how successful Plath is at using stylistic features in an innovative way to convey both overwhelming wonder and unsettling menace.

Paragraph 7: on the same point (opinion of herself as a wife), “Arrival of the Bee Box”, unsettling menace only, extended metaphor for her mental anguish and inner turmoil

Paragraph 8: opinion of herself as a writer, “Black Rook in Rainy Weather” and “Mirror”, unsettling menace in both, moments of overwhelming wonder in Black Rook as Plath locates inspiration to write

Conclusion: LOQ (successful, stylistic features innovative way, overwhelming wonder unsettling menace), re-list AOF from introduction (herself as a mother, wife, and writer), concluding line (summarising opinion of Plath with impactful language)

Seamus Heaney is exceptional in his ability to teach us myriad of profound lessons through his poetry. With a camera-like eye for detail, he manages to authentically capture the reality of life, with a sense of relevance and relatability like no other. Heaney transforms the familiar and mundane in life, such as his Irish identity and history, memories, and different types of love, into masterful poetry and images through his powerful use of language. Heaney tends to write with heavily descriptive, sensuous, but conversational style language. As a result of this, he often achieves a warm, sensitive, and sympathetic tone in his writing. He writes about contemporary events but sometimes in an abstract manner, through metaphors which are frequently original and thought-provoking. This unique style of Heaney's poetry resonated greatly with me and enabled me to learn a range of profound lessons through his familiar, mundane, relatable topics, and powerful use of language.

Commencing firstly with Heaney's Irish identity, he explores the lessons of his Irishness and personal Irish identity, particularly the culture's history, myths and politics, through his powerful use of language. Place and a sense of place is central to Heaney's poetry. This lesson of personal identity can be seen in "Bogland" and "The Postscript". In "Bogland", Heaney uses mundane and familiar imagery to describe the mysterious nature of the bog. The poem centres around the place, the past, memory, and poetry itself. The bogland is in itself a metaphor for Irishness as Heaney uses the idea of the bog in a literal and symbolic way, to represent the collective unconscious of the Irish people. Heaney uses the striking imagery of the "unfenced country" with ground of "kind, black butter melting and opening underfoot" to assist us in visualising the tactile landscape. As the poem progresses, it becomes evident that bogs, and the secrets they hold are a source of tremendous fascination for Heaney. He depicts them as storehouses for the past which preserve the culture of the people who came "millions of years" before him. The image of pioneers that "keep striking inwards and downwards" suggests the depth and complexity of racial consciousness, that it is multi-layered and incapable of total revelation. "Bogland" is evidently not just a landscape poem, Heaney uses familiar, mundane, memorable imagery of the beautiful landscape to teach us profound lessons of the Irish culture. Heaney comments that while the American prairies symbolise the outward-looking attitude of openness and lack of limitations, the Irish mentality is more inward-looking and restricted, refusing to let go of the past, preserving that which has become mainly useless or "full of air" like the "skeleton of the Great Irish Elk".

The final stanza of "Bogland" seems inconclusive, or "bottomless". The stripping away of the layers only reveals more layers which seem "camped on before". Heaney uses this tactile, visual image to symbolise both the Irish psyche and also his own search as a poet to find identity and truth. Like a traditional Irish farmer, he digs, but instead of bog, into the layers of his subconscious, uncovering the memories and emotions that define him as a person and inspire him as a poet. The simplicity of Heaney's familiar, mundane words yet depth within Heaney's writing is inspiring and powerful, something that I believe everyone can enjoy and appreciate. Heaney teaches us the profound lessons of respect for your identity and culture through admiration for the scene that surrounds him.

In "The Postscript", Heaney similarly describes a beautiful, Irish scene. The title of the poem struck me as its connotations suggest it is not something of importance, but rather a gentle reminder of the beauty of the natural world. Heaney suggests that we "drive out west" to "County Clare" when the tourists have gone and the "wind and the light are working off each other". Heaney describes the "wind and the light" as if he wants us to paint a picture in our minds of the landscape of this poem. The "surface of a slate-grey lake" stands in contrast to the white "flock of swans" whose feathers are "roughed and ruffling". The simplicity of the poetic style and familiar imagery not only made it easy for me to enjoy and appreciate Heaney's poems on a personal level, but also makes it accessible and appealing to all. Heaney allows us to imagine his own personal experiences in life and the bond he shares with his country and culture. Heaney attempts to capture the transient beauty of this mundane moment through his imagery, telling us its "useless to think you'll park and capture it", for its not about the scene but the impact the moment has on you. It is a celebration of the fleeting sensation of being "neither here nor there", a celebration of tyh3m mundane moments captured in familiar places that remind us of the beauty surrounding us and more importantly a celebration of freedom. Heaney transforms the mundane and familiar in both of these poems to describe to us the beauty of the country around him through his powerful language. This teaches is a profound lesson about respect for your identity and culture.

Following from this, in "the Forge" and "The Skunks", we observe Heaney connect with different memories through powerful language used to transform the familiar and mundane moments. As "The Forge" begins, it becomes evident that the poet is recalling a memory, offering us the perspective of an outsider looking in on a period of time which cannot be revisited. He lists all of the mundane objects in sight, such as "old axles and iron hoops rusting" in order to bring the scene to life. Heaney creates a connection between the blacksmith and the poet as the "forge" is a symbol for the poetic mind and the metaphor of the blacksmith represents the crafting of a poem and his personal writing process. The poet creates a contrast in the poem between the old ways of life and the modern, between the traditional world of the blacksmith presented in "a clatter of hoofs" and the fast-moving mechanical world of modern society "where traffic is flashing in rows.". this contrast makes the poem more relatable an familiar to readers now and created a memorable image in my mind. Heaney transforms the familiar, mundane images of the forge and the work of the smith into symbols of artistic creation through his powerful use of language, thereby teaching us a profound lesson of the creative writing process and respect for the trade. Heaney is often intrigued by how the artistic process is accomplished by individuals who are in themselves, not terribly inspiring as personalities.

"The Skunk", similar to "The Forge", is a recollection of a memory, opening with Heaney in California as he is writing his wife a love letter. It centres around Heaney's time in Berkley University in California in the early 1970s, when he was apart from his wife. Overtly, Heaney makes a bold comparison between his wife and a skunk but the poem is light-hearted, humorous and affectionate. The poem is a celebration of the poet's mature relationship with his wife. It is a marriage poem, rather than a love poem. Heaney emphasises the maturity, depth, and understanding that evolves in a relationship over time. It seems alien to him to have to write the word "wife", comparing the word to a cask of wine that has been stored away, but is now about to

be opened and savoured. The incongruous tone and this comparison leads us to feel that Heaney has only realised at the start of this poem how much he missed his wife now that they are apart. The tone moves from poignant yearning to playful affection by the end. He recalls inhaling his wife's scent "off a cold pillow", the word "cold", evoking a sense of loss and solitude. The mundane, familiar images and the sensuous, tactile language grips us as readers and enables us to understand the love Heaney and his wife share and the message he wishes to spread of depth in a mature relationship.

Seamus Heaney transforms the familiar and mundane through his powerful use of language, thereby enabling us to learn a range of profound lessons from his poetry

Paragraph 7: same poem, discuss use of colour in the poem and final stanza, lesson of the poem (sense of love and gratitude)

Paragraph 8: different types of love, "The Harvest Bow"/"A Call" relationship with his father, "The Underground" unusual expression of love and marriage

Paragraph 9: conclusion, LOQ (familiar, mundane, powerful use of language, range of profound lessons), AOF, final opinion and concluding line (impact)

Upon receiving the Griffin Prize for Poetry in 2010, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin was showered with praise by the judges who said “she is a truly imaginative poet, whose imagination is authoritative and transformative. She leads us into altered or emptied landscapes... Each poem is a world complete”. I feel that this quote perfectly represents the unusual, yet relatable work of Ní Chuilleanáin as she conjures the most fascinating narratives, allowing her to explore themes which are relevant in the Ireland of today. Her stylistic traits are evident throughout her extensive anthology and contribute to the mystery, beauty, and fascination of her work. Her style of writing is often seen as being quite elusive and some may even say, difficult to access. However, with a little patience and a few readings of her poems, the meanings and relatable themes beneath the rich and obscure language become clearer. It is undeniable that her poems tell varied and profound stories of love and loss, the beginning and end of the journeys of life, and the relativity and malleability of memories. Her manipulation of violent language and religion to examine the same theme of death is admirable, while her use of ancient folklore to discuss the natural cycle of life and the concept of memory is unique and inspiring to study.

I will admit from the outset that thankfully, I cannot personally relate to the central theme explored in Ní Chuilleanáin’s poems “Fireman’s Lift” (“Lift”), and “On Lacking Killer Instinct” (“Instinct”). However, the subject of the loss of a parent is without doubt a tragic issue to which thousands of Irish people across the island and around the globe can relate, particularly in this post-pandemic era. The unusual metaphors and the rich symbolism which lace these poems afford Ní Chuilleanáin the opportunity to look back on the deaths of her own parents and share the story of her experience of these losses in a fascinating and unique way. In “Instinct” we hear Ní Chuilleanáin speak in a very confessional, conversational tone. She states quite clearly, with no ambiguity in the fourth line that “my father was dying in a hospital”. This detached, emotionless, almost clinical tone allows her to open up this difficult topic almost by simply stating this fact as if it was not actually true of her own life. However, she quickly dispenses of this clear, and indisputable speech and reverts back to speak about the experience through indirect symbolism and metaphors. She continues the story using a “hare” to represent herself. We can assume this hare represents Ní Chuilleanáin as she gives it a gender, referring to it as “her”, and talking about “her bright eye”. The deliberate use of the words “speed and fear” add motion to the poem and reflect the fear that Ní Chuilleanáin felt when she left her dying father’s sickbed. Although Ní Chuilleanáin willingly left her father as she was unable to handle the intense emotion of the situation, I think that this now must be a horrifically relatable thing for so many people around Ireland who suddenly had no choice but to leave loved ones on their own in hospital beds when visiting restrictions were put in place in hospitals around the country in early 2020. I think that the final line in the poem is particularly fascinating. It is interesting to see Ní Chuilleanáin mention “the hare, in her hour of ease”. I feel that here she is no longer using the animal to represent herself but rather she is using it as a tool of comparison. Is she suggesting that the hare who is being chased by “two greyhounds” who are out for her blood is in an easier position than she is right now? Perhaps she feels that the suffering and worry of the hare’s possible death is miniscule when compared to her own fear over her father’s imminent and inescapable death. It is certainly a strange way to recount the story of the death of a parent, but as I said, although her situation had quite contrast to that of people in contemporary Ireland, I think that it is quite relevant to our world today.

The theme of a parent's death is also evident in "Lift" as Ní Chuilleanáin examines the death of her mother in depth. However, her use of symbolism and metaphors is quite different to how she uses them in "Instinct". In "Lift" we see a much heavier focus on religion and religious iconography to tell the story of her mother's death. Despite the upsetting theme of this poem, I really enjoyed it as the religious connotations dotted throughout created an almost ethereal atmosphere which I found to be somewhat comforting. I also admired the use of a vignette about a trip to see "The Assumption", a renowned painting by Correggio, in Parma with her mother before she passed away. The use of this story around which to build the poem was ingenious. In her typical style, the title of the poem gives away very little prior to reading but it links to the extended metaphor weaved into the poem. She immediately begins to use symbolism and metaphors to tell this all-too-relatable story. I felt the comparison of the hospital staff who were "crowding her" mother with support and care being like "celestial choirs" was very appropriate. I think the beautiful image of the "Virgin spiralling to heaven" would be of great comfort to anyone who could relate to the poem through the death of a mother as there is a strong sense of her being supported and lifted into the heavens by these altruistic people. The idea of her mother being in a place of eternal peace is beyond reassuring and consoling and anyone would be happy to think of their loved ones moving on to a place like this after death.

Ní Chuilleanáin takes a different approach to extensively examine a similar theme in her poems "The Bend in the Road" ("Bend") and "To Niall Woods and Xenya Ostrovskaja, Married in Dublin on 9 September 2009" ("Niall"). The theme she explores in these two contrasting poems is the beginning and end of the journey of life. We see Ní Chuilleanáin take a very interesting approach to "Bend" when she uses a mysterious style to look at the nature of life and the death of her sister. Once again in typical Ní Chuilleanáin style the title is very ambiguous and does not reveal very much about the subject matter of the poem. In fact, we only gain a real understanding of the meaning behind the poem at the end. Her use of light and dark imagery creates a cryptic feeling, and we are uncertain where the poem is taking us. The image of the "shadow of a house" suggests something dark, while the sense of stillness conjured by the line "nothing moved" relates to the stillness of death, making us feel uneasy the pathetic fallacy of the "one cumulus cloud in a perfect sky" suggests the idea of a perfect life except for one dark, ugly thing. Of course, having studied the poem we know now that Ní Chuilleanáin wrote it after the untimely death of her sister, however, it is the pointed use of non-descript words such as "the absences" and "the faces" which allows people to relate to the poem. Death is a universal fact of the journey of all life and so, the absences and faces she refers to could be with regards to anyone. I think this is one of the key reasons why Ní Chuilleanáin's work remains some of the most loved and cherished today- the stories she tells, although personal and confessional, often have a non-specific aspect to them which opens the door for the reader to interpret them and relate them to their own lives.

Similarly, the journey of life is examined in depth in "Niall", although this time, Ní Chuilleanáin focuses on an entirely different rite of passage. In this poem, she highlights one of the many beginnings in life, rather than the ultimate end. Unlike most of her other work, the title of "Niall" tells the reader instantly what the subject and the purpose of the writing is. She awards the reader the opportunity to relate to this very personal poem by incorporating ancient Irish mythology and folklore to describe her expectations, thoughts, and hopes for

her son and his new wife on their wedding day. We see a lot of humour in her language, and a jovial, upbeat tone is heard throughout the piece. Interestingly, we also glimpse a mischievous side to Ní Chuilleanáin which we don't often see, as she inserts a number of religious references such as the "half a loaf" and the "Book of Ruth"- despite this poem having been written with the purpose of being read aloud at the secular ceremony! I found the subtle slight at her son's new wife in the line about the "King of Ireland's Son and the Enchanter's Daughter" to be quite entertaining as it reminded me of the trope of the stereotypical Irish Mammy and her son- something which many of us can relate to if we have brothers! I thoroughly enjoyed this poem as she explored the theme of the path of life and a beginning to which many people can relate by using Irish mythology and humour. This undeniably added both beauty and mystery to the piece.

Paragraph 6: "Following" and "Streets"- use of obscure language... suggests Hansel and Gretel... "dark shining drops on the paving", "three drops of the heart's blood", like breadcrumbs... discusses memories... violent, visual, visceral.

Paragraph 7: "Streets"- separate but connected stanzas... relates to connection between memories in life... how they can be remembered differently by different people, how our mind alters them sometimes... idea of hiding memories in a book, cannot see them but they are there... mysterious.

Conclusion

Emily Dickinson has been described as 'feeling what she does and she feels it in all its strangeness more deeply'. Dickinson has a unique and dark approach to poetry, while she is vivid in her descriptions like describing her own funeral and death in 'I Heard a Fly Buzz when I Died' and 'I Felt a Funeral in My Brain', to say she has an energetic style would be quite wrong. Dickinson dares to explore the strangeness and incomprehensible aspects of our world. She encapsulates her readers and encourages them to question the human condition through her use of sombre and melancholic tones like in 'After Great Pain a Formal Feeling Comes'. Dickinson was quite shy to experience the world and lead a reclusive path, while she did have a fascination with living, her focus tended to zone in on the struggles and grim side like in her poem 'There's a Certain Slant of Light', she explores her oppressive religion and constant fear of death. We can see in her poems 'Hope is Thing with Feathers' and 'A Bird Came Down the Walk', she was eager for a connection and through her striking use of nature images we understand her desire to not just exist but to attain a fulfilling lifestyle. It makes us all the more sympathetic to Dickinson, we begin to see her reclusive life lead her to focus on the gloomy aspects of living and unable to experience the rich and colourful elements of the world.

Dickinson explores her fascination with the darker side of life and its dark experiences throughout her poem 'I Felt a Funeral in my Brain'. Her poem focuses on the idea of being conscious in a coffin throughout her own funeral. She vividly describes her funeral using the sense of sound, she states she heard 'mourners to and fro', a typical funeral scene. Her tone is lacking energy and is more so on the melancholic side which is appropriate for a funeral. I feel Dickinson may have had a fear of being buried alive or not being able to experience being dead. This fear may have resulted in her reclusive lifestyle and as a result deprived her of life's rich experiences. She creates an eerie atmosphere using a simile, 'service, like a drum beating'. She forms an image that death is attempting to get to her and is almost knocking away at her. She suggests that her 'mind going numb', implying she is slowly dying and she is becoming drowsy. She spurs her readers into a feeling of alarm, we begin to question Dickinson's state of mind when she wrote this poem. She creates a sharp image of death and says 'being but an ear... solitary here', implying that it is just her and death now and all she can do is listen to the silence forever. Her chilling image of her and the silence evokes a sense of fear within her readers. Her use of caesuras really creates a sense of drama and compels readers to think what now? She says 'finished knowing – then –'. I feel the caesuras imply she has finally taken her last breathe. I think the caesuras represent the abruptness of death that while Dickinson was dying throughout her poem, death can be so hasty to stop you mid-sentence. Dickinson's obsession with death and dying is astonishing and her animated exploration of what she thought this experience would be like is quite fascinating.

Dickinson's poetry was like her diary, she expressed her deepest fears and emotions, many of these fears she painted quite strikingly. In her poem 'After Great Pain a Formal Feeling Comes', she shares an overwhelming emotional pain she is feeling. Again, Dickinson focuses on the dull side of life and seems to be unable to enjoy and connect with life. She says that her nerves 'sit ceremonious like tombs', her use of simile invites the reader to understand that she is feeling numb and her heart is feeling cold like the stone in a tomb. Dickinson's use of hyperbole heightens this idea of her inability to savour life and all it has to offer when she says 'the stiff heart questions was it he, that bore, and yesterday, or centuries before'. She implies she has been feeling this pessimistic for so long that she can't remember the last time she felt something. We feel a sense of concern, when she mentions that 'the feet, mechanical, go round', Dickinson implies that she isn't living but that she is just existing in this world. We feel sympathetic towards Dickinson, for her to share such a dark time in her life must have been very difficult. She paints a dramatic image of the shadowy aspect of life in the last two ambiguous lines of her poem. She mentions 'freezing persons', I feel it is an indication to the fact she is losing any sense of emotion and will to live, she's numb. Her last line causes a lot of worry, with the use of caesuras, she says 'first – chill – then stupor – then letting go –'. We begin to wonder as readers, has Dickinson let go of what has been bothering her or like in 'I Felt a Funeral in my Brain', I feel the caesura indicates that she has lost any will to live and embrace life from this pain.

It is evident, Dickinson lacked any real love of life and the experiences it had to offer. She seemed to focus on the gloomy elements, however I feel after studying her poem, 'I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died', she is attempting to pursue the idea of a 'perfect' death to demonstrate that even in dying, we can undergo a final rich experience the world has to offer. Her poem focuses on her idealistic death but also a huge fear of losing that impeccable moment. From the beginning of the poem a very morbid, dull tone is established, 'I heard a fly buzz when I died'. However, she depicts that there is a stillness and a sense of calm in the room, 'between the heavens of a storm'. The picture Dickinson is painting is her ideal final moments with mourners and family and their 'breaths gathering firm'. Dickinson's fascination with death and dying is conveyed strongly throughout the poem that it evokes the question within readers' how she lived till the age of fifty five if she was so focused on the end. She mentions the 'King' in stanza two, suggesting that death is King and she's peacefully waiting for him and is prepared for death, 'I willed my keepsakes'. Despite divulging into the dark and cruel theme of death, she has managed to create an harmonious scene with her soothing but sorrowful tone. Dickinson has thought carefully and meticulously about how she expects her experience of death and dying to take form. However, by the end of the poem, the calm picture soon changes with the annoying buzzing of a fly, 'there interposed a fly'. The fly and its uncontrollable energetic mood is symbolic of Dickinson's fear of losing control. She paints an expressive image of the fly ruining her last few moments and she emphasises this through the alliteration of the letter 'B', 'stumbling buzz- between the light and me'. The fly has intercepted her and her tranquil death something she had hoped would be a rich experience. Dickinson employs the use of caesuras again at the end of the poem, she says 'I could not see to see –', readers are questioning has she taken her final breath? I feel after reading this poem, Dickinson was theatrical portrayal in her of a 'perfect' death, which is quite astonishing, I feel she is a skilful and creative poet who encourages her readers to pursue the idea that our final moments on earth should be a rich experience like the rest of life.

Dickinson shares an insight with her readers that it was her religion that prevented her from enjoying life. In her poem 'There's a Certain Slant of Light', her melancholic and pessimistic tone is seen throughout. She sets the scene mentioning 'winter afternoons', winter is considered to be a dark and cold time of year and representative of death. She mentions that winter 'oppresses, like the heft of cathedral tunes', her reference to religion through the word 'cathedral' indicates that Dickinson may be afraid of death because she was Calvinist. Calvinism has very strong beliefs about death and dying. Predestination was a huge part, meaning it was pre-decided before you were born if you went to heaven or hell, no matter how much sin you committed or how angelic you were on earth, it was 'pre-destined'. Dickinson mentions 'heavenly hurt', implying that her fear of death may stem from the oppressive Calvinist beliefs. I feel Dickinson has anxiety about death and living, and she does wish she can neglect her religion but what if it has been decided she can enter Heaven. I also feel Dickinson may be worried about committing a sin and that God may re-think his decision if she was pre-destined for heaven. There's no way she can know for certain and it seems to be a very heavy burden on her. She is suffering from serious spiritual pain, she mentions there's 'no scar but internal difference' Her struggle is hurting her heart and it makes us, her readers, sympathetic to her. The use of the word 'slant' indicates there's a constant reminder of what death could be for her, the slant offers almost like a sneak peek of her afterlife. Dickinson uses personification to really emphasise her dread of death, 'the landscape listens', nature is reflecting her emotions. Her use of simile and caesuras at the end indicates a sign of hope, 'when it goes, tis like the distance – on the look of death-', the slant of light doesn't always creep around her, sometimes it leaves. The caesuras suggest that she can let go of this fear from time to time. I feel Dickinson struggled so much with her religion and the idea of dying because she really was anxious and fearful of what was decided for her.

Paragraph 6 – 'A Bird Came Down the Walk'

- A poem about nature and her reclusive life
- Expresses her struggle for connection to the outside world
- The bird symbolises her and her fears of the world

Paragraph 7 – 'Hope is a Thing with Feathers'

- Poem about nature and hope
- Hope is fragile, like Dickinson
- Explores her relationship with hope – hope to enjoy life?

Paragraph 8 – Conclusion

[Link conclusion back to main thesis](#)

Question 1(b)

One of the most captivating aspects of the cultural context in the movie “Brooklyn”, directed by the renowned Irish film director John Crowley, and the social setting in the play “Philadelphia Here I come” (“PHIC”), written by the great Irish playwright Brian Friel, is the impact it had on the characters’ relationships. The term “cultural context” refers to the environment in which a character lives and the attitudes and commonly held beliefs in their surrounding community. “Brooklyn”, a historical bildungsroman-esque movie is set unsurprisingly in 1950s Brooklyn, New York as well as in the small Irish town of Enniscorthy in Wexford. “PHIC” is not actually set in Philadelphia, but rather in the fictional rural Irish town of Ballybeg. I found the settings of these two texts to be quite revealing as they allow the audience to perfectly understand the influence that a place and community has on a person and their relationships. From the effect that the social and cultural context has on the roles that the main characters, Eilish and Gar are expected to fulfil with regards to their relationships with their parents, to the freedom – or lack thereof- to express themselves around them, cultural context was by far one of the biggest influences on these two characters’ relationships as well as on their development.

Undeniably, social setting played a very significant role in the relationships of Gar and Eilish with their parents, or more specifically, the roles they were expected to play with regards to their respective genders. In PHIC, we see Gar preparing to leave for America the following day. Although it has been accepted by Gar’s father, S.B. and the maternal figure in his life, Madge, that he is to leave for “the little old USA”, there is an undertone of disappointment in his father during the evening supper. However, it is hard to know whether this is due to a very rational and understandable feeling of sadness at seeing his only son packing up to “leave him forever”, or if this coldness he shows is actually indicative of resentment he harbours for Gar. Contextually speaking, at this time in Ireland, particularly in small rural towns, the eldest son (or only son in this case), would have been expected to inherit the family business and ensure it remained successful once the father passed it down. There is a nuance in the interaction between the pair that is suggestive of S.B.’s disappointment in Gar’s upcoming departure. We have to question whether this is because of the cultural context of the time. Was Gar expected to stay in the family home, get married, inherit the business to become the breadwinner, and make sure his father was taken care of? I found the suggestion of the influence Gar’s surroundings had on him and his fraught relationship with his father to be quite interesting as it was almost as though his identity as an only-son in a small country-side village meant he had to stay there and should not be deserting his poor father. I think one of the most telling moments in the entire play is when S.B. refuses to engage in conversation with his son the night before his departure, and instead, opts to read his newspaper. It just highlights the hint of disappointment S.B. felt towards Gar as a result of the cultural context.

Similarly, in “Brooklyn” we see the expectation of her mother impacting their already distant relationship. However, the influence that cultural context has on Eilish’s relationship is not as straight-forward as it is in “PHIC”. At the beginning of “Brooklyn”, it is for the most part accepted by her mother that she is to go “off to America” as this was common practice during this era, and besides, she still has one daughter with her. Sure, she plays a kind of martyr role when she announces that she will go to bed despite it only being early in the evening. Her sister, Rose is encouraging and even reassures her that there is nothing for Eilish in Enniscorthy. She tells her that could not buy her a “life” there. In fact, the only person who overtly makes Eilish feel guilty about her leaving is Miss. Kelly, the local shop owner for whom Eilish worked on Sundays after mass. She makes reference to her “poor sister Rose” being left all on her own to take care of their mother, suggesting that Eilish should be ashamed of herself for leaving in search of a better life. However, aside from “Nettles Kelly”, it is clear that with regards to the cultural context, it is fairly acceptable that she leaves her hometown for America. Unfortunately, when tragedy strikes later on in the movie, we see a stark contrast between the expectations of her mother before she first left Ireland, and when she plans to leave for the second time. When Rose tragically passes away when Eilish is in New York, she makes the long journey back to Ireland to visit her mother and her sister’s grave. She winds up going out with the local catch, Jim Farrell and even taking over her sister’s old job as an accountant. It seems as though the life she had always wanted in Ireland is being built for her and those in her social setting begin to suggest she should stay in Enniscorthy. There is even a slight suggestion by some that it would be wrong to return to America now that she has a man and a job in Ireland, and especially because her mother would be left alone if she were to leave again. Every time she tries to leave, she is convinced to stay for just a bit longer, for example when her mother tells Eilish’s child-hood best friend that she will stay for her wedding. The cultural context impacts their relationship as her mother expects that Eilish will stay in Enniscorthy to marry Jim and live in the “big house” and always make sure her mother is taken care of. Her mother even goes so far as to say that Jim “came along just at the right time for us”. I found this quite sad as it wasn’t really her mother’s fault for expecting Eilish to stay. Contextually speaking, Eilish having found herself in those circumstances should have stayed and taken care of her old, frail mother.

Paragraph 4: PHIC: Gar can’t be himself around his father... does this make their relationship even more distant? Or is their relationship distant because of this... chicken or egg... evident through two Gar personas (public and private) ... would he have been different in America like Eilish was? Lizzie seems to have changed in America... same for Gar? Or is this just the way he is because he is a man... cultural context of gender... Makes us question the influence his social setting on his freedom to express his true identity and thus, the impact this had on relationship with S.B...

Paragraph 5: family: Brooklyn- a lot of love, mother is cold but thaws at the end, “Mammy” ... unlike PHIC... cold, fractured relationship with father, “Screwballs”, “him”, “Skinflint”, “Skittery face” ... remains that way... is this because of their genders? Men should not show emotion at this time...

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Paragraph 6: Brooklyn & PHIC similar in how characters are both emotionally blackmailed by parents...

Conclusion

Crazam

The Answer