POETRY ESSAYS- THE ESSENTIALS

Leaving Cert HL poetry questions tend to be general in nature. Questions essentially look for a candidate's personal response to a poet's work. Personal engagement with the text must be supported by detailed textual knowledge.

For example John Montague 'A personal response'

One of the more general questions you are likely to be asked in an exam is to write a personal response to a given poet

What does personal engagement with the text involve?

- Comment on themes, subject matter.
- Comment on the relevance of a poet's themes.
- Explain why a particular poem/poet is worth reading.
- Say why you can relate to or 'connect' with certain themes.
- Discuss the impact of particular poems.
- Explain why a personal poem has a universal appeal.
- Say which poems you most enjoyed.
- Comment on aspects of the poet's style:
  - Sound effects: alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, rhyme, etc.
SYLVIA PLATH

The Poetry on Sylvia Plath is intense, deeply personal and quite disturbing. Do you agree with this assessment of her poetry?

I agree that Sylvia Plath’s Poetry is intense, deeply personal and quite disturbing. The best poems to explain this experience are: ‘Black Rook in Rainy Weather’, ‘Mirror’, ‘Morning Song’, ‘Child’, ‘Poppies in July’ and ‘The Arrival of the Bee Box’. There are poems that aren’t quite as depressing, but an unsettled atmosphere plays a big part in Plath’s work..

I start with the dominant theme in ‘Black Rook in Rainy Weather’ is that of Plath’s lack of inspiration. She struggles to imagine a poem to write, because poetry is the base of her life. Depression arises not for the first time in her life. Plath is desperate writing the poem, she describes her life as a ‘season of fatigue’ with ‘brief respites from fear of total neutrality’.
Emily Dickenson

“Dickinson is a unique poet, characterized by her unusual style and interesting view of the world.”

One of the first things that strikes any reader when they look at a Dickinson poem is the unique way it announces itself on the page. My first thought when studying her poetry can best be described through a quote from Dickinson herself –

“Here’s freedom”. While this phrase was used by Dickinson to describe the freedom she felt in her room in Amherst I felt there was a real sense of freedom in her poetry as she cast off the rules of punctuation and grammar to express her ideas.

And it is these ideas and the view of the world that she brought to her poetry a really spoke to me as I read her poetry. It is an intense view of the world, full of joy and horror.
I like Yeats’ poetry because it is far-reaching, exploring various themes and issues. Yeats wrote not just on his own experiences, but on his view and opinion of various issues in the world around him. In particular, my liking of his poetry is because of its three focuses: firstly its personal perspective, secondly its political perspective and thirdly through the variety of themes it covers. In addition, I appreciate his poetry for the manner in which he presents this focus, through his imagery. This can all be seen in such poems as The Lake Isle of Inistre, Easter 1916, September 1913, The Stare’s Nest By My Window, An Acre of Grass, The Wild Swans of Coole and The Second Coming.
The Movement of the Poem, After Apple picking is fragmented in style much like a dream. Initially the speaker reflects on the end or aftermath of the apple harvest. The final reference to ‘sleep’ conveys to the reader that sense of ending that has been evoked throughout. The poem is full of echo and repetition of sound creating a dreamlike quality and rhythm to the poem.

The poem begins with the onomatopoeic ‘sticking’, it is an accurate and earthy word that provides no romance to the image. The consonance of the double ‘ll’ sound is used throughout the poem creating a slow rhythm and tempo. Interestingly much of this poem is about ending and the ‘ll’s peppered throughout the poem come as a peaceful ending.
John Donne uses poetry to explore his own identity, express his feelings, and most of all, he uses it to deal with the personal experiences occurring in his life. Donne’s poetry is a confrontation or struggle to find a place in this world, or rather, a role to play in a society from which he often finds himself detached or withdrawn. This essay will discuss Donne’s states of mind, his views on love, women, religion, his relationship with God; and finally how the use of poetic form plays a part in his exploration for an identity and salvation.

The speaker then boastfully asserts his power over the sun’s rays, stating that "he could eclipse and cloud them with a wink, but that he would not lose her sight so long." This obviously undermines his argument because if it were not for those same beams of light, he would not see his love. Donne surely was aware of the ridiculous nature of this assertion; he appears to be attempting to accentuate the flaws in his argument against the sun, perhaps to emphasize the foolishness of a person in love. He continues this emphasis with his claim that all the riches and nobility the sun has seen "all here in one bed lie."

His frivolous praise to his love continues; he declares that he and his mistress are superior not only to the ruler of the sky, but all others as well. "Princes" he sneers "do but play us." He declares that "all honour's mimic" of the reverence he and his love share, that "all wealth alchemy" compared to the splendor of love, and that the sun is but "half as happy" as this couple.
Montague was influenced by Irish and traditional music. At St. Patrick’s College in Armagh, John learned about the long tradition of Irish poetry from an influential teacher. He was influenced by the people around him and his childhood experiences. The Civil Rights Movement in 1960s Northern Ireland also influenced John Montague. His did a public reading of one of his poems outside Armagh Jail in 1970 to support a jailed civil rights protestors, the nationalist Bernadette Devlin. He took influence from his very early years in Brooklyn, his childhood and youth in rural Co. Tyrone, his formal education in St. Patrick’s in Armagh and his undergraduate studies in University College, Dublin.

John Montague senses the continuation of prehistoric Ireland among the people and in the landscape where he grew up. He seems to recapture a more distant Irish past by recalling his own immediate past.
Eiléan Ní CHUILLEANÁIN

**Poem Title: Street**

This is a short lyrical poem which explores the strange nature of attraction and the mystery beyond that which seems familiar. There is a dream-like; almost nightmarish; quality to the poem.

Joseph Conrad – “The Rover” is set during the French Revolution, where a girl bloodied to knee witnessed a female butcher walking by and is struck by that image. The theme of the poem plays with the notions of attraction. It shows an unusual portrayal of a desirable woman along with the portrayal of relationships and butchery. I particularly like how the nature of love and death is also explored.

The imagery is playful and inviting to the viewer. I particularly like the images of “dangling a knife on the ring of her belt” or of blood – “dark shining drops”, “red crescent” or “bare heels”. It reveals a journey into the underworld.

The tone of the poem is dramatic, intense, tense and menacing. It also has strong tones of longing.

Stylistically the poem is narrated by a third party. It is cinematic and atmospheric, as is shown in its intrigue and suspense, and the run-on lines suggest an immediacy and urgency.

In conclusion the poem is obscure and yet intriguing. It also appears to be a vignette to love.
Thomas Hardy

Hardy lived from 1840 to 1928. He was the son of a mason, from Dorset, in the south west of England. He studied to be an architect, and worked in this profession for many years. He also began to write prose fiction. His first effort (The Poor Man and the Lady) was never published, but his second novel was published in 1871. This was Desperate Remedies. It was not well-received, but the next book, Under the Greenwood Tree (1872), did better. Hardy eventually published many novels - these vary in merit but include many which are established as masterpieces of English fiction: Far from the Madding Crowd, The Return of the Native, The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Woodlanders, Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure.

War poems

Hardy wrote poems at the times of the second Boer War of 1899-1902 and the Great War of 1914-1918. Some poems obviously reflect these particular conflicts (Drummer Hodge and Channel Firing, for example). But others, though written at the time, have a more general relevance - such as The Man He Killed and In Time of “The Breaking of Nations”. This is not accidental - Hardy explicitly tried to relate specific historical conflicts to a wider historical scheme. He attempted to do this in a grand or epic poetic drama of the Napoleonic Wars - The Dynasts (which has three parts, nineteen acts and one hundred and thirty scenes). In this he also relates the great moments of history to the lives of ordinary people.
Hardy’s war poems show a great diversity of attitude. We cannot, on their evidence alone, identify a clear-cut opinion of war to which Hardy keeps consistently. Channel Firing presents a horribly pessimistic view of man’s bellicose stupidity. In Time of “The Breaking of Nations” is triumphantly optimistic in asserting the fact that the good things of everyday life will survive when wars are long forgotten.

In Drummer Hodge, while he shows the tragedy and waste of war, and perhaps implies that Hodge’s sacrifice is rendered futile by his ignorance of the land over which he is fighting, yet Hardy makes no explicit criticism of war.