

# AS and A Level English Literature



## EXEMPLAR RESPONSES

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A level paper 3 (Poetry) Section A – contemporary poetry

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## About this exemplar pack

This pack has been produced to support English Literature teachers delivering the new GCE English Literature specification (first assessment summer 2017).

The pack contains exemplar student responses to GCE A level English Literature paper 3 (Section A – Contemporary Poetry). It shows real student responses to the questions taken from the sample assessment materials. For schools delivering a co-taught AS and A level course, the contemporary poetry text will be covered in the first year, as it is assessed at AS level, as well as A level. For schools teaching a linear 2 year A level only, the course content can be taught in any order. Please see the example [course planners](#) for more support on delivering the course content.

The AS and A level questions address 3 Assessment Objects: AO1, AO2, AO4.

The examples in the pack show response to the A level style questions, in which an unseen poem is compared to one poem from a choice of two from the students' studied text.

For differences in the question style between AS and A level, please see the respective [sample assessment materials](#). The unseen poem to which the students responded can be found on p.132 of the A level sample assessment materials. The two anthology poems, *Please Hold* and *On her Blindness* can be found in the *Poems of the Decade* anthology.

<b>Students must:</b>	
<b>AO1</b>	Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression
<b>AO2</b>	Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts
<b>AO3</b>	Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received
<b>AO4</b>	Explore connections across literary texts
<b>AO5</b>	Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations
<b>Total</b>	

Following each question you will find the mark scheme for the band that the student has achieved, with accompanying examiner comments on how the marks have been awarded, and any ways in which the response might have been improved.

## Mark scheme for A level paper 3, Section A

Level	Mark	A01 = bullet point 1 Descriptor (A01, A02, A04)	A02 = bullet point 2	A04 = bullet point 3
	0	No rewardable material.		
<b>Level 1</b>	1-6	<b>Descriptive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes little reference to texts with limited organisation of ideas. Limited use of appropriate concepts and terminology with frequent errors and lapses of expression.</li> <li>Uses a narrative or descriptive approach that shows limited knowledge of texts and how meanings are shaped in texts. Shows a lack of understanding of the writer's craft.</li> <li>Demonstrates limited awareness of connections between texts. Describes the texts as separate entities.</li> </ul>		
<b>Level 2</b>	7-12	<b>General understanding/exploration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes general points, identifying some literary techniques with general explanation of effects. Aware of some appropriate concepts and terminology. Organises and expresses ideas with clarity, although still has errors and lapses.</li> <li>Gives surface readings of texts relating to how meanings are shaped in texts. Shows general understanding by commenting on straightforward elements of the writer's craft.</li> <li>Identifies general connections between texts. Makes general cross-references between texts.</li> </ul>		
<b>Level 3</b>	13-18	<b>Clear relevant application/exploration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offers a clear response using relevant textual examples. Relevant use of terminology and concepts. Creates a logical, clear structure with few errors and lapses in expression.</li> <li>Demonstrates knowledge of how meanings are shaped in texts with consistent analysis. Shows clear understanding of the writer's craft.</li> <li>Makes relevant connections between texts. Develops an integrated approach with clear examples.</li> </ul>		
<b>Level 4</b>	19-24	<b>Discriminating controlled application/exploration</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constructs a controlled argument with fluently embedded examples. Discriminating use of concepts and terminology. Controls structures with precise cohesive transitions and carefully chosen language.</li> <li>Demonstrates discriminating understanding of how meanings are shaped in texts. Analyses, in a controlled way, the nuances and subtleties of the writer's craft.</li> <li>Analyses connections between texts. Takes a controlled discriminating approach to integration with detailed examples.</li> </ul>		
<b>Level 5</b>	25-30	<b>Critical and evaluative</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents a critical evaluative argument with sustained textual examples. Evaluates the effects of literary features with sophisticated use of concepts and terminology. Uses sophisticated structure and expression.</li> <li>Exhibits a critical evaluation of the ways meanings are shaped in texts. Displays a sophisticated understanding of the writer's craft.</li> <li>Evaluates connections between texts. Exhibits a sophisticated connective approach with sophisticated use of examples.</li> </ul>		

## EXEMPLAR RESPONSE A

Compare the methods both poets use to express strong emotions.

In 'Please Hold' and 'Somewhat Unravelling', both Cieran O'Driscoll and Jo Shapcott use interesting and innovative methods to convey the strong emotions their respective poetic voices feel. Both poems explore notions of powerlessness, in that O'Driscoll focuses upon the insignificance of the individual in a ever more mechanised and commercialised society, while Shapcott looks at the deterioration old age can wreak upon loved one. In a similar vein, we see this lack of power lead to a deep sense of confusion and frustration through a blurring of poetic voice, as they attempt to adjust to the realities they both face. Where both poems diverge, however, is the subsequent feelings of the poetic voice. O'Driscoll's poetic voice responds to this frustration with cynical anger, while Shapcott's poetic voice is arguably stunned into silence by words of her auntie.

Within both poems, it becomes quite obvious that both poetic voices have to grapple with differing sorts of newfound powerlessness. In 'Please Hold', the poetic voice discovers that he is unable to influence his phone-call with an automated robot. Indeed, throughout the poem there is anaphoric repetition of "the robot", which serves to highlight the robot's prominence and dominance of the conversation, while the repeated use of a definite article gives the robot a heightened appearance of power, contrasting against the poetic voice's powerlessness. Shapcott uses a similar technique at the beginning of her poem, when the word "kettle" is repeated three times in the first two lines, highlighting the increased difficulty and frustration the aunt faces as she tries to interact with everyday objects despite her old age and limited mobility. Furthermore, O'Driscoll highlights the debilitating sense of powerlessness with the abrupt realisation that "I'm paying a robot for doing nothing." This construction contrasts with the previous polysyndeton that O'Driscoll uses during the conversation, with this statement marking the abrupt realisation that nothing can be done to shift the balance of power between him and the robot. This blunt moment of recognition does not take place in Shapcott's poetry, as the aunt's deterioration is a much more gradual process. Instead, we are shown a disjointed attempt at conversation between the personas as he says "Let me make you a cup of tea. She says ah ha!" The use of the imperative "let" highlights the dependence of the aunt upon the poetic voice, while her non-sequitur reply shows her failure to understand her niece and, more importantly, to connect with her.

Both poets then explore notions of confusion and frustration, as both poetic voices attempt to deal with the shifting balance of power that has taken place before their eyes. Shapcott uses a list, which lacks any logical sequencing, noting the aunt's "straight-up talk, the built-up toilet seats, ..., the special seat in the bath." This list alternates fond memories with stark hallmarks of her aunt's transition into old age, while also demonstrating the poetic voice's confusion

about whether these observations are intertwined or whether she should now consider her aunt's current state as distinct from the aunt she remembers. This confusion is then taken further when the poetic voice considers images of her aunt and potential attempts to "furniture-walk", noting that her aunt is a "kitchen table on a difficult hike without boots". This imagery is surreal, juxtaposing everyday objects with unlikely physical efforts, symbolising the difficulty of the aunt's task at hand in her attempts to travel within her elderly body, as well as potentially highlighting her aunt's past active lifestyle. Such difficult, complex images contrast with O'Driscoll's simpler efforts to convey his poetic voice's sense of confusion, as he instead prefers to exploit slippage between his choice of words, and the illocutionary force behind them. This is demonstrated by the differing usages of the word "wonderful" and "great" in the poem. Initially, the illocutionary force aligns with the traditional meaning of these words, but they diverge as the poem progresses. This is most obvious when the poetic voice notes "I'm paying for it, I shout, /out of my wonderful account/ into my great telephone bill." It is clear that the poetic voice's sense of confusion and frustration is overpowering and, arguably, limits his ability to communicate his feelings, causing him to describe his telephone bill as "great" when it is anything but.

Finally, as the poems reach a conclusion, we see both poetic voices resolve their feelings of confusion into concrete feelings of anger, in 'Please Hold', and sympathy, in 'Somewhat Unravelling'. In 'Please Hold', O'Driscoll articulates his strong sense of anger through the use of German, as we are told of "eine fucking kleine Nachtmusik". The use of a foreign language means that the poetic voice's sense of anger transcends linguistic boundaries, while German's stereotype as a harsh language, as well as the use of expletive, adds to the impression of unbridled rage. Such feelings of anger are non-existent in 'Somewhat Unravelling', and are replaced with an undying sense of familial love for the poetic voice's aunt. This is shown by the repeated use of the phrase "little auntie", effectively infantilising her because of her loss of independence and ability to undertake day-to-day tasks because of her old age, while similarly showing tenderness and affection. When we consider the poetic voice's command to "let me cook for you", her desire to continue to help and connect with her auntie, in the face of her physical deterioration into old age, potently conveys a sense of sympathy and solidarity that only a family bond can bring. The poetic voice's subsequent silence, as she narrates the thoughts of her aunt is equally touching, and marks that her angst has been resolved.

Overall, O'Driscoll and Shapcott use various techniques to convey the strong emotions that both narrative voices feel. Both poets capture the way that an individual's sense of powerlessness can cause incredible confusion and frustration, to the extent that language is inhibited and stilted as both poetic voices deal with the problems at hand. The conclusion of their poems lead to the expression of different, yet equally strong emotions, with O'Driscoll choosing to crescendo his narrative voice's anger into a brief explosion of unbridled anger,

while Shapcott prefers to deploy a more nuanced, calmer approach to her expression of tender familial love.

### Marker's comments

This answer is critical and evaluative, requirements of Level 5, and is awarded 28 out of 30 marks. The essay neatly links the two poems as being about "differing sorts of new found powerlessness" and "a blunt moment of recognition" in one poem is compared with a more gradual process in the other. The answer sees movement within the poems, such as O'Driscoll's crescendos in the narrative voice. The essay offers an analysis of 'Eine Kleine Nachtmusik' without seemingly being aware of its provenance or common usage as 'holding music'. However, it is a well-supported and reasonable interpretation. The response is particularly strong on understanding nuance and tone. A good example of this is when the essay speculates at the end of the first paragraph that Shapcott's poetic voice is "arguably stunned into silence by the words of her auntie".

### Level 5 – 28 marks

<b>Level 5</b>	25–30	<b>Critical and evaluative</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presents a critical evaluative argument with sustained textual examples. Evaluates the effects of literary features with sophisticated use of concepts and terminology. Uses sophisticated structure and expression.</li><li>• Exhibits a critical evaluation of the ways meanings are shaped in texts. Displays a sophisticated understanding of the writer's craft.</li><li>• Evaluates connections between texts. Exhibits a sophisticated connective approach with sophisticated use of examples.</li></ul>
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## EXEMPLAR RESPONSE B

Compare the methods both poets use to express strong emotions

Within the poems *Please Hold* and *Somewhat Unravelling*, by Ciaran O'Driscoll and Jo Shapcott respectively, strong emotion is expressed through language and structure. *Please Hold* explores how a person struggles with the concepts of the future, present and past and the use of 'robotic' communication. *Somewhat Unravelling* highlights the changes that occur during the ageing process which is enhanced by the contrasting youth of the main voice throughout the poem.

The use of language is key in both *Please Hold* and *Somewhat Unravelling* in establishing a convincing portrayal of strong emotions. O'Driscoll uses repetition throughout, though it is specifically noticeable in the final stanza in the line 'Please hold. Please grow old. Please grow cold'. The lexical and structural repetition enhances the emotive value of the words, reinforcing the strength of the emotions which have been established within the poem. Equally Shapcott uses the same technique of repetition in the first part of her poem as seen in the second line with the words 'help me, help me'. The reiteration of the phrase reinforces the strength of the emotions expressed; the powerlessness of the auntie. Embedded in O'Driscoll's repetition towards the end of the first stanza in *Please Hold* we can see offensive language used in the line 'Eine fucking Kleine Nachtmusik.' This shows that O'Driscoll is able to express anger overtly. This direct and emotive language feels very 'human', complementing the undercurrent of criticism of the development of technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the frustration that non-human interaction and emotion creates. In contrast Shapcott uses language to position auntie as more childlike to establish sympathy and reinforce the powerlessness of auntie, for example with the line 'She says, nurse told me I/ should'. This shows a lady losing her own convictions and relying on others to find out what she needs to do, as a child does. Both writers establish strong emotions through these various language techniques.

Both poets also use some humour to show the narrator trying to deal with their frustrations. O'Driscoll is more direct again with his use of language and is more sarcastic in his tone, as befits his critique of the ways in which technology is a poor replacement for human communication. For example he turns the robot's adjectives back against it, creating humour from the sarcasm which highlights that these terms are inappropriate in this situation in the lines 'Yes but I'm paying for it, I shout,/out of my wonderful account/into my great telephone bill.' Shapcott's speaker is more tolerant of the breakdown in communication, and her use of language expresses emotions of kindness and love, showing the caring relationship between the speaker and her auntie. She also turns the other person's words back on them, but through the use of fun and lighthearted imagery when she says 'nurse told me I/ should furniture-walk around the house, holding on to it./I say, little auntie you are a plump armchair/in flight.' Even though the robot is more positive and complimentary than auntie, who is somewhat critical of the narrator when she says 'your concerns about my weight', the narrator responds with love and patience, whereas the robot's compliments are programmed and insincere, which O'Driscoll highlights with his sarcastic repetition.

Both O’Driscoll and Shapcott express strong emotion though the distinct structure of their poems, with both poems suggesting the destabilising effects of an inability to communicate clearly. The single stanza and use of enjambment in *Somewhat Unravelling* simulates the idea of a running thought. This running thought establishes empathy with auntie, and her mental frailty and as a result enhances the emotions that are presented, as the structure positions the reader within auntie’s perspective. Similarly, O’Driscoll’s first stanza uses a similar technique and the lack of caesura encourages the idea of helplessness or a lack of control, similar to auntie’s when he states ‘but I can find nothing to meet my needs / on the telephone, and into my account / (which is really the robot’s account) / goes money, my money, to pay for nothing.’ The use of enjambment conveys O’Driscoll’s fears and helplessness in the face of technology as a replacement for real communication. Furthermore, the and sentence structure becomes shorter and more repetitious as the poem ends which is synonymous with electronic communication and lack of creativity and spontaneity; through creating this rigid structure it enhances the emotion of anger and frustration at being standardised and constrained by technology.

In conclusion, both writers establish a series of strong emotions through repetition and expressive language. The structures of each poem further enhance the emotions presented and install empathy with the audience. O’Driscoll, conveys anger and frustration in his use of direct, overt and offensive language and rigid structure. Shapcott equally uses the structure of a single stanza and recurring repetition to create empathy with the audience which enhances the powerlessness, frailty and confusion of the character portrayed.

### Marker’s comments

This essay has a controlled argument and is placed in Level 4, with 20 out of 30 marks. It works efficiently through a range of points, although it doesn’t quite get to the heart of the auntie-niece relationship; because expression is clear and a range of technical points is used the essay can sometimes appear to be saying more than it actually is. We are told, for example that the structure positions the reader within auntie’s perspective (but it is not quite clear why exactly this is an effect of structure) and occasionally points are dubious – “the lack of caesuras encourages the idea of helplessness” and the “and sentence structure gets shorter” – neither of these points is accurate.

### Level 4 – 20 marks

<b>Level 4</b>	19-24	<p><b>Discriminating controlled application/exploration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constructs a controlled argument with fluently embedded examples. Discriminating use of concepts and terminology. Controls structures with precise cohesive transitions and carefully chosen language.</li> <li>• Demonstrates discriminating understanding of how meanings are shaped in texts. Analyses, in a controlled way, the nuances and subtleties of the writer’s craft.</li> <li>• Analyses connections between texts. Takes a controlled discriminating approach to integration with detailed examples.</li> </ul>
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## EXEMPLAR RESPONSE C

Compare the methods both poets use to express strong emotions

In both "Somewhat Unravelling" and "Please Hold", the poets attempt to convey a series of strong emotions, predominantly revolving around negative feelings. In "Somewhat Unravelling", Jo Shapcott, attempts to convey a sense of sorrow and love from the narrator, attempting to explain the situation to their auntie, whilst the auntie is confused and almost indignant "ah ha! But I do my crossword don't I" Whilst here the narrator uses vivid imagery to give the impression of emotion, in "Please Hold", the emotion comes from repetition and vernacular language. The narrator is frustrated, bordering on distraught by their situation, with the 'robot' voice at the end of the phone unable to provide a solution to his issues, both with the (presumably) banking problem he has, yet also compounding his feelings of insignificance in the world, where he feels compressed by bodies bigger than himself. These are clearly very different 'strong feelings', so are therefore conveyed through highly differing methods, with varying degrees of effectiveness.

Shapcott's poem is almost completely presented as dialogue, with the narrator's language used to convey the strength of emotion. Seemingly about the narrator's visit to see a visibly ageing 'auntie', Shapcott uses a combination of strong, yet mundane similes "you go to sleep like a rug" and metaphors "you are a plump armchair in flight" creating associations of domesticity and everyday life in order to humour auntie, thus suggesting a strength of love and familial devotion, in spite of auntie's criticisms "your comments about my weight." Therefore in this poem, the narrator conveys a sense of affection, with language being used to create an impression of an imaginative and adventurous woman, despite her current state. The narrator's use of language, in playful descriptions, offers a contrast to auntie's own struggles to recall words "wasname" so whilst language brings auntie to life, in reality she is unable to think, or act in the way she used to, seemingly resentful of the role language plays in her deterioration "look at you, with all you language"

Unlike Shapcott, O'Driscoll's use of language is less playful and affectionate, but rather uses much more direct language, without disguising emotion in imagery. The use of the ironical phrase "This is the future" is repeated, showing a distaste for what the dehumanising future apparently holds, as well as suggesting doubt that this future involves any progress, or improvement on what it replaces. The repetition reflects the narrator's strong feelings, and complements the sarcastic tone throughout "I have a wonderful telephone number and a great account number" almost mocking each development in the narrative of the phone conversation. This further emphasises the feeling of anger at the impersonal and restricting nature of this 'future, as well as the fact that the future is unavoidable, as it is already here "we're already there and it's the same as the present."

The repetition of this phrase, suggests the futility of O'Driscoll's future "countless options, none of which answer to my needs", with the use of repetition emphasise the frustration further, suggesting the repetitious speech of an angry person, unable to be understood. Whilst O'Driscoll's use of repetition suggests a strong sense of frustration and sarcasm "wonderful", Shapcott's use of repetition reiterates love and sympathy "little auntie." In this case, "little auntie" mirrors a parent child relationship, and expresses the vulnerability of the auntie, so that the resultant care seems to be given tenderly, as a parent gives a child. Meanwhile, the further development of this adjective "my very little auntie (because she is shrinking now, in front of me)" fully confirms the vulnerability of the auntie, with the image of her shrinking "in front of me" putting emotion across much more strongly through the relation to the present, making the auntie's problems seem much more real and immediate. As with Please Hold, the future is happening in the present. This offers a contrast in Somewhat Unravalled to the previous surrealist language, being much darker and intentionally hard-hitting. However, the use of brackets conveys a sense that the author does not desire for this "shrinking" to be the defining feature, choosing instead to focus on the vivid imagery, portraying a more positive image of his auntie.

O'Driscoll's more direct use of language to convey strong feelings is further shown with use of vernacular language "Eine fucking Kleine Nachtmusik". The use of the German word "nachtmusik" further increases the hostile feel, with the strong syllabic German pronunciation sounding particularly aggressive, before the swear word "fucking" makes the narrator's feelings seem especially strong. The threefold repetition, building up to this final version again shows the strength of the building frustration and tension. This is then followed by the final stanza, with further repetition, this time of the sound "old", through "cold", "hold", "old" and "told". This is used to highlight the conformity the narrator believes that the future is imposing upon them. Overall, O'Driscoll uses these methods to great effect, with the reader undoubtedly feeling the anger expressed by the narrator, fighting against the future, but also the process of ageing and dying, which the future inevitably brings "Grow old. Grow cold."

Meanwhile, the final dialogue from Somewhat Unravalled leaves auntie unanswered, where she invites the narrator to become a 'flower', and "follow the sun with our faces until the cows come home". This, whilst including 'positive' imagery such as flowers and the sun, also has haunting connotations of death, with the lack of a response from the narrator perhaps indicating a sad conclusion. "Following the sun with our faces until the cows come home" can be seen as indicating an impending sunset, whilst images of "earth" and a "special bed" both indicate the idea of a burial. This therefore subtly tinges the end of the poem with sadness, yet this is not explicit in any way, with the narrator still being coy about expressing her strong feelings overtly, choosing allusion instead to create an overall impression.

Shapcott's poem structurally represents the mental unravelling of auntie, using enjambment strongly so that lines run on, into one another, for example lines 30 through to the end of the poem, as though a stream of consciousness or auntie's rush to get the thoughts and words out before language and thought are gone. Conversely O'Driscoll structures his poem with many end stopped lines, suggesting curt exchanges, lacking in the warmth and human affection of Shapcott's poem "Wonderful, says the robot. /And my wife says, This is the future./I'm sorry, I don't understand, says the robot. /Please say Yes or No." The short sentences and end stopped lines are representative of the type of exchanges that O'Driscoll sees in the present and future, which are robotic and unsatisfying.

In conclusion, the two authors are expressing different types of feelings. One is expressing a combination of love, sadness and pity, whilst the other is expressing anger and frustration. As a result, the methods used are very different. Jo Shapcott uses strong imagery in order to convey happier, surreal imagery of the auntie, as well as a feeling of vulnerability and uncertainty. Meanwhile, O'Driscoll uses a combination of repetition, sarcasm and vernacular language in order to express the narrator's feelings, which is much more explicit and cold than Schapcott's narrator. This could therefore be seen as being more effective, in that it is unambiguous, yet due to the differing feelings being expressed, both methods achieve success in their own ways, appropriate to their differing subjects, successfully expressing the feelings in a manner where they will be felt and understood by the reader.

### Marker's comments

This essay is analytical and demonstrates "discriminating understanding", requirements of Level 4, and is awarded 22 out of 30 marks. It balances the argument well, looking at both poems together. The answer is particularly sensitive in its reading of "Somewhat Unravelling" and engages very well with the attitude of the speaker and the overall tone of the poem. Useful contrasts are made with "Please Hold" and the essay is able to see beyond the immediate frustration represented in the poem to recognise "the process of ageing and dying" as the narrator fights against the future. Arguments are well illustrated and succinct quotation is used. More focus on structure might have moved the answer to a higher mark.

### Level 4 – Mark 22

<b>Level 4</b>	19-24	<p><b>Discriminating controlled application/exploration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constructs a controlled argument with fluently embedded examples. Discriminating use of concepts and terminology. Controls structures with precise cohesive transitions and carefully chosen language.</li> <li>• Demonstrates discriminating understanding of how meanings are shaped in texts. Analyses, in a controlled way, the nuances and subtleties of the writer's craft.</li> <li>• Analyses connections between texts. Takes a controlled discriminating approach to integration with detailed examples.</li> </ul>
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## EXEMPLAR RESPONSE D

Compare the methods both poets use to explore the effects of growing old

Both Jo Shapcott and Adam Thorpe discuss the process of aging, in their respective poems 'Somewhat Unravelling' and 'On her blindness'. There are times where both poets use similar techniques in order to do so, but also use differing ones to convey the suffering of their speaker's relatives. The poems are tonally different from each other, and whilst they may speak of the same topic, they appear to have different viewpoints and understandings of growing old.

In 'Somewhat Unravelling', Jo Shapcott uses a combination of metaphors and imagery to portray the way that the speaker's auntie would see the world. The phrase "our cruises on the stair lift" compares the experience of using a stair lift to something as exciting as riding on a cruise ship. This portrays the act of climbing the stairs as being daunting, and as being something far more complicated than perhaps it would be for a more able person. The act of moving around the kitchen is also described as "the sideboard crawl". The word "crawl" is synonymous with children and babies, and so this links the concept of infancy with the auntie, something which could be seen to present her as weak and reduce her to the state of a child. Through the use of this imagery, Joe Shapcott is comparing the act of growing old to that of returning to childhood, and is therefore highlighting the negative effects of aging, and the loss of independence that can come as a result of it. In 'On her blindness', Adam Thorpe also uses similar techniques to describe the pain of aging for the speaker's blind mother. He speaks of her "bumping into walls like a dodgem", and this paints the image of the mother constantly having unavoidable collisions.

Both poets differ in the ways that they discuss the illness of the aging characters. 'Somewhat Unravelling's speaker uses a nostalgic tone throughout, and is playful in the way that she teases her auntie, calling her a "little auntie" throughout the poem. This allows the reader to understand how the auntie is shrinking in her old age, without openly discussing the issue. Adam Thorpe however, uses a different tone in 'On Her Blindness', and is much more honest and even harsh, in the way that he has the speaker discuss his mother's condition. Thorpe uses phrases such as "catastrophic handicap" to discuss her blindness, and speaks of her death in the end of the poem. This contrasts to 'Somewhat Unravelling's ending, which is more hopeful. The auntie invites the speaker to join her gardening "until the cows come home" – a phrase which suggests they have plenty of time yet to spend together, despite the fact that the aging auntie is clearly suffering with the condition she finds herself in. This difference in tone extends to the titles of both poems. 'On her blindness' refers directly to the issue at hand, whereas 'Somewhat Unravelling' is more delicate in handling the topic.

'On her blindness' is structured into two line stanzas that do not rhyme. This is used consistently throughout the poem, with the exception of the final line, which stands alone. This line itself speaks of the end of the speaker's mother's

life, and so is poignant in the way in which it disrupts the flow of the poetry, signalling that just like the structural pattern Thorpe has established, life is often disrupted. 'Somewhat Unravelling' does not have a clear structure, and instead opts to flow freely, something which could be linked to the carefree nature of the speaker's auntie, who, despite her illness, is not restricted to following a set of rules expected of an older person. The poem, despite its form, does not comply with any specific rhyming scheme or layout.

In conclusion, the poets use a variety of techniques to display the conditions of their speaker's relatives. 'Somewhat Unravelling' is a gentler poem, both in the way it speaks of the speaker's aging auntie, but also in the way that it is written. 'On her blindness' however, speaks brutally about the pain endured by the blind mother, and uses a harsh structure to do this. Both poems also use imagery, metaphors, and similes to portray the situations of the aging, and how the world feels to those who are less capable of being independent.

### Marker's comments

This answer is "clear and relevant", requirements of level 3. It explores the imagery of the poems, although it might have taken this further – the sidewalk crawl is seen as a return to infancy (a possible reading); the simile "like a dodgem" is explained simply as "unavoidable collisions". Neither of these points is explored further. The essay does not quite capture the poignancy of the ending of "Somewhat Unravelling" (summarised as being "more delicate" in contrast to "On her Blindness" (which is "more direct") and tends to interpret the endings too literally in order to make a straightforward comparison. The answer looks at the structure of "On her Blindness" and concludes the last line, being single, shows that "life is often disrupted" (but takes the point no further) and argues that "Somewhat Unravelling" has "no clear structure" (ignoring the even line lengths here). The answer does not discover the "nuance and subtlety of a writer's craft" required for level 4.

### Level 3 – 18 marks

<b>Level 3</b>	13-18	<b>Clear relevant application/exposition</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Offers a clear response using relevant textual examples. Relevant use of terminology and concepts. Creates a logical, clear structure with few errors and lapses in expression.</li><li>• Demonstrates knowledge of how meanings are shaped in texts with consistent analysis. Shows clear understanding of the writer's craft.</li><li>• Makes relevant connections between texts. Develops an integrated approach with clear examples.</li></ul>
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## EXEMPLAR RESPONSE E

Compare the methods both poets use to explore the effects of growing old.

Both Shapcott and Thorpe explore the effects of growing old through the speaker's observation of an elderly family member. Both poems create a sense of sadness and loss through this portrayal, using a variety of methods to do so.

In *Somewhat Unravelled*, the speaker observes the effects of dementia on their elderly auntie's mental state. The repetition of 'auntie' throughout the poem contrasts with the auntie's confusion, as it is a constant reminder of her identity, which she is clearly losing as the poem progresses. The title is significant in conveying the auntie's fractured mental state, as 'Unravelled' connotes a loss of control and a sense of confusion, whilst the modifier 'Somewhat' highlights the ongoing progression of the auntie's dementia, creating a tone of sadness as the reader realises her distress will only continue to grow with the decline of her mental state. The poem's first two lines 'Auntie stands by the kettle, looking at the kettle/ and says help me, help me, where is the kettle?' conveys the auntie's initial distress, as the repeated imperative 'help me' reveals her vulnerability. The speaker's pain at the auntie's distress is also evident in the repetition of 'kettle', as it creates a sense of helplessness because the reader cannot help the auntie to see something which is so plainly apparent. The use of the speaker's adjective 'little' to describe the auntie also conveys her vulnerability in growing old, and this is reinforced in the line 'littlest auntie, my very little auntie/ (because she is shrinking now, in front of me)' through the use of the superlative 'littlest' which suggests she is weaker and more vulnerable than her peers. The use of the present continuous 'shrinking' also highlights the rapid speed of her decline, and this is enhanced by the use of parenthesis to convey the speaker's perspective, or perhaps unwillingness to confront this inevitability directly. In contrast, Thorpe presents a physical disability in growing old in *On Her Blindness*, as the speaker observes the effects of blindness on his mother. A tone of tragedy is created through the phrase 'catastrophic handicaps', whilst the simple sentence 'One shouldn't say it' at the end of the first stanza emphasises the taboo nature of the effects of growing old within society, which Thorpe highlights through the mother's attempts to continue life as normal, no matter what the cost – 'She'd continued/ to drive the old Lanchester/ long after it was safe'. This image causes the reader to fear for the mother's safety, also portraying her as a vulnerable elderly woman, although in a different way to Shapcott's auntie figure.

One particularly noticeable contrast between the two poems is the extent of the elderly person's awareness of the effects of growing old in each of them. Shapcott's auntie is in denial of the effects of her dementia, as revealed in lines 5-7 when she says 'But I do my crossword, don't I, OK not the difficult one, the one with the wasname? Cryptic clues.' The complex nature of this sentence created through the use of multiple commas creates a defensive tone, as does the rhetorical question 'don't I', highlighting the auntie's stubborn denial of her

mental state as she grows older, as she attempts to maintain the same hobbies. However, Shapcott undermines this denial through the use of the word 'wasname', which belies the fragility of the auntie's mind as the sentence's end focus reminds the reader that her memory has been affected by growing old. The fragmented tone created through the incomplete sentence 'Cryptic clues' which follows draws attention to the auntie's struggle and creates sadness and sympathy, as it is evident that she is struggling to remember words associated with a regular activity, and taking pride in clinging to her same life as highlighted by the possessive adjective in 'my crossword'. In contrast to Shapcott's auntie figure, Thorpe's mother figure's distress comes not from her inability to remember but rather from the unaffected clarity of her mind whilst her blindness, the physical effect of growing old, prevents her from continuing her life as usual. The matter-of-fact tone created through the use of the declarative 'It's living hell, to be honest, Adam./ If I gave up hope of a cure, I'd bump myself off' is shocking to the reader as it highlights the extent of the mother's distress in her awareness of her inability to function normally. This creates a greater sense of tragedy in the line 'Instead she pretended to ignore/ the void, or laughed it off' as the speaker reveals the mother's attempts to deny her sadness and struggle to her own family, whilst the abstract noun 'void' reveals the consuming nature of her disability and also connotes a sense of loss and never-endingness, highlighting the significance of the mother's wish to die, rather than to continue to live in decline whilst growing old.

Overall, the greatest sense of sadness in both Shapcott and Thorpe's poems comes from their portrayal of the inevitability of growing old and the effect it has on other family members. Shapcott highlights this through the end focus of the cliché 'until the cows come home', which suggests a continuation of the struggle of both the auntie and the speaker in dealing with the effects of the auntie's dementia. Thorpe's poem instead ends with a sense of finality due to the death of the mother, but the end focus 'it was up to us to believe/ she was watching, somewhere, in the end' emphasises the optimism required of those watching family members struggling with the effects of growing old, in order to not lose hope themselves.

### Markers comments

This answer evaluates and has a sophisticated connective approach, the requirements of level 5 and gains full marks, 30 out of 30. It is a controlled piece of writing which gets to the heart of the poems, analysing tone and using a range of technical points to establish similarities and differences. Whilst the two women and their situations are compared the real focus of the essay is, appropriately, on the poems themselves and their effect on the reader.

### Level 5 – 30 marks

<b>Level 5</b>	25–30	<b>Critical and evaluative</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Presents a critical evaluative argument with sustained textual examples. Evaluates the effects of literary features with sophisticated use of concepts and terminology. Uses sophisticated structure and expression.</li><li>• Exhibits a critical evaluation of the ways meanings are shaped in texts. Displays a sophisticated understanding of the writer’s craft.</li><li>• Evaluates connections between texts. Exhibits a sophisticated connective approach with sophisticated use of examples.</li></ul>
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