

Poem for Lara, 10

The following poem by Michael Hartnett was written for his ten year old daughter, Lara.
Read the poem and then answer the questions which follow. (30)

Poem for Lara, 10

An ashtree on fire,
the hair of your head
coaxing larks
with your sweet voice
in the green grass,
a crowd of daisies
playing with you,
a crowd of rabbits
dancing with you,
the blackbird
with its gold bill
is a jewel for you,
the goldfinch
with its sweetness
is your music.
You are perfume,
you are honey,
a wild strawberry:
even the bees think you
a flower in the field.
Little queen of the land of books,
may you be always thus,
may you ever be free
from sorrow-chains.
Here's my blessing for you, girl,
it is no petty grace –
may you have your mother's soul
and the beauty of her face.



Answer **two** of the following questions. Each question is worth 15 marks.

1. From the imagery the poet uses, what impression of Lara do you get?
2. From your reading of the poem, what type of person do you think Michael Hartnett was?
3. Did you like or dislike this poem?
Give reasons for your answer based on evidence from the poem.

From the imagery the poet uses, what impression of Lara do you get?

- ✓ When you read this question, underline the words imagery and impression of Lara.
- ✓ As the question is on technique, you will need to use poetic terms.
- ✓ Each point you make will be supported by a quote and explained fully.
- ✓ The quotes should be short, there is no point in quoting lines and lines. A few words or a single line will usually suffice.
- ✓ Quote accurately, the poem is printed out for you so there is no excuse for spelling errors.
- ✓ Planning your answer:-
 - intro - pretty, well-loved*
 - red hair – vibrant, warm*
 - lover of and loved by nature*
 - loves books*
 - sweet – perfume, honey*

Sample Answer to Question 1:

This poem is rich in imagery which conveys a clear picture of the poet's daughter. The descriptions of her are very positive and leave me with the impression of a pretty, sweet, charming little girl.

In the opening lines we are given a physical description of Lara. The metaphor describing her hair as 'An ashtree on fire' tells us that she is a red-head. This image also suggests warmth and vibrancy and links the little girl to nature by comparing her hair to

a flaming tree.

This idea of Lara being somehow at one with nature is continued when the poet conjures up the image of flowers and rabbits joining in her fun: 'a crowd of daisies playing with you, a crowd of rabbits dancing with you'. Clearly, Lara loves nature and her father is suggesting that nature cannot help but love her back.

The positive imagery is carried right through the poem with references to Lara's 'sweet voice', 'the goldfinch with its sweetness is your music' and the metaphors which highlight her innocence and goodness, 'You are perfume, you are honey, a wild strawberry'. All the images chosen from nature are ones which are associated with children, which is most appropriate for a poem about a little girl; if she was a grown woman there would possibly be roses and swans mentioned, but as she is a ten year old, the poet chooses daisies, rabbits, strawberries and green grass instead.

It is interesting that the poet compares his daughter to a queen in 'the land of books'; this seems to set the seal on the little girl's perfection. Obviously a poet would value literature and reading and his choice of this image is significant as it tells us that Lara has another, deeper side to her – she is not just interested in the outdoors.

There is a suggestion in the poem that Lara is almost like a fairy, or at least a character from a fairy tale. Her father fondly depicts her as dancing with rabbits, playing with daisies and even being loved by the insects: 'the bees think you a flower in the field'. These images conjure up the impression of a little girl who is naturally good and sweet and full of childlike innocence. It seems clear too that she is a happy little girl, her father hopes that she may 'be always thus, may you ever be free from sorrow-chains'.

Overall, my impression of Lara is that of a happy, carefree, sweet little girl who is idolised by her dotting father.

Note: This answer is longer than necessary but it is no harm to see what could be written.



2. From your reading of the poem, what type of person do you think Michael Hartnett was?

- ✓ This question is looking for your impression of the poet, based on the language he uses, the images he chooses and the tone of the poem.
- ✓ Because you are asked what type of person the poet is, you should be careful to use words which describe personality.
- ✓ Remember, each of the questions is testing your ability to analyse poetry so show that you know how to do this. Don't be misled by the seeming simplicity of the questions.
- ✓ Planning your answer:- *loving father- caring- whimsical
wants the best for his daughter
worries for her future
loving husband also – mention of mother*

Sample Answer to Question 2:

I believe that Michael Hartnett is a very loving father. He idealises his daughter, portraying her as an almost ethereal (*not quite of this world*), fairylike creature who is part of nature's beauty. His descriptions of her are of a child who is perfectly attuned to nature and is loved by all the animals and even insects she encounters: 'daisies playing with you, a crowd of rabbits dancing with you'. This shows that he is a sensitive man who notices details that others may not, and also that he is a whimsical man – not many men would think of daisies playing with a child and rabbits dancing with her.

He is obviously someone who sees the best in everything. His description of his ten year old daughter is a caring, adoring one, he sees all that is good in her, 'You are perfume, you are honey, a wild strawberry'. As well as seeing the best in his daughter, the poet wants the best for her. He worries that her childish innocence will be destroyed and hopes that she will 'ever be free from sorrow chains'.

It is clear, from the final lines of the poem, that as well as being a loving father, Michael Hartnett is also a loving husband. In the last four lines, he wishes that his daughter may have all the blessings of her mother: 'may you have your mother's soul and the beauty of her face'. It is significant that he mentions the soul before physical beauty as this tells me that he is not a shallow person who is concerned only with the superficial. To him, clearly, spiritual beauty is the most important thing.

3. Did you like or dislike this poem? Give reasons for your answer based on evidence from the poem.

- ✓ I would strongly advise you to be positive here. You may, of course, say you dislike the poem but it will be much harder to support this answer by reference to the text. It is also important to remember that the poems chosen are generally thought to be good examples of their genre.
- ✓ Whichever approach you decide to take, it will need to be supported by evidence from the poem. A cursory, 'I disliked the poem, I thought it was boring' will not achieve a passing grade.
- ✓ Although the examiners want to see a personal response, they also want to see that it is based on a reasonably detailed analysis and evaluation of the poem.
- ✓ Planning your answer:- *things to consider - senses, language, sound, imagery*

Sample Answer to Question 3:

I enjoyed this poem very much. The theme of love is one I particularly like and it is pleasant to read such an uplifting poem in which a father extols (praises) his daughter's virtues. The images the poet uses to convey his adoration of his daughter are charming: they touch on almost all the senses. The picture I have in my mind is one of a little girl dancing in a sparkling, colourful meadow, filled with 'green grass', 'daisies', a blackbird with a 'gold bill' like a jewel and friendly rabbits and bees. The mention of perfume and honey appeals to my sense of smell and taste and helps to create an image of an almost perfect world. The description of the goldfinch singing sweetly completes the picture.

The whole poem seems to evoke a fairytale world in which Lara is a fairy queen in a magic kingdom, and the rabbits, larks, blackbirds, goldfinches, bees and even daisies do all they can to make her happy. They adore her: "Even the bees think you / a flower in the field." She is truly at one with nature. I enjoy this element of escapism in the poem; for a moment I am transported to the poet's perfect world and can see his beloved daughter through his eyes.

The part of the poem that I find most attractive, however, is the ending. I really like the way the poet mentions Lara's mother in such a loving way and hopes that the little girl will inherit her mother's beautiful soul as well as "the beauty of her face." This makes me think that the family unit is a close and happy one, and it ends the poem on a very positive note.