

Kavanagh Plan — Examcraft Pre 2025

Question:

How successfully does Kavanagh illustrate his respect for the commonplace in a celebratory style?

Develop your response with reference to the poetry by Patrick Kavanagh on your Leaving Certificate course.

Key words to focus on:

- Respect for the commonplace
- Celebratory style

These are the two main areas the examiner will be assessing: **theme** and **style**. Keep this in mind when planning and writing your response.

Important note on tone:

The word '*celebratory*' suggests that your answer should focus on poems where Kavanagh expresses positivity, gratitude, or joy, especially in relation to everyday life. When choosing poems, you should select those which reflect this positive tone.

Recommended poems for this answer:

Shancoduff

The Hospital

Lines Written on a Seat on the Grand Canal, Dublin

Advent

These poems show Kavanagh's respect for ordinary experiences and objects, often in a tone that celebrates simplicity, nature, healing, or spiritual renewal.

Optional poems (more negative or bittersweet in tone):

Epic

Inniskeen Road: July Evening

While these poems also reflect on the commonplace, they are slightly darker and therefore may be less suited to an answer that focuses on Kavanagh's celebratory style.

Next step:

For each of your chosen poems, jot down what it is that shows Kavanagh's respect for the commonplace and where his style is celebratory in expressing this respect for the commonplace.

- *Shancoduff* celebrates personal and local attachment to difficult land.
- *The Hospital* celebrates reflection, healing and love in a place of weakness.
- *Lines Written on a Seat...* celebrates quiet city beauty and simple moments.
- *Advent* celebrates spiritual renewal and seeing wonder in the everyday world.

Bear in mind is the order in which you would assemble your essay. You should be focusing on creating links between the poems.

The clearest way to organise the essay is as follows:

- Begin with *Shancoduff* (early poem, rooted in land and personal pride).
- Move to *Advent* (spiritual renewal, wonder in the ordinary).
- Then *The Hospital* (accepting weakness and celebrating love and peace).

- Finally, *Lines Written on a Seat...* (final joyful acceptance of the simple world around him, peaceful celebration of life).

Sample Essay

Patrick Kavanagh's poetry is remarkable in the way it captures and celebrates ordinary life. Rather than seeking out heroic subjects or exotic settings, Kavanagh chooses to focus on what is familiar and simple, and affectionately portrays local places, rural landscapes and personal experiences. However, through his vivid imagery and distinctive voice, he transforms the commonplace into something extraordinary. His poems do not merely record these moments; they celebrate them. Kavanagh helps us to see that when approached with gratitude and affection, everyday life becomes worthy of deep respect. This is particularly true in poems such as *Shancoduff*, *Advent*, *The Hospital* and *Lines Written on a Seat on the Grand Canal, Dublin*.

In *Shancoduff*, Kavanagh's respect for his unremarkable homeplace is immediately evident. Although outsiders may dismiss the land as bleak and unappealing, he views it with affection. He refers to the hills as '*my black hills*', a possessive phrase that signals personal connection. Although they '*have never seen the sun rising*', Kavanagh imagines them as proud and content, happy when the sun '*whiten Glassdrummond chapel*'. His poetic imagination elevates these cold, north-facing hills. Rather than complaining about the harshness of the land, he describes how they hoard '*the bright shillings of March*'. This clever metaphor transforms something negative - pockets of ice on Spring farmland- into treasure. The cattle drovers may shake their heads and say that whoever owns the hills '*must be poor*', but Kavanagh disagrees.

Even in its barrenness, he finds beauty, and turns what others see as worthless into something to be valued.

Kavanagh celebrates not only the land but his relationship with it. His use of hyperbole when, with affectionate exaggeration, he claims, '*They are my Alps and I have climbed the Matterhorn / With a sheaf of hay for three perishing calves*,' lifts the simple, difficult act of carrying hay into something heroic and noble. Kavanagh does not deny the struggle; in fact, he embraces it. When others mock the hills as '*hungry hills*', his heart is '*badly shaken*'. This moment of vulnerability reveals how much he treasures this ordinary landscape.

While *Shancoduff* explores a tough yet tender connection to home, *Advent* moves into the spiritual realm, but also shows the joy of discovering wonder in simple things. Kavanagh admits that adult experience has left him somewhat jaded and cynical: '*We have tested and tasted too much, lover — / Through a chink too wide there comes in no wonder*.' His language here is full of regret as he suggests that self-indulgence and over-analysis have robbed him of childlike joy. However, the season of Advent offers a chance to renew his sight and embrace the commonplace again. His goal is simple: to rediscover joy where it has always existed.

The celebratory style of *Advent* is hopeful and prayerful. Kavanagh speaks of '*the newness that was in every stale thing / When we looked at it as children*', using paradox to show how familiar sights can become marvellous when viewed through the lens of childish wonder. When purified by penance, Kavanagh believes he will see the '*bog holes, cart tracks, old stables where Time begins*' not as dull, but as sacred. In a wonderful neologism, Kavanagh describes the 'dreeping' hedges as containing 'heart-breaking strangeness' that he will now simply appreciate for their beauty rather than analysing or

questioning. In this way, the poet celebrates the idea that renewal and joy are found in 'ordinary plenty' and in seeing the world with simple, grateful eyes.

From *Advent*, where renewal and hope colour his view of the ordinary, Kavanagh moves to a setting and a situation that appear – on the surface at least – simply grim. Illness, weakness and hospital stays are hardly obvious sources of beauty, yet Kavanagh finds grace even here. In *The Hospital*, he recalls how he '*fell in love with the functional ward*', an unlikely but honest confession that signals his respect for the commonplace. The simple surroundings — '*square cubicles*', '*plain concrete*', and '*wash basins*' — are not romanticised, but Kavanagh's tone transforms them. He writes, '*Nothing whatever is by love debarred, / The common and banal her heat can know.*' In this powerful line, love itself becomes the force that makes ordinary things radiant.

Kavanagh's celebratory style deepens as he reflects on how love and acceptance change his view. He describes '*the inexhaustible adventure of a gravelled yard*', turning a dull hospital courtyard into a place of possibility. Even snoring from the next bed is accepted without complaint. For Kavanagh, naming and noticing these small details is the poet's task. He states, '*Naming these things is the love-act and its pledge.*' Through gentle, affectionate language, he makes clear that even human frailty can be seen as wonderful, if approached the right way.

Finally, *Lines Written on a Seat on the Grand Canal, Dublin* continues this pattern of finding joy in ordinary places, but with an added sense of lightness and playfulness. If *Shancoduff* was rooted in affection for harsh land, *Advent* in spiritual renewal, and *The Hospital* in peaceful acceptance, this poem offers a vision of gentle contentment. Kavanagh does not ask for a grand memorial. Instead, he wishes to be remembered '*where there is water, /*

Canal water, preferably, so stilly / Greeny at the heart of summer. This peaceful image respects the simple beauty of the canal, a place of quiet reflection.

Kavanagh's celebratory style here is filled with imagination and affection. He uses hyperbole and neologism in '*the lock roars niagarously*' and personification in '*Fantastic light looks through the eyes of bridges*' to elevate this ordinary scene. The sudden exclamation — '*And look! A barge comes bringing from Athy / And other far-flung towns mythologies*' — reminds the reader of how simple things can carry wonder. By describing the canal as '*Parnassian islands*', he places this local and familiar setting alongside the legendary home of poets. Kavanagh manages to turn ordinary urban nature and overlooked moments into occasions for delight.

Across his poetry, Patrick Kavanagh demonstrates a profound respect for the commonplace, elevating everyday experiences through a celebratory lens. From the rugged landscapes of *Shancoduff* to the spiritual introspection of *Advent*, the intimate reflections in *The Hospital*, and the serene observations in *Lines Written on a Seat on the Grand Canal, Dublin*, he consistently transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary. Kavanagh's use of vivid imagery, metaphor, and a tone imbued with affection invites readers to perceive the familiar anew. As Seamus Heaney aptly observed, Kavanagh's work 'kick[s] the familiar into life'¹. This encapsulates Kavanagh's poetic mission: to reveal the inherent beauty in the everyday and to celebrate it with sincerity and reverence.

¹ Seamus Heaney, 'In the light of the imagination' [on Patrick Kavanagh], in *The Irish Times* (21 Oct. 2004)