



Unit AS 1: Section A

The Study of Poetry 1900-Present

Eavan Boland and Jean Bleakney

In this Unit there are 4 Assessment Objectives involved – A01, A02, A03 and A04.

A01: Textual knowledge and understanding, and communication

In this examination, the candidate should be able to articulate informed and relevant responses that communicate effectively knowledge and understanding of poetry.

This AO involves the student's knowledge and understanding of the poems, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently, using appropriate terminology and concepts. Specialist vocabulary should be used where necessary and appropriate. Quality of written communication is taken into consideration in all units.

A02: Poetic methods

In this examination, the candidate should analyse the poet's use of such poetic methods as form, structure, language and tone. This AO is the driver of Unit AS 1: Section A and is of primary importance.

The student should analyse relevantly the ways in which meanings are shaped in poems. This means identifying poetic methods such as form, structure and particular uses of language, and showing how these methods relate to the key terms of the question.

Discussing poetic methods - advice to students:

1. The poetic method should be:

identified, using appropriate terminology if possible. (It should not be necessary for the student to learn or research recondite terms; the more well-known terms should be sufficient at this stage, provided they are used accurately);

illustrated, - as this is an “open book” section, quotation will be expected and this should be relevant and sufficient to illustrate the feature in full. It should observe the



layout of the original text, and should follow the conventions with regard to smooth and syntactically appropriate combining of the quotation with the student's own words;

analysed so as to show that the student understands its operation and effect; and

related to the key term of the question.

2. Use of the terms “image” and “imagery”

For our purposes in this section “images” and “imagery” are to be sought and found in the language of the poems, and not in the mind of the reader. The student should be discouraged from such formulations as “In this poem the reader has the image of nature as a destroying force” where “image” is really being used to mean impression. For the purpose of AO2 analysis in this section, what we mean by “image” is a figure of speech, where the “figure” (simile, metaphor, personification etc.) has a significance more than literal. Where there is no such significance, the student might be advised to use a term such as detailing.

3. Use of the term “tone”

Tone is usually understood as the poet's words in combination with his or her attitude towards subject or reader. It may be considered both in the light of a poetic method and as an effect of other methods e.g. diction, syntax. This feature, if it is to be handled productively, requires careful treatment. As with all methods, the tone must be:

identified - here no specialist vocabulary is needed, merely a precisely chosen adjective or adjective phrase (e.g. acerbic, admiring, mocking);

illustrated - a full and apt quotation should be selected;

analysed – the quotation should be analysed so as to demonstrate that the student understands how the tone is achieved; and

related to the key term of the question.

The importance of shifts of tone as a structural device (in e.g. contrast, characterization or development) should be understood by students.



A03: Contexts

In this examination, the candidate should demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which poetry is written and received.

In this section, the stipulated context will be biographical, and the student should demonstrate how this has influenced the poet's work by drawing on relevant information from outside the poem. Contextual information which is made relevant to the key term of the question will be rewarded. Students should be aware that little credit can be given for contextual information that is introduced merely for its own sake. They should remember that the text has primacy over the context. A good response will use contextual information sparingly and judiciously.

A04: Connections

In this examination, the candidate should explore connections between two named poems.

The student should explore connections between two named poems, discussing similarities and differences in the handling of themes and poetic techniques, and in contexts. Significant, pointed connections which are made relevant to the key term of the question will be rewarded.

Introduction

Teachers and students should be cautioned that this chapter does not contain everything you need to know about the poets and their poems. Instead what is offered is a summary of some of the key elements of the poems, such as context, language and imagery, structure and form, tone and themes. These are intended as a **starting point** which may be explored and developed further both in the classroom and through teachers' and students' own independent research.

No claim is made that the discussion for any one poem is comprehensive. It is hoped that the comparative and contextual material offered here will re-assure teachers and students about the nature and amount of what is expected.

It should also be clear that the list of **themes** which concludes this section might be added to. The following is therefore neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students as they begin to explore their pair of poets. You are encouraged to be flexible in your thinking, realizing for example that a particular poem is likely to embody more than one theme, or that a theme may not receive explicit statement in a poem. Enjoy your study of these poems.

Biographical information

Below is some biographical information relating to the poets Eavan Boland and Jean Bleakney. Use this as a starting point for your own research. (Remember what was said above about how to use contextual information wisely.) Also included are links to a range of websites and books which can be used to deepen your knowledge of the poets, their lives, poetic styles and themes, as well as critical reception.



Eavan Boland

Eavan Boland is one of Ireland's foremost poets. She was born in Dublin, in 1944. Her father was a diplomat and so the family moved around quite a lot. At the age of six she and her family moved to London, and there she experienced anti-Irish sentiment, which she claimed helped to reinforce her Irish identity. Boland's mother was a painter and Boland's use of art as a subject matter for her poetry can be traced to her mother's encouragement. As a teenager Boland returned to Ireland to attend secondary school and later university at Trinity College, Dublin.

After graduating Boland taught and published poetry, prose criticism and essays. For a time she lectured at Trinity College but found an academic career incompatible with that of being a writer. Consequently she worked part time as a lecturer or poet-in-residence.

In 1969 she married the novelist Kevin Casey and has two daughters. After her marriage she left academia and moved to the suburbs of Dublin where she was, 'wife, mother and housewife'. Boland's early work draws on her experiences as a wife and mother. Much of her poetry deals with the realities of everyday life, or "dailiness" as she called it. In some of her work she explores the experience of being female, introducing such taboo subjects as anorexia, mastectomy and menstruation.

Her experiences as a wife and mother also led her to explore the role of women in Irish history and culture. Boland often infuses her discussion of the female experience with mythological references. For Boland the past and the present are inextricably linked. Ireland as a setting and a theme is something she returns to time and again in her work. She regards the Ireland of the past as a place where people were more closely connected. Boland believes that in modern society we experience a lack of communication which results in alienation from the power of myth and history.

In the 1990s Boland taught at several universities in the United States. In 1995, she became a professor at Stanford University where she is the director of the creative writing programme.

Further Research

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/eavan-boland>

<http://www.enotes.com/topics/eavan-boland>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arYWAowatLs>

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/conversation-eavan-boland/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFvVlhKa808>



Jean Bleakney

Jean Bleakney was born in Newry in 1956. Bleakney moved to Belfast in 1973 where she studied biochemistry at Queen's University, Belfast and worked in medical research.

After the birth of her second child she stayed home and discovered poetry and gardening. In 1993 she attended a writing workshop at Queen's. Her interest in writing coincided with a passion for horticulture. Indeed she has worked for many years part-time as an assistant at a garden centre in Carryduff, outside Belfast. Not surprisingly many of her poems feature plants and their symbolic associations.

Her first collection of poems, 'The Ripple Tank Experiment' was published in 1999. This was followed by 'The Poet's Ivy' (2003) and 'Ions' (2011). Bleakney was commissioned to design the garden at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry at Queen's. Each plant in the garden has a significance in poetry.

Gardens and plants abound in Bleakney's poetry; as well as seascapes, birds, paintings, sweetie mice and tumble-drying. Her observations of the natural world are original and perceptive; she has the artist's eye for landscape. Many of her poems are set in the place from which she comes, Northern Ireland or in Donegal, where she holidays. Her wry wit and self-deprecating humour have led some to position her work within the tradition of 'light verse'. However, even her most seemingly 'light-hearted' of poems can often open out into a world where loss, disappointment and a sense of resignation is never too far away.

In terms of style Bleakney is a self-confessed lover of language. "I enjoy the physicality of words: their momentum, the quirk of verbs, the dying fall of adverbs. And I try to be attentive to their roots. Generally, the thrill comes from making something that sounds both newly minted and genuine." As for form, Sinéad Morrissey has written that 'Bleakney is a deft manipulator of form, of end-rhyme in particular, but even when no overt formal devices are evident, there is still a sense of polished workmanship in everything she writes'.

Further Research

<http://www.poetryinternationalweb.net/pi/site/poet/item/6499/29/Jean-Bleakney>

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SeamusHeaneyCentreforPoetry/pal/jeanbleakney>

<http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/literature/jean-bleakney>

In the Chair: Interviews with Poets from the North of Ireland, John Brown, Salmon Publishing Ltd (2002) (portions of this interview are viewable online at Google Books)

Activity

Research the life and times of Boland and Bleakney. Use your research to produce a presentation for the rest of the class.



Using what you now know about Boland and Bleakney's life and times, identify what you consider to be connections or differences between the two poets with regard to context.

Now, that you know something about the poets studied it is time to examine the prescribed poems written by the poets.



Eavan Boland: The Poems

Ode to Suburbia

In this poem, which is addressed to suburbia, the speaker traces a day in the life of a typical suburban housewife. Boland may well have drawn upon her own experiences as a wife and mother living in the suburbs of Dublin when writing this poem. The poem begins at six o'clock, when she wakes and as it progresses we follow the woman's day until bedtime. We see a life defined by her role within the family where she is mother, and within the house, where she is positioned primarily in the kitchen. The poem presents her as confined, uncomplaining, spending her day completing mundane chores and the work of looking after her child. The woman appears to long for change but seems unable to escape her existence.

As the poem develops, we become aware that her marginalised position could actually be one of power. The quiet 'skill' and 'compromises' have the ability to change her surroundings. It could be argued that in some ways the experience of the woman in the poem mirrors that of Eavan Boland. Boland decided to embrace the fact that she had been marginalised as a female Irish poet and use it to her own advantage. Similarly in this poem the woman appears to experience influence and power, maybe even a freedom that exists for those on the outskirts, hidden from the limelight. An alternative reading might see the last two lines as a reminder that this woman's power is limited and that the lion will not be able to catch anything more than a mouse and only on a 'red letter day'.

Language and Imagery

- The personification of suburbia.
- Suburbia as a metonym for housewives, and women who live there.
- Use of the Cinderella story in the extended metaphor.
- Animal imagery used to describe the housewives, 'starting to nose.'
- Imagery of confinement, 'claustrophobia'; 'back garden', 'windows subtly/ Silver into mirrors'.
- Metaphor of the lion/ cat could be interpreted as a celebration of the small acts of everyday heroism or a reminder of the woman's diminishing power.

Form

- Ode.

Tone

- Ironic, using an Ode to address suburbia.

Themes and Ideas

- Suburbia.
- The female experience.



Did you know?

The word 'ode' comes from a Greek word meaning song. Traditionally odes are formal and ceremonious lyric poems that are written in tribute to a person, place, thing or an idea. They sometimes employ direct address, but are not defined by a particular form; rather it is their themes that define them. Odes originated in ancient Greece and have a long and varied literary tradition from Pindar to Horace to Keats.

Activity:

Why do you think Boland chose to write this poem using the Ode form?

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/conversation-eavan-boland/>



Anorexic

In this poem the speaker describes the effect that anorexia has on her physical body and on her emotional health. The speaker regards her body in an angry manner, believing it has betrayed her. She denies her body food in a quest for perfection. At points she sees her starvation as almost spiritual as she links her emaciated, starved body with moral wholesomeness and escape from the burden of sexual temptation, 'sinless, foodless'.

This poem can be read as an exploration of an individual's experience of anorexia or as a metaphor for women's suffering on a larger scale, especially within an Irish context.

Language and Imagery

- 'Heretic' - use of religious language.
- Imagery of fire and burning.
- 'Wiles' is suggestive of seduction or deception.
- 'Flesh' has Biblical connotations of sin.
- Transition from the first to the third person, reflects the split self and emphasises a sense of detachment.
- Reference to 'milk and honey', 'rib' - Biblical allusions

Structure and Form

- Rhythm and rhyme – incantatory like a spell or a prayer.

Tone

- Blunt and abrupt.
- Angry – 'the bitch'.
- Detached, use of third person.

Themes and Ideas

- The female experience.
- Sin.
- Self-loathing, body image.
- Patriarchal expectations.



The Journey

The poem is prefaced by a translation from the *Aeneid* Book VI. In this episode, the hero finds himself on the threshold of the Underworld. He brushes past the wandering shadows of mothers and children who had died before their time.

The poet chooses what is in some ways a marginal scene from the book, the separation of the mother and infant through premature death, and it is this, rather than the hero's journey that the poem focuses upon. The poem subverts the classic story with its traditionally heroic male by having as its protagonist a suburban mother. As darkness falls she connects her worries over her child's illness with her vision of these other mothers lamenting the deaths of their children. There is a dawning realisation that the dead were once real people and that through forming an empathetic connection with them the poet is able to bear witness to their lives.

Therefore, this poem combines the personal and everyday with mythology, history and the poetic tradition. In the last stanza the speaker wakes up to find that nothing has changed, her quest is unfulfilled and there is a realisation that words are often inadequate to express the horror of experience.

Language and Imagery

- Symbolism of darkness falling.
- Imagery of light and dark, contrasted.
- Allusion to classical figure of Sappho, an ancient Greek poetess, who plays the role of poet-guide, whilst the scenes of women and children recall the infant souls of *Aeneid* VI.
- Allusion to classical poetry, Aeneas' descent into the underworld.
- Mixture of formal and rhetorical diction drawn from Aeneas' famous Underworld journey, with everyday language.
- Symbolism of the river.

Structure and Form

- Unrhymed four-line verses.
- Dual setting of modern room and landscape of mythological underworld.
- Dream vision – a journey and return.

Themes and Ideas

- The role of the poet, the limits of language.
- Female experience and suffering.
- History and tradition.

Did you know?

This poem is full of literary allusions, from Virgil to Dante, as well as perhaps a faint echo of the Irish *aisling*. The *aisling* is a dream or vision poem, that developed during the late 17th and 18th centuries in Irish language poetry. In the *aisling* Ireland is presented in the form of a female figure, who is usually lamenting the past and predicting a positive future.



The Singers

This poem is dedicated to M.R. (Mary Robinson, the first female Irish President), who read it at her inaugural speech in 1990. In this poem Boland explores the lives of Irish women, their hardship and their suffering. The poem is concerned with a particular moment when, the poet imagines, the *sean-nós* traditional Irish singers of the West coast of Ireland experience a revelation. This revelation is that the harsh external world of rain and ocean is identical to their own feeling of home. Indeed it seems that the outside world complements or reflects them. Their response to this revelation is a song, which expresses danger but also rejoicing, and reinforces their discovery that self and environment are interconnected. Their song is their art and it asserts their joy in “finding a voice where they found a vision”.

Language and Imagery

- Use of questions.
- Imagery of the harsh Irish landscape and its weather.
- Final line: alliteration connects two central themes ‘voice’ and ‘vision’.

Structure and Form

- Last line emphasised by its placement.
- Central question asked in first section. Consequences of the ‘moment’ are explored, but an explicit answer to the question is not given.

Tone

- Affirmative: ‘And only when the danger/ was plain in the music could you know/ their true measure of rejoicing in/ finding a voice...’ Note too the rhyme on ‘rejoice/ voice’ in establishing this tone.

Themes and Ideas

- The past and the present.
- The power of the female voice/ poet.
- Language and identity.



This Moment

The poem focuses on a specific moment when the speaker looks and carefully studies a particular scene in a neighbourhood. At the time of writing Boland herself was living in a Dublin suburb and this type of setting recurs in her work. The speaker asserts that things are going to happen 'out of sight', but 'not yet'. The moment that the poet has been building up to is then revealed: 'A woman leans down to catch a child/who has run into her arms'. At this point nature itself seems to affirm this small act of love.

Language and Imagery

- Evocative opening.
- Symbolism of dusk – close of the day.
- Imagery of light and darkness.
- Homely simile, 'yellow as butter'.
- Imagery of nature colonising the suburbs.

Structure and Form

- 'But not yet.' Reflects movement between day and night.
- Free verse.

Tone

- Quiet and reflective.
- Suspenseful: 'Things are getting ready/ to happen.'
- Affirmative.

Themes and Ideas

- The female experience.
- Inevitability of change.
- Everyday things transformed into something beautiful, 'Stars and moths./ And rinds slanting around fruit.'



Love

'Love' is a personal poem addressed to the poet's husband. The poet draws on autobiographical detail of her experiences of living in Iowa in the 1970's, where one of her daughters contracted meningitis. This was for the poet a time of emotional intensity. The poem then goes on to interweave their love story with the mythological story of Aeneas' descent into the Underworld.

The experiences of those in the Underworld are seen to mirror the experiences of the speaker and her husband. Time moves on and we see the speaker pining for the emotional intensity they once experienced. 'Will we ever live so intensely again?' There is recognition that the man on the bridge, her hero, is gone forever.

Language and Imagery

- Allusions to a range of characters from mythology.
- Love is mythologised, with the feather and muscle of wings.
- Imagery of being mute, 'their mouths opened and their voices failed, but the words are shadows and you cannot hear me'.
- Simple declarative statements, 'I am your wife'.
- Mixture of elevated and everyday language.

Tone

- Melancholy: 'But the words are shadows and you cannot hear me./ You walk away and I cannot follow'.

Themes and Ideas

- The changing nature of relationships.
- The collision of mythology and reality.

Further Reading

<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/myth-and-experience-the-poetry-of-eavan-boland-1.1932189>



Witness

In this poem Boland writes about her native Dublin. The poet uses the geography of Dublin to reflect on the city's troubled past. The speaker considers how the 'old divisions' are also to be found within her. The speaker here seems to speak for the dispossessed. Throughout her career Boland has frequently declared her resolve to speak on behalf of those whose voices have been lost or silenced in history.

The poem poses interesting questions about the impact the place we live has upon us and the ways in which the past and the present intersect.

Language and Imagery

- Significance of the title, the speaker as witness to history, or speaking on behalf of the dispossessed.
- Use of repetition to illustrate the many different sides to the city.
- 'Grass and iron' illustrates the contrast between nature and industry.
- From Dalkey Island /to the North Wall', shows speaker's knowledge of the whole city.
- 'Its old divisions', a reminder of Ireland's colonial past.
- 'Spurred and booted', imagery associated with Ireland's military past.
- Imagery of death; links to resurrection, Matthew 27:52.

Structure and Form

- Movement from present to the past.
- Movement from the city to the speaker, whose words express the city.

Tone

- Questioning, 'What is a colony.../And the dead walk?'
- Meditative, 'And in me also./And always will be'.

Themes and Ideas

- Irish history and colonisation.
- The impact of the past on the present.
- The role of the poet.



How We Made a New Art on Old Ground

In this poem, the speaker offers a meditation on the site of a famous historical battle. She attempts to extract the place from the history associated with it. The speaker considers the tradition of nature poetry, which she believes has the power to separate the place from 'the torment of the place'. For her the nature poem offers, 'an overlay... an art of peace.' She asserts that by allowing rust to grow on the gates of history we can then start to erase its traces and begin to heal, thus making a 'new art on old ground'. The poem proposes that the written word has redemptive powers to ease the sorrows of history, 'for this moment', at least.

Language and Imagery

- Direct address – but to whom?
- Metaphor of the birds 'writing' on the air.
- The contrast between history and nature.
- Use of sensuous language to describe the natural world.
- Symbolism of the dusk.
- Imagery of rust suggests the passage of time, things being left to rot.
- The power of language, 'as I write *valley* straw, metal/blood, oaths, armour are unwritten'.
- Allusion to Horace's ilex tree.
- Sibilant alliteration creates a soft, calming effect.

Tone

- Reflective.
- Meditative.

Themes and Ideas

- History.
- The power of art.
- Nature.



Is it Still the Same

In the poem the speaker is contemplating the position of a young woman, who appears to be a housewife, a mother and a poet. The speaker wonders if anything has changed for young women like this in the intervening years since she herself was living a similar existence. In the 1960s Boland was a housewife and mother living in the suburbs of south Dublin. The reason for her wondering if things have changed lies in the fact that when she was beginning her career most well-known poets from Ireland were male. Carving out her own poetic identity at such a time was not easy. Indeed much of her own writing has been based around this issue. In many ways Boland was a pioneer, altering poetic traditions in Ireland, and so in this poem she offers herself as a guide. Hence at the end she reassuringly tells the woman in the poem and all aspiring female writers 'when she looks up I will be there'.

Language and Imagery

- Repeated use of questions, reflects the speaker's concerned interest.
- Symbolism of room, 'at the back of the house'.
- Imagery of darkness.
- Focus on the woman's head and hand.
- The use of the personal pronoun, shifts the focus to speaker herself.
- Confessional, 'I wrote like that once'.

Structure and Form

- Series of questions about the 'sameness' of the situation described compared to what it was in the past, followed by three brief statements pointing out the difference.

<http://news.stanford.edu/news/2012/may/boland-woman-poet-051712.html>



And Soul

In this poem Boland recalls the time when her mother was dying and how she journeyed across the city to visit her. Her mother's sickness coincided with the wettest summer on record. The poem is set in Dublin, and the 'watery element' of the city is emphasised. The speaker also reflects on how the human body is composed of water. In this poem Boland considers the fragility of the body and the way in which the elements eventually return to where they came from. Throughout the poem Boland is coming to terms with her mother's impending death, through her use of the motif of water, a reminder to all of us of our proximity to our own dissolution.

Language and Imagery

- And Soul: missing word is Body, which focuses our attention on the importance of the physical body in this poem.
- Arresting opening line.
- Linking of mother and the state, the country .
- 'Took', unusual verb, suggesting the speaker is active.
- Imagery of decay.
- Imagery of water.
- Symbolism of the lilacs.
- Allusion to Whitman's poem, 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd'.

Structure and Form

- Elegy.
- Free verse.
- Placement of 'Fail', has powerful resonance.

Tone

- Solemn, 'the last tribute of a daughter'.
- Accepting, 'the next cloudburst it almost seemed/they could be shades of each other'.

Themes and Ideas

- Inevitability of death.
- Nature.
- The body.
- Family, mother-daughter relationships.

<https://apoetsdublin.wordpress.com/2014/11/06/and-soul/>



Cityscape

In this poem Boland explores the personal associations we have with words, the look and sound of them, beyond their meaning. She focuses on the word 'elver', a small eel, which gives rise to a range of memories and associations. The poem begins with a description of various specific moments and memories; the word she uses to evoke them is 'elver.' The speaker moves on to recall a memory from her youth, of how an elver had reportedly been seen at the Blackrock baths. Through this recollection we therefore come to understand some of the associations the word now has for the speaker.

Language and Imagery

- Assertion in the opening line of the speaker's personal associations with language: 'I have a word for it'.
- Precise description of place.
- Naming of specific places, Blackrock Baths.
- Use of direct speech suggests vivid recollection of the memory, sense of immediacy.
- 'Delicate migration': metaphor reinforces the complex link between memory, association and language.
- Repetition, 'which is elver/ 'which is elver too'.
- Imagery of water, implies fluidity and movement.
- Description of the eel, 'a translucent visitor/ yearning for the estuary,' suggests a luminous quality, desperate to escape and return home.

Structure and Form

- Free verse.
- Use of enjambment represents the fluid movement of the elver as well as of language and its associations.

Themes and Ideas

- Language and memory.
- Nature.

<http://builtdublin.com/blackrock-baths-blackrock-co-dublin/>



Amethyst Beads

Did you know?

To fully understand this poem it is important to know that in Greek mythology Ceres is the goddess of the harvest. Ceres had a daughter called Persephone who was abducted to the Underworld by Hades. Ceres desperately searched for her, preoccupied with her loss and grief.

During this time the seasons stopped and all living things began to die. Zeus then sent his messenger Hermes to the Underworld to bring Persephone back. However, because she had eaten some pomegranate seeds when she was there Hades refused to let her return. Ceres pleaded with him and a compromise was reached. She was then bound to remain in the Underworld for certain months every year. The times when she returned to the world therefore corresponds with Spring and the seasons of growth.

In this poem the speaker takes some amethyst beads, a special piece of jewellery, and tries them on. The speaker then reflects upon them, and in doing so she imbues them with a greater significance and transforms them from an everyday object to something extraordinary. For the speaker the beads evoke images of the hidden secrets of the earth. The mythological characters of Persephone and her mother the goddess Ceres are evoked. Ceres' maternal devotion and endurance is regarded as the most significant part of the myth. The speaker reflects on this and it leads her to recall a time when her own daughter was sick. The poem ends on a haunting note, as the speaker accepts that the child will grow up with no memory of the mother's devotion.

Language and Imagery

- Water imagery, 'well of the throat'.
- The object as having magical properties: 'And when I wear them it is almost/ as if my skin was taking into itself a medicine of light'.
- Contrast between light and dark.
- Mythological allusion, 'only stories of a strayed child and her mother bargaining...'
- Imagery of the natural world, herbs, season, flowers.
- Use of the child's direct speech could suggest Boland's own experiences as a mother.
- Repetition at the end adds to the poignancy of the ideas of loss and devotion.

Structure and Form

- Free verse.
- Irregular rhythm.
- Varying line lengths.
- Movement from present to mythological past and back.

Tone

- Reverence for the beads: 'And when I take them out of /the cherrywood box'.
- Sadness: repetition of 'Who will never remember this'.

Themes and Ideas



- Transformation of the ordinary into the extraordinary.
- Mother and child relationship.
- Mythology.
- Memory and loss, 'who will never remember this'.

Activity

Many of Boland's poems include references to mythology. Discuss why you think mythology features so prominently in her work. How does it function in the poems you have studied?



Jean Bleakney: The poems

Breaking the Surface

This was one of the first poems Bleakney wrote. She was taught to skim stones by her father. In the poem the speaker observes how this is an obsessive pursuit, if the requisite stones are to hand. It is also about showing off, which seems to be much more fun with an audience present. In this and other ways, the act of skimming stones is a metaphor for writing poetry; hence the aim 'to rearrange the shoreline—in a minimalist sort of way'.

In the poet's own words...

"Poetry, for me, is partly that same quest, from a different angle. Otherwise, my love for words and, I must confess, a desire to entertain - show off, even. It's like skimming flat stones across the water: I think I'm quite adept, but I'm not so inclined to lift the stone if there is no one else on the shore to see the bounces and ripples!"

Read the rest of this interview: http://lidiavianu.mttlc.ro/jean_bleakney.htm

Language and Imagery

- Extended metaphor links the act of skimming stones with that of writing poetry.
- Self-referential: 'This is my talent'.
- Use of italics: formal, scientific language used to describe the act of skimming pebbles.
- Hyperbole in fourth stanza.
- 'My primitive desire/ to rearrange the shoreline': acts a metaphor for the creative act of writing poetry.
- Assonance, 'whispering skiff'.
- Onomatopoeia, 'plumping'.

Structure and Form

- Regular quatrains, reflecting the artist's self-conscious interest in 'showing off' her craft.
- Emergence of amused audience in final stanza.

Tone

- Ranges through self-deprecating, boastful, playfully didactic and coy.

Themes and Ideas

- The creative process.



Nightscapes

The poet was thirteen when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the moon. It seemed natural to look at the night sky. She lived on a hill so there was a good view of the stars. Now, living in the city, light pollution has rendered most of the stars invisible. One summer night, in the garden, she became aware of all the white flowers and briefly it felt as if the night sky was around her feet and she went with the flight of fancy. So the poem is part-lament for the stars, and part-paeon to the imagination.

Language and Imagery

- Imagery of light.
- Fanciful, ornate imagery of the leaflets and trees.
- Latin (botanical) name of hedge 'Lonicera *nitida*' combined with the everyday name, 'Poor Man's Box'.
- Astronomical language.
- 'cosmos 'Purity' /and Magellanic Clouds of Artemesia', fusion of botanical and astronomical language could suggest a heaven on earth?
- Imaginative imagery: 'night moths are time-travellers'.

Structure and Form

- Loosely rhymed tercets.
- Generalizing conclusion marked by adoption of 'we'.

Tone

- Whimsical, 'night moths are time-travellers'.
- Reflective.

Themes and Ideas

- The power of the imagination.
- The wonder of nature.



Out To Tender: Ceasefire, 1994

This poem was written in 1994, the year of the IRA ceasefire in Northern Ireland. There was understandably much jubilation at the announcement of the ceasefire. However, the poem attempts to capture the wariness and apprehension of the immediate post-ceasefire period. Was it really permanent? There was a fear of what lay ahead as the Peace Process began. Both sides were still deeply entrenched. Any 'quick fixes', as in landscaping, were risky.

Castlewellan Gold is a fast-growing conifer, a golden form of *Leylandii*, but the resultant hedge is hard to manage. It gets out of hand and goes bare at the bottom. In local vernacular, there was a sense that too many people were 'all talk'. The clichés mounted up. One person's 'reality of the situation' was very different from somebody else's. More investment (not just financial) and commitment were needed on all sides, and a better, more honest dialogue. There was a feeling that a tendering process had begun and nobody knew what the outcome would be. This poem explores this transitional time in Northern Ireland's history.

Language and Imagery

- Imagery of construction symbolises effort necessary to rebuild trust and relationships after the ceasefire.
- 'Fierce', 'unmendable': a reminder of the difficulties that lay ahead.
- Symbolism of the light dropping.
- 'Pleached', a botanical term that suggests the deeply entrenched growth the hedgecutter was unable to tackle.
- Use of italics to emphasise buzz-words of the day, but also to express caustic local scepticism.
- Symbolism of the Castlewellan Golds.
- Use of Northern Irish colloquial language reflects the attitude of those within the community.

Structure and Form

- Movement from quatrain to tercet and then back again.
- Split in the middle reflects abrupt change in tone.

Tone

- Cautious: 'But only an hour or so ahead'.
- Sceptical: 'You can't be middle-of-the-road / when you're the whole road'.

Themes and Ideas

- Traditions.
- Fear.
- The use of language.

Activity

- Give examples of other buzz word or clichés to reflect the tiredness of language in everyday speech.



How Can You Say That?

Written in response to the husband of the poet who remarked, “Your head is full of sweetie mice”. The expression is Northern Irish and a gentle, sugary put down for someone who is considered daft or who has their head in the clouds i.e. not grounded. The poet’s response is to string together a list of abilities, opinions and philosophies, some scientifically based, to demonstrate intelligence and a sense of being attuned to everyday life. The restatement “I am your wife” further undermines the hapless husband of the poet, as he has bracketed himself with the sweetie mice. A perverse love poem.

Language and Imagery

- Short declarative statement to begin: ‘I am your wife’.
- Listing used to demonstrate the range of the wife’s skills.
- Use of domestic imagery, ‘tumble drying’, ‘cholesterol’, ‘bread’, ‘salt.’
- Use of colloquial language, ‘bad press’ combined with technical language, ‘colour is the effluent of light...’ illustrates the many facets of the wife’s character.
- Use of italics for emphasis, ‘I am *your* wife’.
- Northern Irish colloquialism, ‘full of sweetie mice’.

Structure and Form

- Short lines. Staccato declarations of what the speaker ‘knows’.
- Addressed to the speaker’s husband.

Tone

- Light hearted, witty: ‘I think that low-salt/ is also very suspect.’

Themes and ideas

- Love and marriage.

Activity

You may have noticed that in the introduction to this poem we used the words ‘the poet’, rather than ‘the speaker’. Why do you think we chose to do so? Were we correct? Which poems in this selection can and cannot be discussed in this way.



Spring

This poem features a detailed description of seed-sowing in early spring and the subsequent stages of potting in, soil preparation and transplanting. The speaker (or is it the poet herself?) observes from a distance that these almost obsessional activities can blinker the gardener to the here and now. All her effort is directed towards summer. There is a sense of loss, and a sense that the gardener is condemned to repeat, over and over, year by year, the mistake of investing in the future at the expense of the present. The poem acts as a metaphor to show how many opportunities, how many people, may have been missed by reaching too far ahead and disregarding the everyday joys. It is not just time that passes us by.

Language and Imagery

- Use of sibilant alliteration suggests ebullience and energy.
- 'Heart-line' implies care and love taken with the seeds.
- Metaphor, 'a forest of green pins'.
- Detailed, precise use of language when describing the range of activities involved in sowing the seeds.
- Imagery of the fragility of the seedlings, 'tresses of translucent brittle silks'.
- April, possible allusion to Eliot's 'The Wasteland'.
- Imagery of the hands used to emphasise the passing of time.

Structure and Form

- Loose iambic pentameter.
- Occasional use of half rhyme.

Tone

- Moves through excitement, resignation and regret, She's spent/ the better part of spring divining summer.

Themes and ideas

- Carpe Diem.
- Time.
- Nature.



A Watery City: Cork, June 1996

Written about the poet's first visit to Cork where she travelled to take part in a Festival and meet up with a close friend who had moved to the city. On arrival at the airport for a return flight, she was told that all flights were cancelled due to fog. She then went back into the city and had a bonus few hours in the hotel bar talking to her friend about life and love and poetry. The poem captures the alertness to environment, the twitchiness of the unaccustomed traveller. There is also a journey of self-discovery.

Language and Imagery

- Symbolism of the bridges.
- Use of brackets and abrupt openings creates a relaxed conversational tone.
- Water imagery.
- Metaphor of the boat journey.

Structure and form

- Use of the indented line for dramatic effect.
- Internal rhyme, afloat/boat; gist/mist.
- Structure reflects journey from beginning to end.

Tone

- Conversational: 'Well, if I'd known...'
- Playful : 'Desire Straits' echoes dire straits.
- Longing: 'why/ a non-swimmer like me was longing for the sea.'

Themes and Ideas

- Journeys.
- Friendship.



Self-Portraits with Measuring Tape

In this poem the speaker addresses the idea of physical shortcomings and coming to terms with them. The last part, *Lightness of Step in September*, offers more in the way of redemption as it finds the poet in optimistic mood about new beginnings. The weather has settled and the children are back at school.

Language and Imagery

- Everyday language of family life, from kitchen to fitting room to shop counter.
- Wordplay involving freshly-rendered clichés, 'I haven't lost my grip', 'against the grain'.

Structure and Form

- Rhyme schemes and rhythm skips along, serves to underscore the optimism.
- Iambic pentameter (*On Being Short-Fingered*).

Tone

- Light-hearted, self-deprecating.
- Wry fatalism: 'this having to admit/that one leg's shorter than the other.'
- Optimistic, 'I'm suddenly high on the notion...'

Themes and ideas

- Bleakney has spoken of the influence of the English poet Wendy Cope, whose work she encountered in a local library, having exhausted the Gardening Section. The wit, rhythm and rhyme of *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis* triggered an interest in poetry, particularly the desire to try to write. That influence is evident in 'Self-Portraits with Measuring Tape'.
- Mid-life reflection. Whatever the seeming preoccupation with outer imperfections and other failings, there is an inner determination to make the best of things. 'I don't look down, and try not to look back.'

Activity

'In poetry, the confessional, raw approach risks making the reader squirm. Likewise, holding back can be an irritating tease. But mostly I prefer to hint at than point at.'
Jean Bleakney

From your study of Bleakney's poems to what extent have you found this to be true?
<http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SeamusHeaneyCentreforPoetry/AttheHeaneyCentre/pal/jeanbleakney/>



Donegal Sightings

Bleakney has been holidaying in West Donegal for nearly two decades. In this poem the speaker captures different weathers, different seasons. Here, as elsewhere, she often finds that the effort to describe exactly what she is seeing will yield something deeper. In this sequence the poet explores the idea of viewing an object or place from a different temporal/spatial angle.

Language and Imagery

- Use of specific place names: 'Dawros Head', 'Dooey Strand'.
- Allusion to mythology - Cassandra is a character from Greek mythology who had prophetic powers. She famously prophesied the doom of the city of Troy. Her doom was that her prophecies were never believed.
- Use of ellipsis implies the speaker is easily distracted.
- 'Flocculating': scientific language used to describe the movement of the leaves.
- Metaphor of the landscape as a painting.
- Ringed plovers and sanderlings are types of wading birds.
- Use of onomatopoeia to describe sound of the birds.
- Colloquial language: 'saunterings'.

Structure and Form

- Reflections on landscape (first person, addressing an unnamed listener, or detached).
- Note the playing with the sonnet form in '*Apology*'.

Tone

- Conversational, 'You would need'.
- Playful, 'You would need three weather eyes, / and a pothole eye'.

Themes and Ideas

- Nature.
- Mutability.

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/SeamusHeaneyCentreforPoetry/AttheHeaneyCentre/pal/jeanbleakney/>



Csontváry's Flowers

View of Selmecebanya (1902)

This is one of a sequence of poems based on a visit made by Bleakney to Hungary in 2002, part of a British Council contingent at a Pan-Celtic Festival in Budapest. As part of that trip, she was able to travel to Pécs, a city in the south-west of Hungary, a fascinating place in terms of its history and multiculturalism. There, she visited the Csontváry Museum, founded to honour the painter. The paintings, some huge, were unforgettable.

The sequence contains three poems written in response to individual paintings. She became increasingly conscious of their respective positions in time. She was writing this sequence in the aftermath of 9/11 and during the run-up to the invasion of Iraq. A time of profound unease. Bleakney was very aware that these paintings dated from the beginning of the last century, when vast changes were about to happen in Europe in terms of war and subsequent re-drawing of the map, particularly that of Eastern Europe.

Bleakney was fascinated by Csontváry, the person. He had come late to his craft, having started out as a pharmacist. His paintings were almost lost, having been sent for auction after his death as mere pieces of canvas (a rare commodity after WW1). The sequence is preoccupied with darkness and light and tenuousness - and flowers.

Language and Imagery

- The extravagance of language is a kind of mirroring of the drama of the paintings.
- 'Baroque Calvary' – Calvary Banská Štiavnica is the most important Baroque calvary in Slovakia.
- Sensuous imagery reflects the vibrancy of the paintings.
- Personification of the calvary.
- The painter as an animated figure in the picture.
- Repetition of 'then' to suggest the sweeping movement of the eye taking in this vast and airy landscape.

Structure and Form

- Ekphrasis, a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art.

Tone

- Excited. Ecstatic. The poet tries to recapture the painter's vision.
- Anxious: anxiety faintly hinted in concluding lines.

Themes and Ideas

- Natural beauty in an area of instability.

Activity:

- Research and find out about other examples of ekphrasis in modern poetry.



- Find out more about the life and work of Tivadar Csontváry Kosztka.

<http://www.britannica.com/biography/Tivadar-Csontvary-Kosztka>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOebGhWUFjA>

http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Tivadar_Csontv%C3%A1ry_Kosztka



Notes for the Almanac

A loose selection of rhyming four-liners covering the period of an almanac i.e. four seasons. Most are brief glimpses of or meditations on the garden, weather or sky, with an eye to the heart.

Language and Imagery

- Use of idiom, 'run to seed'.
- Repetition of 'No.' emphasises the lack of sustenance for the birds.
- Metaphor, 'winged mêlée'.
- Compound word, 'Umbrageville'.
- Personification of the lights to appear hostile and angry.
- Personification of the flowers speaking to each other.
- Sibilant alliteration, 'spring's sharp scythe'.

Form and Structure

- Four line rhymes reflecting the seasons of the year in a humorous and impressionistic way.
- Some expressed by a detached observer, some in first-person, some addressing an unnamed 'you'.

Themes and Ideas

- The importance of the natural world.
- Change.

Activity:

Bleakney has said of her use of form:

'I rarely set out to write in form, but there is some kind of early warning system that alerts me to the possibility. Once presented, it's hard to resist.'

How effective have you found her use of form in this poem?

<http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/features/literature/jean-bleakney>



Consolidation

This poem deals with memory and loss. The speaker, whose children have grown up and moved on, finds herself clinging to memories of gathering shells as a family, as a team. In particular she reflects on gathering cowries, shells that are small and hard to see but often intact, unlike so many other shells.

Happy times are recollected. The consolidation involves gathering all the cowrie shells collected over the years. Handling them transports her back and she tries to re-establish some order in the shells and in her life, including an acceptance that memories too have to be consolidated.

The poem is dedicated to the children of the poet and it closes with an attempt to reassure herself, and them, that from chaos (whether simply an untidy house or a life crisis) it is possible to restore order. It is also part apology to them for the chaos of their childhood.

Language and Imagery

- Symbolism of the shells.
- Poem directly addresses the poet's children, to whom the poem is dedicated .
- Listing emphasises the quantity, a lifetime's collection.
- Use of domestic imagery.
- Imagery of beads.
- Colloquial verb, 'redd up'.
- Paradox 'only from disorder can order be harvested'.

Structure and Form

- Ellipsis and stanza breaks mark the passage of time.
- Poem projects a future activity.

Tone

- Reflective.
- Conversational: 'I think I'll leave a gap there'.
- Nostalgic.

Themes and Ideas

- Memories.
- Love.
- Nature.
- Time.



Winterisation

Preparing for winter is a facing up to the potential toll of winter, whether it's on a caravan on an exposed site, or a boat, or the human spirit. It is a season associated with death and an imaginative leap is required to believe that summer will come again. So the metaphorical hatches are battened down. This is conveyed by the activities described in the poem. A family member was dying at the time of writing the poem and Bleakney was aware of bracing herself for that.

Language and Imagery

- Halloween, just before the onset of winter.
- Use of Christian name implies a community.
- Imagery of ageing.
- List of directions, to suggest the mechanical nature of 'shutting up' the caravan for winter.
- Use of verbs, 'dump', 'Turn off', 'drain', 'cut', suggestive of completion and termination.
- Symbolism of the robin.
- Resonance of 'a season of goodbyes'.

Structure and Form

- Short lines to accommodate the list of short instructions.

Tone

- Humorous: Ernie with his 'bad hip'.
- Reflective.
- Optimistic: 'the robin'.
- Instructional.

Ideas and Themes

- Being prepared.
- Death and loss.
- The human spirit.



Some connections

Below are some of the key themes explored in the work of Boland and Bleakney. The following is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a helpful guide to teachers and students as you begin to explore the pair of poets. You are encouraged to be flexible in your thinking, realizing for example that a particular poem is likely to embody more than one theme, or that a theme may not receive explicit statement in a poem.

- Love; familial and romantic.
- History.
- Language.
- The female experience.
- The past and the present.
- Ageing and death.
- Nature.
- Domestic life.

Activity:

- Think of poems by Boland and Bleakney that relate to the themes listed above.
- What other themes have you come across in your study which you think should be added to this list?

How to Connect the Poems?

Below is a suggestion of how you could connect two of the poems. Be aware that this is not a “model answer”.

No claim is made that the discussion for these poems is comprehensive. It is hoped that the comparative and contextual material offered here will re-assure teachers and students about the nature and amount of what is expected,

Boland and Bleakney

Specimen question.

This question is about **transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary..**

Read again ‘Amethyst Beads’ by Boland and ‘Consolidation’ by Bleakney. By analysis of the **poetic methods** used, and drawing upon relevant biographical information, compare and contrast how these poets write about transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary.

N.B. Equal marks are available for your treatment of each poem.

In planning an orderly and relevant response to this question, there will need to be an awareness of how each poet deals with the theme of transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary in her poem and how the treatments of the theme differ. There will also need to be an awareness of biographical contextual information.



Eavan Boland and Jean Bleakney have both written poems in which a particular object is transformed from the ordinary into the extraordinary. The two poems which I feel explore this theme most effectively are, 'Amethyst Beads' by Boland and 'Consolidation' by Bleakney. In these poems the poets take seemingly ordinary objects, a set of beads and cowrie shells and imbue them with a deeper, more personal significance, and in doing so they transform them into something extraordinary.

Both titles offer some insight into the poems. In Boland's poem, the title 'Amethyst Beads' refers to the beads which the speaker puts on at the start of the poem. These beads act as a prompt for the poet's own imaginative journey. In Bleakney's poem 'Consolidation', the consolidation referred to in the title is the 'pooling' of cowrie shells collected over the years. As the poem develops, the shells are transformed into a symbol of memory and loss which the speaker attempts to consolidate.

The everyday object in the poem 'Amethyst Beads' is the beads mentioned in the title. Right from the outset however, there is an indication that these beads are special. The speaker retrieves them from 'the cherrywood box'. Cherrywood is considered valuable and beautiful, so it is only fitting that contained within the box is an object of some importance. The poet's description of the beads further reinforces the impression of their importance; they are vividly described as 'the colour of dog-violets in shadow'. The ancient Greeks considered violets a symbol of fertility and love. This reference becomes particularly poignant as later in the poem Boland explores the theme of love.

Whilst the ordinary object in Boland's poem is a thing of worth, the objects in Bleakney's poem are mere cowrie shells. Bleakney's reference to the cowrie shells is not surprising as she is a keen horticulturalist who often uses objects from the natural world as symbols in her poetry. The cowrie shells have a particular resonance in that they are small and hard to see, but often intact, unlike so many other shells. The speaker informs us that she possesses a lot of these shells, a 'decade's worth'. We are given a list of the various everyday objects used to store them: 'in jars, wine glasses, bowls, tins, / sandwich boxes, sandwich bags, shorts' pockets and car boot recesses...' The use of ellipsis implies there may well be other places where these shells have been stored, and this leads the reader to question the speaker's need to hoard these shells and to wonder what their significance is.

In both poems the everyday, ordinary objects are presented at the beginning of the poem; then as the poem develops the objects are transformed from the ordinary into something extraordinary. In Boland's poem this transformation begins just after the speaker places the amethyst beads around her neck, 'at the well of the throat where/ tears start/ they darken.' Enjambment here focuses the reader's attention on the place where the 'tears start'. The use of the word 'well' has connotations of water wells, which are of course deep down in the earth. Alternatively it might also suggest the 'welling' up of tears. At this point in the poem there is a tonal shift, the use of the words 'tears', 'darken' and 'stress' coming in such swift succession creates a sense of foreboding.

The transformation of the beads into something extraordinary continues in the next few lines of the poem. The speaker notes their 'mysterious brightness,' suggesting there is something unusual about the light that comes from them; however, in the next line we are reminded that they are, 'made underground where there is no sun.' Almost instantly imagery of light is contrasted with that of darkness. When the speaker thinks about the origins of the beads it leads her to 'migrate' into the world of mythology, a common feature of Boland's work.



The mythological story Boland draws on in this poem is that of Ceres, the 'mother bargaining', and her daughter Persephone, 'the strayed child'. In the myth Persephone strays into the underworld where she is imprisoned by Hades, 'a sullen king'. Boland draws upon this myth, focusing particularly on the female experience and uses it to explore the theme of maternal love and devotion. Therefore, the poem has transformed the ordinary amethyst beads into something symbolic, something extraordinary.

Similarly in Bleakney's poem the speaker focuses on an everyday object at the start of the poem. The speaker adopts a confessional tone: 'none of us remembers' when the shells were collected or what else happened on that day. A long list of options for when and where they might have been collected is offered: 'Whether we were bucketless, shoeless;/if there were jellyfish, a sloop at anchor'. In presenting us with these snapshots of family life, the poet makes us realize that it is not the cowrie shells themselves that are important, but what they signify, family relationships.

In poetry we must be careful not to confuse the speaker with the poet. However, this poem is dedicated to Stephen and Katherine, Bleakney's own children. Therefore we can suppose that the speaker is the poet. As she writes, her children have grown up and moved on, so she finds herself clinging to memories of gathering shells as a family on Inniskeel, as a team. These are happy memories, Bleakney uses the metaphor of the children as 'pilgrims' to convey a sense of adventure, and the simile 'heads down like crazed prospectors-' also suggests the excitement and enthusiasm of the family in their quest for the cowrie shells.

The theme of maternal love is also explored in Boland's 'Amethyst Beads'. Boland, like Bleakney, is a mother and the relationships between mothers and daughters feature in many of her poems, such as 'The Journey' and 'And Soul'. In 'Amethyst Beads' she uses the myth of Ceres and her daughter Persephone in the underworld to illustrate the lengths to which mothers will go to protect their children: 'Promising and arguing:/ what she can keep, what she can let him have'. The poem's use of free verse and varying line lengths reinforces the idea of the wondering tormented mother desperately searching for her daughter.

The idea of loss is one that Bleakney also explores in her poem. Bleakney fears that memories could be lost, 'now that none of us remembers'. Later in the poem she refers to them as '...the unstrung beads/ of a frayed timeline'. This metaphor effectively illustrates the precious but disconnected nature of the memories; that they are 'unstrung' implies that the speaker needs to organise and arrange them. The word 'frayed' connotes fragility and could suggest her fears about the stability of this timeline.

As the poem continues the tone changes from fear to one of stoical acceptance. The poet asserts that memories, like shells, have to be consolidated. The poet directly addresses her children, '...if /on a visit home you find me /...school ruler in hand, arranging/ rank on rank of cowrie shells'; for her this 'arranging' is part of the process of dealing with loss. The shells are described as 'survivors of swell and storm', an image that acts as a reminder of their origins but also that life is turbulent, and the memories that survive can 'surely bear the weight/ of symbolism, metaphor'. In other words, the ordinary has been transformed into the extraordinary.

Whilst Bleakney accepts change, the passage of time and the inevitability of forgetting and loss, Boland seems to fear it. Towards the end of Boland's poem the



speaker refers to another facet of the beads, this time their healing powers, '...it is almost/ as if my skin was taking into itself a medicine of light'. The imagery of light infused with healing powers confers an almost magical quality onto the beads. From here the poet goes on to list herbs renowned for their healing powers: 'Rosemary, say, or tansy./ Or camomile.' These are required for a child who is presented as 'tossing from side to side'. As a mother Boland has often written about her own children and the times when they are sick. The child speaks directly: 'Wait for me. Don't leave me here', words that could also have been spoken by Persephone. The child is pleading and the tone is desperate and fraught. The poem concludes with the dramatic repetition of a line that implies that forgetting and loss are inevitable. 'Who will never remember this/Who will never remember this.' In this haunting and ambiguous ending, the amethyst beads we saw at the start have in the course of the poem been transformed into a complex symbol for love and loss, something truly extraordinary.

Bleakney concludes her poem on a rather more upbeat but similarly contemplative note. She offers a reminder for her children or the reader, that 'only from/ disorder can order be harvested'. The imagery of harvest implies something sown and gathered to be used for nourishment. The end result of the consolidation is something that is essentially enriching. Similarly to Boland's, this poem ends with the ordinary object, the cowrie shells having been transformed into an engaging exploration of family, memory and love, something truly extraordinary.

Both Boland and Bleakney take the reader on a journey in these poems. One in which we see them take ordinary objects, the amethyst beads and the cowrie shells, which through the course of the poems become invested with the poets' own interests and concerns: myth, family, love and loss, - until at the end the object itself is transformed, and we are left with something truly extraordinary.

Activity:

- Go through this essay and annotate where it has met the assessment objectives.
- If you were to give this student advice on how to improve her essay, what would you suggest?



Glossary of Poetic Terms

An important part of your response in the exam will be your appropriate and relevant use of **literary terminology**. Below is a list of terms you are likely to come across in your study of poetry.

- **alliteration:** the repetition of sounds at the beginning of two or more words in close proximity. The term is usually applied to the repetition of consonants.
- **assonance:** two or more words, which are in close proximity, repeating the same vowel sounds.
- **bathos:** a juxtaposition of the important with the insignificant or trivial – often to comment ironically on the actual insignificance of what is deemed important. This figure of speech can also be used purely humorously.
- **cadence:** inflection or emphasis, sometimes used for poetry based on a “musical phrase” of language rather than a strict metre.
- **caesura:** a significant pause within a line of poetry, generally created by the use of punctuation.
- **diction:** the language used in a work of literature particularly as regards vocabulary choices.
- **epigram:** a short, pithy saying, conveying a profound thought in an economical and arresting way.
- **hyperbole:** language that uses exaggeration for effect.
- **image:** For the purpose of AO2 analysis in this unit, what we mean by “image” is a figure of speech, where the “figure” (simile, metaphor, personification etc.) has a significance more than literal. Where there is no such significance, the student might be advised to use a term such as “detailing”.
- **imagery:** this word generally applies in a visual sense to figurative language that stimulates a picture in the imagination. Tactile imagery appeals to the sense of touch. Auditory imagery appeals to the imagination by echoing or creating sound effects.
- **irony:** this is language and tone that implies that the intended meaning is different from the expressed meaning.
- **metaphor:** where one thing is described directly as another, to enhance meaning or effect. When this is used for a more protracted purpose it is called an extended metaphor.
- **metre:** metre is the measurement of rhythm, expressed as the number and kind of metrical feet in a line of poetry. This measurement considers the number of syllables and where the stresses fall in each foot.
- **motif:** a dominant or recurring idea or figure of speech within a work of art or within the work of an artist, musician or writer.



- **neologism:** a new word, sometimes a compound of two or more existing words, or an existing word with an unusual prefix or suffix added.
- **onomatopoeia:** when a sound is conveyed in word form; or when the sound of a word enhances its meaning.
- **oxymoron:** a figure of speech where two juxtaposed words or phrases appear to be contradictory.
- **paradox:** where two ideas, expressed in close proximity, are apparently contradictory, but on closer examination prove to be meaningfully related.
- **personification:** to attribute human characteristics to a non-human subject.
- **satire:** the use of humour – often through mimicry and exaggeration – to expose as absurd a society, a belief or ethic, or a person or class of people and thereby to ridicule it.
- **simile:** where something is explicitly compared to something else, e.g. by using “like” or “as”.
- **synaesthesia:** the expression of a deliberate confusing of the senses (e.g. describing music as a colour, or light as a liquid).
- **tone:** the emotion or attitude intended by the writer, effected through use of language, rhythm and punctuation.

