

AQA
A-Level
English Language and Literature
Paper 1
Revision Guide

Telling Stories

Remembered Places

Imagined Worlds

Poetic Voices



Remembered Places

Paris

Section A – Remembered Places

Total for this section: 40 marks

<p>AO1: Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression</p> <p>This rewards students' ability to apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study to literary and non-literary material. AO1 also rewards the ability to maintain an academic style throughout the essay.</p>	<p>AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received</p> <p>This relates to students' ability to explore the significance and the influence of contextual factors on the production and reception offered by different genres and text types, and examine why writers and speakers choose to communicate using various forms.</p>	<p>AO4: Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic and literary concepts and methods</p> <p>This relates to the students' ability to make connections between texts, exploring their similarities and differences in the light of how the writers and speakers represent place.</p>
<p>Level/Mark</p> <p>Level 5 13–15</p> <p>Students are likely to:</p> <p>Apply a range of terminology accurately. Select language levels with sustained relevance and evaluation of patterns. Express ideas with sophistication and sustained development.</p>	<p>Level/Mark</p> <p>Level 5 13–15</p> <p>Students are likely to:</p> <p>Offer a perceptive account.</p> <p>Evaluate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the different factors associated with mode • the use of particular generic conventions • the influence of contextual factors on production and reception of the extracts. 	<p>Level/Mark</p> <p>Level 5 9–10</p> <p>Students are likely to:</p> <p>Make sophisticated and perceptive connections. Covers extracts evenly.</p> <p>Evaluate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ideas about how individuals and societies are framed and represented • in detail the ways in which the extracts are similar and different.

<p>Level 4 10–12</p>	<p>Apply terminology relevantly and mainly accurately. Select language levels purposefully and explore some patterns. Express ideas coherently and with development.</p>	<p>Level 4 10–12</p>	<p>Offer a clear account. Analyse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> different aspects of mode genre conventions of the different extracts how the production and reception of the extracts are motivated by contextual factors. 	<p>Level 4 7–8</p>	<p>Make sound and occasionally perceptive connections. Covers extracts evenly. Analyse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ideas about how writers and speakers represent places, societies and people a number of ways in which the extracts are similar and different.
<p>Level 3 7–9</p>	<p>Apply terminology with some accuracy. Select language levels and explain some features. Present ideas with some clear topics and organisation.</p>	<p>Level 3 7–9</p>	<p>Offer some consideration. Explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> aspects of mode more obvious genre conventions the contexts in which the extracts were produced and received. 	<p>Level 3 5–6</p>	<p>Make some connections. Covers extracts reasonably evenly. Explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> more obvious points about representation some ways in which the extracts are similar and different.
<p>Level 2 4–6</p>	<p>Apply terminology with more general labels. Select language levels with incomplete development and identify some features. Communicate ideas with some organisation.</p>	<p>Level 2 4–6</p>	<p>Offer generalised awareness. Describe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> some features of speech and writing genre conventions with some limited awareness with limited awareness the contexts in which extracts were produced and received. 	<p>Level 2 3–4</p>	<p>Make limited connections. Covers extracts unevenly Describe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> some simple points about representation some simple points on how the extracts might be similar and different.

Level 1 1–3	Describe language features without linguistic description. Show limited awareness of language levels but may describe some features. Present material with little organisation.	Level 1 1–3	Offer little discussion. Identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • basic points on speech and writing • basic ideas about conventions of genre • some basic ideas about production and reception. 	Level 1 1–2	Make very few (if any) connections. Covers extracts unevenly. Identify: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • isolated, basic points about representation • very few (if any) ways in which the extracts might be similar and different.
0	Nothing written about the extracts.	0	Nothing written about the extracts.	0	Nothing written about the extracts or only one extract considered.

Instruction to examiners:

When determining a Level/Mark for AO4 you should consider whether the answer has dealt with both extracts evenly. An answer with uneven coverage cannot be placed above Level 2. By uneven we mean a significant imbalance in favour of one of the extracts. An answer that only deals with one extract should not be given any credit for AO4.

Stories are waiting in Paris:

Genre: Travel. Video advertisement (multi modal).

Narrative: Story being presented. Multiple places of interest and choice. A place to find love.

Point of View: French voice – which is detached in some ways from what is happening allowing reader/viewer to make their own version of Paris

Register: French accent.

Representation: Suggested to be a place of option/opportunity to shape your visit.

Literariness: Not particularly literary in terms of writing.

Important points:

Strong use of modality – emphasises possibilities.

Use of Spatial deixis – emphasises possibilities.

Use of music/sound effects/French accent gives sense of immediacy and busy atmosphere.

Sensory

Symbolism of door shutting/opening – take choice – your move.

Mile by Miles London to Paris:

Genre: Travel. Historical/informative – train travel. (Written/picture/Maps)

Narrative: Ever popular destination. Changing architecture to cope with success.

Point of View: Informed enthusiast. Promotional

Register: Impersonal third person (it)

Representation: Popular since beginning. Grand. 'City of Light'

Literariness: Lacking in literary technique to some extent as more to inform than entertain.

Important points:

Use of words from French/Italian origin

Positive language Ultimate/beautiful/bigger/grander/most picturesque/undoubtedly most cosmopolitan/luxurious/elegant

Use of historic images – time thickened use of area as film backdrop

Graphology/typography

Use of inclusive pronouns on map 'us' and 'we'

Importance of Paris/rail as forefront of travel/lighting etc.,

Neither here nor there: Travels in Europe

Genre: Travel/memoir/informative/entertaining

Narrative: Story like – generally negative view

Point of view: First person account of personal experience

Register: Chatty

Representation: Largely critical of French/France with some concessions. Rudeness and aggressive.

Literariness: clear literary techniques used to engage.

Important points:

Contrast London/Paris

First person

Use of adverbs to convey sense/manner

Use of colloquial 'a toilet'

Word choice to represent chaotic nature

Rhetorical question to appeal/engage

Irreverent humour consistent with genre

Triplets

'speech'

Drops names of important tourist location

The Most Beautiful Walk in the World: A Pedestrian in Paris

Genre – Travel: Memoir/tour guide/autobiographical

Narrative – Suggests tourists are viewing by rote – rather than exploring

Point of View – Visitor turned resident.

Register – Chatty/story like

Representation – French pride. Stereotyped visitor

Literariness: Moderately

Important points

Some use of French and opinions – give representation of self as ‘at home’

Use of simile

Representation of place as an individual experience through the interaction of the visitor with their surroundings.

Graphology

Oriental deixis

Stereotyping

Modality

Paris City Guide – Lonely Planet

Genre: Travel. Video (Multi modal)

Narrative: A place of culture, romance, fashion, beauty and history

Point of view: Positive – Australian voice - outsider

Register: Informative

Representation: Positive/cultured/romantic

Literariness: Lacks

Important points

Informative/facts/advisory.

Opinions

Positive language. Epitome. Superlatives

Graphology for stops/pauses and emphasis

Personal Narrative: Anna/ Zara

Genre: Travel. Personal narrative

Narrative: Likes and dislikes/opinion

Point of view: Talking as previous resident.

Register: Informal, chat. Pauses - unplanned

Representation: Positive

Literariness: Low

Important points

Oriental deixis

Unplanned

Informal fillers and connectives

Modality

Comparison

Breathless: An American Girl in Paris

Waiting for Godard: Roommates

Genre: Travel. Autobiographical

Narrative: Jewish American girl seeks independence

Point of View: Naïve. 1960s Jewish Female. Young adult. Well educated. Privileged

Register: Informal, recount of events, thoughts and feelings. Reflective. Re-discovery of former self. Self mocking.

Representation: Paris as place of self-discovery and liberal attitudes. Parents are restrictive and traditional

Literariness: quite extensive use of techniques/figurative.

Important points:

Allusion to Merchant of Venice

Epistolary – novel of letters

Animal characteristics re mother

Use of adverbs

Modality

Around the World in 80 Dates

Genre: Memoir/quest narrative

Narrative: Quest to find partner through travel – irony as cemetery

Point of View: First person narrative

Register: formal/humour/observation

Representation: A place of history, art, culture, eclectic things bring together

Important points:

First person gives her view point/observations

Use of modality to express opinions/certainty/belief

Informative

Alliterative phrases

What do you wish someone had told you – Paris Ile de France

Genre: Forum general audience of tourists. Online blog.

Narrative: Paris is a place that you can get stuck in queues/busy. Benefit of 'insider' knowledge, expensive for some drinks. Suggests that minor differences exist. Suggests French can be offended – different cultural perspectives.

Point of view: Knowing advisor. First person

Register: Informal.

Representation: Positive view, cultured

Important points:

Asynchronous

Non standard punctuation suggests unplanned/hurried not proof read. Abbreviated language/non standard language.

Idealised reader –discourse community but general distribution.

Visiting Paris – Mike and Sophia

Genre: Conversation transcript between friends

Narrative: First person/s account/s of experiences of visiting Paris. Admiration of French dress – chic. Waiters can be rude to British – unfriendly to attempts at dialogue in French.

Point of view: first person

Register: Informal – unplanned exclusive discourse community – friends. Ideal reader friend.

Representation: Mixed view of Paris/French – honest feelings – no ulterior motive

Important Points:

Synchronous conversation

What are were Mike and Sophia's Paris schemas (beliefs/conceptions prior to visit).

Consider whether endophoric or exophoric eg away from events or in same place as events/

Consider agreement/speaker support eg hmm, Yeah, Ah

Exchange structure – sequence of turns

Transition relevance place (a natural place to change turns/speaker)

Preferred / dispreferred response

Memories

Rick Steves' Walking Tour of the Louvre Museum

Genre: Travel/audio tour, Visual, Aural + music

Narrative: Single speaker. Cultural France

Point of View: Positive – confusing as changes frequent

Register: First person and plural first I/we. Informal and inclusive

Representation

Important points:

Emphasis/pauses

Keywords 'Essential' 'Beacon' 'beautiful' 'greatest' 'easiest' 'best'

Spatial/orientational deixis

Exophoric/endophoric/mobile

Humour metaphor 'Barbie Dolls'

Maps

French Milk – Lucy Knisley

Genre: Visual narrative/memoir – graphic non fiction

Narrative: Memories of Paris

Point of View: Subjective First person/plural (speaks for others) 'I' & 'we'

Register: Informal, moody, young female. Hand drawn images.

Representation: of self – moody/selfish. France – cultured. Artistic. Romantic/brooding

Important points:

Ellision of words.

Positive description/repetition

Graphology

Affordance/constraints of genre?

Particular discourse community/reader

Understanding Chic – Natasha Fraser-Cavassoni

Genre: Autobiographical memoir

Narrative: Quest narrative

Point of View: Subjective first person, American female account

Register: Formal

Representation: Stereotypes – pride, defiance. Self – resilient/determined.

Important points:

Culture shock.
Discourse community – biography readers/fashion interest/female?
Alliterative phrases
Re-count conversations
Simile and literary techniques.
Orientational/spatial deixis
Sensory description
Othering.
Double journey –physical and mental

Memories of places in Paris – Isabella and Sophia

Genre: Personal narrative

Narrative: Memories of place

Point of View: Multi/single speaker - subjective

Register: Informal unplanned

Representation: Positive representation of place

Important points:

Vagueness 'about' 'sort of' 'some sort of'
Fillers 'er', 'erm', 'like'
Modality
Temporal deixis
Mental verb processes
Sensory and perceptive verbs
Use of tense

Encore Une Fois – Just Another American in Paris + 18 Months later

Genre: Blog post

Narrative: Memories /account of Paris visit

Point of View: Subjective - positive

Register: Female American, ex resident of Paris, mother of teen child/ren informal

Representation: Positive – weather, food, people

Important points:

Modality –seemed
Onomatopoeic 'woosh'
Discourse community – other Americans interested in Paris
Literary techniques –anthropomorphism, metaphor.
Tense
Asynchronicity

Travelling to Paris with a grandchild – Gransnet

Genre: Forum – grandparenting/travel

Narrative: Seeking information

Point of View: Multi speaker - common bond - grandchildren

Register: Informal conversational

Representation: Positive – culture

Important points:

Asynchronous dialogue

Discourse community – Grandparents/travel with children

Relevance

Politeness – face threatening acts etc.,

Grice's Maxims

Seed/thread

Paris for Children – The Rough Guide to Paris

Genre : Travel guide for parents of children

Narrative: Positive representation of things to do in Paris

Point of View: Knowing advisor

Register: Formal

Representation: Mostly positively slanted but some language could undermine

Important Points:

Organisation of information – use of colour/images

Informative

Positive lexis

Sales driven

Introduction – Not for Parents: Paris – Everything you ever wanted to know

Genre: Travel guide aimed at children

Narrative: Place of discovery – not hard sell

Point of View: Facilitator – knowledge based

Register: Degree of formality – child friendly

Representation: Positive – place of variety/discovery

Important points:

Use of images/colour/graphology

Highlight of the macabre

Use of humour

On Paris – Ernest Hemingway

Genre: Newspaper articles

Narrative: Negative – a place of frauds and pretenders – almost a warning for the 'you' he writes to.

Point of View: Observational

Register: American Author writing on Americans in Paris

Representation: A commercial place which is only frequented by those that pretend to be artists.

Important points:

Blunt and disrespectful

Use of metaphor

Superlatives

Repetition

Opinionated/subjective/offensive/humorous

Modality

Foreign Correspondent: Paris in the Sixties. Peter Lennon

Genre: Autobiographical /Memories/quest

Narrative: A bohemian place

Point of View: First person/naive

Register: Formal/informal/colloquial

Representation: Self inexperienced/naïve. Paris a place of contrasts. Intimidating. Religion.

Important Points:

Modality

Various representations of self/others.

Revisions of history

Tense

Simile

Paris Riots 1968 – British Pathé

Genre: News – TV

Narrative: Civil and political unrest in Paris

Point of View: subjective posing as objective. Establishment

Register: Authoritative, formal

Representation: Militant French – socialist/left wing.

Important points:

Visual/aural/music

Emotive language

Spatial deixis

Adverbs

Repetition of determiner 'every'

Use of conjunction 'but' to add negative

Seven Ages of Paris – Alistair Horne

Genre: History text

Narrative: A country of political change and changing fortunes of the city. Battles and struggles.

Register: Informative/knowledgeable/

Representation: Formation of place and culture. Not to be trifled with! A history of corruption.

Important points:

Chronological

Objective (multi sourced) materials

Use of discourse markers to introduce change

Discourse community those interested in French history

Assumed knowledge of some details eg people and places

Strong verb choices

Personification

Contrasts of higher sensibilities with poor behaviour among the upper classes

Letters from France 1790-1796 – Helen Maria Williams

Genre: Epistolary text

Narrative: Sympathetic perspective of uprising in France. Political consciousness

Register: First person perspective. Formal.

Point of View: Subjective/ English female. Omniscience.

Representation: Proud.

Important points:

Female perspective – gender theory

Period – syntax.

Use of exclamations

Similes

Modality

Paris: Fine French Food – Lonely Planet

Genre: Online travel/food guide

Narrative: Positive view of artisan food trades to be tried and enjoyed

Register: Formal - knowledgeable

Point of View: Distant subjective

Representation: Experts in food and wine. Enthusiastic

Important points:

Superlatives most,

Spatial deixis

Informative

Image/music/sound – sensory

Positive language 'expert', 'premium', 'icon'

The Sweet Life in paris: Delicious Adventures in the World's Most Glorious and Perplexing City – David Lebovitz and Mole Au Chocolat

Genre: Memories/anecdotal/food and culture writer

Narrative: The unsavoury history of water and Paris

Register: 2nd person 'you' and 1st person 'I' – humorous, informal

Point of View: Sceptical, opinionated -subjective

Representation: Parisians and little water unfriendly and lacking in facilities or offering poor facilities – none without purchase. At times impolite - quirky

Important points:

Tense

Alliteration

Allusion – Coleridge Ancient Mariner – assumed knowledge

Graphology

Modality

Stereotypes – unclean French

Exaggeration

Eating in Paris – Isabelle, Mike and Sophia

Genre: Discourse – memories

Narrative: Cultural differences

Register: Informal, unplanned

Representation: Different tastes in cuisine. Reserved tastes of participants in conversation

Important points:

Fillers/gap filling

Agreements

Interruptions

Natural speech

Unfinished sentences

Multi speaker narrative

Paris Anthology

Assessment Objective

AO1 (15 Marks): Using terminology, applying concepts and methods, expressing and presenting ideas.

This AO rewards students' ability to apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study to literary and non-literary material. AO1 also rewards the ability to maintain an academic style throughout the essay. In addition, students should identify features where relevant that highlight distinctive ways that places, people and societies are represented so as to meet the specification content and key terms for this section and provide focuses for AO4 (connections between texts). As a reminder, the key terms are:

- Genre: a way of grouping texts based on expected shared conventions
- Representation: the portrayal of events, people and circumstances through language and other meaning-making resources to create a way of seeing the world
- Point of view: the perspective(s) used in a text through which a version of reality is presented
- Register: a variety of language that is associated with a particular situation of use
- Literariness: the degree to which a text displays 'literary' qualities along a continuum rather than being absolutely 'literary' or 'non-literary'

AO3 (15 Marks): Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received.

This relates to students' ability to explore the significance and the influence of contextual factors on the production and reception offered by different genres and text types, and examine why writers and speakers choose to communicate using various forms.

AO4 (10 marks): Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic and literary concepts and methods.

This relates to the students' ability to make connections between texts, exploring their similarities and differences in the light of how the writers and speakers represent place.

Remembered Places

- Answer Question 1 in this section. Read Text A below, and Text B on page 4

Text A is an extract from *Neither Here Nor There: Travels in Europe* by Bill Bryson. Text B is an extract from Rick Steves' *Walking Tour of the Louvre Museum*.

0 1 Compare and contrast how the writer of Text A and the speakers of Text B present experiences of visiting the Louvre. [40 marks]

Text A

Bill Bryson is an American author who has written a number of travel memoirs, as well as popular books on science and languages. *Neither Here Nor There: Travels in Europe* tells the story of his journey through Europe in 1990. The chapter on Paris includes memories of an earlier trip he made to the city in the 1970s.

Text B

This text is taken from the website of Rick Steves, an American author and TV presenter famous for his guidebooks, radio and TV shows and podcasts on travelling in Europe. His website offers free guides and downloads. Along with the podcast transcript are maps produced by Rick Steves to support his Louvre museum tour.

- 01
Compare and contrast how the writer and speaker of Text A and the writer of Text B express their ideas about times of social upheaval in Paris.
You should refer to both texts in your answer. [40 marks]

Text A

This is a news report of the Paris riots in 1968, taken from the website of British Pathé, a news and film archive. The narrator is male and speaks with a Received Pronunciation accent.

Text B

Helen Maria Williams (1761–1827) was an English writer who supported the principles of the French Revolution and moved to Paris in 1790. From that time until 1796, she published a series of letters in support of the revolutionary movement in France. This text contains a selection of those letters.

5 10 15 20 25 30 35 Letters Written in France, in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England. Containing Various Anecdotes to the French Revolution; and Memoirs of Mons. and Madame de F — (1790), Letter II

Sample answers

Student exemplar: Remembered Places

In 'Understanding Chic', Fraser-Cavassoni has a negative experience of the French because of the slap she receives. However, we see that her opinion of Paris is very favourable, as demonstrated by words such as 'undaunted', 'bounced' and 'enthusiasm'. This shows Cavassoni to have a positive view of Paris. These terms have connotations of energy and a lack of criticism. When talking about the slap, Cavassoni says, 'A Frenchman not a guard'. The emphasis on the nationality of the man and that he is working there, and therefore has no responsibility for the law, indicates that the French are fastidious and not afraid to cause offence. The indefinite article, 'a', suggests that the man can be seen as representative of all Frenchmen.

This kind of generalisation can be seen in 'What do you wish someone had told you?' post, but they demonstrate a different attitude to those living in Paris. The first post states

'French people are not cold or rude'. Although this is a positive statement it still describes the French as one identity. It also suggests through the use of negation that there is a stereotype of French people being cold and rude. By having to state they 'are not' like this, the author implies an awareness of the cultural stereotype of French people being impolite that he has to address in order to then dismiss. This correction of a widely held stereotype is typical of a post such as this, where the audience would be wide and the register mixed.

Fraser-Cavassoni in 'Understanding Chic' uses her negative experience, the slap, as a basis for an analogy for what French People are like. Her generalisations are modified by her statement that it is 'unfair' to suggest all French people are inclined to slap. The disclaimer is appropriate for the text, which takes the form of a memoir, and therefore self-reflection is likely to be present. She creates the term 'slap instinct' to describe the Parisians' mentality as well as saying 'defensive, they had to attack'. These terms are suggestive of something animalistic within the people living in Paris that Fraser-Cavassoni blames on the history of sieges in the city. This is an unsubstantiated claim that is really only the personal opinion, or musing, of the author that is expected in the context of a memoir. The implied depersonalisation of the Parisians demonstrates that Fraser-Cavassoni feels them to be somewhat unstable and sometimes dangerous.

Moreover, the memoir is written from a time when she was thirteen, therefore the perception of the attitude of the Parisians has changed over time, shown through the phrase 'in retrospect'. In contrast, the online extracts are likely to be written immediately after their visit to Paris, therefore the negative attitude is heightened. Furthermore, the colloquial tone of the online extracts allows the reader to exemplify certain phrases. For example, the online extract often uses capital letters, whereas the memoir uses capital letters to indicate clauses that the author wishes to be foregrounded.

Examiner commentary:

Remembered Places

AO1: The student expresses her ideas well and maintains a strong focus on the text at all times. She uses terminology precisely and accurately (eg 'the indefinite article') and provides a thoughtful and developed interpretation of the texts. Ideas are explored throughout (eg the developed discussion of the 'slap instinct' and the exploration of self-reflection and personal opinion). There is a good focus on ways of narrating and the use of narrative voice and particular registers: a great deal of ground is covered in discussing stereotyping, attitudes to culture, and aspects of implied readership and genre.

AO3: The student makes some clear and well-considered points on the memoir as a distinctive genre, and how Fraser-Cavassoni's language choices are typical of this kind of writing. She is also able to draw on the discourse conventions of message boards in exploring her ideas. She makes some developed points on the contexts in which the texts were written (eg on the difference between Fraser-Cavassoni writing retrospectively, and consequently reflecting on her initial thoughts from a distance, and the traveller probably writing after a recent trip to Paris).

AO4: There are clear connections made between the texts. The student has thought carefully about the sections of the texts she wishes to write about (eg identity of the French, comments on place and culture, reasons for wanting to recount experiences of

travel, audience and register). Her writing draws both on similarities and differences and these are well signposted through the use of appropriate discourse markers.

Student responses in examination conditions

Student A

In Text A the narrative style is a homodiegetic retrospective account focusing on a past trip to Paris. The purpose of text A is to mainly entertain the reader as the written style is an anecdote. In text B the narrator is a homodiegetic voice advising the audience who is anyone looking for advice about Paris using the internet, and the mode is written. Text B is advising but is also entertaining to hook the audience. Text A presents people as 'tricky; and 'defensive'. The adjective 'tricky' suggests the Parisians are difficult to try and understand; not easily pleased. The narrator describes an incident of being slapped by a Frenchman, which caused her to see that the Parisians had a 'slap instinct' mentality. The declarative 'defensive, they tend to attack' implies that Parisians are like animals and become vicious if they feel threatened. The pronoun to address the Parisians 'they' distances the writer from the French people suggesting she does not see herself as someone like them. This is shown when she states that 'the Parisians were different, I quickly registered', the adverb 'quickly' shows that it is apparent straight away that the Parisians act differently to people from England.

In text B the people are presented as reserved. The advisor states that the 'French people are not cold or rude, but they are not bubbly types either' this declarative tries to discourage some of the stereotypes people may perceive the French as being. But, also states that they are not the adjective bubbly either. They described the Parisian culture as reserved which 'does not mean they hate you'. They reader is directly spoken to, to make the text feel personal. The tone used in text A is formal, subjective and uses a mix of high and low frequency lexis. It is a subjective account due to it being her own opinion and interpretation of the events in Paris. The fact it is subjective could lead for the anecdote being overexaggerated as she states that she doesn't remember the slap and is writing based on other people's recalled memory. The tone used in text B is informal and conversational as the writer uses the pronoun 'you' to direct the reader. Also, there are a few grammar mistakes which is seen as an acceptable thing to do as it is only being published on the internet. The use of the brackets to add extra information is used repeatedly Informal language used like 'lol' is used to fit in with the mode of the text.

Overall, Parisians are presented as defensive and reserved in the retrospective accounts. The writers used tone to convey their ideas of the French people they encountered.

Assessment Objective	AO1	AO3	AO4
Comments			
Level			

"Compare and contrast how the writers of these texts express their ideas about people living in or visiting Paris."

You should refer to both texts in your answer (40 marks)

AO1 - 15 marks

AO3 - 15 marks

AO4 - 10 marks

Total marks: 40 marks

What to include:

- Tense (first person, second person, third person) and the pronouns used to signify this
- Simple and minor sentences
- Attitude towards Parisians
- Discourse structure / conventions and links with these things in the two texts
- Similarities and differences in PURPOSE, AUDIENCE and GENRE of texts
- Distinction between own culture/society and French people
- The representation of place

Theories

CARL THOMPSON DISCOURSES OF TRAVEL:

Literary critic Carl Thompson suggests that all travel narratives have these defining features:

- A focus on either a COMPLEX OR A SIMPLE JOURNEY. There is always a sense of moving INTO OR OUT A PHYSICAL SPACE that is at the heart of the narrative
- An account of meeting and interacting with people, places and cultures that are unknown
- A literal account of the journey or some kind of learning experience/ revelation that has taken place from that journey
- An additional insight into the ATTITUDES AND BELIEF SYSTEMS OF THE WRITER/SPEAKERS THEMSELVES as well as their background and culture

GENDER SIMILARITIES HYPOTHESIS:

This theory claims that there are substantially more similarities than there are differences between male and female language. Janet Hyde who came up with the theory argues that where there are differences, these may be due to a number of

other variables, such as age, background, status and education.

CULTURE SHOCK:

This has been described by sociologist John Macionis as "personal disorientation when experiencing another way of life." This can manifest itself in several ways but often includes negative feelings towards cultural practices and language, feeling bored and homesick, and in extreme cases feeling anxiety and a sense of danger. Culture shock occurs in the following stages:

-Honeymoon stage - feeling of excitement and being intrigued by a new culture or society

-Anxiety stage - beginning to feel a sense of disillusionment, disappointment or fear about the new culture and society

-Coping stage - developing strategies to deal with the demands of living in a new culture or society

-Settled in stage - a final stage where the traveller feels comfortable in their new surroundings

PARIS SYNDROME

This is a particular type of culture shock. It is a disorder where tourists visiting Paris with expectations fuelled by positive representations of the city and its people in popular culture are overcome by feelings of immense disappointment.

THE DOUBLE-JOURNEY

This theory focuses on the idea that travel narratives draw on life being understood metaphorically as a journey, where the journey taken in the travel narrative assumes additional significance.

Many narratives about travel involve a type of double-journey like this one, where the writer or speaker is not only relaying the events of a physical journey they have made but also describing a psychological journey, usually involving some kind of self-discovery, reinvention of the self or personal quest.

SPACE AND PLACE

Geographers commonly use this distinction to signify the difference between a set of co-ordinates on a map (space) and a location that is given significance and value through its use as a site of human activity, filled with interaction with others, important events and personal memories (place).

Crang suggests that the layering of events and the building of memories around a physical location gradually result in a "dot on a map," evolving into a significant part of someone's life, forever associated with a feeling, emotion, set of events or group of people.

Spaces become places as they become "time-thickened." They have a past and

future that binds people around them.

This theory can only be applied to individuals and not cultures in general.

Quest narratives

Tim Youngs has suggested that the quest narrative is central to the travel genre. The quest narrative normally involves these features:

- A focus on a search for something or someone unavailable in the hero's present culture/society
 - A narrative that is told almost exclusively from the traveller's perspective and offers a very subjective way of seeing the world
 - Characters and objects within the narrative are seen as obstructions that need to be overcome or lessons to be learnt
 - Readers and/or listeners are positioned to follow the narrative in certain ways so as to accept a particular point of view - that of the traveller
 - The "questers," use the journeys they take for their own purposes as a way of promoting a certain world-view and often centre round a narrative of self-discovery.
- Terminology to use in the exam + other things to mention
- Genre and whether text is typical or atypical of genre; does it follow genre conventions (introduction)

 - Audience / purpose (introduction) (Purpose is production) (Link purpose with core genre purpose)

 - Affordances/ constraints (reception) (CONTEXT)

 - Time at which text was written (CONTEXT)

 - Gender of the author and how this links to text (CONTEXT)

 - How long lasting text is (CONTEXT)

 - Noun phrases

 - Semantic field (perhaps can be linked with noun phrases)

 - Polysyllabic lexis (link to potential audience in exam). Colloquial language can be juxtaposed with this.

 - Flaneur / othering

 - Multimodal text (the visual and the written)

 - Typographical feature (relating to use of fonts in texts)

 - Mode (This is not just whether the text is spoken or written. It could also cover whether the text is planned or spontaneous, the distance between the text producer and the receiver, and how long-lasting the text is- key word here is ephemeral.)

 - Register (formal or informal)

- Graphology
- Endophoric / exophoric storytelling.
- Triadic structure
- Phonaesthetics (euphonious and cacophonous).
- Zeitgeist (defining spirit or mood of a particular period of time)
- Idiosyncratic (a mode of behavior or thought / a certain writing style which is individual to oneself). DESCRIBE AS IDIOLECT IF EXTRACT IS SPOKEN.
- The theories
- Mobile narrative (for Rick Steves' walking tour)
- Cartography (study and practice of making maps. Can be applied to The Gare du Nord text).

SPECIFIC KEY WORDS TO LOOK AT IF EXTRACT IS SPOKEN

- Topic Shift
- Sociolect / idiolect
- Sentence functions
- Phatic talk - Conversational utterances that have no concrete purpose other than to establish or maintain personal relationships
- Back-channel
- Adjacency pairs / turn -taking
- William Labov order of elements (This includes Abstract, Orientation, Complicating action, Resolution and Coda.)
- Grice's maxims (Quality, Quantity, Relation and Manner.)
How to decide what to write about
- Compare HOW the texts are presented, not WHY
- Choose similarities / differences that allow you to get to the heart of the text - essentially the genre, audience, purpose, and how this impacts on the way Paris is presented
- Comparisons that will enable you to draw on the language levels
Affordances and constraints in relation to genres
An affordance is a term that refers to the properties or characteristics associated with a particular genre or mode that might dictate how it is used. For example, the

Eurostar advertisement is a text that draws on the conventions associated with advertising, using visual and aural codes in a format that can be easily viewed and shared (via YouTube).

A constraint refers to properties or characteristics that limit a text's potential uses. In the case of the Eurostar advert, a very obvious physical constraint is that a screen and sound are required to "read," the text.

INFORMATION TEXT

AFFORDANCES

- Allows audience to have a stronger understanding of Paris and it's history

CONSTRAINTS

- Reader has to have a strong understanding of background context

- Some people may find the information dull

- Zeitgeist - places change

ADVERTISEMENT

AFFORDANCES

- Refer to YouTube example

CONSTRAINTS

- Screen and sound will be required in order to "read," the text

- Need of a schema

- There may be disagreement in what is said

- Zeitgeist

TRAVEL WRITING / MEMOIR

AFFORDANCES

- Allows audience to understand geography of Paris

- Is a very personal opinion of Paris and thus will very impartial

- Use of humour

CONSTRAINTS

-The writer has to try and speak universally

-Pragmatics of travel writing has to be understood

-Writer has to physically travel to locations. As there is only one person travelling and writing the book then the viewpoint might be quite narrow and closed off, meaning the overall impression that the reader gets of Paris is limited.

-Linked to someones view of the culture at the time, however places change. Link to word "Zeitgeist."

SPOKEN DISCOURSE

AFFORDANCES

-Partial point of view from speaker. Therefore view is honest and realistic. Speech is also representative of normal speech.

CONSTRAINTS

-May be hard to understand, depending on the fluency of the speaker.

-Need of a transcriber

MEMOIR/ ILLUSTRATED JOURNAL

AFFORDANCES

-Honest and reliable account from writer

-Flaneurs and quest narratives can be more easily identified

CONSTRAINTS

-Illustrated journal means perhaps that not as many ideas can be expressed

-Could attract a younger audience if there are pictures. This could mean a smaller audience

Imagined Worlds

The Handmaid's Tale

<p>Level 4 7–8</p>	<p>Apply terminology relevantly and mainly accurately. Select language levels purposefully and explore some patterns. Express ideas coherently and with development.</p>	<p>Level 4 7–8</p>	<p>Offer a good and secure analysis by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> interpreting the question focus relevantly providing a clear and sound interpretation making appropriate choices from the text including ideas that are relevant. <p>Offer a clear account of how meanings are shaped by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> exploring how narrative techniques contribute to meaning examining the writer's craft through close comment on some details. 	<p>Level 4 10–12</p>	<p>Offer a clear account.</p> <p>Analyse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> aspects of the novel in relation to the fantasy genre genre conventions how the production and various interpretations of the novel are motivated by contextual factors.
<p>Level 3 5–6</p>	<p>Apply terminology with some accuracy. Select language levels and explain some features. Present ideas with some clear topics and organisation.</p>	<p>Level 3 5–6</p>	<p>Offer some analysis by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifying the question focus straightforwardly providing some valid interpretations making some successful choices from the text. including ideas that are generally relevant. <p>Show some awareness of how meanings are shaped by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> explaining some ways that narrative techniques contribute to meaning discussing the writer's craft 	<p>Level 3 7–9</p>	<p>Offer some consideration.</p> <p>Explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> aspects of the novel in relation to the fantasy genre more obvious genre conventions the contexts in which the novel was produced and has been interpreted.

	through reference to some examples.			
<p>Level 2 3–4</p> <p>Apply terminology with more general labels. Select language levels with incomplete development and identify some features. Communicate ideas with some organisation.</p>	<p>Level 2 3–4</p> <p>Offer a partially descriptive/analytical account by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> commenting generally on the question focus providing general interpretative points showing less certainty in selecting from the text possibly including some irrelevant ideas. <p>Show a partial or an emerging awareness of how meanings are shaped by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> commenting broadly on narrative techniques making general observations about the writer's craft with little comment on how meaning is conveyed. 	<p>Level 2 4–6</p> <p>Offer partial awareness.</p> <p>Describe:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> aspects of the novel in relation to the fantasy genre broad genre conventions the contexts in which the novel was produced and has been interpreted. 		
<p>Level 1 1–2</p> <p>Describe language features without linguistic description. Show limited awareness of language levels but may describe some features. Present material with little organisation.</p>	<p>Level 1 1–2</p> <p>Offer a brief or undeveloped account by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> describing the question focus offering limited interpretation making limited reference to the text including irrelevant ideas. <p>Show limited awareness of how</p>	<p>Level 1 1–3</p> <p>Offer limited discussion.</p> <p>Identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> basic points on fantasy writing with limited or no relation to the novel basic ideas about the conventions of genre some basic ideas about 		

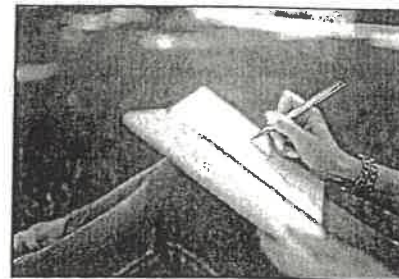
			<p>meanings are shaped by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> labelling with little relevance to narrative techniques making brief or no reference to the writer's craft. 		production and interpretation of the novel.
0	Nothing written about the text.	0	Nothing written about the text.	0	Nothing written about the text.

Instructions to examiners:

- When determining a Level/Mark for AO2 you should consider whether the answer includes selections from both the given extract and elsewhere in the novel. An answer that only includes selections from the set extract cannot be placed above Level 2.
- If the candidate does not write about the set extract, you should treat this in the same way as if s/he had written only about the extract, i.e. an answer that does not include selections from both the extract and elsewhere in the novel cannot be placed above level 2.

Student Introduction and Summary of Skills

Welcome to this study guide for Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* for AS and A Level English Language and Literature. It involves a close analysis of each section of the novel, along with exploration of key themes, characters and contexts, encouraging you to closely explore the novel from both a linguistic and literary perspective.



Your teacher may have provided you with this entire guide to work with – in which case, you have an important revision resource to use when preparing for your exams. You might find it dense to read from cover to cover, but I suggest dipping in and out to read the sections on content you find most difficult. See whether you can reduce some of the introductory information on the whole text into note form for your revision. You also have some comprehension questions and activities to attempt throughout, as well as material towards the end of the guide to help with exams.

How much is the 'Handmaid's' question worth?

For AS, the novel is assessed in Component (paper) 1 and alongside whichever poet you are studying. You will answer one question worth **35 marks** (out of 150 marks for the entire AS – therefore, this question is worth around **23% of your total marks**).

For A Level, the anthology is assessed in Component (paper) 1, alongside the Paris Anthology and poetry option selected by your centre. There is a choice of two questions, of which you need only answer one. This component is worth 35 marks (out of 250 marks for the entire A Level – therefore, this question is worth 14% of your total marks).

How can this guide help you?

It hopefully goes without saying that you should have read the novel in its entirety before you begin your studies in the classroom. Remember that reading the novel to gain an understanding of plot and a preliminary grasp of character and themes is an essential first step that comes before a more in-depth reading for meaning.

Once you feel that you know the novel well, this guide can help you to:

- find out more about the social, historical and biographical contexts in which the novel was produced, and learn more about the contexts of reception
- apply the language methods (see the following section) to each section of the novel to improve your close analysis skills
- use terminology effectively to discuss the novel
- explore the storyworld that Atwood creates in the novel
- understand what makes a top-grade response and practise writing your own

What skills do you need to demonstrate?

Use of language methods (AO1)

You should be familiar with the language levels already as these are crucial to success for every question when studying A Level English Language and Literature. They are as follows:

Phonetics, phonology and prosodics: how speech sounds and effects are articulated and analysed

e.g. p. 13 – 'the music lingered, a palimpsest of unheard sound, style upon style, an undercurrent of drums, a forlorn wail, cardboard devils'

In this description of what would have taken place in the gymnasium in the past, Atwood uses the semantic field of a haunted house ('unheard', 'forlorn wail', 'devils'), creating the impression that the ghosts of the past are tormenting the girls in the Red Centre. Ironically, it is the present that is the nightmare and the past that they crave and hold on to. The use of the unusual noun 'palimpsest' (a text overwritten on top of an earlier work) compounds this idea that they live among the echoes of the time before.

Lexis and semantics: lexis – the vocabulary of English, including social and historical variation; semantics – how meaning is created through this vocabulary

e.g. p. 177 – ‘Subversion, sedition, blasphemy, heresy, all rolled into one’

Here Atwood uses **sibilance** to link all these forbidden words in the list – the low, hissing ‘s’ pattern of sound sounds like Offred is whispering the words, afraid to speak too loudly and aware of the treacherous impact of what she and Ofglen are discussing.

Grammar, including morphology: the structural patterns and shapes of English at sentence, clause, phrase and word levels

e.g. the use of **asyndetic listing** in the above quotation creates a sense of multiple layers of time and space crowding in on the inhabitants of the gymnasium. It is a complex, extended sentence packed with sensory information – the length of the description adds to the sense that the past is overwhelming the present.

Discourse: extended stretches of communication occurring in different contexts

e.g. p. 29 – ‘The war is going well, I hear’ she says

‘praise be’ I reply

‘we’ve been sent good weather’

‘which I receive with joy’

This exchange of **phatic talk** between Offred and Ofglen appears exceptionally banal. They are reciting the mantras of the Gileadean regime, almost parrot-like, exactly as they are expected to do. The discourse is littered with the semantic field of religion (‘praise’, ‘joy’) and the use of the **passive voice** in ‘we’ve been sent good weather’ to indicate that higher powers are at work that shape these powerless women’s lives. Offred even begins to leave out the **speaker tags** in her retelling, as though it doesn’t matter who says what. This snapshot of their discourse serves to emphasise the constraints placed upon them and the extent to which they talk without actually being able to communicate anything much at all.

Pragmatics: the contextual aspects of language use

e.g. the above quotation shows how the women of Gilead are silenced. Their talk is reduced to meaningless set phrases, characteristic of the propaganda associated with a dystopia. The use of **adjacency pairs** shows that each response is automatic, with little deviation from what is expected of them.

Adjacency pairs – a unit of conversation that consists of one turn each by two speakers, with the two parts related to each other (question and answer, statement and response, etc.)

Anadiplosis – a writer’s use of the same word/phrase to close one clause and to open the next (e.g. ‘When I give, I give myself.’, Walt Whitman)

Asyndetic listing – listing without the use of conjunctions (usually with commas or semicolons in their place)

Passive voice – when the object of the sentence is placed as the subject in the sentence construction (e.g. ‘the letter was opened by the official’ or ‘ground was gained during the battle’)

Phatic talk – small talk; conversation that has a social rather than an informative function

Semantic field – a group of words linked by meaning

Sibilance – a pattern of soft consonant sounds such as ‘s’, ‘ch’, ‘th’, z, x

Speaker tags – a speaker’s name and the speech-related verb after direct speech (e.g. ‘she said’, ‘the Commander declared’)

You will need to range across the language levels in your analysis of the novel. Hopefully you can see how each of these might contribute to meaning – from harsh plosive sounds affecting tone (phonology) to powerful imperative sentences (grammar). What examiners want you to be able to demonstrate is that it is not simply the words on the page that help writers achieve effects; structure, sound, image and context also contribute to meaning. For the top grades (Level 4 or above on the mark scheme), students are also expected to evaluate *patterns* in language – the detailed analysis for each text will help you consider this. Patterns can most often be found by exploring at whole-text/extract level through examining discourse structure. However, you could also consider the

semantic fields in a text or the use of patterning in sentence structures through techniques such as anaphora or anadiplosis.

Throughout this resource, key terminology will be highlighted for you in italics and defined in text boxes nearby – see previous page. These are the terms that will demonstrate your ability to explore texts closely and critically. You may want to add these to an ongoing glossary to help with your revision. A complete linguistic and literary glossary is available for you at the end of this guide.

Creating an argument (AO1)

AO1 marks are also available for structuring your essay well. The Level 5 band descriptor, for instance, asks that you 'Express ideas with sophistication and sustained development.' As you proofread your analytical writing, this will involve checking for the following:

- Have you included a question-focused topic sentence at the start of each paragraph that signposts your argument and guides the reader?
- How clear are your ideas? Does your evidence fully support your point, for example?
- How thorough are your ideas? Do you look at other possibilities/ambiguities in the text? Do you include close linguistic analysis before you move on to your next point?

Exploring narrative choices (AO2)

A mistake that weaker candidates often make is to write their response as though they are discussing real people and situations ('Offred shows her fear by...', 'Gilead is a world rife with...'). Remember that the novel is a *construction* created by its author, Margaret Atwood. You should be using Atwood's name repeatedly throughout your response, demonstrating how *she* makes the choices of how the storyworld appears to us. The AS question even uses her name explicitly (how does *Atwood* present...). You need to consider how Atwood crafts her characters to manipulate the reader to like or dislike them, how she presents places and spaces, and how she chooses to structure the narrative. The highest mark scheme bands are reserved for students who can evaluate what is successful about Atwood's authorial choices.

Exploring contexts (AO3)

Although there are no AO3 marks explicitly available for the AS exam, it is often impossible to divorce text from context; therefore, you may need to include some of the information you have learnt to fully illuminate the meaning of an extract. For A Level, thorough discussion of contexts is crucial – more marks are available for AO3 than for any other assessment objective. You must acknowledge the significance of whatever focus you are given in the exam question in the context of the whole novel, and consider its importance to the fantasy genre as a whole. You will also need to include *specific, relevant and integrated* information on social and historical contexts to the novel.

Context of production: Where and when was the text first produced, and how does that affect meaning?

Historical context: What was happening socially, culturally and politically at the time of production? Although you are not writing a history essay, knowledge of the basics (such as the dates of when the Berlin Wall stood) could prove very useful.

Biographical context: What do you know about the author/s of the text, and how does their personal history affect meaning?

What does this mean?

Specific information – avoid general statements that could (and do) apply to most novels of the period/genre, e.g. 'Women were still not equal citizens at the time' or 'When the novel was written, many people disagreed with abortion'. Instead, include specific factual information to support these ideas, e.g. 'The Roe v Wade case had legalised abortion in the USA in 1973, 11 years before the novel was published.'

Relevant information – depending on the focus you are asked to discuss in the question, consider how relevant the contextual knowledge is that you want to share. Avoid throwing in facts simply to show the examiner that you have learnt them! For instance, biographical information about Atwood's life may be wholly irrelevant to an essay on the significance of the character of Janine, but may be relevant if you are asked to discuss the setting of the wall.

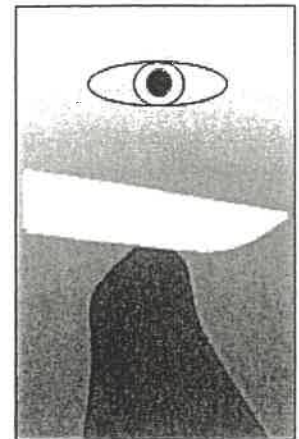
Integrated information – avoid devoting whole paragraphs to observation on historical contexts or thoughts on genre. These ideas should be integrated and combined with your close language analysis and main essay argument. You should use contexts to help bolster your ideas, not as separate asides.

Plot Summary

The novel takes place in a dystopian alternative present where a **theocracy** has taken over from the US government. Due to a past characterised by pollution, high crime rates (particularly, it is implied, the rape and murder of women) and extreme sexual liberation leading to widespread production of pornography and sexually transmitted infections, the country has undergone a **paradigm shift**. Now, all rights for women are stripped away; they cannot work or own property or savings, and they are assigned a role in a strict new social hierarchy – either they are the wives of the new order ‘Commanders’ or they are lower-ranking ‘Econowives’, household servants termed ‘Marthas’... or, they are Handmaids. Handmaids are walking wombs – the few fertile women left in the country. Their job is to act as surrogates for the wealthy wives who cannot bear children. As this new republic of Gilead values tradition over technology, Handmaids are required to have sex with the wives’ husbands in a ritual termed the ‘Ceremony’, in order to procreate.

Our narrator is Offred (literally ‘Of Fred’ as she ‘belongs’ to Commander Fred Waterford) whom we meet as she completes her training for her new role at what she calls the ‘Red Center’. She is evidently traumatised by what has already happened to her – it becomes clear she was forcibly separated from her husband and daughter and has no idea where they are, or even if her husband is alive. She introduces us to her new life in which she is controlled at every moment, able to leave the house only on shopping trips with a fellow Handmaid (Ofglen), during which both women are encouraged to watch – and spy on – each other. She spends long periods alone in her room, contemplating what has happened to her and what may happen next.

Atwood uses an achronological narrative throughout, employing flashbacks through which readers can learn how the state of Gilead came about. In these reminiscences, we learn about Offred’s marriage to Luke and the affair that brought them together when Luke was previously married. Offred also recalls the child they had together, who, through her piecemeal account, we learn was coveted in an increasingly infertile society and then taken from her as they attempted to flee Gilead across the Canadian border. We also meet Offred’s best friend, Moira, a confident, articulate and daring young feminist who later manages to escape the Red Centre through subterfuge. In these glimpses of the time before, Offred also recalls how Gilead came about through a military coup, culminating in the assassination of the president and members of Congress.



Meanwhile, in the present, we meet Serena Joy, Commander Waterford’s wife and former evangelical preacher, who displays a cold indifference towards Offred. We hear of the ordeal of the Ceremony, preceded, of course, by a Bible reading, during which Offred must endure impersonal, awkward sex (or, as many critics have alleged, rape) with the Commander while Serena Joy holds her hands. The early part of the novel emphasises both the monotony of her life, but also the everyday horror it contains.

Neologisms – newly coined words or expressions

Paradigm shift – a 180-degree turn in the opposite direction, where a society / an individual / a group fundamentally changes the very basis of its existence

Theocracy – a system of government whereby rulers reign in the name of God

The first shift in routine comes when Offred visits the doctor for one of her many reproductive health check-ups and he offers to sleep with her so she will get pregnant. She refuses, but only as it is too risky (she could be sent to the ‘Colonies’ – where the most troublesome female dissenters end up – if she is caught). After the next Ceremony, the Commander sends Nick, the household chauffeur, to ask Offred to come to his study that night. He begins to give her contraband gifts of perfume and magazines, and they spend their nights playing Scrabble together (a forbidden activity as women are no longer allowed

to read or write). At the end of one such meeting, the Commander asks Offred to kiss him and she knows she is unable to refuse, given all the power is in his hands.

Meanwhile, Serena Joy orchestrates a plan for Offred to start secretly sleeping with Nick, as both women are aware that the Commander may be infertile, given that Offred is not yet pregnant. They can then pass the baby off as the Commander’s. She bribes Offred by offering to find out information about her daughter. During one of

their shopping trips, Offred discovers that Ofglen is a member of a resistance movement called 'Mayday', determined to undermine and overthrow the regime. Offred starts to feel that the Ceremony is different now – she cannot remain detached knowing the Commander as she does. She starts to discuss the regime with him and talk to him about the monster that he and his fellow leaders have created.

One night, the Commander takes Offred out, in disguise, to a club called Jezebel's, where those in the upper echelons of the regime mingle with prostitutes. Here, Offred discovers Moira working, whom Offred has not seen since she escaped the Red Centre. Moira was captured and chose to work there instead of being sent to the Colonies. For the first time, Offred and the Commander have sex outside the Ceremony, during which she pretends to feel pleasure and passion, knowing that is what he expects. When Offred returns, Serena takes her to sleep with Nick and they begin to sleep together frequently.

We continue to see the rites of Gilead, from the ritualistic birth of Janine's baby to the disturbing '*Particicution*', whereby the Handmaids are encouraged to collectively stone a supposed rapist to death. During this ritual, Ofglen throws the first stone. Offred is shocked but is later told that he was a member of Mayday and Ofglen wanted to save him from suffering. Offred, however, is preoccupied with her complex new relationship with Nick and fails to assist Ofglen in gleaning inside information from the Commander. When she next goes shopping, a new 'Ofglen' meets Offred and tells her that her friend hanged herself when she saw the secret police coming for her. On returning home, Serena Joy reveals she has found out about the trip to Jezebel's and promises punishment. As Offred waits to see what this will be, she sees a black van approach, the signifier of the '*Eyes*' (the state secret police). Nick comes to fetch her but tells her not to worry – it is really Mayday and they are here to save her. Offred's narrative ends with her walking out the door, unsure whether she is heading to death or freedom.

The novel closes with an epilogue from 2195, long after Gilead has fallen, termed the '*Historical Notes*' and written in the form of a lecture given by Professor Pieixoto at a conference exploring Gileadean history. Through the lecture, he reiterates how the regime was created, but from an objective, academic standpoint. He reveals that Offred's story turned up on a series of cassette tapes, but no one knows what happened to her. He explains that it was he who gave the narrative the name of '*The Handmaid's Tale*', partly as an allusion to Chaucer, partly as a dirty joke.

For further explanation and exploration of the neologisms in italics, see the 'Glossary of Gileadean terms' at the end of this guide

The Storyworld

The AQA specification makes repeated reference to the 'storyworld', asking that candidates consider how the author creates the storyworld in their responses. But what does this mean?

Essentially, the storyworld is the fictional world (in Atwood's novel, the world of Gilead) crafted and shaped by Atwood, often through her conduit of Offred as narrator.

All of Atwood's authorial choices help to make the storyworld what it is; therefore, you should be discussing and considering the following when you consider how it is crafted:

- Its place in the genre(s) (fantasy / dystopia / speculative fiction)
- The use of narrative voice and points of view to depict the world
- Setting and characterisation
- The use of motifs, tropes and symbols
- The use of linguistic devices from the language methods (from whole-text discourse strategies down to precise lexical choices)

The following section will offer a whole-text analysis covering the above points to help you get started in your analysis of Atwood's storyworld.

Narrative structure

AQA specifies that the novels in the 'Imagined Worlds' / 'Telling Stories' module are '*characterised by unusual narratives, narrators and events*'. With this definition in mind, let us examine how Offred could be considered an unusual narrator and how the dystopic fantasy genre befits this description of unusual events.

Offred's narration

- **Offred writes mostly in the present tense**, unusual in itself in a first-person narrative (e.g. 'the Commander sits with his eyes closed... he works long hours. He has a lot of responsibilities' (p. 101)). This lends her narrative a sense of immediacy, even urgency at points. We, as readers, feel as though we are living each moment alongside her, feeling her frustration, despair and joy vicariously. Of course, she is in fact using a subtly different tense – the **historic present** (also called the dramatic present) – to make it sound as though what happened in the past is actually happening in the present. She is not actually speaking as these events happen, rather recounting them retrospectively, almost as print journalists write their headlines in the present tense to depict the news of the day. This difference is important to acknowledge when we consider her (un)reliability and propensity to twist her retelling of events.
- **The narrative is achronological** – it does not reveal everything in time order. We begin with a disorientating glimpse into her training as a Handmaid before jumping to the Commander's house. While events seem to progress in a relatively linear way, Offred frequently includes flashbacks both to the Red Centre and to the 'time before' and her life with Luke and her daughter. Most importantly, these jumps in time and space result in Offred withholding information as narrator so that we are tantalised by names without contexts, or half-told stories that are only completed chapters later. Arguably, this is an important authorial decision – Offred is utterly powerless in many respects, but Atwood grants her narrative power over the readers.
- **Offred is a flawed narrator** – she does not present herself as a hero and recognises her own faults. She is honest, often brutally so, about not only her less laudable actions but also her darkest thoughts. She presents herself to us as a raw, imperfect specimen.
- **Yet, Offred is also an unreliable narrator** – confusingly, she may be honest about herself and her thoughts, but she has a fluid version of truth. Often, she will admit that she has made up a story, or part of a story, or guessed what she does not know. Sometimes she will retell the same story again and again, with a differing version each time. In a storyworld where truth has been manipulated and remodelled by the rulers of Gilead, we can perhaps appreciate how our narrator may also begin to question the nature of absolute truth.

Achronological – a narrative not arranged in or determined by the order of time

Genre – a particular type of literature defined by its themes and ideas

Historic present – the use of the present tense to depict past events as though they are happening as the narrator writes

- The **Historical Notes** complicate matters. This difficult section of the novel is sometimes seen by students as a postscript, but it is in fact an important framing device. It adds authenticity to Offred's account by adding the dimension of an academic symposium where Gilead and Offred's narrative are discussed. This seminar moves events to the year 2195 and shifts to a heterodiegetic narrative wholly different in style – it reads more like a dense, academic paper. It is in these notes that we discover that Offred never wrote down the narrative, but recorded it as a series of audiotapes. Moreover, we find out that the title of the novel was bestowed by a third party, again transforming our view of Offred. These complications also raise questions about the authority of Offred's narrative voice and the concept of the novel as her attempt to relay the uncensored, unedited version of her world.

Genre

NB this section is most relevant for A Level students as discussion of genre will gain you AO3 marks (not available at AS).

The Handmaid's Tale does not fall easily into any one genre. Despite it winning prizes for novels in the science fiction genre and often being cited as a 'feminist dystopia', Atwood has declared that both of these genre descriptions are incorrect. A popular story from her lecture circuit recalls one young student, during the final space for questions, raising her hand to ask whether the novel was a 'true story', resulting in lots of laughs from the audience. Atwood chastised the audience, telling them that they certainly should not be laughing because, yes, everything that happens in the novel has happened to some woman at some point in history. As a result, she prefers for the novel to be called 'speculative fiction' or 'fact within fiction'. She argues that it is not science fiction as 'the science fiction label belongs on books with things in them that we can't yet do, such as going through a wormhole in space to another universe; and speculative fiction means a work that employs the means already to hand, such as DNA identification and credit cards'. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this guide, let's explore how the novel befits the genre of a dystopian fantasy, bearing in mind that it is the notion of fantasy in particular that AQA specifies should be explored.

Dystopian fiction

- The term 'dystopia' comes from the Greek for a 'not-good place'; an antonym of 'utopia', the word coined by Thomas More in his 1516 novel to name a perfect world.
- Essentially, dystopias are terrible places, characterised as nightmarish worlds few people would enjoy inhabiting.
- Dystopias often resemble totalitarian regimes of history and project our fears for the future. They are not necessarily supposed to be set in the future (distinguishing them from science fiction) but rather an alternative time/space to our own, perhaps another concurrent dimension. Rather than predictions of what will happen, they are warnings about our current behaviour.
- Famous classic dystopian novels include George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (although the latter has been argued to be both a 'soft dystopia' and even a utopia – reminding us that a dystopia is subjective and, as Offred declares, 'Better never means better for everyone... It always means worse, for some' (p. 222)). Recently, in the last couple of decades, there has been a trend for dystopic novels in popular young adult fiction, with series such as *The Hunger Games* performing exceptionally well in the charts and as cinema adaptations. We may argue that the genre is particularly suited to young adults with its notions of the outcast individual, discontent towards higher powers, heroism and rebellion.



An anti-Trump protester equates modern USA to a dystopia

Fun fact: Atwood began writing the novel in 1984, the year that acts as the setting for Orwell's 1949 novel (confusing, I know!)

Motifs of a dystopia

Characterisation

- A protagonist who functions as an outsider – different from the prescribed norms of society.
- Typically the protagonist undergoes a **double journey** in the text – there is some literal **quest plot** whereby they must complete a challenge (start a rebellion, disobey a law, win a contest, etc.) and, alongside this, they undergo metaphorical growth, often becoming stronger, smarter or braver as the narrative progresses.
- A nefarious, intelligent **antagonist** acts as **foil** to the protagonist. They will usually represent the establishment/government and will have the goal of maintaining the regime as it stands.

Setting

- A world in which some past event (famine, natural disaster, war, etc.) has led to scarcity of resources and, perhaps, desperate measures to prevent it recurring.
- A strictly controlled society that assumes the worst of humankind and, therefore, closely regulates behaviour – a world inspired by Hobbesian philosophy.
- Usually an urban environment, often with futuristic elements – sometimes alongside anachronistic references to the past (seemingly ancient laws, weapons, homes, etc.).
- A world manipulated by propaganda and the media but where free speech, literature and self-expression are feared or banned.

Antagonist – the opposition to the narrative's protagonist; a hostile adversary who holds the protagonist back in their aims/quest ('ana' – up, against, back)

Double journey – when a narrator undergoes a literal, physical journey at the same time as a period of emotional, metaphorical growth

Foil – a character who contrasts with another, often used as a device to highlight elements of the other's character

Protagonist – the leading character of a narrative

Quest plot – a journey towards a specific mission or goal. In folklore, often literal, but increasingly in modern literature the goal may be a more metaphorical aim.

In detail – Hobbesian philosophy

'Man is a wolf to man'

Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) was a prominent political philosopher, best known for his book *Leviathan*. In this treatise, he compares a society to a leviathan, a primeval monster that is capable of great destruction if not brought under control. He argues that without a *social contract* in place, dictating how we should and must behave, humankind is naturally inclined towards selfishness, cruelty and even slaughter. This hypothetical, lawless world, he calls the *state of nature*. In some dystopic novels, there exists such a realm (e.g. in the Reservation in *Brave New World*) that acts as a threat to those within the society as to where they will end up if they do not comply. Hobbes also argues that we, as individuals, must submit to a *sovereign authority*, willingly giving up some of our rights in return for protection – a philosophy that clearly resonates with Aunt Lydia in *The Handmaid's Tale*, when she explains the difference between 'freedom to' in the time before and the 'freedom from' they enjoy now.



Whole-text Analysis

Themes and motifs

Power

The novel epitomises the notion that power corrupts (and absolute power corrupts absolutely). A **dichotomy** is created between those with power – most of the male figures in the novel and the Aunts – and those without. Handmaids are one of the lowest-ranking echelons in terms of power; although they are socially above Marthas or Econowives, they are the most severely restricted in their everyday freedoms of both action and thought. It is with heavy irony that we hear the doctor tell Offred, after offering to impregnate her, ‘think about it... but it’s your life’ (p. 71). Atwood constantly reminds us that, in being stripped of power, Offred and her ilk are also robbed of choice. However, Atwood also reveals that power comes in many forms; there is the unlikely power of the Aunts to enforce and control in a way that intimidates many of their male counterparts, the subversive power of Mayday, even the Handmaids’ power that comes from their position as objects of sexuality and desire. Offred is quick to note that ‘this desire of his. It could be important, it could be a passport’ (p. 154), equating potential power to freedom, yet in the same breath admits ‘it could be my downfall’ (p. 154), acknowledging the more dangerous repercussions of misplaced power. At one point, Offred wonders whether what matters most is not power but forgiveness: ‘maybe it isn’t really about who can own whom, who can do what to whom and get away with it... maybe it’s about who can do what to whom and get forgiven for it’ (p. 145). This interpretation again places the power back in the hands of the affected, the objects, as opposed to the abusive subjects.

Language

Exploration of language and wordplay is at the very heart of the novel – and is also linked to power. She/he who has the power to name, or the power to harness language, has a supreme advantage. Aunt Lydia, for instance, becomes associated with her frequent aphorisms – ‘where I am is not a prison, but a privilege, said Aunt Lydia’ (p. 18) or ‘Pen Is Envy, Aunt Lydia would say, quoting another Center motto’ (p. 49) – that mark her out as knowledgeable but also as able to (re)construct the world as she sees fit. She names it so and it becomes. Offred, however, has had her name stripped from her and is forbidden to read or write, instantly robbing her of these privileges. Yet she uses language as a way to soothe herself in her private thoughts: ‘Rendezvous it says, terraces, the sibilants run up my spine, a shiver as if in fever’ (p. 161). Here she plays with phonology to create a recurrent soft hush that seems to have a physical effect on her. Throughout, she also considers the etymology of words, exploring how we link lexis (words) with semantics (meaning) and how meaning can be ambiguous or change over time. Linked to language is also the trope of silencing, where we see women made mute either by the powers that be or by their own trauma that prevents them from articulating themselves or fragments their accounts. Silence is connected to safety and sanctuary while words are linked to heresy and danger. Yet they tread a precarious balance; when meeting a group of Japanese tourists, for instance, Offred acknowledges that ‘There is a silence. But sometimes it’s as dangerous not to speak. “Yes, we are very happy,” I murmur.’ (p. 39). It is a double bind where they seem damned if they do or damned if they don’t.



Truth and lies

Connected to language is the concept of truth; language can deceive. Offred’s narrative itself could be regarded as a manipulation of the reader’s emotions, playing with us as it plays with language. She is an utterly unreliable narrator, even admitting herself that she has told us lies earlier in her tale or embellished a story to suit her own purposes. Pieixoto’s lecture in the Historical Notes only serves to emphasise that we cannot rely on the veracity of what we have read. Again, truth is portrayed as dangerous, lies as an often-comforting illusion. The reality of Gilead is something Offred cannot fully confront (she begins to ignore Ofglen’s pleas for help and doesn’t want to look at the hanged bodies on the wall – ‘I don’t want to look at something that determines me so completely’ p. 73)) as in doing so she must accept her own hopeless situation and the likely demise of her daughter and husband. The structure of the novel allows the alternate ‘Night’ sections to thus act as places of respite, where she can retreat into her imagination and memories, away from nightmarish reality.

Men and women

We are presented with a succession of conflicting notions of gender and the ideal relationship between the genders, from Offred's maverick mother who believes that 'a man is just a women's strategy for making other women' (p. 131) to the inverse notion in Gilead that women's sole purpose is procreation. In the patriarchal structure of Gilead, we see the worst gender inequalities and injustices put into practice; women are devoid of any rights or privileges and do not belong in the upper echelons of society. Sex, too, is rarely represented positively. With the Commander in the Ceremonies, it is disturbing and unnatural. With Nick it is shrouded by darkness and fraught with insecurity and uncertainty. Even in Offred's memories of Luke, there is a sense of sordid guilt as she recalls their hotel liaisons while he was married. Atwood draws on common misconceptions that women should not enjoy sex, recounting an 'old joke' on pp. 233–234:

'Is anything wrong, dear?

No, why?

You moved.

Just don't move.' This joke – and its more sinister basis in reality – highlights the role of women as the passive partner, objectified and acted upon.



Aside from the connections between men and women, much of the novel's important relationships are between women. Mostly, women are suspicious of each other, as is encouraged by Gilead to deter any possible solidarity or connection that may become subversive. While Aunt Lydia dreams of a future where they will live 'in harmony together', with the Handmaids like daughters, all women 'united for a common end!' (p. 171), this seems laughable in a present where the Wives regard the Handmaids with contempt and the Handmaids see the Wives as cruel and cold. Even among the Handmaids, paranoia reigns. Offred and Ofglen do not find out their shared views for some time, for fear the other is an informer. Offred's closest connections seem either confined to the past (with Moira) or imagined (with her 'predecessor in this room, my friend with the freckles and the good laugh' (p. 107), who acts as her doppelgänger, both haunting and comforting her).

Activity 42: Active learning

Naming and the power of names are crucial themes in the novel. Look at the following quotes about naming:

'Fear of a name increases fear of the thing itself.' – J K Rowling

'A rose by any other name would smell as sweet' – Shakespeare

'The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their correct names' – proverb

'Tigers die and leave their skins; people die and leave their names' – proverb

'I can point fingers and name names!' – Jack Sparrow, *Pirates of the Caribbean*

'Names, once they are in common use, quickly become mere sounds, their etymology being buried, like so many of the earth's marvels, beneath the dust of habit.' – Salman Rushdie

'Naming things, breaking through taboos and denial is the most dangerous, terrifying, and crucial work.' – Eve Ensler

'Names are everything. I never quarrel with actions. My one quarrel is with words. The man who could call a spade a spade should be compelled to use one. It is the only thing he is fit for.' – Oscar Wilde

'The precision of naming takes away from the uniqueness of seeing.' – Pierre Bonnard

- Select two quotations you particularly agree with, and, for each, explain why you selected it.
- Select a quotation that you believe sums up how Atwood uses the process of naming in the novel, and explain why you selected it.
- Select a quotation that might explain why having a name is so important, and explain why you selected it.
- Select a quotation that indicates how the process of naming might be manipulated in a dystopia, and explain why you selected it.

Motifs

The colour red

This is analogous with the Handmaids, chosen, we find out in the Historical Notes, carefully by Commander Judd in order to best represent them. It is a sensual colour, once associated with passion and seduction, but also linked to bloodshed (and, therefore, menstruation and fertility). It also marks them out, for both ideological purposes (akin to Hawthorne's scarlet letter) and practical ones ('red is so visible' (p. 305), Offred bemoans, when contemplating how she might escape).

Flowers

Flowers represent fragility, vulnerability and the passing of time (significant in the context of Serena Joy's garden, where she grows them as a substitute for the child she is unable to nurture) but also femininity. Offred jokes that they are 'so female in shape it was a surprise they'd not long since been rooted out' (p. 152). Of course, as with any living organism, flowers also represent the possibility for fertility and growth, so are used symbolically in Gilead to show these are virtues prized by the regime.



Doubles/doppelgängers

In a world where Offred struggles to find connections to others, she strives to invent them. Various, throughout the novel, she likens herself to other characters, particularly other Handmaids as they form their indistinguishable pairs to shop, but even Serena Joy, as they are replicated in the glass on the staircase as each other's reflection, and Nick, as they stare at each other as he catches her out of bed: 'for the moment we're mirrors' (p. 109). Mirrors, echoes, duplications, ghosts and reflections feature prominently throughout.

Eyes

Eyes, of course, signify insight and clarity. Offred often describes the eyes of other characters carefully to us, but also observes imagery of eyes elsewhere too (e.g. 'under the plaster eye of my ceiling' (p. 47)). This accentuates the disturbing notion that she is constantly under surveillance. In addition, 'Eyes' is the name given to undercover Gileadean government enforcers planted in the community as spies. Thus, the recurrence of eye imagery emphasises the idea of Gilead as a **panopticon**, where those in charge see one's every move.



Analogous – comparable in respects that make the nature of each thing clearer

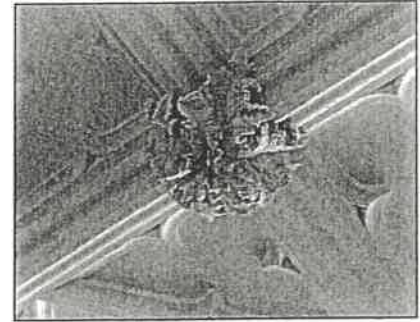
Dichotomy – a division of two things

Panopticon – an all-seeing institution (literally, a circular prison arranged around a central well, ensuring prisoners are visible at all times)

Characterisation and relationships

Offred

Offred is our window into the world; she has narrative power in the sense that she shapes our own judgements and perceptions. Yet she also forces us to recognise her own unreliability in her fragmented and often revised versions of events. She is also flawed, often cruel and judgemental of others (particularly the younger Guardians employed by the state to do their job, who she seems to taunt at the checkpoints, and of Janine, a highly vulnerable individual). She is also increasingly filled with rage and inclined to violence as the novel progresses; her narrative is rife with fantasies of destruction (for instance, she imagines she might remove a weapon from the toilet – in the same way as Moira – and attack the Commander, ‘drive the sharp end into him between his ribs’ (p. 232). Throughout, we also sense a death drive haunting her narrative. Motifs of death surround her, from ‘the wreath, on the ceiling’ to curtains ‘hanging like drowned white hair’ (p. 60), until it seems she is on the verge of suicide in the final pages. We don’t know Offred’s real name, but she gives us various clues (e.g. ‘no mooning and June-ing around here girls’ (p. 232)) that it may be June, notably the month that follows May/Mayday.



The Commander

Anonymous to the extent Pieixoto struggles to identify him in his academic research, the Commander is symbolic of all those in power in Gilead. He is the leader of the household Offred is assigned to, and the one she is compelled to have sex with in order to conceive a child for the couple. Offred tells us that ‘he works long hours. He has a lot of responsibilities’ (p. 101), in an ambiguous tone that seems part-sardonic, part-understanding. He talks in tired idioms (‘can’t make an omelette without breaking a few eggs’ (p. 222)) that seem to suggest only a superficial loyalty to the aims of Gilead. Ultimately, he is a hypocrite, indulging in the depravities of Jezebel’s and coveting items from the past. He uses Offred to fuel his own desires, which she recognises but accepts as there is a benefit for her in this bargain. She gets the material goods she craves, plus the delicious excitement of the forbidden in their Scrabble games and clandestine meetings (‘this is conspiracy’ she says on p. 149). Yet she warns both us readers and herself, stating that, ‘for him, I must remember, I am only a whim’ (p. 168). Her use of the **subordinate clause** here shows how she is forcing herself to think logically and strategically, not letting emotion take over. The noun ‘whim’ also sums up the Commander’s casually privileged position in which he can indulge himself in passing fancies with seeming impunity.

Serena Joy

As with the Commander, we see his wife, Serena Joy, only through the conduit of Offred’s thoughts and perceptions, so must remember that we may be being manipulated to view her particularly harshly. Her appearance is derided as old, wrinkled and visibly barren: ‘her face is sinking in on itself, and I think of towns built on underground rivers, where houses or whole streets disappear overnight’ (p. 56). Here, Offred also hints at the way Serena Joy is destroying herself with her bitterness and jealousy. Once a successful televangelist, she has, ironically, been subsumed by the patriarchal theocracy she once advocated. Offred uses **hendiadys** to depict her as ‘a malicious and vengeful woman’ (p. 170), showing her as someone who has no qualms about putting Offred in danger or disobeying the moral/legal rule of Gilead if it serves her purposes (such as encouraging her liaisons with Nick), but also someone who doesn’t forget any perceived slight against her. The antagonism between Serena Joy and Offred is emblematic of the wider tensions between women. Aunt Lydia tells the Handmaids it’s the wives not the husbands they need to watch out for.

Allegorical – containing an allegory (a hidden meaning there for a reader to interpret)

Hendiadys – ‘one through two’; the expression of a single idea through two words connected with an ‘and’

Prescient – having or showing knowledge of events before they take place

Subordinate clause – a clause in a complex sentence that is dependent on the main clause to make sense

Moira

Offred's charismatic and confident friend, Moira, was with her at the Red Centre but managed to escape. Later, she reappears as a prostitute in Jezebel's, somewhat defeated by Gilead and resigned to her role. Yet Offred heaps praise on her friend; she is 'a skilful borrower' (p. 255) able to manipulate others, and has an 'audacity' which is 'what we liked' (p. 143). Offred views her as a role model and an icon; she does what Offred only fantasies about doing. Even Aunt Lydia's hendiadys – 'she is a cunning and dangerous woman' (p. 141) – demonstrates her prowess and power to defy authority.



Ofglen

Offred's shopping partner, Ofglen, is a rebel within Gilead who introduces Offred to the existence of Mayday and asks for her help in discovering more about her Commander. Her first, brave attempt to reach Offred, asking 'do you think God listens' (p. 177) as they stand in front of Soul Scrolls, shows her strength of character in her questioning what they are indoctrinated – or coerced – into believing. Yet while Offred calls them 'Siamese twins', she lacks Ofglen's courage or heroism. Offred ignores her pleas to help gather information and is shocked – even a little appalled – at her mercy beating of the condemned informer. Ofglen commits suicide as the van arrives for her, something Offred is ultimately unable to do. Ofglen represents another figure of female friendship whom Offred both admires and envies, who has characteristics Offred seems to aspire to, even as she notes that they lead to the owner's doom.

Janine

A vulnerable Handmaid who is with Offred and Moira at the Red Centre and seems to disintegrate mentally in her time there, until her grip on reality loosens. She is publicly humiliated in rituals where the group chant that it is her fault she was gang-raped. She is so stripped of dignity that she becomes a lackey for the Aunts, described by Offred as 'like a puppy that's been kicked too often, by too many people, at random: she'd roll over for anyone, she'd tell anything, just for a moment of approbation' (p. 139). This eagerness to please, in her new role as Ofwarren, leads her to an illegal encounter with a doctor to ensure she gets pregnant. She becomes 'inflated but reduced' (p. 126) in Offred's eyes, physically blooming but devoid of any sense of selfhood. Offred witnesses the birth of Janine's baby but later finds out it was a 'shredder' or an 'unbaby' that did not survive, so Janine was reposted.

Nick

A mysterious 'man made of darkness' (p. 73), he is the reclusive chauffeur who works in the Commander's household. He and Offred start a form of relationship after being forced together by Serena Joy in the hope he can impregnate her. She visits him under cover of night and few of their conversations are relayed to us. We are never sure if he is indeed a rebel or an Eye. It is implied Offred is carrying his baby by the end of the novel, and, in the Historical Notes, Pieixoto argues that this is why Nick helps her escape – 'the possibility of fatherhood, so redolent of status, so highly prized' (p. 323).



Aunt Lydia

Described as 'angular and without flesh' (p. 153), Aunt Lydia is the Aunt in charge of the Red Centre and thus in control of the Handmaids. She is brutal in her methods and unflinching in her authority, yet also infantilises the 'girls' in her care to the extent that she becomes a disturbing version of a surrogate mother to them. She loads them with aphorisms and advice because 'we make her salivate morally' (p. 124). By imbuing her metaphors and allusions with violence ('sometimes she had a graphic way of putting things' (p. 74)), she gets the Handmaids to fear the world they've left behind and feel that the present offers a better alternative.

Offred's mother

Offred's mother represents the second-wave feminism that readers may be familiar with and associate with their own past or present. She is rebellious and empowered in the past, flatteringly described by Moira as 'neat... she's got pizzazz... she's cute' (p. 265). After Gilead comes into existence, she is exiled to the Colonies, where Moira sees her in a re-education film she is forced to watch, clearing up radioactive waste. Along with Luke and Offred's daughter, Offred's mother represents the past that Offred has been torn away from yet cannot bear to relinquish: 'I've mourned for her already. But I will do it again, and again' (p. 265) she says, emphasising how, although her mother is not physically present in the novel, she appears as a ghost in Offred's thoughts and memories.



Activity 43: Discussion

1. Is Offred a hero(ine)? Traditionally, literary heroes must conform to a specific set of prescribed characteristics. We may argue that Offred does not meet this criterion.
 2. Consider the list below of characteristics of a hero, taken from Joseph Campbell's book *The Hero's Journey* (New World Library, 1990). Discuss in pairs/groups:
 - a) Which of these criteria does Offred meet?
 - b) Is this list outdated?
 - c) Is this list gender-biased?
 - d) Can we use this list more metaphorically to describe Offred's experiences?
 - e) Does this list assume an idealised hero rather than an imperfect, human one?
1. The hero is naive and inexperienced.
 2. The hero meets monsters or monstrous men.
 3. The hero has a wise being as mentor.
 4. The hero yearns for a beautiful lady who is often his inspiration.
 5. The hero must go on a journey, learn a lesson and return home.
 6. The hero crosses a bridge or a body of water.
 7. The origins of the hero are mysterious or they lose their parents at a young age.
 8. The hero returns to the land of their birth in disguise or as an unknown.
 9. The hero is one-of-a-kind and often represents a whole people or nation.
 10. The hero struggles for something valuable and important.
 11. The hero has help from divine or supernatural forces.
 12. The hero goes through a rite of passage or an initiation that changes their understanding of the world.
 13. The hero undergoes a ritual or ceremony after initiation.
 14. The hero makes a stirring speech to his companions.
 15. The hero engages in tests or contests of strength that show his excellence.
 16. The hero suffers from an unhealable wound from which they never recover.

Exam-style Essay Questions

All of the following questions are in the style of the exam questions for the AQA English Language and Literature AS and A Level exams. You may also wish to adapt the AS questions for A Level by ensuring you refer to the whole novel in your responses.

AS

1. Read the extract beginning on p. 60 with the line 'In the afternoons, when Luke was still in flight from his wife' and ending on p. 61 with the line 'an impossible thing, now, like something you'd make up'. Examine how Atwood presents Offred's past in this extract.
2. Read the extract beginning on p. 36 with the line 'As we wait in our double line' and ending on p. 37 with the line 'the pinkish tip of her nose'. Examine how Atwood presents relationships between the Handmaids in this extract.
3. Read the extract beginning on p. 196 with the line 'I print the phrase carefully' and ending on p. 197 with the line 'to play children's word games with him'. Examine how Atwood presents the Commander in this extract.
4. Read the extract beginning on p. 291 with the line 'Aunt Lydia waits a moment' and ending on p. 292 with the line 'he has become an it'. Examine how Atwood presents the Particution in this extract.
5. Read the extract beginning on p. 31 with the line 'We produce our passes' and ending on p. 32 with the line 'our retreating shapes'. Examine how Atwood presents power in this extract.

A Level

1. Read the extract on p. 149 beginning with the line 'we play two games' and ending with the line 'this is conspiracy'. This is from the section of the novel where Offred and the Commander play Scrabble. Explore the significance of language and communication in the novel. You should consider:
 - the presentation of language and communication in the extract and throughout the novel
 - the use of fantasy elements in constructing a fictional world
2. Read the extract on p. 186 beginning with the line 'but I could see out into the corridor' and ending with the line 'made us feel we deserved it?'. This is from the section of the novel where Offred describes the moment when she discovered she had lost her job. Explore the significance of Offred's memories of the past in the novel. You should consider:
 - the presentation of the past in the extract and throughout the novel
 - the use of fantasy elements in constructing a fictional world
3. Read the extract on p. 273 beginning with the line 'he steps back and aside to let me past' and ending with the line 'I knew it might only be once'. This is from the section of the novel where Offred describes the first time she sleeps with Nick. Explore the significance of the character of Nick in the novel. You should consider:
 - the presentation of Nick in the extract and throughout the novel
 - the use of fantasy elements in constructing a fictional world
4. Read the extract on p. 89 beginning with the line 'the sitting room would once have been called a drawing room' and ending with the line 'the glint of brass on the box beside it'. This is from the section of the novel where Offred describes the Commander's house. Explore the significance of the domestic setting in the novel. You should consider:
 - the presentation of the house in the extract and throughout the novel
 - the use of fantasy elements in constructing a fictional world

Sample Essay Responses

Essay 1 – an AS top grade response to the following question:

Read the extract beginning on p. 31 with the line 'We produce our passes' and ending on p. 32 with the line 'our retreating shapes'. Examine how Atwood presents power in this extract.

This extract comes from the second section of the novel, where Atwood is still working to establish her storyworld and reveal the dystopic elements of Gilead. Consequently, this extract is rife with dystopic motifs in its exploration of power imbalance as Offred and Ofglen pass through a Guardians' checkpoint. Interestingly however, as the extract progresses, different forms of power are explored. While the young Guardians hold obvious institutional power, by virtue of their gender and position, we see the women's own subversive power, held in what they withheld – the forbidden desire they ignite in these men. Offred calls it the 'power of a dog bone, passive but there' – a metaphor which highlights that her power lies in the temptation her mere presence creates. However, the metaphor is complicated by the fact it also reminds us that Gilead – and these men who represent its values – see her as no more than a fetishised body. She is so 'passive' she is likened to an inanimate object.

The power of the state is demonstrated in the opening of the extract through the semantic field of bureaucracy. Verbs such as 'inspected' and 'stamped', and nouns such as 'pass' and 'pillbox', and the intimidating-sounding neologism 'Compuchek' create a sense of a storyworld where every minutiae of life is carefully regulated and individual liberty is severely constricted. Even on this innocent, chaperoned visit to the shops, Offred has to pass through this intimidating checkpoint. The verbs also carry an undercurrent of violence as the authority figures check their identity passes; 'stamped' and 'punch' in particular are also synonyms for physical attacks. This highlights how Offred feels these measures of control are an assault on her identity and freedom.

Offred also contemplates how Gilead's power is created by uncertainty and concealment. The palpable threat of the 'black painted van' (perhaps an echo of the 'Black Ravens' in Stalinist Russia that transported dissenters to the Gulags) is exacerbated by the fact you cannot see inside the 'dark-tinted windows' and that the men in the front seat wear 'dark glasses'. This symbolism connotes ominous blindness and moral darkness and evil. Offred also uses plosive sounds in this description – harsh 'd' and 't' stop consonants – to reflect her unease.

Yet Offred's – and the reader's – notion of institutional power is complicated with her realisation that these men too are lackeys of the state. She muses on how they are conditioned to suppress their own desires: 'if they think of a kiss, they must then think immediately of the floodlights going on, the rifle shots. They think instead of doing their duty'. Atwood uses anaphora of 'they think' here at the beginning of each clause to juxtapose the natural and unnatural, impulsive and conditioned thought processes. This highlights how brainwashing is used in dystopic society to convince its followers to act in the interests of the ruling party. These men's desires are subsumed by the conviction they cannot succeed if they give in to them, not to mention the threat of retribution (obliquely referred to with suggestion of exposure in 'the floodlights' and the consequences of the 'rifle shots').

Offred goes on to explain how she reasserts her own power in the situation, wriggling her hips as she walks away. We readers may judge her for her deliberate provocation here, especially as she admits these are young men who played no part in her enslavement. Indeed, she admits, with characteristic narrative honesty, that she is 'ashamed' of herself for doing so, reminding us of her fallibility – and relatability – as a human narrator. Atwood depicts her as almost outright cruel in her fantasies here, as she states, 'I hope they get hard

at the sight of us and have to rub themselves against the painted barriers, surreptitiously'. This graphic reference to erection shows Offred has normalised her role as a sexual object, while also vindictively imagining the irony of the young men, forbidden by the state from acting on their desires, relieving that same desire by copulating with the 'painted barrier', a symbol of the state.

Ultimately, Atwood emphasises that it is the power of Gilead that is all-encompassing. The extract is literally framed by it – both the beginning and end of the passage is an image of the roadblock, impenetrable and absolute. Offred ends the passage with a melancholy asyndetic list, reminding the reader that in this storyworld there are 'no outlets now... no more magazines, no more films, no more substitutes'. She frames her world not by what exists but by this extensive list of what is lost. While these young Guardians might have a vestige of authority bequeathed to them, and while she has the irrevocable power of untouchability, these powers are petty in the face of the might of Gilead.

Sample examiner's comments:

AO1 – this is a detailed and confident essay that clearly focuses on the theme of power in all its ambiguities, along with the significance of power in the narrative. The student thoroughly discusses narrative voice and authorial creation of the storyworld. Apt comments on genre (although some contextual information cannot be awarded marks here as it falls under the remit of AO3). A well-structured argument that provides a thorough, often perceptive, analysis. The student's use of terminology is accurate and wide-ranging. Total – 18 marks

AO2 – the close analysis of language ranges across the language levels, including some useful exploration of phonology (in discussion of plosive sounds) and discourse (in touching on the framing within the extract). The student often explores at word level effectively. Throughout, multiple meanings and significances are intuited. Total – 14 marks

Essay 2 – an A Level top grade response to the following question:

Read the extract on p. 89 beginning with the line 'the sitting room would once have been called a drawing room' and ending with the line 'the glint of brass on the box beside it'. This is from the section of the novel where Offred describes the Commander's house. Explore the significance of the domestic setting in the novel. You should consider:

- the presentation of the house in the extract and throughout the novel
- the use of fantasy elements in constructing a fictional world

The Commander's house is the setting for much of the novel; even when action takes place elsewhere, it is punctuated by a return to this space. Thus, the domestic space appears inescapable and claustrophobic, a prison not a sanctuary for Offred. She might briefly escape to shop, visit the doctor or attend one of Gilead's many rituals, but, as we might expect from a dystopic society, her place is firmly in the home. Despite it often being represented in banal, everyday terms, the house also becomes menacing. In the storyworld, Gilead is a panopticon from which there is no escape and nowhere to hide; she is being watched and judged even behind these closed doors. As we progress through the novel, domesticity becomes more and more dangerous – Offred intones that the world is 'full of weapons if you look for them' – and everyday items like 'knitting needles' and 'garden shears' take on a new-found menace.

The house is represented as a territory where each room is ruled by a different faction of the household; there is no unity between the inhabitants of the house. Cora and Rita, for example, control the kitchen; Serena Joy the garden. Unsurprisingly, most of the spaces are under the Commander's power. Atwood effectively therefore represents the house as a microcosm of the outer world, where men control the spaces that influence and are seen by the public, while women (namely the Aunts in Gilead) work behind the scenes to keep order. In this extract, Offred describes the sitting room. She begins by exploring the semantic shift from 'drawing room' to 'living room' to 'sitting room', considering how this is no longer a space where action happens ('drawing') or where communal life flourishes ('living'). The use of the modifier 'sitting' instead connotes passivity and inaction – a space where they simply wait for something to happen. She also considers the past epithet of 'parlour', alluding to Mary Howitt's poem in saying 'the kind with spiders and flies'. This reference to Howitt's moralistic poem reminds the reader of her entrapment and sense of victimhood as we can consider it an allegory for her own situation. Yet in citing this reference, she seems to be admitting that she is knowingly entering the spider's trap.

The sitting room setting also echoes the wider storyworld in other respects. Pain and suffering colour their surroundings. 'Minor discomforts are instructive', intones Offred as she notes the hardness of her seat, using an aphorism that sounds both sardonic and resigned in tone. Alternatively, we might see this as evidence of the extent of her indoctrination as she almost takes on Aunt Lydia's voice here, echoing the phrases she was taught at the Red Centre. Atwood also uses phonology – in the sibilant 'subdued, symmetrical' – to highlight the way that order and modesty are prized in Gileadean society. Yet the insidious hissing sound created reflects Offred's discomfort with these surroundings. Offred also uses the metaphorical description of the room taking the 'shapes money takes when it freezes', hinting at corruption in the society that has funded such a lifestyle.

The room is evidently a masculine space in which Offred is an intruder. Atwood uses synaesthesia – the sight is presented 'mutely' – as a reminder of her enforced silencing at the hands of the patriarchy. The semantic field of silence runs throughout the passage – even the leather chair is described using the unsettling, macabre noun phrase 'cow's tongue hush'. The room's masculinity is also highlighted through its hard edges and coldness; Atwood uses hendiadys – 'crusting and hardening' – to compare it to the formation of underground caves, suggesting an insidious, gradual process that's made this world what it is.

In contrast, Offred's room lacks the grandeur and prestige of this communal space. It has the illusion of privacy, although she is not allowed a lock on the door. Despite the novel's structure ensuring every other

section (the 'Night' chapters) are spent in this room, she is reluctant to call it hers; to do so, it is implied, would mean that she resigns herself to this fate and admits she belongs to this world. Yet we return to it again and again – there is a sense of relentlessness in the novel's structure, alongside the obvious negative connotations of 'night' that are associated with the room. It is first described in the opening to Chapter 11, with an asyndetic list ('a chair, a table, a lamp') that portrays it as monastic in its simplicity. It is also somewhat military, conforming to the dystopic trope of regimented order (Aunt Lydia suggests they 'think of it like being in the army'). The simplicity of the room, with its 'single mattress medium hard' and 'archaic' art also echoes what contemporary readers would have thought of as a communist style and values; this is particularly pertinent considering Atwood wrote the novel in the shadow of the Berlin Wall, which was not demolished until 1989. Called the 'Wall of Shame' by Western powers, the wall divided a world of modernity and forward momentum from a world they perceived as stuck in the past. Thanks to the intensity of Offred's homodiegetic narrative voice, we also begin to sense that the room harbours death. She imbues her description with haunting motifs of death – she spies a 'wreath' in the ceiling, notes the 'shatterproof' glass and remarks that they have 'removed anything you could tie a rope to'. Thus it truly becomes a prison she cannot escape from, even with suicide.

An interesting domestic space is Serena Joy's garden; it is both her one domain in the house and her surrogate child. Unable to conceive, she instead breeds new life in her flowers. Gardens have an important significance, particularly in colonial literature, of taming and controlling the wilderness and carving one's own territory out of such spaces. This links closely to Serena Joy's former life as a famous preacher (whom Atwood seems to model on the televangelists that enjoyed a surge of popularity in 1970s America, drawing on contemporary fears of moral decline to preach their sermons to millions). She sees her job as transforming and taming the chaos around her; yet here it is on a pathetically small scale. Irony surrounds her – she enthusiastically preached that a woman's place is in the home, and got her wish to the extent she too no longer has a role. Her garden too, is ironic – Offred describes it almost as if it is mocking her: 'the tulips along the border are redder than ever, opening, no longer winecups but chalices'. The comparative adjective 'redder' and the verb 'opening' imply menstruation, along with the imagery of 'chalices' echoing the womb. The trope of flowers throughout the novel represents vulnerability, frailty and transience. Just as the Commander is reflected in the house, thus Serena Joy is embodied in the garden. Even Offred's first descriptions of the garden are closely followed by her memory of Aunt Lydia's denunciation 'all flesh is grass', a biblical allusion reminding us of the transience of human life. Like the state of Gilead, Serena Joy's garden seems doomed to fall back into symbolic disrepair.

Finally, we must consider the Commander's study, the 'oasis of the forbidden'. Offred's description is problematic and reflects her ambiguity towards it. It is both an 'oasis' (a place of respite and relief in the metaphorical desert of Gilead; (the storyworld is often linked to images of the desert – consider the epigraph 'in the desert there is no sign that says 'thou shalt not eat stones' and the desert's connection to the central theme of barrenness) and a place of danger and temptation. We might consider this description an allusion to the Garden of Eden – paradise in the midst of a wasteland, but rife with deadly temptation. The study, like Jezebel's, also represents the hypocrisy of Gilead. The Commander's retreat is packed full of illegal literature and illicit reminders of the past; these are all of the things he should have eschewed in his supposed role as a Commander of the Faithful. Offred's anaphora betrays her shock as she notes there are 'no locks, no boxes' but this array of prohibited material out in audacious plain sight. In some respects, it also bears the hallmarks of a stage set – Offred notes the 'fireless fireplace' and his 'studied pose' as she enters – it is a thinly veiled facade we readers are being encouraged to see through as soon as possible.

The domestic space is thus both divided and dangerous – to transgress into another's space means having to conform to their rules and to risk their hostility. It is a house, not a home, and can instead be interpreted as a microcosm of the entire storyworld. Like Gilead, it is rotten at the core, hypocritical and ultimately unstable.

Sample examiner's comments:

AO1 – *this is a thorough and often perceptive interpretation of the domestic setting that offers a wide range of evidence to support ideas. Authorial intentions are taken into account and the argument is convincing. The student uses terminology from across the language levels, including some more complex concepts ('hendiadys' or 'anaphora') to frame their ideas. Total – 9 marks*

AO2 – *The close analysis supports ideas and is often precise and perceptive. Word level analysis is used throughout, including some alternative readings, although this could be further developed. Sophisticated interpretations and valid exploring of meanings. Total – 8 marks*

AO3 – *The candidate offers a very comprehensive look at the whole novel, considering the role of the particular setting in the storyworld and using several sections of the narrative to shape their response. Good understanding of genre is evidenced throughout. Historical context is explored via references to the Berlin Wall and televangelism. Comprehensive. Total – 13 marks*

Literary and Linguistic Glossary

Abstract noun	a noun denoting something intangible (a quality, a state, an idea, a belief, etc.), e.g. confusion, terror, death, challenge
Achronological	a narrative not arranged in or determined by the order of time
Adjacency pair	a unit of conversation that consists of one turn each by two speakers, with the two parts related to each other (question and answer, statement and response, etc.)
Adverb	a word that qualifies a verb (e.g. 'slowly', 'eventually')
Allegorical	containing an allegory (a hidden meaning there for a reader to interpret)
Allegory	a short story with a moral meaning and message
Anachronistic	seeming to belong to a period other than that which is being portrayed
Anadiplosis	a writer's use of the same word/phrase to close one clause and to open the next (e.g. 'When I give, I give myself', Walt Whitman)
Analogous	comparable in respects that make the nature of each thing clearer
Analogy	a comparison between two things for the purpose of clarification or explanation
Anaphora	repeating the same word at the beginning of consecutive sentences or clauses for rhetorical effect
Antagonist	the opposition to the narrative's protagonist, a hostile adversary who holds the protagonist back in their aims/quest ('ana' up, against, back)
Antithetical	directly opposed or contrasted; mutually incompatible
Aphorism	a pithy observation which contains a general truth
Asyndetic listing	listing without the use of conjunctions (usually with commas or semicolons in their place)
Bathetic	producing an anticlimax
Blazoning	in literature, a technique whereby a person is represented by a body part / body parts (common in odes and metaphysical poetry)
Catharsis/cathartic	the process of releasing pent-up emotions, bringing a sense of relief as a result
Chiaroscuro	refers to the interplay and balance of light and shade, often in artworks, in order to represent character or setting
Cliché	an overused phrase or expression
Comparative adverbs	adverbs using the suffix -er or the word 'more' to designate a comparison (e.g. 'faster', 'more quickly')
Continuous present tense	use of -ing verbs to denote something ongoing in the present tense (e.g. walking to the shops, eating quickly)
Declarative	a sentence in the form of a statement
Determiner	a modifying word that determines the kind of reference a noun has, e.g. 'the', 'that', 'our'
Dichotomy	a division of two things represented as opposite
Diminutive	a lexical choice or grammatical form denoting smallness (e.g. 'little', 'tiny', '-let')
Direct speech	a report of the exact words said, using speech marks and, often, a speaker tag (e.g. "It's about time we got going", he said')
Double journey	when a narrator undergoes a literal, physical journey at the same time as a period of emotional, metaphorical growth
Dramatic irony	when the reader is aware of something that the narrator is not
Dynamic verbs	verbs that denote a progressive action with a time span (e.g. 'walked', 'talked', 'lied')
Epizeuxis	immediate repetition of a word for emphasis (e.g. 'location, location, location')

Etymology	the study of word origins
Expository	intended to introduce, explain or describe
Foil	a character who contrasts with another, often used as a device to highlight elements of the other's character
Foreshadowing	a literary device where something acts as a warning or indication of what is to come in the chapter/novel
Genre	a particular type of literature defined by its themes and ideas
Gerund	a verb form in continuous present tense that often functions as a noun
Graphology	the appearance of the text on the page, including layout, font, kerning, colour, etc.
Hendiadys	'one through two'; the expression of a single idea through two words connected with an 'and'
Historic present	the use of the present tense to depict past events as if they are happening as the narrator writes
Homodiegetic narrator	a first-person narrator who is a part of the same story that they are telling
Hyperbolic language	an exaggerated or melodramatic style
Hypophora	a rhetorical technique whereby the narrator/speaker asks a question then immediately answers it. Often used by politicians (e.g. 'How can we solve this issue? By tackling it at source!')
Idiom	a set expression with a meaning not necessarily clear from the words themselves (e.g. 'give up the ghost' or 'over the moon')
Imperative	a sentence fronted by a verb that commands (e.g. 'listen', 'watch')
In media res	Latin for 'in the middle of things'; beginning a story in the middle of the narrative, without context or exposition
Inclusive pronoun	a pronoun replaces a noun in a sentence; 'we' and 'us' are inclusive pronouns, indicating a group
Interjection	an abrupt remark used as an aside/interruption, often at the beginning of a sentence/paragraph
Interrogative	a sentence that uses the grammatical form of a question
Irony	a situation that is opposite to what one would expect
Juxtaposition	two images or ideas placed close together for contrasting effect
Lacunae	narrative gaps in space/time, where part of the story is left unspoken
Latinate	words of Latin origin, usually creating a more formal register and indicating knowledge and prestige for the speaker
Lexical borrowing	words taken from other languages, used as part of the English lexicon (e.g. fiancée, bungalow, amok)
Lexical shift	generational change in the choice of a word to signify something (e.g. 'pictures' becomes 'flicks' becomes 'movies')
Liminal	a state occupying both sides – or the threshold of – two states of existence
Low-frequency lexis	words used less often by the average speaker and seen more rarely in written or spoken discourse
Maxim	a short statement expressing a general rule
Metaphor	a non-literal comparison used to create imagery, build atmosphere or help a reader picture the unfamiliar (e.g. the wind is a ghost)
Metatextual	the quality of being self-referential, reminding you that you are reading a book, or 'breaking the fourth wall' by talking directly to the reader

Minor sentence	a sentence without a main verb/subject (i.e. an incomplete sentence without an independent clause)
Monologue	an extended speech by one character where others listen on
Neologisms	newly coined words or expressions
Noun phrase	a word / group of words containing a head noun and functioning together in a sentence to act as the subject or object
Panopticon	an all-seeing institution (literally, a circular prison arranged around a central well, ensuring prisoners are visible at all times)
Paradigm shift	a 180-degree turn in the opposite direction, where a society / an individual / a group fundamentally changes the very basis of its existence
Passive voice	when the object of the sentence is placed as the subject in the sentence construction (e.g. 'the letter was opened by the official' or 'ground was gained during the battle')
Peripeteia	a sudden reversal of fortune or change of circumstances in a narrative
Phatic talk	small talk; conversation that has a social rather than an informative function
Plosives	hard stop consonant sounds (e.g. p, t, d, b)
Polysyllabic	a word with more than one syllable
Portmanteau	a word blending the sounds and meanings of two others, e.g. 'brunch' ('breakfast' and 'lunch') or 'Brexit' ('Britain' and 'exit')
Prescient	having or showing knowledge of events before they take place
Pronoun	a word class of words that replace nouns as subjects/objects in a sentence (e.g. 'I', 'he', 'they')
Protagonist	the leading character of a narrative
Quest plot	a journey towards a specific mission or goal. In folklore, often literal, but increasingly in modern literature the goal may be a more metaphorical aim
Reflexive verb	a verb where the direct object is the same as the subject (e.g. I wash myself)
Refrain	a line that is repeated in a pattern throughout a song, poem or story
Reported speech	a reported version of what someone said that may be approximated/paraphrased (e.g. 'he declared that we should leave')
Rhetorical interrogative	a sentence constructed as a question not meant to be answered
Sartorial language	lexis associated with clothing
Satire	mocking an institution or a belief for serious purposes – ideally to effect change
Semantic field	a group of words linked by meaning
Sibilance	a pattern of soft consonant sounds such as 's', 'ch', 'th', z, x
Sibilants	soft consonant sounds such as 's', 'ch', 'th', z, x. Alliteration with these sounds is called sibilance.
Simile	a non-literal comparison made using 'like' or 'as'
Soliloquy	an extended speech by one character where it is implied that the only listener is the reader/viewer
Spatial discourse markers	words used to organise discourse into segments by marking out space (often prepositions or adverbs such as 'under', 'beyond', 'past')
Speaker tags	a speaker's name and the speech-related verb after direct speech (e.g. 'she said', 'the Commander declared')
Stream of consciousness	a narrative style where the narrator's thoughts and reactions appear as an uncensored flow
Subordinate clause	a clause in a complex sentence that is dependent on the main clause to make sense

Synaesthesia	a literary device whereby writers present something to appeal to more than one sense, or mix up the senses (e.g. 'a red scream', 'a musical smile')
Syndetic listing	listing with conjunctions to join elements in the list
Syndetic pair	two words (often descriptive) connected by an 'and'
Synecdoche	a figure of speech where a part is used to represent the whole (e.g. talking about your 'wheels' to refer to your car)
Tableau	a group of motionless figures representing a story
Tag question	using a short interrogative on the end of a declarative statement, usually to gain confirmation of what one has said or to reinforce one's own belief in what was said (e.g. 'It's a lovely day, isn't it?')
Theocracy	a system of government where rulers reign in the name of God
Tricolon	a rhetorical term for three parallel clauses/phrases/words that come in quick succession without interruption
Trope	a significant, repeated theme
Vernacular	the language of ordinary people
Zoomorphism	when humans are given animalistic qualities (the antonym of anthropomorphism)

Glossary of Gileadean terms

Listed here you will find all of the neologisms that Atwood coins in the novel, along with a brief explanation of their significance.

All Flesh	the butcher's shops in Gilead, named after the biblical verse 'All Flesh is Grass' [Isaiah 40:6], a reminder of the transitory nature of human existence
Angels	the soldiers/guards working for the Gilead regime
Angels of the Apocalypse	Gilead soldiers fighting in the overseas wars, with a name that denotes holy purpose and suggests they have God's judgement behind them
Aunts	female senior figures in Gilead who are tasked with controlling and re-educating the other women, primarily the Handmaids. Their familial title belies their sadism and cruelty, although they also act as patronising schoolteachers on occasion, infantilising their subjects.
Birthmobile	the van that transports Handmaids to a birth so that it becomes a collective and communal experience where they unite to help their fellow Handmaid bring the child into the world
Children of Ham	a biblical allusion to any nation with dark skin [Genesis 10:6]
Colonies	places outside Gilead that have become infected with radioactivity and dangerous pollutants. They are used as a threat among women as anyone who is deemed too old, sterile or dangerous for the regime is sent there to clear them up.
Commanders	in full, 'Commanders of the Faithful' – the male elite who represent the upper echelons of Gileadean society
Compuchek	a kind of barcode scanner that reads identity cards
Compucount	a version of a credit card
Compudoc	a computer used in medical centres in Gilead to check identity and patient records
Econowives	the working-class women who dress in multicoloured stripes and do not have the privilege of a Handmaid or Marthas to help in their households
Emerge van	a cross between 'emergency' and the concept of a child 'emerging' from the woman's body. These vans, with trained male doctors, park outside the house during labour, and the doctors only enter in the event of a medical emergency.
Feels on Wheels vans	in the time before, these were mobile brothels, used by those in charge in Gilead as an indication of the moral depravity that existed
Gender treachery	homosexual acts
Gilead	in the Old Testament, Gilead was a rich and idyllic region north-east of the Dead Sea, known for its bucolic beauty and agricultural bounty
Identipasses	ID cards all citizens of Gilead are compelled to carry
Jezebel's	the large-scale brothel that Commanders and trade delegations use; it is the ultimate mark of hypocrisy. Jezebel was the wicked wife of Ahab, Israel's king. She attempted to worship false idols and was eventually devoured by dogs.
Martha	Marthas are the housekeepers who work for the Commanders. The more Marthas a Commander has, the higher their status. Martha in the Bible is a housekeeper who works hard to welcome Christ into her home, but then fails to take advantage of his teachings [Luke 10:38–42].
Particution	a group execution, where the condemned person is attacked by a large cluster of Handmaids who are free to attack them however they wish
Pornomarts	distributors of pornography in the time before
Prayvaganzas	large-scale public meetings where groups (divided by gender) pray together and are able to publicly demonstrate their devotion to both God and Gilead

Red Center	an acronym for 'Re-education Center', where the Handmaids are sent to be taught the ways of Gilead and learn what is expected of them in their new roles
Salvagings	ultimately, a euphemism for executions. Pieixoto suggests it is a term borrowed from other cultures, where religious language associated with saving souls is used to cover up state brutalities.
Soul Scrolls	an automated, unstaffed print shop that exists in every town in Gilead. It produces reams of prayers ordered by wealthy families, perhaps in the hope of salvation, perhaps simply to showcase their devotion in a visible way.
Unbaby	a baby that is stillborn or born deformed; also called a 'Shredder'. Offred tells us that one in four children is born this way in Gilead.
Underground Femaleroad	operated by Mayday, the route by which women are smuggled to Canada. Atwood draws on the underground railroads that transported slaves to free Northern states. In the Historical Notes, Pieixoto jokes that it is also known by academics as the 'Frailroad' – a reference to both the instability / varied success of the line and a pun on women as the weaker sex (a possible allusion to Hamlet's damning line 'Frailty, thy name is woman').
Unwoman	a woman stripped of her womanhood and sent to the Colonies; perhaps a Handmaid who has failed to conceive, a dissenter, someone from a religious sect who has refused to convert, or simply an elderly female who is of no use elsewhere

Further Reading

Other novels by Atwood

The Testaments [Chatto & Windus, 2019]

The Booker-Prize-winning, compelling sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, with three narrative voices, including Aunt Lydia, detailing the eventual collapse of Gilead.

The Blind Assassin [McClelland & Stewart, 2000]

A clever, multiframe feminist narrative (a book within a book within a book) that merges romance, politics and humour.

The Heart Goes Last [McClelland & Stewart, 2015]

A more recent Atwood novel that posits a dystopia where couples, enticed by the promise of economic security, volunteer to be prisoners and guards for alternate months.

Oryx and Crake [McClelland & Stewart, 2003]

Set in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, this novel is particularly topical in its exploration of environmental issues and ecocriticism.

Other dystopic novels

Brave New World [Aldous Huxley: Chatto & Windus, 1932]

A more complex 'soft' dystopia, where citizens are divided into five social classes and are grown in laboratories to perfectly fit the characteristics of their class, with happiness the highest priority.

1984 [George Orwell: Secker & Warburg, 1949]

The original dystopic nightmare; a society ruling with an iron fist, controlling every inch of its citizens lives under the panopticon of 'Big Brother'.

Fahrenheit 451 [Ray Bradbury: Harper Collins, 1953]

Named after the temperature at which paper burns, this dystopia bans all forms of reading and is told from the perspective of a firefighter whose job is not to quell fires but to start them.

The Power [Naomi Alderman: Viking, 2016]

An interesting modern take on dystopias where women discover they have the power to give dangerous electric shocks at will and begin asserting themselves as the dominant sex.

Vox [Christina Dalcher: Harper Collins, 2018]

Another modern feminist dystopia – here, women are forbidden to speak more than 200 words a day and are thus excluded from mainstream society and community.

Non-fiction

The Mother of All Questions [Rebecca Solnit: Haymarket, 2017]

A series of essays on 'future feminisms', including a compelling exploration of women's silence and speech and the power of women's testimony.

Moving Targets: Writing with Intent [Margaret Atwood: House of Anansi, 2004]

A collection of essays, book reviews and cultural commentary that gives an increased insight into Atwood's philosophy and social views.

Violence, Silence and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression [Deirdre Lashgari: Virginia, 1995]

Exploring key feminist themes across women's writing, including the role of rage in the novel and the relationship between silence and emotion.

It is also worth reading some of Atwood's interviews, of which there are many, discussing both the original novel and, more recently, its sequel and her creation of the world of Gilead. The articles linked below may be useful places to start:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/20/margaret-atwood-moving-away-from-gilead-testaments>

<https://www.newstatesman.com/margaret-atwood-interview-the-testaments-handmaids-tale-sequel>

Poetic Voices
Seamus Heaney

Seamus Heaney

**Digging
Blackberry Picking
Mid-Term Break
Night Drive
Broagh
Punishment
The Otter
Hailstones
Death of a Naturalist
Follower
Personal Helicon
Bogland
The Tollund Man
Strange Fruit
The Skunk**

Poem themes

Family – Digging, Follower, Mid-Term break

Childhood – Digging, Follower, Death of a Naturalist, Blackberry Picking, Mid-Term Break and Personal Helicon.

Growing up/loss of innocence – Follower, Death of a Naturalist, Blackberry Picking, Mid-Term Break

Country Life/ rural influence – Digging, Follower, Death of a Naturalist, Blackberry Picking

Guilt – Digging, Follower, Death of a Naturalist, Punishment

Creative inspiration – Digging, Personal Helicon

Love/relationships – Night drive, The Skunk, The Otter, Follower, Digging, Mid-Term Break

Married Life – Night drive, The Skunk, The Otter

Bog Poems – Bogland, The Tollund Man, Punishment, Strange Fruit

Violence – The Bog Poems

Ireland's Troubles – Bog poems

Death – Bog poems and Mid- Term Break

1 – Mid-Term Break

Key Idea

A poem that deals with emotional themes is 'Mid-Term Break' written by Irish poet, Seamus Heaney. The poem describes the aftermath of the death of Heaney's infant brother (Christopher) and how people (including himself) reacted to this.

Structure

7 stanzas – tercets – three lined stanzas
One line stanza at the end

Title – Usually relate mid-term to going home and spending time with family, creates a sad, slow emotional feel

End of poem – clear/year this rhyme gives the death a sense of finality

Language

Stanza 1

Assonance – 'bells' and 'knelling' the repeated vowel sound, mimics the sound of bell and things ending

Sibilance- 'classes to a close' emphasis on everything stopping

Alliteration mimics the sound of the bell

Stanza 2

Use of verb 'crying' – First time we see his father showing any weakness. Father is embarrassed and worried- contrast to the way he is presented in other poems.

Adjective describing what his father is doing 'taken funerals in his stride' – this reminds us of his father on the farm, destroying of the normal behaviour of his father.

Another man feeling the same way 'And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow' – shows how he is also embarrassed and his image is being destroyed through this event.

Pun 'hard blow'- loss of brother, blow of brother

Stanza 3

'baby cooed and laughed' – shows innocence of the baby and he's unaware of what's going on around him.

'the pram' links to the cot at the end of the poem

Stanza 4

Colloquial language and euphemism 'sorry for my trouble' – sense of community because they're all around to help at the sad time

Stanza 5

Emotive language 'angry tearless sighs'. Shows a strange image of grief, he's unable to expose it properly- Heaney feels exposed.

'Corpse'- brother has become 'a thing', not alive anymore.

Stanza 6

Calm imagery 'snowdrops' 'candles soothed' – under these circumstances how could it be calm?

Past tense 'I saw him' – his brother has become a memory

Stanza 7/8

Connotations of remembrance 'poppy bruise'

Simile 'lay in the four foot box as in his cot' poignant, reminds poet of his brother as a baby

Repetition 'four foot box' for emphasis to show shock and sadness

Rhyme 'clear' and 'year' gives a sense of finality, death is very final

2 – Digging

Key Idea

Heaney appeals to sense of sound. In this poem, Heaney is taken back in memory to 20yrs previous, when he remembers his father digging. He focuses initially on his hand holding his squat pen, the symbolic tool of his trade to be. Compared with the elegance of the spades used by his father and grandfather, this pen is unglamorously short and stubby. Heaney lends the pen a small-arms image, warm and reassuring in his grasp, “snug as a gun”. Designed to fire bullets.

Structure:

Title – the title “digging” becomes an extended metaphor for finding memories and reminiscing – roots become extended metaphor.

Free verse – shows his thought process as he is writing – no plan

1st person – shows what he is talking about is personal

Enjambment – stanza 2-3 – the stanza is carrying on to the next.

Caesura – stanza 2 – stops the line halfway through.

Rhyming couplet – not continued – alliteration creates rhythm.

9 stanza of varying length from 2 to 5 lines

End-of-line rhymes disappear, after starting formally aabbb the poem moves into free verse with the exception of a distant rhyme in v6 “day.....away” assonant effects provide mid and end-line rhymes, rhythm/digging; repetition of old man; chain provides echo akin to rhyme: “edge/head/them;

Language

Simile – “snug as a gun” - used as a weapon – weapon= famine, one crop law.

Onomatopoeia – “clean rasping sound” – depict act of digging.

Onomatopoeia – “squelch/slap/soggy

Harsh sound – “spade sinks”

Personification – “the flowerbeds bend low” + “coarse boot nestled on the lug”

Assonance – “rooted” “cool” – repeated vowel sound “OO”s

Contrast – “new” + “old”

Colloquial – “By God”

Alliteration – “buried the bright” “squat/snug” “nestled/shaft/against” – groups of consonant sounds; voiced alveolar “gravelly ground”

In repeating of the first phrase in the final stanza Heaney confirms his freedom to probe, his preparedness to work hard in pursuit of the linguistic “good turf”; the amendment from “snug as a gun” to “I’ll dig with it” also betrays an intention to say what he feels without pulling punches

Vigorous verbs, alliterations, enjambed lines and assertive diction placed strategically at the end of lines for emphasis

Rapid succession of images of decay....burdened rhythm,,,monosyllables

predominate....accretions of alliteration and assonance

3 – Broagh

Key Idea:

- The poem gives a sense of place
- About the English not being able to pronounce the gaelic language.
- The poem expresses Heaneys interests in the language from his roots, a language that can never be England's, even if they take over Ireland.
- He celebrates aspect of culture that is really truly theirs – only Irish are bonded by it. Symbol of their unity. Can't be taken over or belong to English invaders.

Structure:

- Title- 'Broagh'= Irish word meaning riverbank – Bruach
- Form- four quatrains
- The word 'broagh' is in English and Irish showing importance of both languages.

Language:

- 'Docken'- old English word, Plural for dock leaves.
- "Boortree" – suggests boorishness – rudeness, popular myth that Irish are drunkards and stupid
- 'your'- personal pronoun suggests intimacy
- 'O'- Is from the place name which is associated with Gaelic
- 'tattoo'- sign of identity. Shows identity and language can't be erased. Tattoos-tribal
- 'bootrees'- dialect/ slang for the elder trees.
- 'Last'- enjambment suggests lyrical nature of Gaelic nature.
- 'Bruised'- suggests violence.
- Tries to capture meaning, essence of word in a word picture
- "heelmark" – woman's heelmark making imprint in damp soil which is then filled with rain – reminds poet of shape on the riverbank and "O" sound
- Vowels are feminine
- Idea of oral tradition, spoken word of country exists by word of mouth- story telling
- Celebration of peoples culture and history

4 – Blackberry Picking

Key Idea

- Childhood memory.
- Metaphorically about the loss of innocence.
- Account of picking blackberries in late summer.
- Description is vivid and sensuous.
- The picking of blackberries and the inevitable process of decay becomes a metaphor for other experiences.

Structure

- Broken into 2 sections.
- Change of tone during 2nd section through the contrasting language in this part of the poem.
- **The sensuous description language in the first section “a glossy purple clot/its flesh was sweet.” Changes imagery conveying revolution and disgust at “a rat-grey fungus.”**
- **Onomatopoeic verbs = “glutting” and “stinking” continue this sense of repulsion.**
- **Iambic pentameter couplets using rhyme and enjambment- shows rhythm and a reflective tone.**

Language

- **Conveys obvious enjoyment of speaker in initial section of poem- sensuous imagery to describe blackberry picking; there are references to different colours, to the taste “sweet like thickened wine”**
- **“round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills/we trekked and picked until the cans were filled” : The characteristics use the countryside imagery sets the scene as the speaker shows the children’s enthusiasm by describing how far they wander as they search.**
- **Throughout the poem however, the speaker could be foreshadowing disappointment and the pain with the use of more violent imagery. From the beginning of the poem, words such as “clot” and “blood” may suggest this. The children’s hands are described as being “sticky as bluebeards”, another simile referring to the character of bluebeard, he murdered his wives, and had blood on his hands.**
- **The speaker’s tone changes and this is shown through the contrasting imagery and language. The blackberries decay and the speaker finds “a fur, a rat-grey-fungus” and describes how, “the juices were stinking too.” The flesh, described as “sweet” earlier in the poem now becomes, “sour” and “the lovely canfuls smell of rot”.**

5 – Death of a Naturalist

APPROACH TO THE POEM

A youngster blessed with a vivid imagination is open to disturbing dreams. Flooding the text with sense-data, Heaney describes how an early enthusiasm for nature within his Irish townland was turned into a nightmarish event generated by a youngster's guilty perception of crime-committed and a foreboding of potential punishment. The poet's mature, adult eye recalls himself as a boy growing up.

Heaney devotes the first nine and a half lines to a natural process. The language is rich in alliterative and assonant effects (flax-dam festered ... heavy-headed) with a vocabulary of fermentation (festered ... rotting ... sweltered ... smell). Initially none of the unpleasant odours distract his observation; later however they will contribute to the perceived threat to his well-being.

He is recounting an All year flax-process and the natural phenomena that accompany it: gases are given off, bubbles gargled delicately, insect life abounds: bluebottles/ wove a strong gauze of sound .../ dragon-flies, spotted butterflies.

The boy goes on to reveal an important annual event for him (starting in March or April) and his studied interest in what transpired: the warm, thick slobber/ of frogspawn ... like clotted water. The innocent and unsuspecting collector in him would fill jam-potfuls of the jellied/ Specks for the classroom and for home so as to observe a second natural process: wait and watch until/ The fattening dots burst into nimble-/ Swimming tadpoles.

The poet mimics the voice of the Primary teacher, her Irishness somehow revealed in the local usage of mammy: having explained the Biology in the simple way that a young class might require for understanding she ventures beyond science adding an old-wives' tale: You could tell the weather by frogs too/ For they were yellow in the sun and brown/ In rain.

The boy's nightmare took shape one hot day when the fields were rank/ With cowdung. His enhanced awareness of unpleasant odours acts as a trigger: both the flax-dam and his imagination are invaded by larger-than-life angry frogs ... coarse croaking that I had not heard/ Before, causing the boy to take cover (I ducked). The volume of sounds (The air ... thick with a bass chorus) persuades him that he is militarily outnumbered. The frogs are big (gross-bellied), confident (cocked/ On sods) and use all their natural defences to scare: their loose necks pulsed like snails'.

The boy feels increasingly threatened by their potential aggression: The slop and plop were obscene threats. Some sat/ Pulsed like mud grenades, their blunt heads farting. He loses courage and is routed: I sickened, turned and ran.

The crime he sensed was to have deprived the frogs of their young and summoned them in search of retribution: The great slime kings/ Were gathered there for vengeance. The innocent 'naturalist' that he was, was no more, leaving him in no mind to repeat the act: I knew/ That if I dipped my hand the spawn would clutch it.

'snails': an alert student pointed out that, unlike the Faber re-print of 2006 that I was using as a basis for the commentary, other editions including the 'Opened Ground' anthology (supported by Heaney's own recitation of the poem) printed the word as 'sails'. The image of the spinnaker sail of a racing yacht bulging and contracting in the wind provides a much more compelling comparison with the bloated throat of the frog swelling and shrinking like a beating pulse than links to the snail family. Thank you Paul (DF)

- The poem is divided into 2 extensive sections: the first of 21 lines describes a sequence of innocent events; in the second section (13 lines) imagination takes over.
- lines largely based on 10 syllables with a single exception: their arrangement as sentences with enjambed lines offers ways of delivering emphasis and pace to the text; there is no formal rhyme scheme.
- It can be fun to explore the possibilities the poem offers to the reader as a piece of music to the ear; imagine background sounds that enhance the content: woodwind and strings might reflect the sensitivity of the lyrical descriptions, the timeless aspects of a child's existence, tempered somehow in the score by the rancid smells that will later contribute to the nightmare, once the fear sets in, however the mood changes, lends itself to use of brass instruments and a crescendo leading to a scherzo accompanying the boy's flight.
- the end-piece needs a musical sound to reflect the surreal idea of vegetation grabbing the thief's wrist so that the frogs can get him.
- alliterations in pairs or sets: voiceless labio-dental [f] in flax/ festered; sibilant [s] in sods/ sweltered/ punishing/ sun/ sound smell/ slobbered/frogspawn/ loose/ pulsed/ snails/ gross/ frogs/ sods; inter-labial [w] walt/ watch: voiced alveolar [dʒ] jam-pots/ jellied; voiceless velar plosive [k] coarse croaking;
- assonant effects: [e] heavy/ headed; [o] watch/ dots; [i] nimble/ swimming; [ɔ] one/ hot; [æ] rank/ angry/ flax-dam; [ʊ] frogs/ cocked/ sods;
- vocabulary of unpleasantness: festered/ rotted/ slime/ sweltered/ smell/ rank/ dung/ farted;
- use of a triple verb phrase each shorter than the previous to describe the build-up of flight: sickened, turned ... ran;
- all the senses represented: sound, smell (taste is never far away from smell), touch, sight all activated;
- use of synaesthesia weaves touch (the texture of gauze) with hearing: a gauze of sound; synaesthesia describes one of the senses using vocabulary associated with another (e.g. a loud tie).

- The poem presents a sensual evocation of Humanity's violation of Nature (Michael Parker *Seamus Heaney, The Making of a Poet* p.57)
- this and the next poem expose the dark underside of childhood (*ibid* p.38).
- a fall from innocence into experience (*ibid* p.6);
- a coda of ethics stirs within a youngster;
- the poem ends with an explicit statement of new knowledge acquired during the incidents described (Neil Corcoran *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney* p.6);
- the poem contains the terrible knowledge of the threat implicit in apparently benign natural forms (*ibid* p.6) ... in fantasy;
- referring to mud grenades (above) Heaney suggests how easy it is for the reader to visit sociological motives on what, for Heaney, was an entirely phonetic prompt, a kind of sonic chain ... the connection between the 'th' sounds of 'thumb' and 'snug' and 'gun' that are at the heart of the poetic matter rather, perhaps, than containing some kind of sexual pin in them just waiting to be pulled (Dennis O'Driscoll *Stepping Stones* 83);

6 – Personal Helicon

Key Idea

Personal helicon is a poem showing the progression of a child's mind-set and how they viewed life. The 'wells' represented a certain goal of view, something that changes slightly but its overall way that you see it, that it changes completely.

Structure

Title – illuminate negative aspects of life.

Helicon in the traditional sense is a large spiral based tuba that rest on the shoulders.

Helicon also refers to a mountain in Greek mythology that was said to be a source of poetic inspiration.

ABAB Rhyme Scheme – represents him walking through the wells. Repetitive frequency of memories
5 stanza – quatrains

Language

Stanza 1

'As a child' – recount (memory)

'Wells' – references to the helicon

'And old pumps' – past tense. Rites of a passage

'Loved' – positive

'Dark drop' - alliteration

'The trapped sky' – oxymoron, personification, alliteration

'Of waterweed, fungus and dank moss' - tripling. Emphasises description

'Moss' – pungent, earthly smells. Attracted to them

Stanza 2

'Rotted' – negative, ambiguous

'Savoured the rich crash' - metaphor 'savouring innocence'

'End of the rope' – life line

'So deep you saw no reflection in it' – shows importance of seeing a reflection

'Reflection' – sense of identity

Stanza 3

'Dry stone ditch' – alliteration

'Fructified like an aquarium' – Simile

'Out long roots from the soft mulch' – assonance of 'O'

'Mulch' – decomposed

'Roots' – family heritage

'White faced' – ghostly, impersonal

'Hovered' – poltergeist

Stanza 4

'Echoes' – sounds bouncing memories

'Your own call' – personal pronoun voice. Finding your own voice

'Scare some' – childish

'A rat slapped across my reflection' – personification, onomatopoeia, imagery

'Slapped' – Aggression

Stanza 5

'Finger slime' – erotic. Rites of passage, sexual discovery

'Narcissus' – relation to a Greek figure

'Some spring' – alliteration

'Is beneath all adult dignity' – adult poet is fascinated by childhood thoughts

'To see myself' – self-discovery.

'Darkness' – ignorance

'Echoing' – echo gives a sense of liveliness, and being alive. He wants to ignite another being to convey his emotions, bring back memories.

7 – Follower

Key Idea

- Speaker expresses his admiration towards his hard working father + his farming skills
- We see a contrast between the skilled father + clumsy young son
- End shows a role reversal as time passes + son becomes more in control

Structure

- Title – ‘Follower’ – shows connection between Father + son – will also link to role reversal
- Form = quatrains throughout + steady ABAB rhyme scheme – shows steadiness in their relationship + reflects the inevitable passing of time
- First person narrative – from point of view/perspective of son – shows his changing views over time
- Role reversal – contrast from beginning – Father is in charge + strong – end son is more in charge as father has grown older

Language

- **Description of Father**
 - ‘Shoulders globed’ – repeated ‘o’ sound shows width of body + size – ‘globed’ shows size
- **Father’s strength / control**
 - Sailing imagery – show Father can control animals way sailor control boat
 - ‘like a full sail strung’ – simile – show the Father’s control
 - ‘sod rolled over without breaking’ – continued lexical field of sailing
 - ‘clicking tongue’ – onomatopoeia sound – shows small action to control large animal
 - ‘An expert’ – short sentence – heightens his admiration of Father
 - Verbs – ‘narrowed’ ‘angled’ ‘mapping’ ‘exactly’ – shows his skill + expertise + control
- **Contrast Father + son**
 - Contrast with precise verbs above
 - ‘stumbled’ – repeated – show son’s lack of control
 - ‘fell sometimes’ – verb – clumsiness
 - ‘tripping, falling, yapping’ – triplet + enjambment shows the son’s lack of control
- **Son’s view of Father**
 - ‘I wanted to grow up’ – ‘wanted’ shows his desire + wish to be like Father
 - ‘All I ever did was follow’ – ‘ever’ shows desperation + want to be like him
 - ‘broad shadow’ – dual meaning – literal shadow reflect size + metaphorically doesn’t feel ever as good as father – overshadowing him
- **Role reversal**
 - ‘But today’ – Caesura – shows how quickly + abruptly time has passed
 - ‘Father stumbling’ – verb repeated – show father’s age means lost control – **KEY PART OF ROLE REVERSAL - VERB USED EARILIER FOR SON**
 - ‘behind me’ – role reversal as now Father is following him – son in control like Father earlier

8 – Bogland

Key Idea:

- The Bogland about the Irish landscape the main general history of the Irish landscape.
- The lost identity of the rest of Ireland, which also portrays the feelings of Heaney himself, however the Bogland can never been lost.
- portrays the 'troubles' and the affect that it has on the country as the identity of the cultural and scene if Ireland is at the heart of the crisis
- The Bogland shows nationalistic and about the essence of Ireland and which links to he's origins in digging (metaphor).

Structure:

- 7 stanzas, 4 lines per stanzas
- Free verse
- No rhyme or rhythm
- reflects the bog and how it is unpredictable
- Amazed at how large and powerful the bog is
- There's limited punctuation, allowing the poem to flow and run easily
- Between the first and second stanzas there is enjambment this gives the idea that the peat has and endless softness

Language:

- Prairies – Irelands answer to the American Myth to the land of opportunity – prairies land of opportunities and freedom symbolised by miles and miles of stretching land
Language of land dependant on agriculture, Heaney is looking at the pre-Christian myth.
-
- The language creates interesting images in the reader's mind, 'To slice a bug sun at evening'
- Language is easy to understand with reference to Ireland and its heritage.
- The speaker use personal pronouns this relates to just the speaker or a small group but for everyone in Ireland.
- 'butter sunk under' shows the repetition of the 'u' sound which shows the mellow and softness of the Bogland
- Metaphor – "to slice a big sun"
- Personification – "Is wooed into the Cyclops' eye"
- "Our unfenced country" – narrative voice – unrestricted
- "Peat" – boggy ground
- "Melting and opening" ing verbs – long sounding verbs – link to the sound of the bog
- Enjambment at 5th stanza – never find coal all there is, is bog
- "Only" – no hope to find anything else
- "Only the waterlogged trunks Of great firs, soft as pulp" – metaphor everything is decomposed and soft in the bog
- "Inwards and downwards" – bog is never ending
- "Every layer they strip seems camped on before" – link to the history of Ireland, the memory of the land
- "the bogholes might be the Atlantic seepage" – links to the power of nature – the world is preserving

9 – The Tollund Man

Key Idea

- Heaney is speaking about the famous 'Tollund Man' found in Denmark. Which was a well preserved body found in the bogland.
- It is relevant to Seamus Heaney as he has worked on bogs for a great portion of his life, and he has witnessed many bog bodies.
- It is as if Heaney wants to pay his respects to the Tollund Man, and speaks of him as if he holds history.
- Seamus feels so far from life, yet at the same time, he feels at home. As he knows the bogs.

Structure

Quatrains

- The poem is structured into stanzas of four lines, but each stanza represents a chapter from a novel. It is almost as if this poem is being told as a story. This is important, as it conveys the way Heaney feels about the Tollund Man. A mummified corpse which holds history and has its own story.

Language

- Throughout Heaney's 'The Tollund Man'. There is a lot of linguistic techniques used to convey how he feels and his ideas about the Tollund Man. It shows passion and connection to the bogs as he has grown up working in them.
- 'Someday I will go to Aarhus'. This shows a promise of a pilgrimage. Referring back to Seamus Heaney's deep, and somewhat spiritual connection to the bog lands.
- 'His last gruel of winter seeds. Caked in his stomach'. This is Heaney's way of telling us that the Tollund Man has become one with the Earth, and that this is possibly the fate of us all.
- 'Naked except for the Cap, Noose and Girdle'. Not only does this show a gruesome death, but also one which appears to be ritualistic. He was likely sacrificed to a goddess. This is furthermore backed up with the use of 'Bridegroom' which suggests that the bog is the goddess, and that the Tollund man was sacrificed to it. The Earth.
- 'She tightened her torc on him'. Heaney is presenting the bog to be a living thing through language. There are sexual references and it suggests that the ground is ready for male fertilisation. It is almost as if the bog and the Tollund man are married through ritual, connected forever.

The Tollund Man

I did 'The Tollund Man' in Ballydavid in Kerry at Easter in 1970. Marle and I had gone there for holidays regularly ...' (DOD124);

Heaney makes the pledge he will fulfil in 1973 a year after *Wintering Out* is published: *Some day I will go to Aarhus.*

His pilgrimage will aim to bring him face to face with Tollund Man his body recalled now (from photographs taken by PV Glob): his stained **peat-brown head**; the gentle swellings (**mild pods**) of his eye-lid; the leathery crown (**His pointed skin cap**).

The body had been miraculously preserved by the Jutland peat bog (**the flat country nearby/ Where they dug him out**), leaving, too, remains of the thin food he consumed prior to execution: **His last gruel of winter seeds/ Caked in his stomach**. The poet's eye moves slowly down the body **Naked except for/ The cap, noose and girdle**; Heaney will want to digest every detail of the body he sees displayed: **stand a long time**.

The man was a human sacrifice to *Nerthus*, the pagan deity (of the next poem): **Bridegroom to the goddess**. Heaney hints strongly at the sexual dimension of her mythology: both she and the peat-bog have embraced Tollund man's body: **She tightened her torc on him/ And opened her fen**.

Two thousand years of exposure to the peat's protective **dark juices** delivered a miraculous relic (**a saint's kept body**) retrieved by men **digging peat** (as evidenced by the visible spade patterns): **Trove of the turfcutters/ Honeycombed workings**.

Tollund man now lies peacefully on public display: **his stained face/ Reposes at Aarhus**.

- **Aarhus**: Danish town on the east coast of the Jutland peninsula close to which the bog bodies were disinterred by PV Glob;
- **mild**: not exaggerated;
- **pod**: elongated, swelling seed vessel of plant or vegetable;
- **gruel**: thin oatmeal soup;
- **noose**: loop of knotted rope use to hang/strangulate;
- **girdle**: belt worn around the body;
- **goddess**: female deity;
- **torc**: neck ornament of twisted metal worn in ancient times;
- **fen**: low, marshy ground;
- **saint's kept body**: the miracle of his preservation in the peat somehow makes him a 'religious' relic;
- **trove**: found treasure, treasure hoard;
- **honeycombed workings**: patterns made by peat diggers' spades resembling a bee's honey store
- **stained**: discoloured by peat water;
- **honeycombed workings**: patterns made by peat diggers' spades resembling a bee's honey store
- **stained**: discoloured by peat water;

• *5 quatrains in 4 sentences; line length between 5 and 8 syllables; unrhymed;*

• *the balance between enjambed lines and punctuation regulates the breath groups of oral delivery;*

• *verb tenses: future of promise made/ intention; past tense of body retrieval by PV Glob; present tense of things current;*

• *pseudo-scientific references based on the biology: preservation, limited non-meat diet;*

• *opposites: 'mild', 'pointed';*

• *nature of the Nerthus cult suggested as sexual: 'torc', 'fen', 'juices'; relationship appears to offer status 'saint's kept body';*

• *omission: (treasure-'trove' stresses the precious nature of anthropological discovery*

• *compound adjective and compound noun for economy of words;*

• *metaphor comparison: turf-spade markings and bees' food store;*

• *time: 'Some day ... Now';*

• *for alliteration and assonance see below;*

||

Heaney's empathy for these ancient victims of tribal superstition and ignorance quickly acquired a religious intensity' (MP91).

Heaney establishes a parallel of suffering and sacrifice between Tollund man and victims of atrocity in Ireland.

His reverence for the pagan bog body is dangerous ground for a poet with a Catholic background: he could risk **blasphemy** were he to declare the excavation a sacred site (**Consecrate the cauldron bog/ Our holy ground**) or petition God (Him) to make whole (**make germinate**) the victims of brutal acts in 1920s Ireland: **ambush (The scattered, ambushed/ Flesh of labourers); retribution Stockinged corpses/ Laid out in the farmyards** (see note below).

Heaney has seen harrowing evidence of the extraordinary brutality exercised on the victims: **Tell-tale skin and teeth/ Flecking the sleepers/ Of four young brothers, trailed / For miles along the line**.

the 'Stockinged corpses / laid out in the farmyards' that appear in 'The Tollund Man'. I saw first in a photograph in Tom Barry's book *Guerilla Days in Ireland*. 'It was of a farmer's family who had been shot in reprisals by the Black and Tans, left lying on their backs beside their open door' (DOD135);

- **blasphemy**: profane, unchristian talk;
- **consecrate**: formally declared sacred;
- **cauldron**: large receptacle, large metal cooking pot; site of strong feelings;
- **stockinged corpses**: 'an incident from the 1920s provided illustration of the barbarity to which the some of the 'Christian' inhabitants of the island have sunk ... "Part of the folk-lore of where I grew up", concerns four Catholic brothers "massacred by Protestant paramilitaries". Their bodies "had been trailed along the railway lines, over the sleepers as a kind of mutilation." (from a *Faber Poetry cassette of 1982*) An entire generation from one family – or at best a major part of it – had been wiped out. Whereas the Tollund Man was forewarned of his death, perhaps accepted its justification, and was left physically intact by his 'executors', the young brothers were 'ambushed', slaughtered for no conceivable 'common good' (MP107);
- **tell-tale**: giveaway;
- **fleck**: speck, small patch;
- **sleepers**: durable rectangles of wood that support railway tracks;
- 3 quatrains in a single sentence; line-length 4-7 syllables; unrhymed;
- balance between enjambed lines and punctuation regulates the breath groups of oral delivery;
- 'risk blasphemy': suggestion that use of foul language in response to an outrage act is beyond the speaker's principles;
- 'make germinate (like French construction 'faire faire'); someone else does the job; here God perform a miracle;
- parallel: 'cauldron' is a deep, dark receptacle; it and the bog are presented as agents of regeneration;
- vocabulary of violent, sadistic paramilitary execution; forensic detail;
- the music of the piece builds to an angry fortissimo;

Poet and Tollund Man have **sad freedom** in common. At the wheel of his car (driving) Heaney reflects on the irony of Tollund man's **sad freedom en route** to the place of his execution (As he rode the tumbrel).

Lack of Danish enhances the poet's sense of dislocation as he seeks directions to the Danish sites that figure in the story (Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard); whilst appreciating gesticulations of support (the pointing hands) he cannot understand their replies **Not knowing their tongue**.

Heaney is struck by a tragic irony: when one day he arrives **Out there in Jutland**, areas where men were once slaughtered in the name of some pagan belief or other (In the **old man-killing parishes**) will mirror what is happening routinely on the so-called 'christian' streets of Ulster: I will **feel lost, / Unhappy and at home**.

use of the word 'home' (...) goes beyond irony and sadness into tragedy (...) is utterly comfortless and desolating (NC33-7).

- **tumbrel**: open cart (iconic pre-guillotine vehicle of the French Revolution);
- **Tollund, Grauballe, Nebelgard**: sites (fens/ villages) associated with the recovery of bodies from the peat;
- **man-killing parishes**: small administrative districts usually centred around a church;
- **at home**: in one's home; by extension in a familiar spot, a place one is used to, in one's comfort zone;
- 3 quatrains in 2 sentences; unrhymed lines of 4-9 syllables;
- the balance between enjambed lines and punctuation regulates the breath groups of oral delivery;
- paradox bordering on oxymoron: 'sad freedom';
- use of present participle '...ing';
- modal 'should' expresses hope rather than moral dimension;
- transportation in keeping with moment: victim's 'tumbrel', poet's car;
- Danish place names include sites of similar anthropological interest;
- 'tongue' for 'language';
- common Irish (Danish land divisions 'parishes' will suit the poet's intention;

- adjectival compound 'man-killing' economical in the sense of places where men are killed.
- main clause set at the end for deliberate effect, main verb has 3 complements the first 2 emotional, the third in emphatic position, most powerful and a strong indictment of Ulster sectarianism: 'ot home'.
- at home: both back in Ulster and feeling accepted in an area of Denmark where bodies are recovered.
- Heaney is a meticulous craftsman using combinations of vowel and consonant to form a poem that is something to be listened to.
- the music of the poem: twelve assonant strands are woven into the text; Heaney places them grouped within specific areas to create internal rhymes, or reprises them at intervals or threads them through the text.
- alliterative effects allow pulses or beats or soothing or hissings or frictions of consonant sound to modify the assonant melodies:
- the first lines of (l), for example, bring together bilabial [w] and a cluster of plosives: alveolar [t][d], bilabial [p] [b] and velar [k] interspersed with nasal [n] and [m];
- it is well worth teasing out the sound clusters for yourself to admire the poet's sonic engineering:
- Consonants (with their phonetic symbols) can be classed according to where in the mouth they occur
- Front-of-mouth sounds voiceless bilabial plosive [p] voiced bilabial plosive [b]; voiceless labio-dental fricative [f] voiced labio-dental fricative [v]; bilabial nasal [m]; bilabial continuant [w]
- Behind-the-teeth sounds voiceless alveolar plosive [t] voiced alveolar plosive [d]; voiceless alveolar fricative as in church match [tʃ]; voiced alveolar fricative as in judge age [dʒ]; voiceless dental fricative [θ] as in thin path; voiced dental fricative as in this other [ð]; voiceless alveolar fricative [s] voiced alveolar fricative [z]; continuant [h] alveolar nasal [n] alveolar approximant [l]; alveolar trill [r]; dental 'y' [j] as in yet
- Rear-of-mouth sounds voiceless velar plosive [k] voiced velar plosive [g]; voiceless post-alveolar fricative [ʃ] as in ship sure, voiced post-alveolar fricative [ʒ] as in pleasure; palatal nasal [ŋ] as in ring/anger.
- Face from Prehistoric Denmark/ tollundman.dk offers some background detail: Tollund Man is probably the best preserved body from pre-historic times in the world. The head was exceedingly well-preserved. The eyes were closed and so was the mouth – the look on his face was calm and solemn as if he was just sleeping...
- ... on Monday May 8th, 1950 the police in Silkeborg received an alarming message. On the previous Saturday a body had been discovered in a bog close to Bjældskovdal, an area located approximately 10 kilometres west of Silkeborg. Accordingly, the body was discovered on May 6th, 1950.
- Tollund Man was alive during the first part of the Iron age, 300-400 years B.C. at a time when almost everybody was involved in farm work. (ibid)
- The Tollund Man was discovered with a rope around his neck. Questions followed: had the rope been used for hanging him or strangling him; was this a sacrificial offering? Was he guilty of a crime for which he had to be punished? Was he a low-life in society that people wanted to get rid of? Or was he a slave or perhaps a well respected man who was sacrificed in order to appease the gods of the bog? (ibid)
- The famous Irish poet and Nobel Prize winner Seamus Heaney wrote an extract of his famous poem "The Tollund Man" in the guest book for Silkeborg Museum in 1973. (ibid)
- Seamus Heaney gave a talk at Silkeborg Museum in 1996, where he described his childhood memories of the bog: "When I was a child and an adolescent I lived among peat-diggers and I also worked in the peat bog myself. I loved the structure the peat bank revealed after the spade had worked its way through the surface of the peat. I loved the mystery and silence of the place when the work was done at the end of the day and I would stand there alone while the larks became quiet and the lapwings started calling, while a snipe would suddenly take off and disappear..."
- Heaney was influenced by Danish anthropologist PV Glob's book, 'The Bog People' (1967) which showed photographs of gradual removal of bodies from the bog; the poet views it as 'rebirth' and the body becomes an icon; (ibid)
- The historical and political themes in *Wintering Out* are carried, in a number of poems in Part One, by particular imagined or recalled human figures ('the Tollund man') ... In both parts of the book, many of the evoked figures suffer some kind of human diminishment: isolation, repression, disenchantment, exploitation or betrayal' (NC30);
- 'That the Tollund man has a significance for Heaney comparable to that of the other figures of the book is made plain in an interview in which he says that when he first saw the man's photograph in PV Glob's book, *The Bog People*, he 'seemed like an ancestor almost, one of my old uncles, one of those moustached archaic faces you used to meet all over the Irish countryside' ... (Heaney) is beginning, here, to discover that suggestive analogy between Glob's bog-bodies and the victims of Irish political violence which culminates in the extended mythologizing of the 'bog poems' of *North* ' (NC33);
- 'Where Heaney did discover 'common ground' in 1969 was in an archaeological study of Iron Age Jutland, P. V. Glob's *The Bog People*. 'The minute I saw the photograph (of the Tollund Man) and the reviews I sent for it', he writes. The book embraced the majority of his deepest concerns – landscape, religion, sexuality, violence, history, myth – a 'knot of obsessions' which would preoccupy him in his next two volumes. It provided an historical perspective enabling him to 'cope with and confront the contemporary Troubles', and created a sense of continuity, kinship, affirmation at a time of social and political disintegration' (MP91).
- 'The most accomplished poem resulting from Heaney's search during the early 1970s "for images and symbols adequate to our predicament" is without doubt 'The Tollund Man'. A potent combination of historical analogy and myth and intense emotion, it exhibits the depth of Heaney's religious nature. He speaks of it as 'an offering'. In it he articulates a "perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence", "a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together". Composing from a sense of reverence for a victim from the distant past came more easily to him than responding to the all-too-immediate horror of the present' (MPIOS-6);

10 – Strange Fruit

Key Idea Strange Fruit is part of a Heaney series referred to as 'The Bog Poems'. These poem are inspired by several dead bodies Heaney came across in Northern Denmark. They were the result of ritualistic murders during which the bodies were carefully preserved and given as an offering to villages in hopes of a fruitful harvest.

Structure

- Written in free verse – unrhymed sonnet with almost unbroken 10 syllable lines
- Form, traditionally used for love poetry, indicates the reverence that the speaker has for the lead.

Language

- All the language that Heaney includes reflects an overall solemn, gloomy, and disgusted tone.
- **Simile:** 'Like an exhumed gourd', 'dark as a turf clod' – Compares the head to a rotting fruit; her death was futile, just as the rotting fruit is useless
- **Imagery & assonance:** 'her eye holes blank' = Poet paints the image of total nothingness.
- **Present tense:** 'Here is the girl's head...' = this gives a sense of immediacy and involvement.
- **Metaphor:** 'Prune-skinned, prune-stones for teeth' = Heaney presents the image of an undesirable fruit in comparison to a human that one filled with life. This repetitive image offers an 'overall' feel for the audience; this corpse had reduced entirely to a rotting fruit.
- **Oxymoron:** 'Pash of tallow' = the tribe's phrase for something undesirable as a dead body, or animal fat, further demonstrates the author's disgust of the bog people and their behaviours. The animal fat is treasurable, which is an oxymoron as it contrasts to the 'turf clod'.
- **Pluperfect form of verb:** 'had' indicates it no longer happens
- **Symbolism:** 'her hair' nameless people responsible for her death. This relates to baby Jesus symbolising religion being taken away.
- With the help of the allusion to Diodorus Siculus, Heaney expresses his outstanding fear for the Irish people in the final lines.

11 – Punishment

Key Idea

- Looking at a bog body, he can imagine how it would have been/having watched it. Addresses her, in pity, and tells her he would not have stopped it (did not speak when Catholic girls were tarred for seeing British soldiers).
- Inspired by the discovery of a dead body of a young girl who was believed to be killed on the charge of adultery.
- This discovery is taken as an ancient example of brutality and links it with the modern form of brutality.
- Brutality is at the centre of the poem and it links past and present.
- Title – ‘Punishment’- Creates a negative tone

Structure

- 11 stanzas, 4 short lines
- Enjambment – disrupts rhythm
- No rhyme
- Tone - First 4 stanzas have a gentle sadness (3rd person)
- Mood – Opening is peaceful, 5th stanza is violent, uncertain, confused and helpless

Language

- 1st, 2nd, 3rd stanzas – sympathetic imagination describes the way the girl was punished. Creates picture of a weak/fragile girl and seems to suffer her pain.
- 1st, 2nd stanzas – language is visual and anatomical, images are natural
- Double alliteration – ‘halter...nape...her neck...her naked...her nipples’
- Alliteration – ‘body...bog’, ‘stones of silence’, ‘shaved...stubble’, ‘blindfold bandage’
- Metaphor – ‘the frail rigging of her ribs’, ‘she was a barked sapling’, ‘her blindfold a soiled bandage’, ‘her noose a ring/to store/the memories of love’, ‘your brain’s exposed/and darkened combs’, ‘your muscles’ webbing’

Heaney measures his sense of injustice against a stone-age community's brutal intolerance of rules perceived to have been violated. He illustrates the troubling irony: stone-age justice that puts an adulteress to death is not so far removed from contemporary Ulster society that metes out punishment when sectarian rules are seen to be breached. *Conflicting loyalties, pity and guilt, private and collective, supply 'Punishment' with its emotional charge... Heaney is looking for a tenable position (MP p 137)*

The first person speaker attends the stages leading to the execution of a young woman accused of adultery. He senses the **tug of the halter at the nape of her neck** as she is pulled to the execution site; her upper body has been stripped of clothing; the chill wind exaggerates the shape and colour of **her nipples blown to amber beads** sending shivers through her frame: **the frill rigging of her ribs**.

From **feel to see**. He imagines the executed girl disposed of: her **drowned body in the bog**, weighted down and held in place with **rods and boughs**; her survival was as impossible as that of a **barked sapling**.

Her retrieved, **dug up**, body has survived the centuries, its bones as enduring as the strongest tree (**oak-bone**), its skull a durable container (**brain firkin**). The speaker notes the detail: the head **shaven** before the event, its short hair still evident **like a stubble of black corn**; the blindfold that passes judgement on the execution: a **solled bandage**; the noose with which she was strangled a metaphor for a locket of keepsakes: **a ring/ to store the memories of love**; the crime that led to her death-sentence: **Little adulteress**.

Heaney portrays the girl that was: from the Viking north (**flaxen-haired; undernourished** as hunter-gatherers generally were); the bog-stained **tar-black face was beautiful**.

He expresses affection and admiration for a girl who bore the sins of the whole community: **poor scapegoat**; but his conscience stops him short: **I almost love you** confessing that he would **have cast ... / the stones of silence**, connived with injustice and by not condemning it appeared to condone barbarity.

The narrator's 'peeping Tom' rôle makes him **the artful voyeur**; his artfulness couched in his poetic talent for description: her **brain's exposed/ and darkened combs**, the softer tissue of her **muscles' webbing / and all your numbered bones** (whether biblical reference or museum coding system).

As in the previous piece description of the fate of the bog body is replaced by the grim exposure of contemporary events in Northern Ireland. The poet questions his own conscience: empathetic towards the bog-girl and addressing her directly he confesses he has remained a silent observer in the cases of Irish women being humiliated: **I have stood dumb** when, seen as **betraying sisters** for consorting with British soldiers, they were publicly humiliated, **cauled in tar** and feathered.

Heaney's inner conflict stems from paradox: he finds it difficult to balance the **civilised outrage** generated within him as a minority Catholic himself against his understanding of root factors: **the exact/ and tribal, intimate revenge**

• Tarring and feathering was a vehicle of rough justice; hot tar was poured onto a person's skin or scalp and feathers thrown in; once cold the tar became immensely difficult to remove and acted as a long-term reminder of punishment;

• **halter**: originally a rope for leading a horse;

• **barked sapling**: the bark is the tough outer protective sheath of the tree; to 'bark' a tree is to strip the bark from it, any tree that has a complete ring of bark removed will die; **sapling** is a young tree;

• **firkin**: a small cask; 4 firkins would make 1 barrel; used here to indicate something cask-shaped and 'head sized';

• **scapegoat**: goat sent into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement, symbolic bearer of the sins of the people;

• **combs**: probable reference to the internal structure of the honeycomb;

• **cauled**: early 14c. "close-fitting cap worn by women," from Fr. *cafe* "cap."

• a body retrieved from a peat bog in North Germany in 1952 was christened 'Windeby Girl'. The powerful impact of Heaney's poem should not be diminished by the fact that DNA analysis was later to prove that 'Windeby Girl' was in fact a boy!

• 11 quatrains; lines vary in length between 2 and 8 syllables;

• 7 sentence structure with plentiful use of enjambed lines. No rhyme scheme;

• **assonant effects in stanzas (1) and (2)**: Heaney retains the [ʌ] of the title in *tug/ front*; a pair of [i:] *feels/ Beads/ later see*; [eɪ] *nape/ naked/ shakes*; [ɪ] *wind/ nipples/ rigging/ ribs*; nasal consonant [ŋ] is repeated alongside bilabial plosives [b] and [p];

• **stanza (3) offers a weave of variant vowel (o) sounds** [au] *drowned/ boughs*; [ɔ] *body/ bog/ rods*; [eu] *stone/ floating*; bilabial [b] is heard;

• **stanza (4) reverts to [ʌ] Under/ dug up**; [eu] is retained: *oak-bone*; [ɜ:] *first/ firkin*;

• [æ] emerges and carries into (5) *at/ sapling/ that/ black bandage*; alliterative effects are achieved using labio-dental fricative [f] bilabial plosive [b] the latter joining sibilant [s] in (5) and (6); (6) interweaves [ɔ:] *Stone/ before* and [ʌ] *love/ adulteress/ punished*;

• (7) (8) and (9) retain assonant [ʌ] *undernourished/ love/ muscles/ numbered/ dumb* also exploring the variant sounds of vowel (a): [eɪ] *brain/ shaved/ face/ scape* [ɑ:] *tar/ cast/ artful/ darkened*; [æ] *flaxen/ black* and so on; [eu] *goat/ know/ stones / exposed/ combs/ bones*;

the final 8 lines mix a sound cocktail around [ʌ] (stood)/ dumb/ understand [eɪ] betraying/ railings/ outrage [aɪ] connive/ civilized/ tribal [ɪ] civilized/ intimate [e] when/ betraying. alliterative effects are achieved using voiced and voiceless alveolar plosives [d] and [t];

the use of powerful language accompanies the graphic images of humiliation published in the British media: *betraying/ cauled in tar/ connive/ outrage/ tribal/ revenge*;

From *The Paris Review No 75* in conversation with Henri Cole: *But there was always a real personal involvement—in a poem like “Punishment,” for example. It’s a poem about standing by as the IRA tar and feather these young women in Ulster. But it’s also about standing by as the British torture people in barracks and interrogation centers in Belfast. About standing between those two forms of effront. So there’s that element of self-accusation, which makes the poem personal in a fairly acute way. Its concerns are immediate and contemporary, but for some reason I couldn’t bring army barracks or police barracks or Bogside street life into the language and topography of the poem. I found it more convincing to write about the bodies in the bog and the vision of Iron Age punishment. Pressure seemed to drain away from the writing if I shifted my focus from those images.*

biblical references: *the adulteress in John 8 saved by Jesus from stoning*; Jesus pointed out that her would-be executioners were also sinners (*‘He that is without sin ... NCP73*);

the ‘scapegoat’ in the Bible’s Leviticus carried *the sins of the tribe out into the wilderness (ibid)*;

‘They have numbered all my bones’ appears in *Psalm 21 of the Catholic Bible (ibid)*;

incidental to the Bible reference it is also common practice in museums to provide reference numbers for each bone;

3 ‘religions’ are present: the fertility vegetation rites of Nerthus; Irish republicanism; Christianity.

the poem reminds us of the persistence of atavistic emotions and responses *in any poet born into the community of Northern Irish Catholicism who wishes to tell the truth about it (NC)*;

NC spots a duality: creativity and connivance; intrusion *in the name of Art ... inherent scopophilia* (synonymous with ‘voyeurism’).

Heaney’s dominant emotion: *empathetic pity for the victims (NC74)*;

NC sees it as an *almost-love poem* because Heaney is questioning his own integrity.

Some lines, regarded as ambiguous sparked off intense debate about Heaney’s stance in relation to events; NC quotes Conor Cruise O’Brien: *I have read many pessimistic analyses of NI but none that has the bleak conclusiveness of these poems (1975)*;

12 – Hailstones

Key Idea: Violence relates to the troubles in Ireland. Shows violence will always return. Being hit by hailstones, pain doesn't last forever.

Structure:

- There are three chapters- different time periods of his life
- Tercets in each stanza.
- There is enjambment could symbolise the hailstones not stopping.
- Lexical fields: 1 for hailstones and 1 for memory.
- Chronological order.
- First person narrative
- Epic Poem- because it has chapters in it about remembering a memory
- Sense of place – Ireland

Language:

- Repetition - 'hit and hit'
- Onomatopoeia - 'pelted and bounced'.
- Personification - 'burning water running from my hand'
- Onomatopoeia - 'rattling the classroom window'
- Juxtaposition - 'the sting of hailstones'
- Sexual imagery - 'nipple and hive, bite-lumps'
- Sexual imagery - 'foraging in the nettles' looking for food survive and reproduce.
- Extended metaphor – hailstones are seen as the stinging pain, you can get through the pain
- Metaphor – 'Hailstones' – title
- Symbolism – violence – relates to the Troubles in Ireland, shows violence will always return.

13 – The Otter

Key Idea:

- The use of an extended metaphor and opposition expresses the importance of love and the freedom it can bring.

Structure:

- No rhyme scheme
- Quatrains – each stanza has four lines
- Meter – no observable pattern
- The ‘otter’ is revealed to be a person, not an animal
- The woman becomes a metaphor: in stanza 5, she is swimming within him; he is her pool, her infinity/she is his, he is hers
- Enjambment
- Symbolism – “freshened pelt” – stanza 7

Language:

- Personification – “the light of Tuscany wavered and swung through the pool” – this is imagery and shows it has become unsteady, the light refers to the way the water bends in
- Assonance – “wet head”
- Onomatopoeia – “smashing crawl” – perhaps this describes the otter
- Sibilance – use of ‘s’ sound in stanza 2 – lyrical, flows off tongue
- Opposition – “dry-throated” – contrasts to “wet head” and “pool” – and “warm stones” is in contrast to the cool water
- Personification – “grape-deep air” – also imagery
- Tone shift – “when I hold you **now**, we **are** close” – from past to present
- Simile – “we are close and deep as the atmosphere on water” – the way the atmosphere and water are close, so are Heaney and the woman
- Metaphor – “otter of memory in the pool of the moment” – compares her to an otter
- Opposition – otter and lithe, palpable and memory
- Repetition – “light” mentioned again to show significance
- Repetition of letter ‘t’ – “out”, “intent” – harshness
- Metaphor – “freshened pelt” – to otter
- Opposition – “heavy and frisky” – contrast to lithe
- Comparison – “printing the stones” – compares her to an artist

14 – The Skunk

Key Idea: romantic poem of his wife, written in California, also a memory of how aroused he was by his wife removing her night dress reminding him of the skunk and how aroused he was by it.

Structure: six quatrains (4 line stanzas)

Language read essay

The poem opens with Heaney in California. He is missing his wife and, for the first time in eleven years, he is writing her love letters. Naturally, he would not have to do so if he were living at home. It seems strange to him to write the word 'wife' and he compares the word to a cask of wine that has been stored away but is now about to be opened and savoured. This is an image of their marriage: something self-contained and precious. Heaney focuses on the word 'wife' itself – its strangeness highlighted by the inverted commas around it – and reflects on the sound of it, almost as if he had never really heard it before.

California, of course, was at that time associated with a freedom of expression that would not have been the norm in Ireland. Heaney said many times that his time there opened up new poetic avenues for him and imbued him with a sense of freedom he would have been unlikely to achieve in Ireland in the early seventies.

The beautiful smell of the eucalyptus tree reminds him of his wife, as does the aftertaste of wine. The euphony in 'beautiful, useless / Tang of eucalyptus' reflects both the loveliness of the tree's scent and the poet's wife's loveliness. He remembers inhaling his wife's scent 'off a cold pillow': the word 'cold' evoking a sense of loss and emptiness.

As Heaney sits at his desk each night, looking out the window, he is aware of the silence of the house. The intermittent noises the fridge makes seem unusually loud, like the whinny of a horse. Note Heaney's use of the word 'refrigerator' rather than 'fridge'. This American usage emphasises how far from home Heaney is. He is in a place where even the ordinary appears strange and exotic to him.

The only light is that on his desk, and it illuminates the verandah and orange trees outside. The language in the poem is intensely sensual, as befits the theme. The visual imagery is particularly striking. The harsh glow of the lamp light is softer by the time it reaches the verandah, and the oranges take on a dramatic aspect, looming in the trees. This sense of drama is heightened by the arrival of the skunk, parading around in all its glamorous mystery.

The skunk appears each evening, 'snuffing' around the verandah. The word 'snuffing' is part of the ordinariness of the skunk. Its showy tail is so much in evidence that it appears to lead the skunk: 'the skunk's tail / Paraded the skunk'. The tail appears 'damasked', which simply means shiny and patterned. It reminds Heaney of the vestment a priest would wear at a funeral mass. This reference to church links the skunk to the sacred and the mysterious.

The skunk is confident as it walks around the garden, intent on its own business and unaware of or uninterested in the poet. To an Irishman like Heaney, the skunk is quite an exotic and 'glamorous' creature, although it would be a common sight in California. The contradictory or paradoxical language here again shows how, to Heaney, the commonplace has taken on special meaning for the poet. It also epitomises a lasting marriage in that it must be both ordinary and mysterious if it is to survive. On a practical level, people become familiar with one another and go about their everyday lives together, but they must also retain a sense of the mythology and mystery that are a part of romantic and sexual love.

The nightly ritual of the skunk's appearance leads to the poet becoming tense and excited as he wonders if she will appear his night. He says that the thrill he gets from watching the skunk is almost like the thrill a voyeur would experience as he secretly watched a woman. This tension and excitement, along with his admiration of the skunk's beauty and confidence makes Heaney long for his wife. This feeling is exacerbated by his loneliness and sexual frustration.

The last stanza returns us to Heaney's present. He is back home, some years after his stay in California. He and his wife are getting ready for bed and he hears the sensual, gentle 'sootfall' of her clothes as she undresses. The word 'sootfall' is a most evocative one. As her clothes hit the floor they make a soft sound similar to soot falling down a chimney. He is 'stirred' by this, and as she bends down to get her nightdress from the bottom drawer, he is reminded of the skunk 'snuffing' around the verandah. The sexual tension he felt then is linked to his arousal now.

It is worth taking a moment to look closely at the word 'sootfall'. Like the skunk itself, it seems a strange image to connect to a loved one and to sexual desire. Soot, after all, is dirty. is aroused or 'stirred' by the sound. However, one critic said that if we think about it practically, clothes taken off at the end of the day and let fall to the floor are dirty too, and Heaney's reaction is part of the 'ordinary mysteriousness' of marriage. You may disagree, and may think that Heaney compared the clothes to soot in order to continue the link to the colour black. (The skunk, the chasuble, soot, the nightdress...)

The poem ends on a happy note. From the 'cold pillow' of his time alone in California and the funereal image of the priest's chasuble, we move to the shared marriage bed at home in

Ireland. The black chasuble is replaced by the black, 'plunge-line' nightdress. The poet longed for his wife at the beginning of the poem, and he longs for her now. This time, the longing is more like anticipation, though, as she is about to join him in bed.

Themes:

Love and marriage

This poem shows how a couple can retain their love and desire for one another even after eleven years of marriage. Heaney misses his wife deeply during his time in California, and is reminded of her by sensual pleasures such as the scent of eucalyptus or the taste of wine.

The separation forces Heaney to look at his relationship anew and he is once again like a besotted suitor, charming the object of his affections with carefully written love letters.

The poem is also a celebration of the erotic love that exists in marriage. At the end of the poem, Heaney is still 'stirred' by the mere sound of his wife's clothes falling to the floor, even though they have now been together for many years.

Memory

The poem shows just how intense and powerful memory can be. At the start of the poem Heaney remembers his wife when he tastes wine, smells eucalyptus and even when he finds himself anticipating the nightly visit of the skunk. Back in Ireland, his wife reminds him of the skunk by her 'tail-up' search for her nightdress in a bottom drawer, and this in turn reminds him of how much he missed her and longed for her during his stay in America.

15 – Night Drive

Key Idea:

- Getting to France to be with his wife
- Theme of married life & love and relationships

Structure

- Cyclical structure and repetition of ordinariness
- Half rhymes to convey the sleepiness the driver is feeling, un-fulfilment, state of mind
- The repetition “bookends” the poem bringing us back to the original idea.
- The scheme is not clear or always consistent reflecting persona’s lost/sleepy/unfulfilled of state of mind.

Language:

- **1st stanza –**
 - Familiar smells from the farm. The sense of smell brings the setting to life, Heaney is good at using the senses.
 - The setting is in France (a journey).
 - Freedom and comfort “warm”.
- **2nd stanza –**
 - Headlights hit signposts repetition and lists.
 - Sense of disappointment adverb “relentlessly”.
 - Is the fulfilment a sense of strangers, and not knowing?
- **3rd stanza –**
 - Personification of the combine – tired, working late.
 - “Bled” – suffering in its work – “light” highlights the seeds.
 - Negativity: groaning, bled, smouldered, out, shut
- **4th stanza –**
 - Is he talking about a woman or place?
 - Closeness of Italy to France – close relationship to a person/place?
 - A renewal of beauty in being ordinary. Is this a compliment?
 - ‘Loin’ – sexual imagery, waiting to see his wife
 - ‘Your ordinariness was renewed there’ – sense of promise when he gets to the end.

Heaney Poems *Digging* and *the Follower* are two of Seamus Heaney's poems from his collection of poems *Death of a Naturalist* published in 1966. Both poems are written in the 1st person point of view which is clear from the use of "I", "my", "me". The poems share a common theme which is the persona's relationship with his father. Another theme they share is aging and its effects or, in other words, the effects of the change in time. The title of *the Follower* shows the theme because of the relationship with the father is following one another. The title of *Digging* is related to the theme because the father and even the grandfather are the heritage of the persona or, simply, the "roots" of him which can be found by digging the soil. The theme is very clear in both of the poems, but there are three levels to understand it in a deeper manner: understanding the structure, the characters and the use of language. The structure is important because it affects how the reader sees the poem in overall as well as demonstrating changes in characters in time. In *the Follower*, there are 6 quatrains. The rhyme scheme is abab and it is different for each quatrain. This adds a rhythm to the poem, making it more memorable and easy-to-read. There are 4 main sections in the poem which are created by shifts which bring out the change in time, aging, and effects of changing. From line 1 to 12, there is a flashback to the persona's childhood, where he is talking about his father's success and his own actions. From line 12 to 22, the persona is talking only about himself as a child and how unskilled he is. It is still a flashback. From line 22 to 24, there is a shift in time. Reader never finds out what happened in those years he doesn't mention but he/she finds out that the persona is not the follower anymore; the father is. So there is also a shift in the roles of the characters. Although it is not made clear, this change may be because of the father's age. In this section, he is talking in present tense which is made clear from his time reference to "today". In the second half of the last line, there is a final shift in time which is future: "will not go away." The persona is saying that he will continue being successful but the father will keep failing and following him. On the other hand, in *Digging*, there is no specific rhyme scheme but it is possible to find rhyme. For example the first and second lines rhyme: "thumb" and "gun". The third, fourth and the fifth lines rhyme as well: "sound", "ground" and "down". Therefore, the effect is partial rhythm. The structure is not strictly organized which rather confuses the reader instead of helping. The order is as follows: rhyming couplet, 3-line-stanza, quatrain, 5-line-stanza, couplet, 8-line-stanza, quatrain and a 3-line-stanza. Just like in *the Follower*, in *Digging*, there are different sections created by shifts which, again, bring out the change in time, aging and its effects. The first section is from line 1 to 7 which talks about the present. Then, from lines 8 to 15, there is a flashback to 20 years earlier than the present day: "comes up twenty years away" (7). The person is talking mainly about his father, father's success and what himself was doing at that time as a child. From line 16 to 26, the persona goes to even more past by talking about his grandfather which is made clear in line 17. He compares his father to his grandfather and the reader realizes that as time passes, the newer generations are less skilled. This is made clear from his grandfather's success: "My grandfather could cut more turf in a day/Than any other man on Toner's bog." (17-18). The next section is from line 27 to 30 where the persona is back to the present and he compares his job, a poet, to what his father and grandfather did. The last line of the poem is referring to the future where the persona says in a determined voice that he will "dig with it". The structures of the poems, in general, are similar in the sense that they both mention the past, the present and future where the personas compare themselves to their ancestors. Another similarity in the structure of these poems is the use of enjambment—a very popular technique used by Heaney. For example, in *Digging*, a sentence starts in the middle of line 20 and goes on until the middle of the line 24. A similar thing happens in *the Follower*: a sentence starts in the middle of line 10 and continues until

the end of the stanza which is line 12. The effect of enjambment is that it increases the flow of the poems and makes them story-like. It brings out important words and phrases. The next aspect to discuss is the characters of the poems because they have the major roles in the themes. In the Follower, there are two characters that are described with the heavy use of visual, auditory and tactile sensory details. These sensory details help the reader envision the characters and understand them better. The father is a farmer which is clear from his actions and the terminology used by the persona to describe him. The first line makes this very clear: "My father worked with a horse-plough". The father is very skilled and he is an expert at his profession. In line 4, the reader is given an example of skill of controlling the horses by only "clicking" his tongue. This is an auditory detail. Another example is in line 7 where he rolls the sod without breaking it. The person makes the final statement about the father's skills with a short sentence in line 5: "an expert". The short sentence puts emphasis on the word "expert" which suggests that the father character is very good at his work. From lines 8 to 10, the reader gets an idea of the leadership skills of the father who can control an entire "team" (9) of horses "with a single pluck" (8). The persona always talks about his father working which suggests that the father is a hard-working character. Or, this may just be what gets the persona's attention. In line 20, the persona talks about a "broad shadow" of the father which is both physically on the farm and persona and emotionally on the persona. This is a hyperbole and it is used to show the control the father had over the entire farm. From lines 22 to 24, the reader finds out that the father is not skillful anymore and he changed roles with his son, the persona. The next character to talk about in the Follower is the persona, himself. The poem is generally a flashback to his childhood and a recalling of his memories. In the beginning of the poem, the reader gets a sense of this character being an observer. He watches every move of his father very carefully as presented in lines 10 to 12: "His eye narrowed and angled at the ground/Mapping the furrow exactly." This is a very precise observation of what his father was doing. It is also a visual detail. Lines 13 and 14 prove that he is a child and he is not talented. This is clear from the words such as "stumble" and "fell". These lines suggest that the persona falls down even on surfaces that are easy to walk on: "polished sod". It is an irony, tactile sensory detail and a visual sensory detail. In line 17, the reader finds out about the inner feelings of the persona. He admires his father and he is determined to be like him. In line 19, there is evidence of regret and acceptance that he will never be like his father which gets carried on to lines 21 to 22 where there is evidence of low self-esteem. In the last 3 lines, it sounds as if he wants to take revenge on his father. This is the effect of the tone here which is very harsh and shows evidence of irritation. In Digging, there are 3 characters: the persona, persona's father and the persona's grandfather. The persona is a poet because he keeps on mentioning a "squat pen" with which he will make his life with. The father character is a farmer, just like in the Follower. The father character's skills are not touched on as much as they were in the Follower but what he does as a farmer is described in detail in comparison to what the persona does. The difference between the father and the persona is the difference between their professions in Digging. However, in the Follower, it was both the profession and the level of skills they had in farming. Unlike in the Follower, where the persona almost hates his father because of the difference of level of skills between them, in Digging, the persona is proud of his father and the grandfather as evident in lines 15 and 16. The third character in Digging is the grandfather who has the most skills among the three of them. With this third character, the Digging poem gains the idea of level of skills just like in the Follower—each generation is less skilled. The final area to discuss is the use of language, because it affects the meaning of the words, phrases and sentences. There are many sensory details in both of the poems which emphasize certain concepts and/or help bring out details about characters, actions and themes. For example, "rasping sound" (3), "coarse boot" (10), and "the cold smell of potato mold" (25) in Digging. In the Follower, the examples of sensory

details are as follows: “dipping and rising to his plod” (16), and “yapping” (22). In both of the poems, the terminology is related to farming and what the people living the countryside use. For example, “shafts”, and “headrig” in the Follower and “spade” and “digging” in Digging. The effect of use of such terminology is that it makes it more clear what the profession of the fathers and the grandfather is. There is heavy repetition in both poems. For example, in Digging, the word “spade” is repeated many times. In this case, the repetition brings out a symbol. Spade symbolizes a connection between the three generations. The word “digging” is repeated too, which again is a symbol of heritage and finding your own roots. The word “pen” is repeated too. It symbolizes the profession of the persona and it is connected to “spade” in sense of digging with it. It means that with the pen, the persona will make his own life just like with the spade, his father and grandfather did. In the Follower, the repetition is not as heavy and it isn’t used in order to bring out symbols. It shows change in time and characters. The word “plough” is repeated in lines 1 and 17 and it helps comparing the two characters. The word “furrow” is repeated in line 3 and 12. It brings out the theme of following. In both poems, there are some interesting choices of words. For example in line 6 in the Follower, the word “team” is used instead of just saying “group of horses” or anything similar. It shows that the father has a team and he is the leader which, then, shows his power. In line 16 in the Follower, “dipping and rising” points out the father’s power compared to the persona’s own power. It may also show how strongly the persona felt the actions of his father. In line 4 in Digging, “sink” is interesting. The persona could have said “dig” in order to describe how the spade was being moved. In line 24 in Digging, the word “turf” is used. The reason of this word being used is that it grows in the soil and it is related to the symbol of roots. So, in conclusion, the effect of these different uses of language is that it connects structure to character and both of these to the main theme(s). In conclusion, the themes of aging and change in time, effects of aging and most importantly, the father-son relationship is shown through how the structures were presented, the use of language and its effects and the detailed character descriptions. The themes are the biggest connection of the two poems besides the fact that Seamus Heaney wrote both of them. The techniques and characters were similar in both poems but they were not the same entirely. This is why the approach to the main theme was different in both poems. However, at the end, it is very easy to connect these poems together and it is very likely that Heaney was the persona himself because he is a poet and his father was a farmer in Ireland.

Read 'Follower' and 'Mid-Term Break' printed below and on page 13. Compare and contrast how childhood is presented in these poems.

Assessment objective(s) covered:

AO1 (15 marks)

AO2 (15 marks)

AO4 (10 marks)

Total marks available: 40

Student response (1)

Heaney presents the struggles of childhood in his poems 'Follower' and 'Mid-Term Break'. Whilst in 'Mid-Term Break' this is explored through the traumatic death of the speaker's brother, 'Follower' explores this through the speaker's desperation to follow in his father's footsteps as a farmer. Both poems present the speaker looking retrospectively at their own childhood. This view of childhood from an adult perspective creates a sense of remorse and regret, in both poems as the speaker reflects upon their struggles as a child. Arguably, in 'Mid-Term Break' this is explored in a more traumatic tone making this reflection more poignant.

Heaney creates a sense of distance between the speaker and their family in both poems. In 'Follower' this distancing is explored through the semantic field of sailing. Imagery associated with sailing is used in order to explore a rift between the speaker and their father; phrases like "a full sail strung" and "Mapping the furrow" allude to sailing. Heaney cleverly juxtaposes the father's job as a farmer on land to sailing and the sea. Perhaps, subtly Heaney is exploring the idea that during childhood father and son have become estranged: one on land the other on sea. This distance created between the protagonists of the poem creates a tone of loss. This damaged relationship between parent and child is further explored by the use of half rhyme throughout the poem. The use of half rhyme creates a sense of disunity and struggle as the speaker desperately tries to follow his father maintaining the relationship between them. In the last line the use of the preposition "behind" suggests father and son remain distanced even after childhood. It seems, Heaney here, presents the relationship between father and son as futile due to irreparable damage created during childhood.

Similarly, in 'Mid-Term Break' following the death of the speaker's brother Heaney seems to present the speaker's detachment and distancing from his brother. This idea is explored through the noun 'corpse'. The use of 'corpse' dehumanises his brother as a mere dead body. Moreover this idea is reinforced through the use of colloquial term 'box' devaluing the death of his brother. Heaney presents the speaker's disregard for his brother creating distance and animosity. However, on other hand, it could be argued that Heaney subtly presents the speaker's grief over the death of his brother in the final stanza. The use of the pronoun 'he', and 'his' gives the 'corpse' described in the fourth stanza an owner. This acknowledgement of his brother is perhaps a sign of the speaker's grief. Structurally, as this idea is introduced the final stanza of poem is suggests that only in adulthood where the speaker has reached the emotional maturity to comprehend his brother's death has the speaker felt this grief. During childhood the speaker was not able to understand as Heaney presents the speaker as absent, shifting between school 'in the college sick bay' and the 'funeral'. In addition, it could be argued that the 'bells' described in the first stanza could allude to both church bells and school bells. This lack of distinction between the two shows the speaker's childhood confusion concerning the death of his brother. Therefore, it seems that

whilst in 'Follower' the distance between the speaker and his father is presented as futile due to a rift created between them during childhood, in 'Mid-Term Break' this distance has closed as an adult perspective has provided hope for the relationship after death. This after death experience is further explored through the reference to flowers 'poppy', the image of a flower symbolises new life after death. This new life it could be argued is perhaps blossoming from a reconciled relationship between the siblings.

In both poems, Heaney presents the temporary nature of childhood. In 'Follower' this is presented through a shift in verbs. Heaney describes the speaker of the poem using the verbs 'tripping' and 'falling'. These verbs have connotations associated with instability and uncertainty. Perhaps here, Heaney is presenting the speaker's instability moving into adulthood and away from childhood. Moreover, on the following line Heaney describes the speaker's father as 'stumbling'. This idea that he is 'stumbling' suggests that the speaker's father is now elderly and perhaps physically impaired. Consequently, this suggests that the poem is written in retrospect as the speaker is looking back upon his childhood. This abrupt shift in time in the poem suggests childhood is also abruptly ended. Writing in retrospect, Heaney presents childhood as a distant memory highlighting its impermanence and temporary nature. Presenting childhood as a temporary period of uncertainty Heaney creates a sombre, nostalgic tone as the speaker mourns the end of this period in his life. Contrastingly, in 'Mid-Term Break' childhood is presented as a tormenting period in life. The use of metonymy through the noun 'whispers' suggests the speaker feels tormented by the gossip surrounding his brother's death. This idea of gossip is further explored through 'Big Jim Evans' saying 'it was a hard blow'. Here the adults of the poem are presented as insensitive 'it was a hard blow' metaphorically could suggest the trauma and pain the speaker and his family are suffering. However physically this could allude to the speaker's brother's death as a car ran him over. This light-hearted use of pun creates an unsettling tone as it surrounds the death of a child. In presenting the speaker's recognition of this Heaney cleverly deconstructs the idea of a childhood ignorance. Instead the speaker is very much aware of the 'talk' surrounding him. Therefore, whilst in 'Follower' childhood is presented as a temporal period of uncertainty, in 'Mid-Term Break' it is presented as an extremely difficult, challenging period in life.

To conclude, Heaney presents childhood as an extremely difficult phase in life. Both in 'Mid-Term Break' and 'Follower' children's relationships with their families seem to have deteriorated during childhood. However whilst in 'Follower' this damage seems irreparable in 'In Mid-Term Break' it could be argued there is hope for a reconciliation after death. Furthermore, in 'Follower' childhood is presented as a fleeting faded memory whereas in 'Mid-Term Break' it is a much more vivid period in the speaker's life. Perhaps this is due to the speaker's loss of childhood ignorance in 'Mid-Term Break' after the death of a loved one childhood is no longer such a passing moment but instead an extremely poignant part of the speaker's life.

Student response (2)

The corrupting nature of harsh realities on childhood ideals is explored in both 'Follower' and 'Mid-Term Break'. This evidences the elusive quality to childhood and Heaney, through the increasing cynical tone clear in each poem, seems to comment on the damaging effect of time on one's visionary perspective of the world as a child. However, whilst a child's relationship with his father is depicted in 'Follower', a wider range of interaction and foci stems from the incorporation of different characters and settings in 'Mid-Term Break', perhaps alluding to the effect of a traumatic event on childhood: a loss of optimism and therefore an increase in awareness and perception.

Heaney's shifting of verbs in each poem aids him in crafting an increasingly pragmatic tone which strongly communicates the fleeting nature of childhood. In 'Follower' such physical verbs as 'work', 'globed' and 'strained' used in the first stanza, illustrate the forceful power and size of the father through the narrator's eyes. This hyperbolic language aids the poet in depicting the utter admiration of the Son for his father and a child's habit of exaggeration. This contrasts the use of clumsy verbs in the last stanza such as 'tripping', 'falling' and 'stumbling' as the initial skill of the Father is undermined. The directly opposing verbs effectively present the sheer difference in mindset of a child and an adult and the speed at which this changes.

Similarly, in 'Mid-Term Break' the verb 'counting', often associated with childhood, is used in the first stanza compared to the common verbs such as 'went' and 'lay' seen nearing the end of the poem. The shift from playful to common verbs could represent the loss of childhood; however, the more obvious child-like verbs such as 'cooed', 'laughed' and 'rocked' in the third stanza could allude to the narrator's awareness of the naivety of 'the baby'. This seems emphasised through Heaney's use of iambic pentameter as the rhythm in this line is bouncy and emphatic highlighting the ignorance of the baby compared to the understated emotional response of the narrator. Whilst the narrator's innocent perspective appears one-dimensional in 'Follower', Heaney presents a more complex depiction of childhood in 'Mid-Term Break' as the narrator is both aware of the reality of the 'four foot box' but still 'held hands' with his mother.

Although in both poems Heaney depicts childhood as fleeting and alludes to the realisation of growing up, different techniques are used to craft this sense of time. In 'Follower' this is achieved through a shift in tenses as the use of past tense throughout the first five stanzas aids the poet in highlighting the retrospective tone of the poem and such lines as 'wanted to plough' depict a represented form of childhood from an adult perspective. This aids the poet in presenting a naïve

tone which is then disrupted with the monosyllabic 'but' which emphasises the Volta and Heaney's shifts from a childlike register to a more mature voice. The older voice is evident in the cynicism that arises from the use of the negative adverb 'not' in 'and will not go away'. The loss of childhood is strongly conveyed to the reader through this technique and childhood is depicted as something temporary that should be treasured as the optimistic voice of the child is neglected.

However, in 'Mid-Term Break', the foregrounding of time evident in such phrases as 'all morning', 'ten o'clock' and 'next morning' alludes to a vivid awareness of the surroundings suggesting the narrator, although recalling events retrospectively, had a grasp on the reality of the death of his brother, suggesting that childhood is not lost quickly, rather it is corrupted slowly by one's experience of suffering. This seems further highlighted by the haunting yet subtle pun 'it was a hard blow' which is later conveyed explicitly in the line 'the bumper knocked him clear'. The direct linking of these phrases through the use of active verbs emphasises a gradual understanding and realisation of the situation showing childhood to be more daunting and less idealistic than in 'Follower'.

Ultimately, Heaney allows his adult narrative voice to prevail in the last lines of each poem: 'A four foot box, a foot for every year.' and 'behind me and will not go away'. This suggests that the memories of childhood cannot remain completely unadulterated by one's adult pessimism. Whilst childhood, although brief, appears to be an ideal in 'Follower', Heaney explores the true awareness of a child through his narrative voice in 'Mid-Term Break' suggesting the similarities between adult and child mentality when faced with pain and sorrow.