

Paul Durcan

Themes and Style

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Themes

- ✿ *The complexity of love, both parental and romantic, married love*
- ✿ *Family - the joy of having a loving family and the pain of losing it*
- ✿ *Satirises Irish society - its faults and failings*
- ✿ *Draws on personal experiences to provide universal insights when talking about love and family*
- ✿ *Some poems are more deeply personal and autobiographical*

Style - Difficult to pin down!

- ✦ *Humorous*
- ✦ *Startling, original language*
- ✦ *Inversion of the norm*
- ✦ *Surreal*
- ✦ *Unusual perspectives*
- ✦ *Sense of longing and sorrow for what he has lost*
- ✦ *Conversational - rhythm of speech*
- ✦ *Journalistic*
- ✦ *Variety of voices*

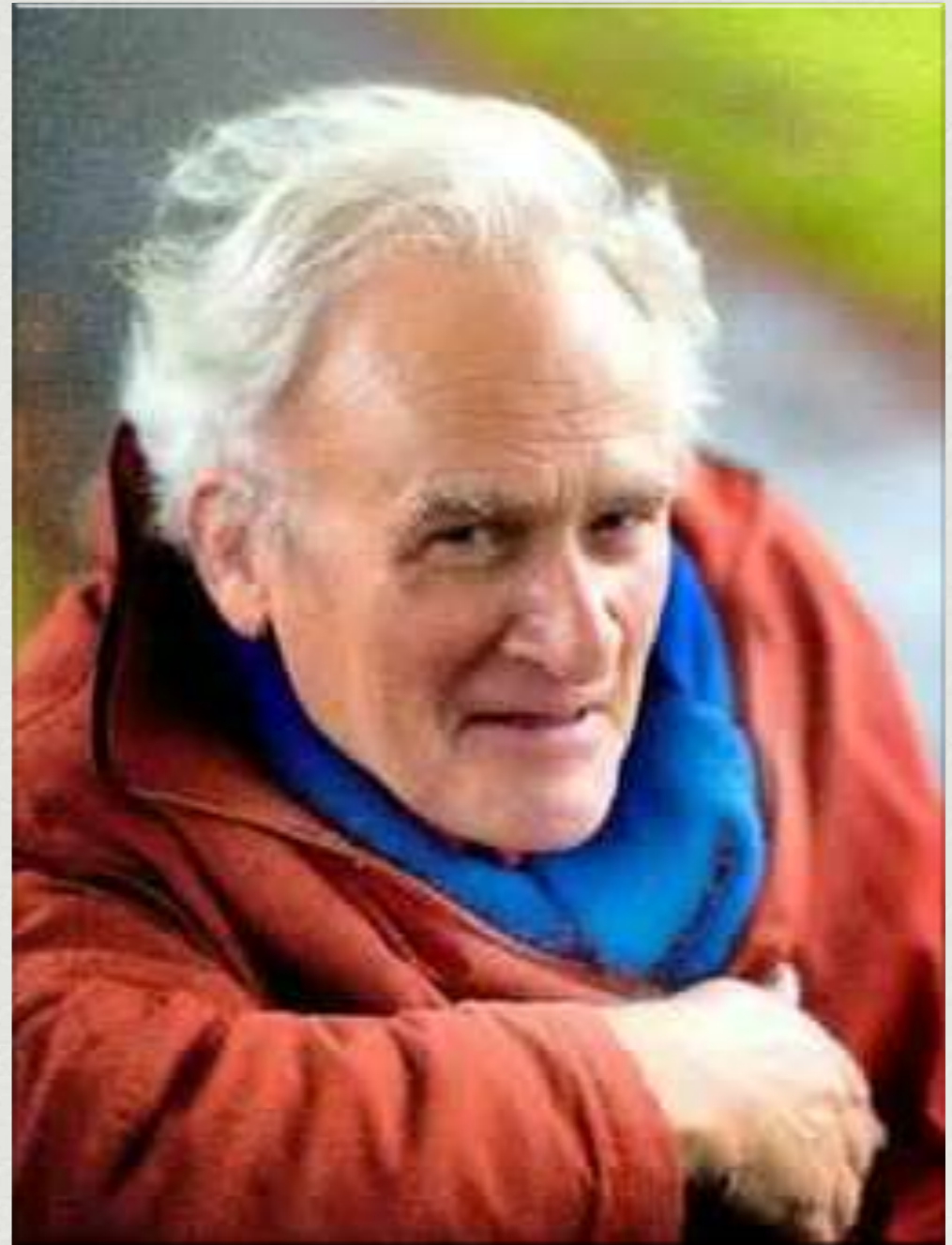
Quotes about Durcan

- ✿ *"Durcan focuses on the individual's reactions to sometimes overwhelming and overpowering forces, attempting to empower individuals and to give them a sense of possibility and dignity in the face of those forces by holding them up to scrutiny, sometimes savage, satiric scrutiny." - Bernard McKenny*

- ✦ *"[Durcan] has crafted a unique, manically confidential voice which puts a surreal (or maybe super-real) imagination to work through self-deprecating tragic comic narrative and social observation which shows us every detail in a bizarre and surreal light. He brings out the madness of what everyone takes for normal." - Ruth Padel*

"Ireland's most
playful poet"

Arminta Wallace



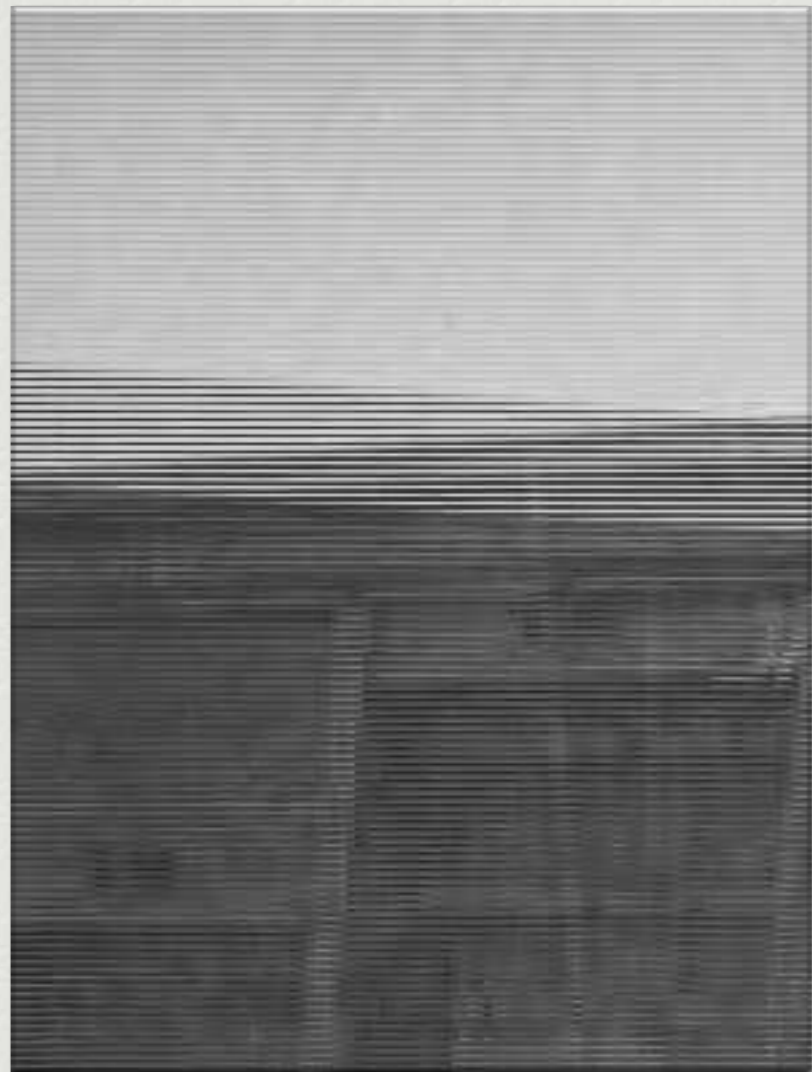
- ✿ *"[Durcan's work is] bittersweet clowning" - Seamus Heaney*
- ✿ *"[His poems] celebrate our small mercies and tender decencies in a world that favours the corrupt, the greedy, the alpha-gobshites." - Paula Meehan*

Quotes from interviews with Durcan

- ✿ *"My work as a poet has always been searching for the other place. The notions of 'utopia' is fundamental to something about myself and, I think, about the human condition."*
- ✿ *"I don't want to engage in polemic."*
- ✿ *"Hardly a day goes by that you don't think of your own childhood"*

Family

- ✿ *Wife Who Smashed Television Gets Jail*
- ✿ *Parents*
- ✿ *Windfall*
- ✿ *Sport*
- ✿ *Father's Day*



- ✿ *Different views - sense of longing for happy family time with his own family and difficult memories of his relationship with his father*
- ✿ *Distance between parents and children*
- ✿ *Society's view of the family and negative impact of modern life*
- ✿ *Style ranges from the satirical and humorous to the heartbreaking*
- ✿ *Great honesty is evident throughout*

Love

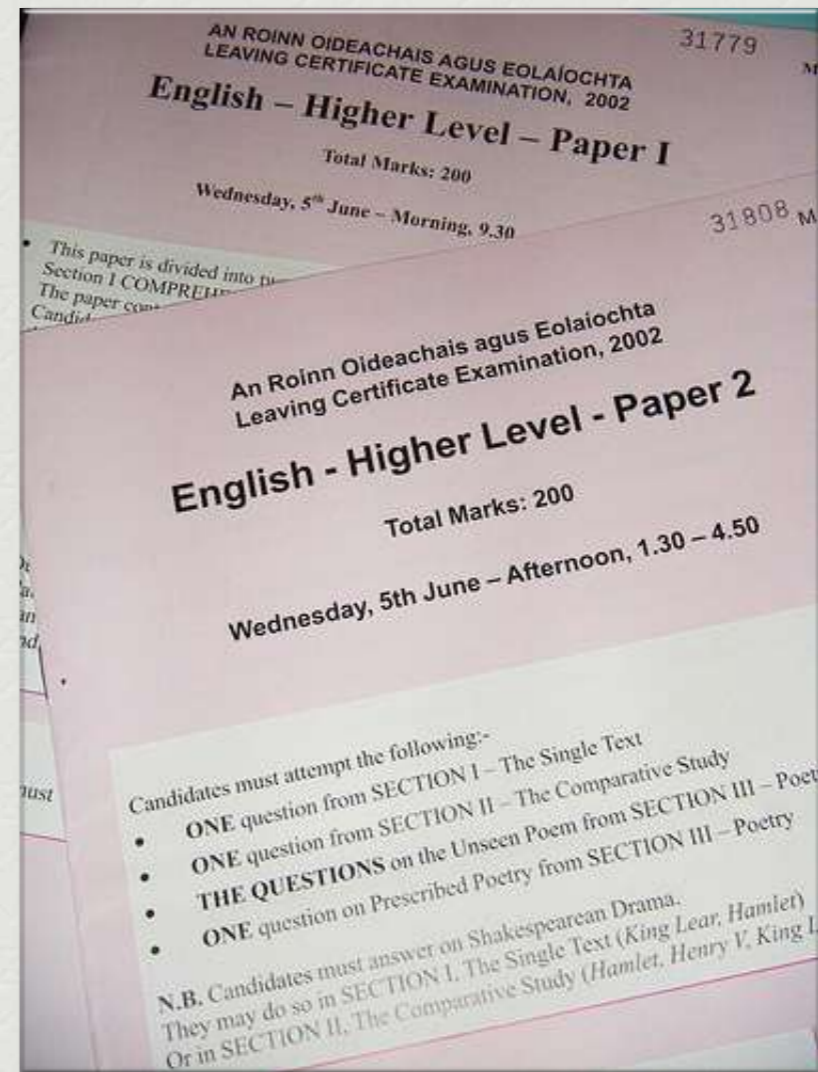
- ✿ *Realistic - accepts that love need not be perfect*
- ✿ *Deep longing for happy days with his wife*
- ✿ *Acceptance that he is responsible for much of what went wrong*
- ✿ *Sense of place evident in 'Windfall' in particular, adding to poignancy*
- ✿ *Humour blended with sadness in 'Father's Day'*

Thesis

- ✿ *What are the key words in the question? There will almost certainly be several. Highlight each of them and remember that even though words might sound similar, 'engaging and appealing', they are different and the examiner will require you to discuss both.*
- ✿ *However the question is phrased, it will require you to discuss Durcan's **themes and style**.*
- ✿ *Avoid writing a list of the poems you will use. Work the names of the poems into your opening paragraph if you wish.*

DEB Pre - 2016

“Durcan communicates rich insights into human experience using language that is both accessible and appealing.”



Coding

- ✿ *As always, ask yourself how this question might be coded.*
- ✿ *Underline the key words.*
- ✿ *In this case, the coding is RI for 'rich insights' and LA for 'language that is accessible and appealing'.*
- ✿ *When you are writing your plan, make sure that every single point could be coded with RI and/or LA. If it could not, do not include it.*

Plan

- ✿ *Get down all the poems that you think have rich insights into aspects of life. Beside each one, write the insight/s it contains and what it is about the language that is appealing and/or accessible.*
- ✿ *Don't worry at this stage if you have too many poems or if you find not all of them fit the question well: you can narrow the list down when you have decided on your final approach.*

Example

- ✿ *Parents: RI - separation between parents and child despite great love etc. LA - not particularly accessible, unusual metaphor - sea - parents are fish etc.*
- ✿ *The Difficulty that is Marriage: RI - complexity of love LA - honest (appealing), simple, accessible; sonnet form familiar at first glance but rewards closer inspection as not typical etc.*
- ✿ *Sport: RI - Complexity of relationship between parent and child, son wants to impress father despite everything; LA - Relatable setting, simple language, black humour etc.*

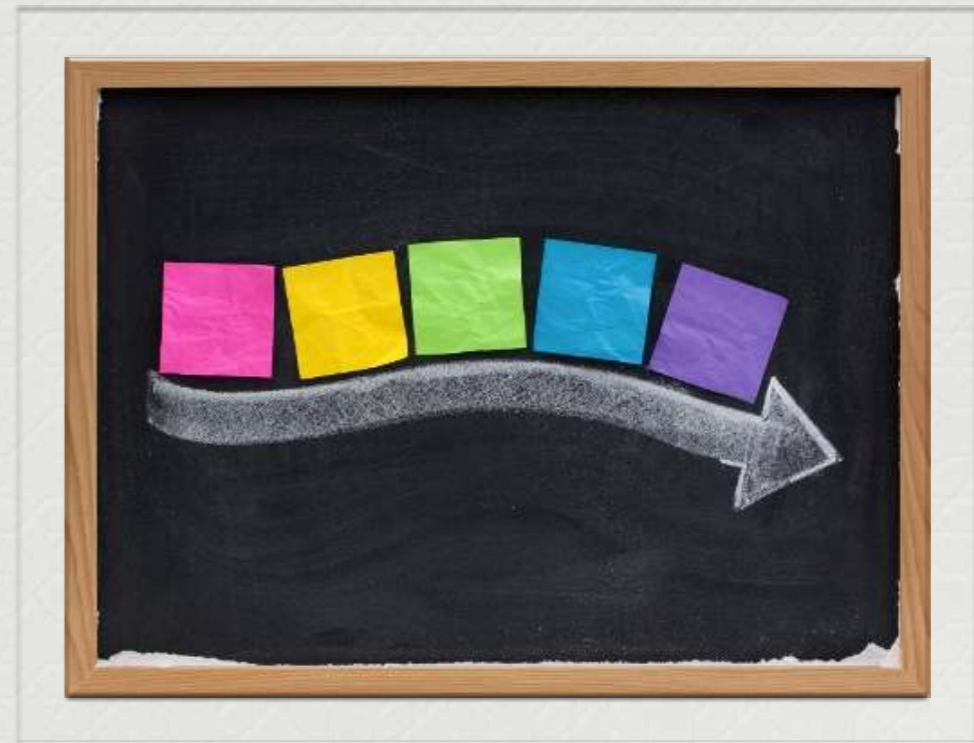
✿ *Father's Day: RI - Relationship in trouble; helpless; cannot fix it; LA - Relatable setting, storyline but quirky twist with appearance of axe; self-deprecating, honest, black humour, man on train - axe obvious symbol - train journey obvious symbol of increasing distance etc.*

✿ *Windfall: RI - importance of home and family 'a chance in life to transcend death'; pain a person can feel even when end of marriage was their fault; LA - descriptions of home familiar, outside versus inside worlds; like 'Parents', unusual metaphor of sea (not quite so accessible); mantra of being 'almost home' etc. heartbreaking yet hauntingly memorable*

- ◆ *Wife Who Smashed Television Gets Jail: RI- Damaging effect of television/ American culture on Irish family life; lack of respect for importance of family in modern society; LA- News report is dramatic and unusual for a poem; black humour; rewards closer reading although simple on surface - 'Queen Maeve' etc.*

Organising Your Poems

- ✿ *Decide which poems you will use (four or five is best although you may also briefly refer to sixth or seventh poem.)*
- ✿ *Look for links between poems, either thematically or in terms of language.*



Thesis

- ◆ *Now is the time to look at the poems you have selected and decide what your final response to the question is. This will form your thesis. For example, you might say that while all of the Durcan poems you have studied have rich insights into various aspects of life such as family, home, and the complexities of relationships between parents and children, you don't necessarily feel that the language in each is immediately accessible, although it is certainly appealing and the more difficult elements of his style, such as his surreal imagery, definitely rewards closer reading.*