

“Hamlet” is often considered the pinnacle of Elizabethan drama. Its intricate plot, rich characterisations and thematic depth contribute to its enduring popularity. Though there are only two traditionally female characters in the play, Gertrude being one of them, the play itself speaks volumes about the uniquely painful, difficult struggles and unfair fates women have suffered in the 17th century. The fact that when “Hamlet” was written, females were forbidden from appearing onstage, and Gertrude’s role was played by a man highlights the oppression and inequality women in the past were confronted with. The relationship of Hamlet and Gertrude is a rather strange and unique way to describe mother and son. The complexities of their relationship highlight a variety of core issues in this play such as deception, power and mistreatment of women. In my opinion, Gertrude is a product of her society, she forced to make difficult decisions to survive and stay afloat in a politically dangerous world built for men, not women.

Gertrude's actions and decisions significantly impact Hamlet, contributing to his emotional turmoil. Their relationship is marked by a subtle yet significant manipulation that adds complexity to the play’s exploration of power, morality and familial bonds. While Gertrude’s actions may not be as overtly manipulative as those of Claudius, her influence on Hamlet is profound. Gertrude makes many questionable decisions such as her swift remarriage to Claudius following Hamlet seniors’ death deeply disturbed Hamlet initially raising serious moral frailties in her nature; “frailty thy name is woman”. Another thing that cannot be ignored is the insinuation that Gertrude has been unfaithful. The ghost of Hamlet Snr. describes her as his “most seeming virtuous queen”. He uses the suggestive adjective “seeming” to imply that his wife may have been committing adultery. True or not, it points to her questionable morals and highlights that she made one premeditated decision that influences the entire plotline. This decision fuelled Hamlet's anger and contributed to his existential crisis and quest for revenge. Not to mention when she attempts to sooth and control Hamlet in Act 1 Scene 2 when she ordered him to cast off his “nightly colour,” and move past his grief and accept the new order in Denmark, which I would view as almost manipulative. he replies bitterly that his inner sorrow is so great that his dour appearance is merely a poor mirror of it. Gertrude’s behaviour underscores the tension between maternal care and the political realities of the court, complicating Hamlet’s perception of her motives. Through this subtle manipulation by Gertrude, Shakespeare can explore the often-blurred lines between love and control, which we see in many other relationships throughout this play.

I feel as though it is impossible to explore Gertrude and Hamlet's relationship without discussing the questionably incestuous nature from Hamlet's side. Hamlet is constantly sexualising Gertrude and appears to have a case of the Oedipus complex, the idea that every man has the desire of having relations with their mother to appear better than their father, or possibly in Hamlet's case, to appear better than his stepfather, King Claudius. Hamlet's strange obsession with his mother's sexual relations is shown through the coarse imagery he uses throughout the play and his preoccupation with the sexual aspects of Gertrude and Claudius' relationship. In act 3 scene 4, the conversation between them is interesting to examine in this regard. During this heated exchange, Hamlet verbally abuses Gertrude in graphic terms, attacking her for "hurrying with such dexterity to incestuous sheets" and referring to her "unseamed bed". Some stage productions lean into this concept more than others however I believe that it is a vital part of the plotline. And while yes there is no explicit incest, their relationship is definitely tinged with a disturbing undertone of incestuous tension, solely from Hamlet's side which highlights the play's issues with the mistreatment of women and the fact that they are only seen as objects and tools for the men in this society to use and manipulate.

The dynamics of power within Hamlet and Gertrude's relationship are complex and reveal volumes about the play's exploration of authority, influence and control. As you would expect in a modern society, Gertrude, being the queen and Hamlet's mother, wields a certain degree of maternal and political power. However, due to the male-dominated world at the time, Gertrude's power holds many limitations. Gertrude holds zero political power on her own, if not for Claudius, she would have lost her position at court, could have been executed or forced into another, less appealing marriage arrangement. What Hamlet consistently fails to see is that Gertrude had no option, marrying Claudius was the lesser of two evils, and just an effort to survive. Hamlet constantly attempts to assert his power over Gertrude as he was meant to become king, he was meant to hold power over everyone. The clearest example of this is in act 3 scene 4, the closet scene. Hamlet is exceptionally stern and aggressive towards Gertrude, describing her as having a "wicked tongue" and calling her a "wretched, rash intruding fool". He is so powerful over Gertrude in this moment that Gertrude is terrified and yells out for "help" for someone to save her from her own son. This constant struggle for power between them highlights the corruption present in this play, reflecting broader themes explored such as family loyalty. Hamlet's desire for power stems from his deep sense of betrayal and moral outrage, whereas Gertrude's need for power comes from fear.

William Shakespeare masterfully uses the complex relationship between Hamlet and Gertrude to highlight a number of core issues in the play "Hamlet". He delves into issues such as power struggle, corruption, mistreatment of women and manipulation. It is clear that Hamlet's deep-seated resentment toward Gertrude's remarriage reflects his inner conflict and his struggle with the disillusionment that follows the loss of his idealised view of family. Meanwhile, Gertrude's comments range from passive complicity to moments of genuine concern and love for her son highlight the nuanced dynamics of power within this strange family. Their relationship serves as a microcosm of the play's themes, showing how relationships are linked to what drives the tragedy in a play.

With 4042 lines and 29551 words, “Hamlet” by William Shakespeare is the longest Shakespearean play. One could say that it is considered the pinnacle of Elizabethan drama; a play of exceptional calamity and tragedy, filled with themes of betrayal, revenge, and mortality. At first glance, the story of Prince Hamlet, who grapples with the ghostly revelation of his father's murder and the ensuing spiral of vengeance, seems to be an exploration of the darkest aspects of human nature. However, beneath the surface of this tragedy, “Hamlet” also contains elements that can be interpreted as surprisingly positive and hopeful. These aspects emerge through the play's exploration of human resilience, the enduring power of love and loyalty and intelligence. By examining these themes, we can see how “Hamlet” ultimately offers a more nuanced view of life, where hope persists even in the face of despair.

The theme of human resilience is subtly woven throughout this play, highlighting the characters' ability to have perseverance in the face of adversity. Many characters confront personal and existential problems that test the limits of their strength, yet most have a remarkable ability to keep going and keep fighting. Our protagonist Hamlet is a perfect example of this. Despite being burdened with grief over his father's death, the betrayal of his mother and the heavy task of avenging his father's death, Hamlet continues to stay loyal to his father and put all his heartache aside and attempt to do right by his father. Hamlet's loyalty to his father is unfaltering. As soon as he is told by his father that “he is the spirit of thy father” and that “the serpent that did sting thy father's life, now wears his crown” revealing that Claudius was the one that murdered King Hamlet, Hamlet springs into action. Immediately after their encounter Hamlet decides to “sweep to his revenge” and swears Horatio and Marcellus to secrecy when he decides to feign “an antic disposition”. Already we see the fiery determination from Hamlet to avenge his father for the injustice that had been done to him. This is a particularly brave move from Hamlet, proving his loyalty to his father because at the time, madness was often viewed as incredibly dangerous. Hamlet was so committed to his act that he faked utter insanity in front of Ophelia, appearing with his “doublet all undone”. We have to commend Hamlet's commitment to his task, especially when it was a task, he found so immensely difficult to complete due to his highly intellectual nature and his hamartia of being exceptionally procrastinating and prone to vacillation. However, Hamlet persevered, and even though ultimately, he lost his own life in the process, Hamlet fulfilled his task when he finally, in a fury, stabs Claudius with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink down the rest of the poisoned wine at the end of Act 5 scene 2. “Hamlet presents human resiliencies not as an avoidance of suffering, but as the ability to confront and endure pain, giving a form of hope, even in the darkest moment.

The enduring power of love is a poignant theme that shapes the relationships and motivations of the characters, even as they navigate a world of betrayal, revenge and tragedy. Despite the overwhelming presence of corruption and deceit, love emerges as a force that persists and continues to influence the actions of key characters. Ophelia's love for Hamlet is unwavering and persists right up until her final moments. We can clearly see Ophelia's heartbreak when Hamlet degrades her in Act 3 Scene 1, when he makes her feel as though he never loved her, saying things such as "I loved you not" and suggesting she should "get thee to a nunnery" essentially stating that Ophelia is such an awful person that she should never be allowed to "breed sinners". Ophelia's love for Hamlet is evident in her lament "O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown" as she is grieving the madness of the man she loves. Even in her tragic descent into madness Ophelia's songs reflect her lingering attachment to Hamlet and the power the love she has for him holds. In Act 1 Scene 5, after Ophelia shockingly took her own life, Hamlet declares at Ophelia's grave that he "loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers could not, with all their quantity of love, make up (his) sum". This shows that even in the face of tragedy, the enduring power of love in Hamlet serves as a reminder of strength and resilience throughout the play. It provides characters with purpose and motivation. Despite the play ending in death and destruction, the persistence of love amidst the chaos suggests that these human connections of love hold an enduring significance, which counteracts the darker elements in this play, making it surprisingly positive.

Hamlet's intelligence is a key feature that contributes to the positivity of this play. Hamlet's sharp intellect allows him to navigate the treacherous world of Elsinore with a level of insight and depth which allows him to avoid manipulation and deceit. One key scene that highlights this intelligence is the "Mouse-Trap play" in Act 3 scene 2. In this scene, Hamlet uses his wit and understanding of human psychology to trap King Claudius. By staging this reenactment of his father's murder by twisting and exploiting the tale of "The Murder of Gonzago" was genius. Hamlet was seeking to confirm the ghost's accusation and measure Claudius' guilt. When Claudius becomes visibly uncomfortable, Hamlet exclaims "I'll take the Ghost's word for a thousand pound", telling us that his plan was a success. This scene showcases Hamlet's sharp mind and ability to use his intelligence to uncover the truth, offering a glimmer of hope in his pursuit for justice. We see the same intelligence again in Act 4 Scene 6 when Hamlet realised, he was in fact not being sent to England for an innocent diplomatic mission but to be executed. Although it is unclear exactly how Hamlet discovered the truth, once he knew his life was in danger and he had not yet achieved his vengeful ambitions, he knew he needed to prevent his premature death, to do this, Hamlet used his genius and charming ways. He convinced the pirates whose ship he boarded to bring him back to Elsinore by offering to "do a good turn for them" by compensating them royally. Aside from this scene showing his bravery, it shows how clever he really was to firstly figure out what was going on beneath the subterfuge and secondly to see the potential for escape. The enduring power of his mind to be able to find meaning and resolve, even in moment of crisis and panic make for an unexpectedly hopeful and positive drama.

William Shakespeare's play "Hamlet" is too often wrongfully considered the most tragically upsetting play he ever wrote. The Play is often characterised by its tragic elements and dark themes when in reality, we simply cannot deny that several aspects of this play offer a surprisingly hopeful and positive perspective. Human resilience, the power of love and Hamlet's intelligence all contribute to the counterbalance of the play's darker moments. These glimpses of positivity collectively transform this play from a mere tragedy into a profound exploration of strength, wisdom and enduring hope that can emerge even in the most challenging circumstances.

In 2016, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin was appointed the title of Ireland's professor of poetry by President Michael D. Higgins, a recognition of the truly exceptional poet she is. Ní Chuilleanáin is universally recognised as an astonishingly imaginative poet, whose imagination is authoritative and transformative, with each and every poem she leads us into altered and creative landscapes and each poem is a world complete. Ní Chuilleanáin creates these new realms of imagination through her use of evocative and highly descriptive imagery which often reveals meaningful insights into the nature of life. Ní Chuilleanáin tells profound stories of love and grief, each highly relatable themes which allows her readers to apply her poetry to their own lives. However, we cannot deny that the often narrative style to her poetry can generate confusion as to the true meaning behind her work and how they can relate to our lives, but, this challenge of unlocking her unique style is immensely refreshing and inspiring to study.

Her poem "Street" is exemplary of this conventional narrative core that does not affirm a colossal revelation about the nature of life. At its core, this is a storytelling poem, which could be described as a gothic love story. The title of this poem is rather ambiguous however the specific location of the "Street" hints to a highly descriptive poem with lots of sensuous detail – highly narrative. Many would describe this poem as an 'economy of language', where Ní Chuilleanáin says very little but there is huge meaning behind her words. The poem opens with an exposition, "He fell in love with the butcher's daughter". The third person narrative of this line gives it a sense of universality. Ní Chuilleanáin also explores the concept of gender roles in this line by giving the female persona of this poem a typically male role. The image of her wearing "white trousers" gives a sense of innocence and gives her angelic and pure qualities. The enjambment of this line adds speed and suspense which quickly links into the highly juxtaposing image of the female "dangling a knife". This highly visual, visceral, and violent image left me with an almost uneasy feeling. The image was so unexpected that it was difficult to digest. Ní Chuilleanáin continues to create this uncomfortable feeling when she uses the sinister, gory image of blood and describes it as "dark shining drops" on the ground. This image was giving almost voyeuristic qualities. It reminded me of the dark fairytale 'Hansel and Gretel' almost as if the drops of blood were the breadcrumbs luring the follower into some kind of horrific trap. Ní Chuilleanáin uses lots of evocative imagery in this poem to leave her readers with a huge sense of unease and making them feel almost anxious and fearful. However, this poem does not reveal a huge insight into the natures of life. This poem reads as if it is a novel. It is a story of lust, with a dark suggestion of perversion with an equivocation of clarity as to who is the more sinister. This poem does not give us any meaningful observations of the typical life events. The subject matter is too abstract to be relatable to a wide audience.

Ní Chuilleanáin explores the concept of life's challenges and the death of her sister in the poem "The Bend in the Road" through a mysterious, metaphorical style. This metaphorical journey of life comes with difficulties or "bends". Similarly to "street" this poem takes place in a specific location which once again hints to an immensely descriptive poem. Ní Chuilleanáin uses highly relatable imagery in the beginning of this poem to allow her readers to engage with these universal life experiences. The poem begins with the line "This is the place where the child". The use of "the" is very non-specific and accessible. The poem continues to describe the child feeling "sick", a highly relatable image as everyone has experienced feeling car sick at least once in their life. She continues to use dark and light imagery in the line "like one cumulus cloud in a perfect sky". This pathetic fallacy creates an almost cryptic feeling. It suggests that everything in her life is perfect except for one horrifying thing- the death of her sister. Her use of non-specific images such as "the absences" or "the faces" allows her readers to relate this poem to their own experiences of the highly universal topic of death. Death is a fact of the journey of life which we all adventure into. The final line of this poem is my favourite line of all of her poetry. She leaves a long lasting, hopeful impression through the beautiful imagery in the line "the place of their presence: in the tree, in the air". She explains gorgeously that the people we have lost are everywhere, ever-present. The stories she tells, although personal and confessional, often have a non-specific aspect to them which opens the door for her audience to interpret them and relate them to their own lives. This is what makes her poetry so special.

Similarly, in her poem "On Lacking Killer Instinct" Ní Chuilleanáin explores her experience with the death of her father. This extended metaphor has a very confessional conversational tone. She opens this poem with the very striking line "My father was dying in a hospital", an experience most will go through at some point in their lives. She leaves no ambiguity as to what this poem is about from the start making it very accessible for her readers. The detached, emotionless, almost clinical tone allows Ní Chuilleanáin to open up about this difficult topic almost by simply stating a fact that is not true about her own life. The clear and concise speech is quickly dispensed and she reverts back to speaking about her experience through indirect symbolism and metaphors. Ní Chuilleanáin uses the image of a "hare", a rather mundane, naturalistic image to represent herself. We can assume that Ní Chuilleanáin is referring to herself in this image of the "hare" as she gives it a gender by giving it a gender by referring to it as "her". Ní Chuilleanáin gives us this image of a "hare" running for its life with "speed and fear" from "two greyhounds". This adds motion to this poem, leaving us with a sense of panic and horror. It is suggestive of the fear that Ní Chuilleanáin felt when she left her father's dying sickbed. Ní Chuilleanáin left her father willingly as the emotion was too much for her to handle, a sensation lots of people who have lost their family members to illness can relate to. The final line of this poem is rather fascinating. The "hare" is no longer representing her but is being used as a tool of comparison. She talks about "the hare, in her hour of ease" suggesting that this animal that is being chased and hunted by these two vicious dogs who are out for her blood is in an easier position than she is in having to watch her father die. Perhaps she feels as though the hare's possible death is miniscule compared to her own fear over her father's imminent and unescapable death. Although I am very lucky and I have not had to experience these awful feelings, I can only imagine that this poem perfectly encompasses the feelings that people all over the world have when they experience the inevitable horrible part of life, when they lose a loved one. Ní Chuilleanáin cleverly describes this experience through her use of evocative imagery in the image of the "hare" being chased, instilling the same fear that she experienced on her audience.

Similarly, in the poem “Fireman’s Lift” Ní Chuilleanáin talks about her experience with her mother’s death. She uses a huge amount of religion and religious iconography to tell the story of her mother’s passing. The religious images dotted throughout this poem create an almost ethereal atmosphere which I found to be somewhat comforting with the upsetting, heavy subject matter. She cleverly uses these religious images such as “celestial choirs” to represent the hospital staff helping her dying mother and describes them as “teams of angelic arms...supporting, crowding her”. The angelic qualities she places on the hospital staff shows the value and appreciation. She describes the “light melting” highlighting the experience of losing your loved one piece by piece until all their “light” is gone. Ní Chuilleanáin cleverly uses enjambment to show how helpless she felt that she couldn’t do anything for her mother that she just “stepped back” out of the way of the doctors and nurses. The word “back” is physically back in the structure of the poem. Ní Chuilleanáin uses a lovely visual metaphor to describe her mother near the end of the poem. She describes her mother as “the crick in the branch loaded with fruit”. The “branch” representing the mother and the “fruit” representing Ní Chuilleanáin and her siblings. Its almost as if her mother cannot bear the weight anymore and that she feels as though she has filled her life’s purpose and she is ready to go. The imagery in this poem described the universal painful process of losing a loved one in a very beautiful and comforting way.

As I have demonstrated in this essay, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin tells profound stories of love and grief through her expert use of evocative imagery to give us meaningful insights into the nature of life. However we cannot deny that her more narrative, storytelling poems can make us question as to how they can apply to our own lives. Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin is truly an inspiring and innovative poet. Her work is very original and completely different to any other poet I have studied. We are so lucky to be able to claim this exceptional poet as our own, and even luckier to be able to study and appreciate her work.

Emily Dickinson has been described as “feeling what she does, and she feels it in all its strangeness more deeply”. She has an exceptionally unique and dark approach to poetry. Her *sui generis* style is one of a kind. She manipulates words and phrases to create this innovative style which is widely recognised. She has put her own distinct mark in the world of poetry which is so inspiring that we still study her work centuries later. However, to say that this style allows her to explore the complexity of a variety of abstract ideas in a concrete and accessible manner is not entirely true. I would argue that some, but not all the ideas she explores in her poetry are not extraordinary, but experiences of life. She explores themes such as death, mental anguish and her struggles with faith, while terrible dark, and often upsetting, I would not classify them as abstract ideas however the way in which she describes these themes can be immensely abstract. This distinct style of hers can also often be tricky and confusing to access for a reader. She uses an immense amount of metaphorical language throughout her work which can often be complicated to discern and discover the true meaning underneath. I believe that it is this complexity and this mystery that has drawn her readers back for centuries.

We see Dickinson’s style evidently in her rather euphoric, positive poem “Hope is the Thing with Feathers” (“Hope”). This poem is an extended metaphor which symbolises the abstract idea of hope with a concrete, naturalistic image of a “little bird” to try and allow her readers to comprehend this philosophical idea with a literal object. All of Dickinson’s poems have titular phrasing due to the posthumous nature of her publishing. This poem is a highly universal, uplifting poem, which you could say deviates slightly from Dickinson’s “typical” style. She talks about the bird singing “the tune without the words”. This statement is extremely positive. She says that everyone can experience hope and that the “song” of hope is universal. We see Dickinson’s typical metaphorical language, using techniques such as pathetic fallacies, sibilance and personification in the line “and sore must be the storm” to immediately contrast within a rhyme with the tactile statement “that kept so many warm”. The “little bird” is taking people under its wing, helping them. The fragile gentle “bird” is so strong, and resilient, working so hard to help anyone it can- just like hope. Dickinson uses pathetic fallacies to explain the moments that we need hope the most. She uses inhospitable, harsh conditions like “gale”, “storm” and “chilliest land” to contrast the beautiful image of the bird to highlight how hope is consistent, and it always exists in all of us. Dickinson’s style is seen throughout this poem in her unique use of metaphorical language. I believe that this an example of a poem where an abstract idea is told in an accessible way for her readers.

In complete contrast to the highly positive, beautiful poem we just explored, Dickinson explores her mental anguish in an insanely dark way in the poem “I Felt a Funeral in My Brain”, another extended metaphor which has extremely abstract content within the metaphor. Dickinson uses a Rhyming scheme to create a cyclical flow to highlight continuous pain and suffering. This is an example of a poem that is quite difficult to differentiate. The immediate use of “I” makes it very restrictive and difficult to relate and empathise. Dickinson uses “mourners” to symbolise her thought. She uses sensuous language to describe these thoughts as being oppressive and loud like a “drum” that “kept beating-beating-“. These pauses and dashes are a widely recognised stylistic trait of Dickinson’s that she uses to create pauses in the flow of the poem. This creates a sense of anticipation and tension in the reader. By breaking up the lines in this way, she is forcing the reader to stop and think about what is happening in the poem. This creates a sense of suspense and makes the poem more interesting to read. This mastery of punctuation is used in a different way to show that her suffering has no end in the line “and finished knowing-then-“. The lack of a full stop shows no sense of finality, almost like a cliff hanger. Dickinson cleverly plays on our aural senses using words like “drum” and “numb” or “soul” and “toll” that rhyme and have a long ominous sound that matches the mood Dickinson is trying to create. It almost creates an atmosphere of entrapment. Even though this poem is exemplary of Dickinson’s highly unique approach to language, I found it incredibly difficult to understand the true meaning behind her extremely abstract metaphorical language. However, upon closer examination I discovered that Dickinson is trying to tell us her experience of her struggles with depression, which I would classify as something many experience in life, not an abstract idea.

Similarly, in “The Soul Has Bandaged Moments” we see Dickinson describing experiences with mental anguish using highly metaphorical language. However, in this poem, we see a third person narrative and a much more universal, relatable poem. Dickinson describes a girl feeling a “ghastly fright come up and stop to look at her”. This metaphorical embodiment of her mental health has monster-like qualities. It is voyeuristic, unwanted wanted attention almost like a bad moment or problem coming into our lives. She talks about the “soul” our eponymous focal point “salute her—” and “caress her freezing hair” welcoming the pain. We see a completely juxtaposition and huge tonal shift when she describes the soul having “moments of escape”. It shows times where we heal and have joy in our lives. It is completely incongruent to the rest of the poem. We get a sense of positivity in sheer adversity and hope temporarily improving life. She describes how “she dances like a bomb abroad”. This oxymoronic simile tells us that she enjoys these moments and is filled with energy, excitement and enthusiasm. Dickinson says that “liberty” from mental anguish is like being in “paradise. This glimpse of hope and positivity is what sustains her life and keeps her going. She describes the downs of life as “retaken moments” and that it feels like she has “shackles on the plumed feet”. She feels trapped, like there is no escape, despite all the positivity shown in the previous stanza. Dickinson ends this poem on a rather ironic statement she tells us that these moments of struggle “are not brayed of tongue-“. That they should not be talked about, yet these thoughts are what a lot of Dickinson’s poetry is about. This poem is yet another perfect example of Dickinson’s style including the mastery of punctuation; the pauses and dashes, the highly metaphorical language yet it deviates from the very personal, inaccessible style we are used to reading. I actually found this poem quite simple to understand the true meanings behind the metaphors and once again the actual content and subject matter behind this poem is not abstract, but rather mundane.

Dickinson describes her struggles with religion and faith in the poems “Theres a Certain Slant of Light” (“light”) and “I Heard a Fly Buzz When I Died” (“Fly”). In “light” we are met with an opening line that appears beautiful and positive, however, upon reading we discover that the subject Dickinson is describing is quite weighty. She outlines the pressures of religion and the church and discusses how oppressed she felt whilst living this puritan lifestyle. The positivity of the “light” is immediately juxtaposed by the pathetic fallacy of “winter afternoons”. The sensuous detail describes the “light” as harsh, blinding, cutting. We can almost feel the panic and the horror of being robbed of the sense of sight. We can almost hear the “cathedral tunes” that “oppress” and left Dickinson with a “heavenly hurt”. The clever use of alliteration to connect two juxtaposing words is exemplary of Dickinson’s style. These words really solidify her struggle with her faith and religion. We really see Dickinson’s mastery of punctuation in the line “but internal difference – where the meanings, are –”. The lack of cohesion and the syntax being off is jarring- almost as if her struggle with religion is causing so much pain that it is affecting her writing. We even see Dickinson using macabre humour mimicking her father teaching the religion- “none may teach it – any – ‘tis the seal despair –” She concludes this poem on a polemical attack. She says that morality and religion don’t matter until you are “on the look of death” Dickinson’s style allows her to explore the complexities of her struggle with religion and her faith. This poem uses lots of inclusive pronouns like “us” and “we” to add a sense of universality and relatability to it. This poem is highly accessible and simple to comprehend. The use of religious metaphors to describe her struggles with beliefs made it far easier to understand what this poem was truly about.

In “Fly” we also have a religious aspect to the poem, however, this poem is very personal with death being the main subject matter. The highly personal aspect is why I would argue this is one of Dickinson’s more inaccessible, difficult poems to comprehend. This poem is full of sensuous detail, using cacophonous onomatopoeia with the “buzz” making an annoying, abrasive sound. There us a sense of ulteriority when she describes the “breaths.. gathering”. Is she describing more people coming to support her in her dying moments? Or are her breaths becoming shallower and shallower the closer she gets to passing? We see a huge amount of confidence from Dickinson in her religion describing the “king” “in his power”. Even so comfortable that she uses macabre humour and makes jokes about her faith; “I willed my keepsakes, what portion of me be assignable.” However, we see a disruption between her and the peaceful death she had envisioned. She describes this disruption as “blue – uncertain – stumbling buzz – between the light and me –”. The poem finishes frantically with a huge sense of panic. She depicts that “the windows failed – and then – I could not see to see –”. The windows symbolise the eyes, the “windows” to the soul. We can almost feel the fear of the unknown. The fact that this poem ends on a dash leaves us with a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity. It does not feel as though there is finality. There is a clear loss in confidence of her faith. I found that the huge amount of metaphorical detail in this poem made it quite difficult to unpack and truly understand what Dickinson was trying to tell us. However, the metaphors almost helped to explain the mysterious concept of death and the reference to religion was somewhat comforting.

There is no doubt that Emily Dickinson was an immensely unique and exceptional poet. It always upsets me to know that she never got the recognition she deserved while she was alive. As I have shown in this essay, Dickinson has a sui generis style that allows her to explore the complexities of some abstract ideas in a concrete and accessible manner, however, this is not always the case. At times her work is quite complex to discern and others she explores ordinary ideas in her work. However, I believe that it is this mystery and this difficulty of her work that gives people the desire to return to her work hundreds of years later. It's no wonder that Emily Dickinson has been described as "feeling what she does, and she feels it in all its strangeness more deeply" as this is evident from her ability to create highly dynamic and unique poetry.

“I am myself; that is not enough” so said Sylvia Plath one of the 20th century’s most celebrated and remembered poets. This quote from Plath’s diary perfectly highlights the suffering with which Plath went through for much of her tragically short life. It is deeply upsetting to discover that such a talented poet felt so unconfident in herself and in her work. This suffering is evident throughout her work as she is typically labelled as an immensely dark and upsetting poet however it is impossible to deny the range of her work and the notes of positivity present in some of her poems. In my opinion, Plath utilises lots of dramatic imagery in her work to explore a myriad of different concepts such as motherhood, mental anguish and her insecurity in herself – all relatable topics that can be applied to a lot of people in society. However, some of her poetry uses rather mundane imagery, nothing particularly striking to explore these themes. As well as this, Plath can often talk about themes that would be relatable to society, but she does it in a very inaccessible way. The vast majority of her poetry is written in an immensely personal manor which I would argue makes her a commentator of herself and her life experiences as opposed to a social commentator.

We receive a clear view of the theme of motherhood in the poems “Morning Song” and “Child”. These two juxtaposing poems give two dramatically different outlooks on motherhood. In the poem “Morning Song”, Plath does not use dramatic images, but rather calming, naturalistic imagery. In this poem she describes the love that a mother has for her child and describes the challenges that new mothers have adjusting to their new role, something I believe to be a highly relatable topic among humanity and could be considered a fair comment on society. Plath’s use of highly visual similes such as “like a fat gold watch” is exceptionally clever in this poem. The “gold” suggests the highly precious nature of this child and the sheer importance and value that Plath places on her first born. While this is an insanely positive quote from Plath, it should be noted that Plath never wanted to be a mother. This precariousness around being a mother is explored in this simile. The comparison to a “watch” is somewhat strange as love should not be as formulaic and mechanical as a watch. Despite the obvious love and positivity shown, we must question whether this is Plath revealing to us that this is struggling to adapt to her new role, something I believe a lot of new mothers could relate to. She continues to explore her struggles in the simile “we stand round blankly as walls”. This is an immensely peculiar statement from Plath. The statement does not make sense with the subject matter. The birth of your child is supposed to be the most supercharged moment of your life and to suggest that there is the gamut of emotion to the point where you cannot feel anything is bizarre. It shows that Plath is clearly struggling and does not know how to feel. This poem could almost be a comment on the mothers struggling with post-partem depression in society. However, ultimately this poem shows the pure love that Plath has for her child. She says that her child is so important to her that it could “dull stars” and that her child is almost a beacon of light is insanely positive. The poem ends on a very loving, positive final line; “your handful of notes; the clear vowels rise like balloons.” She states that every noise the child make is beautiful. Ultimately, I believe that Plath describes the experience that many first-time mothers have when adjusting to their new norm and daily lives in this poem. The imagery in this poem is not exceptionally dramatic, it is rather mundane, yet it still describes issues or experiences many people in society experience today.

Similarly, in Plath's poem "Child" she explores her experience with motherhood. However, we are faced with a stark juxtaposition in tone and a complete opposing view from Plath on motherhood. It should be noted that this poem was written just three weeks before she tragically took her own life. This poem uses naturalistic imagery to describe a rather dramatic and upsetting moment in Plath's life. In my opinion, this poem is immensely personal to Plath, and I feel as though her readers would struggle to relate to this extremely dark outlook on motherhood. Although the title of this poem has very positive connotations suggestive of innocence and protection it is not reflective of the subject matter at all. This is an unconventionally structured poem with lots of enjambment which adds lots of pace and speed creating an almost uneasy sensation as if we are hurtling toward the end of her life. The poem begins on an incredibly sad line. Plath suggests that this child is "the one absolutely beautiful thing" in her life and while at first glance this may appear positive it is extremely sad as she is suggesting that every other aspect of her life is ugly. Plath "wants to" and "should be" doing things for her child but her mental state simply will not allow her to. She wants to do justice by this child and give him rare and beautiful things, but she just cannot. She compares herself and her child as "April snowdrop, Indian pipe" two entirely juxtaposing flowers. She describes her child as the "April snowdrop" a flower that grows in grass and needs lots of light to flourish. She compares herself to an "Indian pipe" a desert flower that grows in very harsh conditions and is a very invasive weed. This was extremely upsetting to read and to know that Plath thought so little of herself that she felt as though she was ruining her own child's life. She ends this poem by saying that this child does not deserve this "troubled wringing of hands" or that it did not deserve to be born into a troubled life and it deserves a life filled with "colour" and "ducks". This poem concludes on a very ominous, foreshadowing line. Plath uses her motif of "stars" in an extremely contrasting way as in her poem "Morning Song". Plath compares this child's life as "a dark ceiling with out a star." This suggests that there is no light, no hope. Plath feels as though she is keeping her child trapped in the dark and ruining its life. While this is a very dramatic and upsetting poem, this imagery and language used is simple and straightforward, but, the meaning behind the images and metaphorical language describe a story of an incredibly depressed mother, something that cannot be applied to society as a whole.

The second prevalent theme in Plath's work is her self-deprecation and insecure nature. We see this predominantly in her poems "Mirror" and "Black Rook in Rainy Weather" (Rook). "Mirror" is a poem that I and many others can personally relate directly to. Through very clever personification of the inanimate object of the "Mirror", Plath explores her struggle with the ravages of age and an immense lack of self-confidence. This poem is a perfect example of Plath using dramatic imagery to be a social commentator. She uses the personification of the "mirror" to give us lots of dramatic, violent images. She describes the "silver and exact" object "swallowing" whatever it sees. The "mirror" describes Plath "searching (its) reaches for what she really is". This is a deeply disquieting statement. It shows us that Plath believes that her entire self-worth is based solely on her appearance and her beauty. I find this utterly insane considering she is one of the greatest poets of all time. However, we see this theme of self-deprecation continue in "Rook" where Plath is extremely self-critical about her poetry, stating that her inspiration is a "miracle" and her poetry was an accident. This completely disregards the sheer talent she has, and the power that she holds over the English Language.

Towards the end of “Mirror” we really see Plath using the highly dramatic, visceral almost frightening imagery to describe her struggle with her appearance and growing older. We see the evocative, violent image of Plath “drown(ing) a young girl” in the mirror. A highly dramatic, scary way of Plath to describe her getting older and losing her youthful looks. She describes her looking in the mirror “day after day” almost like a nightmare or as if she is trapped under addiction. The final line of this poem is incredibly self-deprecating. Plath uses the incredibly harsh simile “like a terrible fish” to compare herself to. It is very clear that Plath lacked a huge amount of confidence and struggled substantially with her appearance. I, like many teenagers, am constantly seeing people on social media with perfect lives and always look immaculate and it can really take a toll on my confidence. Plath is commenting on an issue that affects most of the population at some point in their lives, which I believe makes this poem particularly relatable for a lot of people.

Following from Plath’s harrowing perception of herself, we see from the poem “Poppies in July” Plath exploring the theme of her mental anguish. Plath uses striking imagery in an innovative way to convey both overwhelming wonder and unsettling menace of her experience as a wife in “Poppies in July”. Plath gives us a confessional, arresting poem surrounding her feelings after she discovers her husband Ted Hughes’ infidelity. In my opinion, this poem is very personal and specific to Plath, and I struggle to apply it to a wider social context. She gives us startling images of “hell flames” to describe the “poppies” or stating the superlative that “nothing burns” describing that she wants to exchange this feeling of obtundation for any other sensation- even physical pain. Plath continues to describe this desire by very clever use of assonance explaining that if she could just “bleed or sleep” she could escape this awful feeling. The assonance cleverly connects two paradoxical words that should not be together in any context. While one could argue that this state of living but not existing could very well be relatable to the people in our world struggling with depression, this poem describes specific experiences that Plath had with her husband. Plath fondly refers to the first moments she spent with her husband in the double entendre “wrinkly and clear red, like the skin of a mouth”. She fondly remembers when she bit him on the cheek when they first met “a mouth just bloodied”. She remembers when she inflicted pain on him and he was the one suffering for once, not her. This poem does use lots of dramatic imagery; however, I cannot decide whether Plath explains the experience of lots of people who struggle with depression or if this poem is too specific of Plath’s own experiences to be considered a comment on society.

As I have demonstrated in this essay, Sylvia Plath was a deeply troubled individual who was given the gift of being able to write utterly breathtakingly unique poetry which sets her apart from every other poet on the Leaving Certificate course. We are so incredibly lucky to be able to study and appreciate her work. As I have shown in some of her poetry, she does use dramatic imagery to become an insightful social commentator however a lot of her poetry uses rather mundane, naturalistic imagery and other poems are far too personal and inaccessible to be considered comments on society. Despite this, it is undeniable that Plath was an exceptional poet. I will always find it baffling that she once wrote ““I am myself; that is not enough” when she was one of the most renowned and rejoiced writers of the 20th century, who is still celebrated, even to this day.