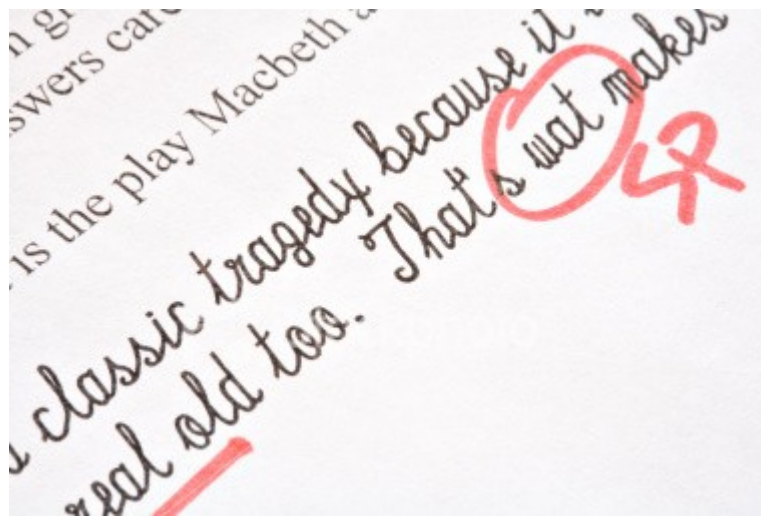


# LEAVING CERTIFICATE ENGLISH ORDINARY LEVEL



## CHRISTMAS TEST 2010

## SAMPLE ANSWERS

Aoife O'Driscoll  
2010

# THE COMPARATIVE STUDY

**You must answer both questions. Do not spend longer than thirty minutes on either question.**

Before beginning your answer to each question, you must

- name the text studied for your comparative course
- name a theme that you are going to discuss in the second question.

## 1. SOCIAL SETTING

In relation to one of the texts on your comparative study course, describe the way in which the social setting played an important part in the life of the central characters. (30)

The text I have studied as part of my comparative study is the film "Inside I'm Dancing", directed by Damien O'Donnell.

The social setting in this text plays an important part in the lives of the central characters, Michael Connolly and Rory O' Shea. Through their struggles to live normal lives despite their disabilities, we learn of the difficulties faced by many disabled people in contemporary Ireland. It may appear at first glance that the young men live in the same world as we do, but their experiences are very different to ours and to those of the majority of their peers.

Our introduction to Michael in Carrigmore shows how much his life and his freedom are curtailed by his disability. He is sitting passively with other residents, watching a children's television programme from the 1970s. We soon realise that Carrigmore is run more for the benefit of the carers than the residents. Although he is a grown man, Michael is treated like a child and while his physical needs may be met, his emotional needs most certainly are not.

When Rory arrives at Carrigmore, the director shows us clearly what he thinks of

Rory's position in society. He comes to the home in an ambulance and the first view we have of him is through a metal grille. We are thus prompted to see him as a prisoner, an impression he reinforces on the first night when his stereo is confiscated and he shouts, "Free the Carrigmore one!" Rory is viewed as a disruptive influence and it is clear that his behaviour is interfering with the smooth running of the home. Michael's reaction to Rory's rebellious acts is one of bewilderment and shock initially and we see again that he has been kept in a child-like state by the carers in order to make their lives easier. The film does not flinch from showing us the truth about society's attitude towards people with disabilities and we are keenly aware that no young men of Rory and Michael's age should be subjected to such arbitrary and restrictive rules. As Rory points out when he is denied a front door key, Carrigmore is not much of a home.

When Rory and Michael venture out into the "real world" of modern-day Dublin, we see the difficulties they face in society. The girls they approach in the pub are frankly dismayed when they see the boys' wheelchairs and only agree to stay when Rory offers to pay for their drinks. Even then, they treat the pair with a sort of amused tolerance rather than any real affection or kindness. When the girl who has been chatting to Michael reluctantly gives him a quick peck on the cheek as she leaves, the camera close-up of Michael's delighted expression makes the scene both comic and a little sad. Rory had promised him romance and Michael's thrilled reaction to a brief kiss shows us what a sheltered life he has led up to date.

As the film progresses, we see that there is no area of the boys' lives which is not affected by their social setting. Rory, not content to have his every move directed by others, seeks an independent living allowance. We are struck by how different his position is from most people his age. He must prove to the panel that he deserves to live on his own and they, like the carers in Carrigmore, are disinclined to help him because they consider his behaviour unruly and immature. The hypocrisy of the panel is shown when Michael makes his case for independent living. He simply quotes their own brochure back to them and they are most impressed by this argument. They have no hesitation in granting him an allowance and we see that society is far more concerned with the letter of the law and with bureaucracy than it is with the rights and needs of those with disabilities. Nothing we have seen so far in the film has shown us that our society is a truly caring one, for all that it appears to make provisions for those with special needs. Lip service is paid to those needs, but little real understanding or compassion seems to accompany the services.

Rory and Michael manage to turn society's discomfort in the presence of those with

disabilities to their advantage on a number of occasions, most notably when they shame Fergus Connolly into paying Michael off by buying him a flat. During the visit to the barrister's office, Michael's gaze falls on a photograph of his father with a young man at a graduation ceremony and the message is clear: if Michael hadn't been disabled he might have been the one standing with his proud father.

Although the boys do succeed in making their own way in the world, the struggles they face to be treated just like everybody else tell us a great deal about discrimination in our society. The pair just want to be treated like everybody else, which does not seem like a lot to ask. The measure of success they have achieved is shown at the end of the film when we see Michael heading off into a busy street on a sunny day. The camera pulls back and Michael blends into the crowd, just another young man out on the streets of Dublin. He has at last overcome most of the obstacles society has placed in his way and can lead a normal life. That he should have had to fight so hard to be allowed to do this makes it clear to us that

## **2. THEME**

Choose a key moment in one of the texts you have studied in your comparative course and describe how it reveals a significant theme in this text. (30)

The text I have studied as part of my comparative study is the film "Inside I'm Dancing", directed by Damien O'Donnell. The theme I have chosen is that of communication and understanding.

Michael's inability to communicate easily with others is shown clearly in the opening sequence, set in the Carrigmore care home. He is sitting with the other residents who are watching "Bagpuss", a children's television series from the 1970s. Michael is sitting silently and passively but is not watching the television. In the background, a cleaner is moving around the room with an electric polisher.

Eileen enters and asks the residents if anyone wants to go to mass. Meanwhile, the polisher's cable has snagged on one of the wheelchairs and Michael notices it. The camera angle allows us to see the situation from Michael's point of view. He becomes agitated as he realises the potential danger of the cable and tries to alert Eileen to the hazard. Eileen is well-meaning but cannot understand Michael. We realise that he is unable to communicate a simple but important message to her. Added to his frustration is Eileen's condescending attitude. It appears that she has no sense Michael may have something urgent to tell her. In the end, Eileen gets

Michael's "card", which we realise is his principal means of communication. We share in Michael's rising panic as he tries desperately to pronounce the word "Cable" clearly. Eileen points out the letters on the card and the slowness of it all adds to our understanding of Michael's frustration. It is such a simple message and yet it seems to take forever to spell it out as Michael's agitation grows.

When Annie falls, just as Eileen says, "Cable? What cable?" we hear the television in the background referring to the prima ballerina and the humorous note here makes the situation seem even more ridiculous.

In this scene, we see that everything - from the setting to the camera angles to the characters themselves - contributes to our understanding of the theme and clearly show us how difficult it is for Michael to communicate with those around him. We empathise with his distress, his feelings of powerlessness and frustration and we feel his sadness and hopelessness as he sits in his wheelchair, watching a children's television programme.

## POETRY

### **Shancoduff by Patrick Kavanagh**

My black hills have never seen the sun rising,  
Eternally they look north towards Armagh.  
Lot's wife would not be salt if she had been  
Incurious as my black hills that are happy  
When dawn whitens Glassdrummond chapel.  
My hills hoard the bright shillings of March  
While the sun searches in every pocket.  
They are my Alps and I have climbed the Matterhorn  
With a sheaf of hay for three perishing calves  
In the field under the Big Forth of Rocksavage.  
The sleety winds fondle the rushy beards of Shancoduff  
While the cattle-drovers sheltering in the Featherna Bush  
Look up and say: "Who owns them hungry hills  
That the water-hen and snipe must have forsaken?  
A poet? Then by heavens he must be poor."  
I hear and is my heart not badly shaken?

1. (a) What is the poet's attitude to the black hills of Shancoduff? (10)  
(b) What is the attitude of the cattle drovers to the hills? (10)  
(c) What does Kavanagh mean by the lines:  
"My hills hoard the bright shillings of March  
While the sun searches in every pocket." (10)
2. Answer **one** of the following. [Each part carries 20 marks.]
  - (i) What images or details in the poem give a vivid picture of the landscape of Shancoduff? Explain your choice.

**OR**

- (ii) From your reading of this poem, what kind of person do you imagine the poet to have been? Explain your answer, quoting from the poem in support of your view.

**OR**

- (iii) Would you like to live in Shancoduff? Explain your answer.

1. (a) What is the poet's attitude to the black hills of Shancoduff?

*Note: The key word in this question is **attitude**. When answering, you must be sure to include words which describe attitude, and support each one with quotation from the poem. Remember, you must prove your point. You cannot say something about the poem without backing it up with evidence.*

*In my sample answer, I have highlighted and underlined the words which describe the poet's attitude. You should not do this in your own answers, obviously.*

<p>The poet's attitude towards Shancoduff is one of <b>possessiveness</b>, <b>protectiveness</b>, <b>pride</b> and deep <b>affection</b>.</p> <p>Kavanagh's <b>love</b> for Shancoduff is seen in the <b>possessive</b> way he refers to it as "My black hills" in the opening line of the poem. This <b>possessive</b>, <b>protective</b> sense of ownership is continued into the second stanza when he describes the place as "My hills", and "my Alps".</p> <p>Kavanagh's <b>love</b> of his local place is also seen in the <b>affectionate</b> way he describes dawn breaking over the little church in Glasdrummond and the mention of "the Big Forth of Rocksavage" and "Featherna Bush". The use of place names shows a <b>pride</b> and a <b>love</b> for this north-facing farm and adds to the sense of intimacy. It is a special, magical place for the poet, and he compares it favourably to the beauty and majesty of the Alps.</p> <p>The land itself is personified through the use of verbs such as "seen", "look" and "hoard". This personification adds to the idea that the relationship Kavanagh has with Shancoduff is almost that of a <b>lover</b>. Like someone in <b>love</b>, he sees only good in the loved one and he defends it against the casual criticism of others. His heart is "badly shaken" when the cattle-drovers speak badly of his farm.</p> <p>Overall, Kavanagh's attitude towards the black hills of Shancoduff is a very <b>positive</b> one and he clearly <b>treasures</b> his "black hills", regardless of their material worth. 233 words.</p>	<p><i>In my opening, I reflect the wording of the question and I outline the points I will make.</i></p> <p><i>Each point is given a separate paragraph.</i></p> <p><i>1. I say what I think the poet's attitude towards his farm is.</i></p> <p><i>2. I quote to support my point.</i></p> <p><i>3. I explain – using the verbs "shows" and "adds" - why the quote I have chosen proves my point.</i></p> <p><i>I make sure that each paragraph is about the poet's attitude.</i></p> <p><i>Brief conclusion which reflects the question and my opening lines.</i></p>
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1. (b) What is the attitude of the cattle drovers to the hills?

*Note: You are asked about the drovers' attitude towards the hills – not towards Kavanagh himself.*

*This answer cannot really be longer than the example I have given. To write more would be to risk going off the point and discussing matters not raised in the question.*

<p>The attitude of the drovers towards the hills <b><u>differs greatly from Kavanagh's attitude.</u></b> In the last stanza, a <b><u>negative</u></b> note is introduced as the drovers talk <b><u>contemptuously</u></b> about Kavanagh's beloved Shancoduff. They look at the land <b><u>objectively</u></b>, and notice only the poor quality of the fields: "them hungry hills", which have been abandoned by even the marshland birds.</p>	<p><i>Adverbs such as "contemptuously" and "objectively" show the drovers' attitudes towards Shacoduff.</i></p>
<p>The drovers are <b><u>materialistic</u></b> men who <b><u>cannot see beyond the monetary value of the farm.</u></b> To them, it is simply bad farming land and in their opinion, Kavanagh "must be poor." They appear to be <b><u>practical, unsentimental men who cannot see the attraction in such a bleak place as Shancoduff.</u></b> Their view seems <b><u>narrow and overly simplistic</u></b>, compared to Kavanagh's deeper appreciation of the hills. <i>105 words</i></p>	<p><i>Even in a very brief answer, you must quote to support every point being made.</i></p>



1. (c) What does Kavanagh mean by the lines:  
 "My hills hoard the bright shillings of March  
 While the sun searches in every pocket."

*Note: This question could be interpreted in a literal or metaphorical manner, or a mixture of both. In my answer, I have given both the literal and the metaphorical meanings.*

<p>The lines above tell us about the time of the year when the spring warmth begins to melt the ice and snow everywhere except on the north facing hills of Shancoduff. The little pools of ice or frost shine brightly and from a distance they resemble coins "bright shillings". The sun cannot penetrate the hollows or pockets where these last pools of ice remain. Kavanagh puns on the word "pocket" in these lines. The word can refer to the pockets of sheltered ground but also ties in with the idea of a pocket in clothing where coins might be kept.</p>	<p><i>Literal explanation.</i></p> <p><i>Showing an understanding of the poet's use of language.</i></p>
<p>The hills are personified again as they "hoard" little pools of snow and ice, while it melts elsewhere in the spring sunshine. The sun searches desperately for these "bright shillings" but cannot find them in the cold shade of the hillside. Kavanagh seems to admire the hills for holding onto their "shillings". They do what they want. They don't change just because it's spring; the laws and rhythms of nature do not rule them, it seems. The poet respects their independence and rebelliousness.</p>	<p><i>Metaphorical meaning. Again, use of the word "personified" shows an understanding that this is a poetry question. It is vital to use literary terms when possible.</i></p>
<p>It is significant that Kavanagh compares the little icy pools to "bright shillings". This shows that, although the hills may appear valueless to others, to the poet the little pockets of ice which hold on when the spring melt has begun are as valuable as the shiny coins they resemble. 233 words</p>	<p><i>Close reading of the poem shown by this analysis.</i></p>

2 (i) What images or details in the poem give a vivid picture of the landscape of Shancoduff? Explain your choice.

*Note: This question asks for images or details. Take note of the plural. You must give several images or details in order to get high marks here.*

*You must demonstrate that the images you have chosen help you to see Shancoduff vividly in your mind's eye.*

<p>There are several images in this poem which give a vivid picture of the harsh but beautiful landscape of Shancoduff.</p> <p>In the first stanza, Kavanagh describes his hills as being "black" and tells us that they "look north towards Armagh". The word "black" has negative connotations, but this is balanced by the mention of the sun and the dawn which "whitens Glassdrummond chapel." The contrast between the bright little church and the dark, north-facing hills is simple but effective and helps me to visualise the area clearly.</p> <p>I was particularly struck by the way in which Kavanagh manages to describe the hills in a way which might appear unappealing at first glance, but which draws the reader in and helps us to share the poet's love for his home place. There is a fine example of this in the second stanza, when Kavanagh talks about the hills hoarding "the bright shillings of March / While the sun searches in every pocket." Again, the image is a simple one but when I read it I can see the patches of ice or frost shining on the hillside, impervious to the spring sunshine.</p> <p>In the third stanza, the poet talks about the "sleety winds" which "fondle the rushy beards of Shancoduff". Just as Kavanagh balanced the sombre description of the black hills in the first stanza by personifying the hills and calling them happy, so he balances the harshness of the "sleety winds" here by using the verb "fondle" to introduce a note of affection or even love. Again, the hills are personified and the rushes on the boggy hills are like a beard on a man's face. I found this image evocative and oddly touching. Kavanagh's love for his land makes him see everything there in a positive light and, through him, I see it that way too.</p>	<p><i>In my opening line, I reflect the wording of the question.</i></p> <p><i>I move through the poem stanza by stanza.</i></p> <p><i>Each point is supported by a quote.</i></p> <p><i>I concentrate on the visual imagery and I show a level of personal response.</i></p> <p><i>Every time I quote, I say what the quote <u>does</u> in the context of the poem.</i></p>
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- (ii) From your reading of this poem, what kind of person do you imagine the poet to have been? Explain your answer, quoting from the poem in support of your view.

<p>From my reading of the poem, I imagine Kavanagh to have been a loyal, positive, thoughtful, sensitive man with great poetic vision.</p>	<p><i>I outline the main points.</i></p>
<p>Kavanagh appears to have a deep affection for his "black hills". To others they may appear harsh and valueless, but to him they are beautiful. He refers to them possessively as "my black hills" and speaks proudly of the harsh, unforgiving landscape which might seem unattractive to many people. His allusion to the Bible and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah shows that he considers his place to be pure and faultless, perhaps by comparison to big cities.</p>	<p><i>I develop the main points and support each one with quotation and/or reference to the poem.</i></p>
<p>Everything which might appear negative about Shancoduff is turned into a positive by Kavanagh. In an example of hyperbole, he compares the hills to the Alps and the Matterhorn. Even the "sleety winds" are portrayed in an affectionate way: they "fondle the rushy beards of Shancoduff". Although most people might regard his north-facing hills as cold and unappealing, the poet is proud of their ability to "hoard the bright shillings of March". That Kavanagh manages to view his hills in such a positive way shows me that must have been a very loyal man, refusing to see anything but good in the object of his affection.</p>	<p><i>I write about the poem itself in the present tense, but when summarising and talking about Kavanagh himself, I reflect the past tense used in the question.</i></p>
<p>Kavanagh's poetic vision shows clearly throughout the poem as he fondly describes his beloved Shancoduff. His sensitivity is shown in the last stanza when he hears the cattle-drovers talking slightly about "them hungry hills". They are mercenary men and lack any appreciation of the beauty of the land they see. To them, it is simply poor and there is a hint of mockery in the line, "A poet? Then by heavens he must be poor." Kavanagh hears and his heart is "badly shaken". I much prefer Kavanagh's appreciation of the land and his loyalty towards his "black hills" than the drovers' narrow, materialistic view.</p>	<p><i>Each new point is given a new paragraph.</i></p> <p><i>Personal response is expected in the long question.</i></p>
<p>The impression I am left with, having read this poem, is that Kavanagh must have been a loyal, sensitive man with a strong attachment to his home place.</p>	<p><i>Brief conclusion.</i></p>

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