



Poetry - Beer

English Past Exam Questions

Ordinary Level

D THE VOICE

When God took my aunt's baby boy, a merciful neighbour
 Gave her a parrot. She could not have afforded one
 But now bought a new cage as brilliant as the bird,
 And turned her back on the idea of other babies.

He looked unlikely. In her house his scarlet feathers
 Stuck out like a jungle, though his blue ones blended
 With the local pottery which carried messages
 Like 'Du ee help yerself to crame, me handsome.'

He said nothing when he arrived, not a quotation
 From pet-shop gossip or a sailor's oath, no sound
 From someone's home: the telephone or car-door slamming,
 And none from his: tom-tom, war-cry or wild beast roaring.

He came from silence but was ready to become noise.
 My aunt taught him nursery rhymes morning after morning.
 He learnt Miss Muffett, Jack and Jill, Little Jack Horner,
 Including her jokes; she used to say turds and whey.

A genuine Devon accent is not easy. Actors
 Cannot do it. He could though. In his court clothes
 He sounded like a farmer, as her son might have.
 He sounded like our family. He fitted in.

Years went by. We came and went. A day or two
 Before he died, he got confused, and muddled up
 His rhymes. Jack Horner ate his pail of water.
 The spider said what a good boy he was. I wept.

He had never seemed puzzled by the bizarre events
 He spoke of. But the last day he turned his head towards us
 With the bewilderment of death upon him. Said
 'Broke his crown' and 'Christmas pie'. And tumbled after.

My aunt died the next winter, widowed, childless, pitied
 And patronised. I cannot summon up her voice at all.
 She would not have expected it to be remembered
 After so long. But I can still hear his.

Patricia Beer

1. (a) What picture of the poet's aunt emerges from this poem? Refer to the poem in your answer. (10)
- (b) In your opinion, what part did the parrot play in the aunt's life? Explain your answer by referring to the words and events in the poem. (10)
- (c) Which of the following statements best describes *your* response to the poem? Give a reason for your answer.
- *I found the poem amusing*
 - *I found the poem sad*
 - *I found the poem both amusing and sad* (10)

2. Answer **ONE** of the following: [Each part carries 20 marks]

- (i) Imagine that the poet was asked to make a speech at the 'funeral' of the parrot. Write out the speech that you imagine she might deliver.

OR

- (ii) '*Nature's creatures should not be kept in cages for our amusement.*'

Write a short piece outlining your views on this topic. You should refer to the poem to support the points you make.

OR

- (iii) Imagine you were asked to make a short film or video using **one moment or event** from this poem. Describe the moment or event you would choose and explain the kind of film or video you would make.