Love through the ages: specimen question commentary for AS Paper 1, Section B

This resource explains how a question taken from the specimen assessment material addresses the assessment objectives, with some suggestions of how the task might be approached. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of every point that could be made but it gives teachers and students some guidance that will support their work on this paper.

AS Paper 1, Section B

Sample Question

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

How the question meets the Assessment Objectives:

In this question, as throughout the paper, the assessment objectives are all assessed. As a result, all the key words in the question should be addressed, indicating either focus (presents, the speaker, a selfish attitude to love) or direction (Examine the view).

AO1 is tested through the way the students organise their writing and express their ideas as they are examining the presentation of the speaker in this poem. Students will need to use coherent, accurate written expression in their answer in order to examine the view efficiently and in doing so will use appropriate concepts and terminology.

AO2 is signaled by the word ‘presents’ in the requirement for students to examine the view that the speaker is presented as having a selfish attitude to love in this poem, and therefore to show how the poet’s methods open up meanings about selfishness. Students should illustrate their answers with relevant textual detail wherever possible – with quotations and other close reference – to support the points in their discussion.

AO3 is addressed when students engage with how literary representations of lovers expressing their feelings in texts can reflect different social, cultural and historical contexts.

To address AO4 students will connect the way in which this poem addresses the central issue of literary representations of how lovers express their feelings with
the typicality within love poetry of subject matter, point of view and poetic methods.

AO5 will be addressed when students consider the extent to which they agree/disagree with the view of this poem by engaging with different interpretations.

Possible content:

Students will address AO2 if they focus on any of the following:

- aspects of form such as: dramatic qualities including elements of lyric poetry and dramatic monologue; the speaker's incredulity in the opening question which leads to his argument
- use of structural features such as: the title 'The Scrutiny' which might refer to the speaker's evaluation of this relationship or to his intention to scrutinise other women; a sense of a progressing argument where each stanza develops a new aspect of the argument; the culmination of this argument in a conclusion that the speaker may return to the addressee
- use of imagery: love is presented in terms of discovery and warfare ('search', 'mineralists', 'treasure', 'un-plowed', 'spoils', 'laden', 'crowned')
- use of rhyme and aural effects: the full rhyme might reinforce the speaker's argument as reasoned/calculated or could draw the reader's attention to the speaker's mixed feelings towards the addressee; it might be argued that the very regular rhyme creates a teasing, tongue-in-cheek tone which suggests that Lovelace intends to entertain rather than promote male promiscuity
- a sense of passing time: the immediate past (when the speaker and the addressee made love); the present (when the speaker is presenting his argument); the immediate future (when the speaker intends to love other women); the distant future (when the speaker may return to the addressee)
- use of an ambiguous tone - possibly the arch, knowing tone of an arrogant seducer, who quibbles cleverly on 'swear and forsworn' in the first line or the possible sincerity of the final lines in confirming his intent to return
- use of rhetoric to argue his way out of commitment: idea of a reunion being cynically used to clinch his case or the honesty of the speaker about his sexual needs.

To address AO3 students might explore: the Restoration-era representation of love shown here as well as the representation of love in poems written by men addressed to women; the absence of the woman's voice; biographical
information for Lovelace who was raised in a wealthy family, had a courtly education and never married.

To address AO4 students might connect to their reading of other texts that: are written by cavalier poets; might be considered metaphysical poetry; explore the idea of breaking up; are presented as an argument; use images of discovery, warfare, time; have a sense of ‘carpe diem’.

To address AO5 students might agree with the view, disagree with the view or present a balanced argument around the view.

Arguments in agreement with the given critical view might consider:

- the speaker seeming to exploit the addressee; the cruelty of speaking to her about his desire for other women
- the frank, thoughtless ways in which he talks about his plans to leave her.

Arguments that counter the given critical view might consider:

- the speaker’s arguably realistic and open attitude to love
- the view that some parts of the poem suggest the speaker has fond feelings towards the addressee despite planning to leave her
- the view that the poem’s final thought of returning to the addressee might be seen as sincere.