

EXAMPLE 8 MARK SCOTTISH TEXT QUESTION AND ANSWER

By referring to this poem and to at least one other poem by MacCaig, discuss how the poet uses symbolism to develop central ideas in his poetry. (Assume that the printed text is 'Basking Shark')

(References to HR12F are ADDITIONAL examples for you)

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Symbolism is used to good effect in 'Basking Shark', 'Aunt Julia' and '**Hotel Room 12th Floor**'. In 'Basking Shark', the shark represents the natural world, evolved and adapted to its own environment, in its correct place, which contrasts with humanity as MacCaig suggests that humans have somehow gone down the wrong path and are in fact the destructive '*monsters*' that he at first considers the basking shark to be. In 'Aunt Julia' MacCaig's aunt symbolises the possibility of humans living as one with the environment – she is very closely associated with the natural world. ***In 'Hotel Room 12th Floor' several objects described in the setting suggest that despite human technology there is a darker side to humanity.*** **2 MARKS**

EXTRACT

Reference to printed poem and comment/discussion/analysis. You gain marks for good analysis. Reference only = 0.

In Basking Shark, "*So who's the monster? The thought made me grow pale*" shows that the encounter with the shark has provoked deep thought in the poet. The symbolic shark, in its correct environment, has made the poet reflect upon the corrupt and damaging creatures that humans are compared to wild animals living as they should, in harmony within the natural world. Earlier in the poem, "*He displaced more than water. He shoggled me // Centuries back*" shows that the symbolic shark has had such a major impact on MacCaig that it has made him almost see far back in time to the origins of evolution. He concludes that we are related to the shark, indeed to all life, and that we are corrupt, wasteful, damaging '*decadent townees*' in comparison to the purity of wild creatures in their natural environments. **2 MARKS**

OTHER

Reference to another poem and comment / discussion / analysis.

In 'Aunt Julia', "*I can see her strong foot // stained with peat*" depicts MacCaig's aunt to be so closely integrated with the land that the skin of her foot has taken on the colour of the land, over time. In addition, "*paddling with the tread of the spinningwheel*" combines the idea of her attachment to nature, to the land ('paddling' is something we might do in a stream) with her creation of garments to wear. Everything she does seems to be closely associated with nature, and far from the industrialised world. **2 MARKS**

OTHER

Reference
to another
poem and
comment
/
discussion
/ analysis.

In the final stanza MacCaig writes *'But I hear her still, welcoming me // with a seagull's voice'*, and this metaphor develops two things – both aunt Julia's symbolic integration with her natural environment (her voice being that of a sea bird's suggests she is as one and in harmony with nature); and also the distance in understanding, the unbridgeable gap, caused by MacCaig's lack of capacity to speak Gaelic. MacCaig suggests that Aunt Julia's language in itself is somehow in harmony with the environment, and that his lack of understanding renders him detached.

2 MARKS

**OTHER
(EXTRA)**

Reference
to another
poem and
comment /
discussion /
analysis.

In 'Hotel Room 12th Floor', MacCaig's setting is New York, USA, one of the most technologically advanced civilizations on Earth. In line two he describes 'a helicopter skirting like a damaged insect'. The helicopter is symbolic of the imperfection inherent in human technological advancements. It is compared to a 'damaged insect', suggesting that it is inferior to the real, natural thing, and this foreshadows MacCaig's poem's central concern – that despite all humanity's technological advancements, there is a stronger underlying natural force within humanity, and that is a dark, deep, violent, destructive instinct. **2 MARKS**