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Essay Breakdowns

LC English - Poetry

Durcan
(2016)



Understand the Key Words!

- This will help you to **accurately address the question**.
- Comment on **all aspects** of the question to achieve full marks!

The Question

"Durcan takes a narrative approach to explore a variety of issues in poems of great emotional honesty". Discuss this statement, supporting your answer with reference to the poetry of Paul Durcan on your course.

Think Like the Corrector!

- What are the **codes on the marking scheme** going to be?
- The coding for this question will be **N/I** (narrative approach & issues) and **EH** (poems of emotional honesty).



There are TWO Tasks!

You must address BOTH tasks outlined in this question. **(1)** The narrative approach to explore issues and **(2)** the emotional honesty of the poems.

Great **reinforcement of the question's key words!**



Introduction

A wide range of vocabulary is used!



After studying a selection of Durcan's complex and wildly **enigmatic** poems, I cannot deny the fact that he has mastered the art of transporting readers to the fascinating world of his poems. He does this through unusual imagery, striking language, and of course, his unique **narrative style**. Durcan's poems are **multifaceted** which often left me confused as a reader upon first reading. He manages to infuse several themes and **issues** into his poems, which gives readers a riveting insight into his complicated mind. What I like most about Durcan's poems is his **candid and sincere nature**. He discusses monumental times in his life in a **truthful and heartfelt** manner. This **emotional honesty** hugely contributed to my enjoyment of his poems.

Great reference to the **emotional honesty** of Durcan's poetry!



Paragraph 1

Integrated Quotes!

Try and integrate your quotes, this reads much better in comparison to stand alone quotes.

'Wife who Smashed Television gets Jail' tells the story of an apparently volatile mother and wife in a journalistic style. On the surface, the poem appears to be a tale of an enraged mother who puts "*her boot through the screen*" of a television in an erratic fit of rage.

However, Durcan seamlessly probes into deeper and more profound questions regarding the changing role of families, women's place in society and the power the judicial system wields over its citizens. Indeed, Durcan creates this woman to show the *pent up anger and frustration* that so many women were feeling at the time.

"I didn't get married to a television and I don't see why my kids or anybody else's kids should have a television for a mother or father."

Durcan's clever verb choice during the husband's testimony effectively vilifies the woman, which adds drama and tension to this courtroom narrative "*marched, declared, smashed*". Durcan also manages to weave the fascinating myth of Queen Maeve into this eventful account. Maeve, like the woman in question, was a fierce and fearful force. This reference adds great depth to the poem.

Durcan boldly questions the credibility of Ireland's judicial system as he describes the utterly ridiculous reaction of Justice O'Bradaigh "*jail was the only place for them*". *I believe that Durcan was suggesting that the judicial system had very little to do with justice, but rather dominance and power.* This poem is an excellent example of Durcan using a seemingly trivial event to encourage readers to question the world around them.

Mention the Emotions.

This student effectively refers to the emotions evident in the poem. This helps them to address the 'poems of emotional honesty' (EH) aspect of the question.

Effective implementation of **Personal Response**

Narrative Approach

By referring to the poet's clever verb choice, this student begins to address the 'narrative approach' (NI) aspect of the question

Durcan's Motif

Impressive acknowledgment of Durcan's recurring motif shown here.

Paragraph 2

In 'The Difficulty that is Marriage', Durcan continues his discussion of the complexities which arise between married couples. It was in this poem that I was introduced to a recurring motif of Durcan's; that of insurmountable gulfs which so often exist between individuals, be it a mental, physical or emotional gulf. The harsh alliterative 'd' in the opening line seems to underscore the petty bickering of the couple,

"we disagree to disagree, we divide, we differ"

I like that Durcan has no interest in creating a facade of a perfectly harmonious marriage, but instead gives us an honest depiction of the relationship they shared. He is forthcoming and upfront, which I found hugely refreshing as it made for a welcome change from the majority of romantic sonnets.

Durcan describes the longing he has to understand his wife. Physically, they are close, yet as his wife lies in a peaceful slumber, he can't help but feel as though she's withdrawn *"you are faraway curled up in sleep"*. It seems as though sleep seems to magnify and intensify the emotional distance between them.

Refer to the Poetic Techniques!

Use the prescribed poetry section of the paper to **show off your knowledge of your poet's poetic techniques**.

Excellent understanding of **cacophony** shown here.

Effective concluding sentence

- the student ensures that their point is on task through their reinforcement of the question's key word.

Personal Pronoun 'I'

Providing a personal insight into the poem is always much more effective than simply relaying generic note-style observations.

Personal Response

Once again personal response is used to show the corrector that **the student has the ability to analyze Durcan's poetry in light of the question** posed.

Unrealistic Quantity of Quotes!

Two quotes in each main body paragraph is plenty!



Paragraph 2

I appreciate Durcan revealing the delicate and fragile aspects of his character, which are so often shunned and discouraged in our society, "*how was I so lucky to have ever met you?*"

This is emotional honesty at its finest. Durcan unashamedly shows vulnerability and tenderness which I find truly touching. He tracks his thought process as he gazes at his sleeping wife,

"you must have your faults, but I do not see them" Durcan comes to the conclusion that he would rather live in an imperfect relationship than a dull "*changeless kingdom*". Rather than forfeiting to the difficulties of marriage, he embraces them "*if it were with you I should live forever.*"

Awareness of the Question

The student shows great awareness of the question here. TIP: reinforce the questions key words to help show an awareness of the question in your poetry essay



Paragraph 3

Lack of personal response in this paragraph!



The idea of emotional gulfs is introduced once more in 'Parents' as Durcan recounts the apprehension and worry that is so fiercely felt by new parents. Once again, sleep acts as a barrier which prevents any form of mutual understanding. Durcan also introduces the sea as a metaphor to describe the isolation he felt from his newborn child

"estranged from her by a sea: she is under the sea, and they are above the sea"

Again, we see emotional honesty and fragility from Durcan as he describes the intense angst he felt *"their foreheads furrowed"*. The repetition in this poem is interesting and almost ghost-like, *"father father, mother mother"*. This haunting call perhaps represents the fact that despite the efforts of both the child and the parents *"they cannot hear her"*.

Durcan manages to evoke a sense of worry in me as a reader, as he narrates these difficult parental struggles. I, too, long for the child and parents to connect and understand one another. Their efforts seem futile at the close of the poem, as the parents are left at sea, metaphorically,

"they stare at the drowned, drowned face of their child".

Another good reference to the **narrative approach!**



Emotional Honesty



The strength of this essay is that it focuses on the question.

This is a great explanation of how emotionally charged Durcan's poetry is.

Paragraph 4

Great
**knowledge of
themes and
language**
used by
Durcan in this
poem!



**Excellent
personal
response** -
shows the
examiner that
you have
thought about
the poem!



'Sport' is another prime example of Durcan's unique narrative style, and also provides an eye opening insight to his psyche during a tremendously difficult period in his life. The poem opens on a profoundly sad note, a tone which is to be maintained for the majority of the poem,

"There were not many fields in which you had hopes for me".

He describes the joy and gratitude he felt after his father "drove all the way down, fifty miles, to Mullingar" for his match alongside the Grangegorman Mental Hospital. Yet as he further recalls events, it becomes evident from Durcan's choice of cold and loveless verbs that his father was there to scrutinise, not support him "stand on the sidelines and observe me" The narrative style continues as Durcan describes the uneasiness he felt before the men with "gapped teeth, red faces". They are monstrous and animalistic images, and I think this is how Durcan felt society looked upon him, as a mental illness patient. Thankfully, that heartless stigma is beginning to break down, but nonetheless, readers can sympathise with the extreme social exclusion he felt.

The triumph and jubilation Durcan feels is heartwarming, "in your eyes I had achieved something at last", but is ultimately short lived. Durcan's emotional confusion at the close of this poem provides a saddening insight to the sheer inadequacy he felt both as a son and a person,

"seldom if ever again in your eyes was I to rise to those heights."

This paragraph is **on task**. There is a good discussion on the **narrative approach** and **emotional honesty** in the poem.



Understanding the Metaphor!

Good understanding of the metaphor evident in the poem shown here. **Durcan compares the female subject in the poem to Ireland.**

Reinforcing the Emotions.

Again the student **reinforces the emotions felt by Durcan. (EH)**



Paragraph 5

'The Girl with the Keys to Pearse's Cottage' is a charming poem in which Durcan recounts the exciting teenage love he shared with the spellbinding Cáit Killann. The contrast he makes in the opening stanza shows his innocent infatuation with her,

"her dark hair was darker because her smile was so bright".

Durcan blissfully imagined a life of "cosmic peace" with Cáit, perhaps just as how the "passionate and pale Pearse" somewhat naively wished for Ireland. Durcan becomes somewhat embittered by their doomed romance. Durcan addressed the bleak economic position of Ireland at the time, and the inevitability of young people being forced out of their homes in the hopes of finding a better life "our world was strange because it had no future". Just as Pearse's Ireland was unachievable, so too was a future for Cáit and Durcan,

"you have gone with your keys from your own native place."

Cut to the Chase!

The student can at times be **overly analytical of Durcan's poetry.** This can lead to the paragraph veering away from the question being posed.

The student displays a **wide range of vocabulary** throughout the essay. This can heighten their L mark in the context of the PCLM marking template.



Effective Conclusion

This conclusion is personal, insightful and on task.



Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Durcan takes a different approach to poetry than the other poets on this course. He is **unabashed and audacious** and talks about his personal struggles in an utterly candid way. I may not be able to relate personally to some of the issues he writes about, yet I can certainly admire the soul-bearing way in which he does so. His **narrative style** invites us to walk through his personal experiences, all the while learning more about ourselves, and the issues in the world around us. Yes, he is complicated, and at times verbose, but at least he is authentically so. His poems are genuine and open, and I find this honesty incredibly admirable.

Reinforcing the questions key words and phrases in the conclusion is a great way of ensuring that your essay remains on task.



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