

Paper 1 – Example Poetry Commentary
Standard Level
November 2005

On the surface Gibbons' poem 'The Visitor' is a poem about a piano tuner, probably the visitor referred to in the title, but it is also a poem about music and the effect that it can have on life and our surroundings.

Comment [KH1]: Clear concise intro that demonstrates the candidates ability to read below the superficial meaning

A striking feature of this poem is the use of a speaker who, although present throughout the poem, is distant, a distance which is emphasised by the contrast with the superficial relationship that is developed between the wife and the piano tuner. There is also a sense that, although the poem is written in the present tense, the events themselves took place in the past. Hence the dream-like state evoked by the poem.

Comment [KH2]: Good sense of personal evaluation

Comment [KH3]: Nice subtle literary feature considered

This feeling of dreaming is created by the very strong visual and auditory images such as 'the afternoon that blurs in a haze of music,' which effectively conveys the idea that the music can almost be seen: it is as if the sounds are having an almost tangible effect on their surroundings. The powerful image of 'the blaze of New October' accentuates the passionate and fiery effects of the music.

Comment [KH4]: Clear topic sentence that introduces the focus for this paragraph and refers to the effect on the reader

Comment [KH5]: Again good evaluation

Comment [KH6]: Good development of ideas

This visual and auditory imagery is crucial in the development of the character of the blind piano tuner. The way that 'his hands glide over the slow keys, ringing changes finer than the eye can see,' creates the impression of the slow, meticulous demeanor of the piano tuner and his attention to his work. Additionally, the image is ironic and it perhaps implies that because of his blindness he is provided with a more subtle sense of hearing than the rest of us. The enjambment between the lines echoes the smooth grace of the piano tuner's movements and, like him, the rhythm of the poem is slow and considered. The subtle rhyme scheme throughout serves to create a sense of unity and a sense of perpetual continuity

Comment [KH7]: Again, good clear topic sentences

Comment [KH8]: Good smooth inclusion of quotations

Comment [KH9]: Ability to identify the more subtle features of the text

Comment [KH10]: Good awareness of when a point needs to be made tentatively

The use of 'quiver like a bowstring' again provides a strong visual image that creates an impression that the piano is powerfully 'quivering' with pent up energy. However, the simile also suggests that the action of twisting the strings one notch higher is not as trivial as it seems but is instead of great significance. The power of the music is perhaps most effectively emphasised by the time shifts in the poem as in one section it is late afternoon and in the next it is hours later, which is perhaps suggestive of the idea that music can carry the listener away and that the music has consumed time in a 'hazy blur.' The author's use of 'all the old familiar, unfamiliar music-lesson pieces; is an interestingly ironic comment. Perhaps it suggests how things once familiar have, through time, become unfamiliar. However, Gibbon leaves the reader on a note of hope as there is the feeling that time would have destroyed the piano but '[the piano tuner] saved it this time.'

Comment [KH11]: Good sensitivity to some of the more subtle, complex or difficult to notice literary features

Comment [KH12]: Good ability to explore multiple interpretations of elements of the text

Comment [KH13]: Again good evaluation, lending a personal feel to the analysis

Comment [KH14]: Again, good sense for when a to make a comment tentatively

Comment [KH15]: Nice sense of the logical development of an idea to its conclusion

One very important aspect of this poem is the inclusion of different types of writing. Set in amongst the narrative are titles of music pieces, the use of specific names instead of a generalized reference to music suggests that these specific pieces are being brought back to life by the piano tuner. The use of dialogue is also effective in enabling Gibbon to convey the piano tuner's love of music and create a rapport with the reader.

Comment [KH16]: Again an unusual literary feature identified and the effect on the reader is explored

The final line of the poem where 'a single lucid drop of water stars my dream,' is peculiarly beautiful as it shows the connection between the music and the speaker's dream. It is the first time that the speaker is actually connected to the events of the poem and the first time that we can see that the music has an effect on him. Interestingly, the music is given a physical form as if, like a drop of water, a note can drop down and physically touch someone, a power that is emphasised by the grandeur of the comparison to a star.

Comment [KH17]: Lovely sense of personal engagement with peculiarly beautiful – but this is also a nice end to the commentary which creates the sense of conclusion without having to recap all of the main ideas so far

Marks Awarded:

Understanding of the Text	5	Clear understanding of the events of the passage and some ability to explore different interpretations of the text
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Interpretation of the Extract	5	Clear exploration of the effect of the poem on the reader. Note in particular that the candidate does not force there to be a deeper meaning when one is not there
Appreciation of Literary Features	5	Literary features are generally well used, including some of the more 'complex' ones such as rhyme and rhythm. Every feature is clearly linked back to the effect on the reader.
Presentation	4	Overall the essay is very well structured with a clear development of individual ideas and a sense of overall progression as we move from one idea to the next
Language	4	Good clear language at points, although there is an absence of any really sophisticated vocabulary
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