

Candidate 7

The Rabbit Catcher

The evidence for this candidate has achieved the following marks for this Course Assessment component.

20 marks

Question 11

Choose a poem which encourages you to think differently or to understand something in a new way.

Discuss how the poet's ideas and techniques led you to change your thinking or understanding.

The candidate has selected the poem 'The Rabbit Catcher' by Sylvia Plath and chosen to write in response to Question 11, an appropriate question for this text. It is made clear from the beginning that, in the candidate's view, Plath's feminism informs the central concerns of the monologue, a study of 'the conflict' caused by 'restrictive marriages' and 'how women in such circumstances cope'. Immediately we can see the thorough understanding of the text which is a feature of this piece, as well as the perceptive focus on the demands of the question.

There is a confidence to the writing from the outset. We are given the setting in time and place – 'a rural landscape on a searing summer's day'. The appearance of snares (obviously set to trap the rabbits) makes the speaker draw parallels between her husband and the rabbit catcher. Just as her husband is seen to be like the catcher, so she feels that the doom of the rabbits is a representation of her fate.

We are told that Plath's 'manipulation' of word choice, imagery, symbolism and personification are features which enable the reader to grasp a better understanding of the poem's key concerns; the candidate then proceeds to make perceptive selection of many examples of textual evidence, analysed to support this line of thought.

The candidate establishes an argument by considering how the struggle faced by women is illustrated by the startling description of the scenery: 'it was a place of force'. The analysis which follows covers the use of past tense and reference to the 'place' as literal landscape and metaphorical relationship. The 'oppression' of the marriage is indicated by the speaker's inability to feel free in the 'stunning, open landscape'. Despite the speaker not being with her husband, the candidate emphasises that she cannot escape his 'restrictive presence': connotations of the word 'force' – 'power, strength and violence' – are linked to the 'cruel man', the husband.

The candidate considers how Plath 'infuses unusual word choice' into description such as 'I tasted the malignity of the gorse'. Again, there is perceptive analysis of the connotations of 'malignity' and, in particular, the disparity between the associations with 'tumours, cancer and poison' and the normal pleasant associations with a flower. This is expanded to link the joy and grace of a flower with the beginning of a marriage when the couple experience

'happiness and contentment'. This, however, is quickly followed by a comment on the ephemeral nature of a flower's beauty, reflecting 'the same principle' in marriage. The candidate maintains the focus on the question by alluding to the 'overwhelming scent' of the bush, reminiscent of 'the constraint' of the speaker's husband's power over her.

The candidate moves on to personification in 'The wind gagging my mouth with my own blown hair tearing off my voice'. The resulting inability of the speaker 'to explicitly express herself' verbally is viewed as being symptomatic of her inability to 'express her thoughts'. Furthermore, the connotations of physical and sexual abuse in 'gagging' are highlighted, and this is developed along with the lack of communication, consideration and listening in the relationship. Throughout, we see perceptive analysis of techniques and the candidate's committed evaluative stance is revealed in the highly articulate conclusion to this section: 'the speaker struggles to gain emancipation from patriarchal control, thus further stressing the constrictive attributes associated with some marriages'.

The candidate considers the effect of word choice, specifically how in 'The paths narrowed into the hollow' the idea of 'narrow' encapsulates the 'lack of opportunities available to women...unable to pursue dreams and ambitions'. Marriage, perceived as the confining element in this 'set route for women', is summed up in the candidate's short list, 'marry, conceive and raise children'. Again, the candidate is displaying a high level of understanding of the poem's central concerns in these fluently argued points.

The candidate explores Plath's use of symbolism in a particularly successful section of this very high quality essay. The brutality of the snares, used to kill rabbits, by starving them or 'severing deeper and deeper into their skin' is shown to mirror the destruction of 'fragile, defenceless women' by the constraints of marriage, 'killing them slowly'. The candidate highlights the symbolic link from snare to noose to wedding ring as the 'patriarchal control' of such a relationship proves suffocating to the woman. This paragraph ends by referring explicitly to the question, previously alluded to implicitly throughout the essay: the reader has been encouraged to think differently about the 'confining' and 'oppressive' nature of such marriage and 'the struggles women face while attempting to gain emancipation'.

The essay concludes with a summation of the techniques Plath uses to explore the subject of 'conflict and struggle that women face in these situations', that is, oppressive marriages. Overall, we can clearly see that the candidate displays thorough knowledge and understanding of the text and makes a perceptive selection of textual evidence to support a line of argument which is fluently structured and expressed. A committed evaluative stance has been adopted throughout. This is a substantial answer – impressive in its fluent structure and focus on the question. It is placed in the 20-19 mark range at the top and is awarded **20 marks**.