

Love through the ages: Exemplar student response and commentary for AS Paper 1, Section B

Below you will find an exemplar student response to a section B question in the sample assessment materials, followed by an examiner commentary on the response.

Sample script – AS Paper 1, Section B, band 5 response

Examine the view that Richard Lovelace presents the speaker in this poem as having a selfish attitude to love.

It would be easy to argue without question that Lovelace presents the speaker in this poem as having a selfish attitude to love. This *Carpe Diem* poem, rather than exhorting a woman to join him in seizing the day as Donne and Marvell do, is firmly focused on how the speaker himself intends to live his life to the full; when we realise the speaker is arguing for his own promiscuity at the expense of fulfilling a promise of commitment he made to a lover, the view becomes convincing. With this in mind, it is also easy to identify a number of ways in which Lovelace presents the speaker as having this selfish attitude.

Hardly surprisingly, given the male-centred world in which this cavalier poet was writing, Lovelace presents only the point of view of the speaker through the continual use of the personal pronoun 'I' and we are not directly privy to the woman's reaction to his argument; whilst a modern feminist reader no doubt finds the speaker's reasoning selfish, it may be that a female of the poem's era would not be shocked by such an egotistical male attitude. Certainly the intended private male readership at Court were not only unlikely to be offended but were probably entertained and amused by the speaker's attitude. Nonetheless, the absence of the woman's direct voice emphasises the speaker's selfishness. His rhetorical questions: 'Why should you swear?' and 'Have I not loved thee...?' convey not only a sense that she is in fact challenging his behaviour but also his irritation with this challenge and dismissal of it. Coming at the beginning of the poem, the questions form the basis of his argument, one which feels calculated through Lovelace's use of a reinforcing regular ABABA rhyme scheme.

Lovelace presents this argument in terms of the speaker's past, present and future needs: in the immediate past, 'last night', he had 'vowed to be' committed to the woman; in the present 'morn', however, after 'a tedious twelve hour's

space,' he has decided this commitment is an ironic 'fond impossibility'. The speaker's immediate future, therefore, means that 'others must be found'; his more distant future depends upon the results of his searching 'the black and fair' but may involve returning to this woman if 'thou provest the pleasant she.' Whilst the speaker's future is presented as uncertain, he at least has plans and he is at least in control of the outcome; the woman's future is conversely presented as totally dependent upon the whim of the speaker. Furthermore, Lovelace finishes the poem with an image of the speaker as 'sated with variety' of women he will court in the meantime, which conveys a sense of greed and gluttony and a selfishness which sees the future, and therefore love, on his terms.

Presenting love from this male point of view allows Lovelace to use heroic male-oriented imagery of conquest. Whilst the speaker's description of his intention to 'sound/For treasure in un-plowed-up ground' could be considered hurtful to his lover and so selfish, perhaps the view is less convincing if we at least applaud his honesty in articulating his physical needs where he 'must search' among virgins. Modern readers might reflect on the often heard advice that 'you should play the field' or 'get it out of your system' before settling down, a sentiment equally valid for both men and women today. Likening himself to 'skilled mineralists' might also convey a brief sensitivity to treating these women carefully but any selflessness is short lived in the final stanza where the language of conquest returns emphatically with 'spoils', 'crowned', 'laden' and 'sated'. Where his lover will presumably be waiting humiliatingly for him to love these women and decide whether she 'provest the pleasant she', the speaker will clearly have enjoyed his voyage of discovery whatever the outcome. Whether Lovelace has purposely presented his speaker as self-centred in order to entertain at court or not, and whether readers can appreciate the presentation of the speaker as tongue-in-cheek or not, the evidence overwhelmingly supports the view that Lovelace presents the speaker as having a selfish attitude to love.

Examiner commentary

A01 – An assured response which consistently focuses on the question. The wholly relevant debate is assured both in overall structure and in the use of discussion 'markers' at key points. Technical accuracy is of a high standard and the vocabulary consistently shows maturity and appropriateness.

A02 – The candidate perceptively discusses a range of ways in which meaning is shaped to support the clear assertion that the speaker is presented as selfish. Well-chosen quotations are embedded and accompanied by perceptive explanation and/or analysis connecting them to the argument.

A03 – The candidate is fully aware of the context in which the poet was writing and is able to discuss the poem's possible reception both at that time and by a modern readership, thereby enhancing the argument.

A04 – What is meant by a selfish attitude to love and how it is presented is thoroughly explored and so connection with the representation of one of the central issues of Love through the ages is achieved.

A05 – Alternative interpretations are discussed with assurance and with perception. There is much evidence of a personal and considered response to the presentation of the speaker and of a well-constructed debate.

Overall: Perceptive and assured. This response seems consistent with the Band 5 descriptors.