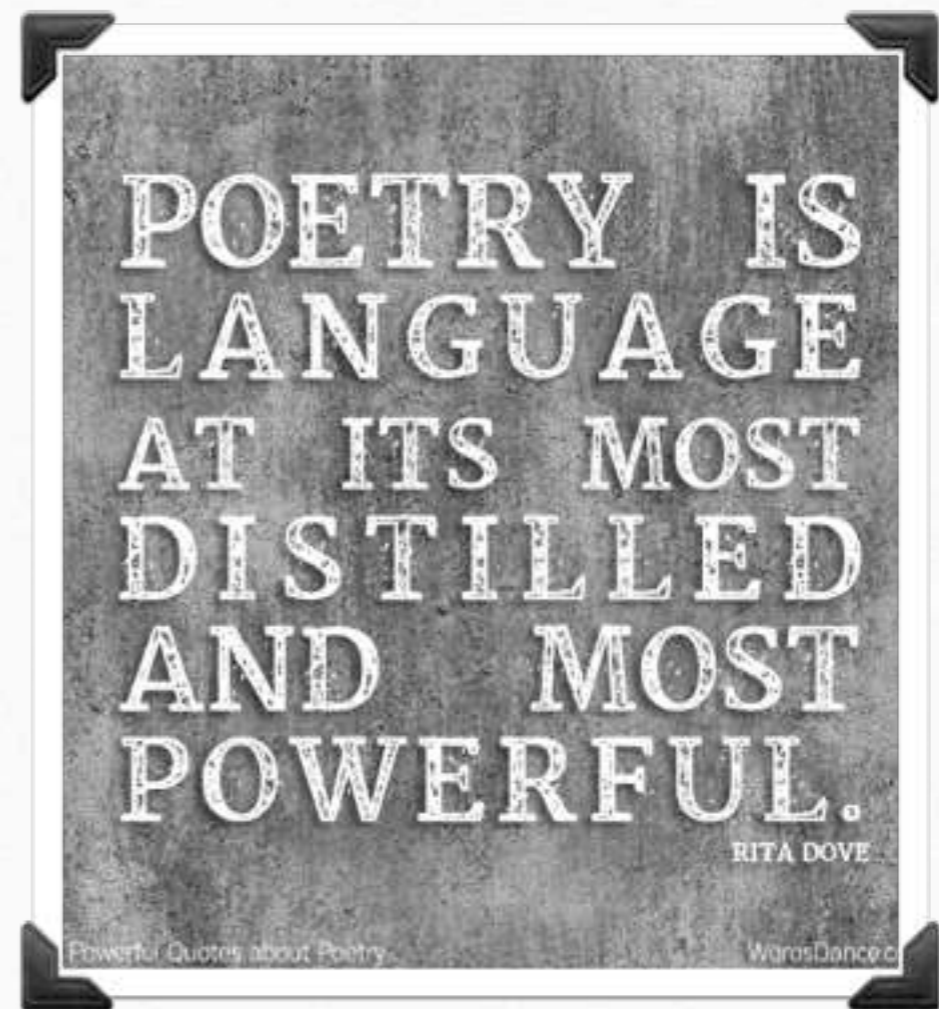


Unseen Poetry

2013 - The Fist - Derek Walcott

Tip

- ❖ Examiners are increasingly looking for an analysis of the language of the poem rather than a general personal response. In the next slide I have given a checklist you should look for in each poem. There will be examples of several of these in any unseen poem. Trust me!
- ❖ In each and every case, be prepared to talk about the effect of each feature of style.



When analysing unseen poems, look out for...

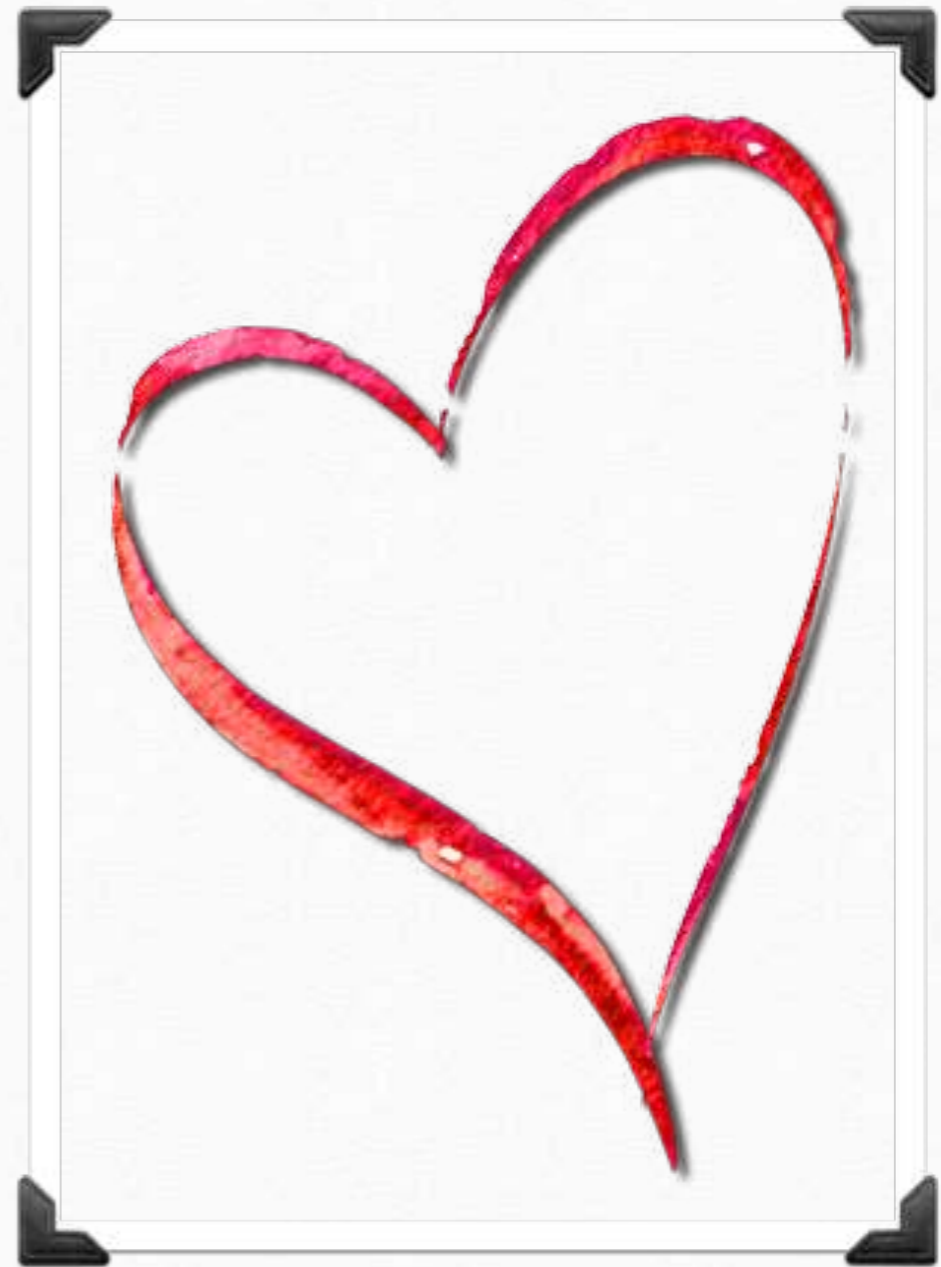
- ❖ The title: all possible meanings/connotations
- ❖ Simple or complex language (it is usually quite simple in unseen poems but may express a complex emotion)
- ❖ Metaphors and similes
- ❖ Personification
- ❖ Assonance/alliteration
- ❖ Harsh or soft vowel/consonant sounds
- ❖ Onomatopoeia
- ❖ Enjambment/Run-on lines
- ❖ Changes in rhythm and/or punctuation
- ❖ Negative/positive words

Title

- ❖ What does the title suggest?
- ❖ In this case, it could be violence or even holding tight to something.
- ❖ Do both or either of these meanings fit in with your understanding of the poem?

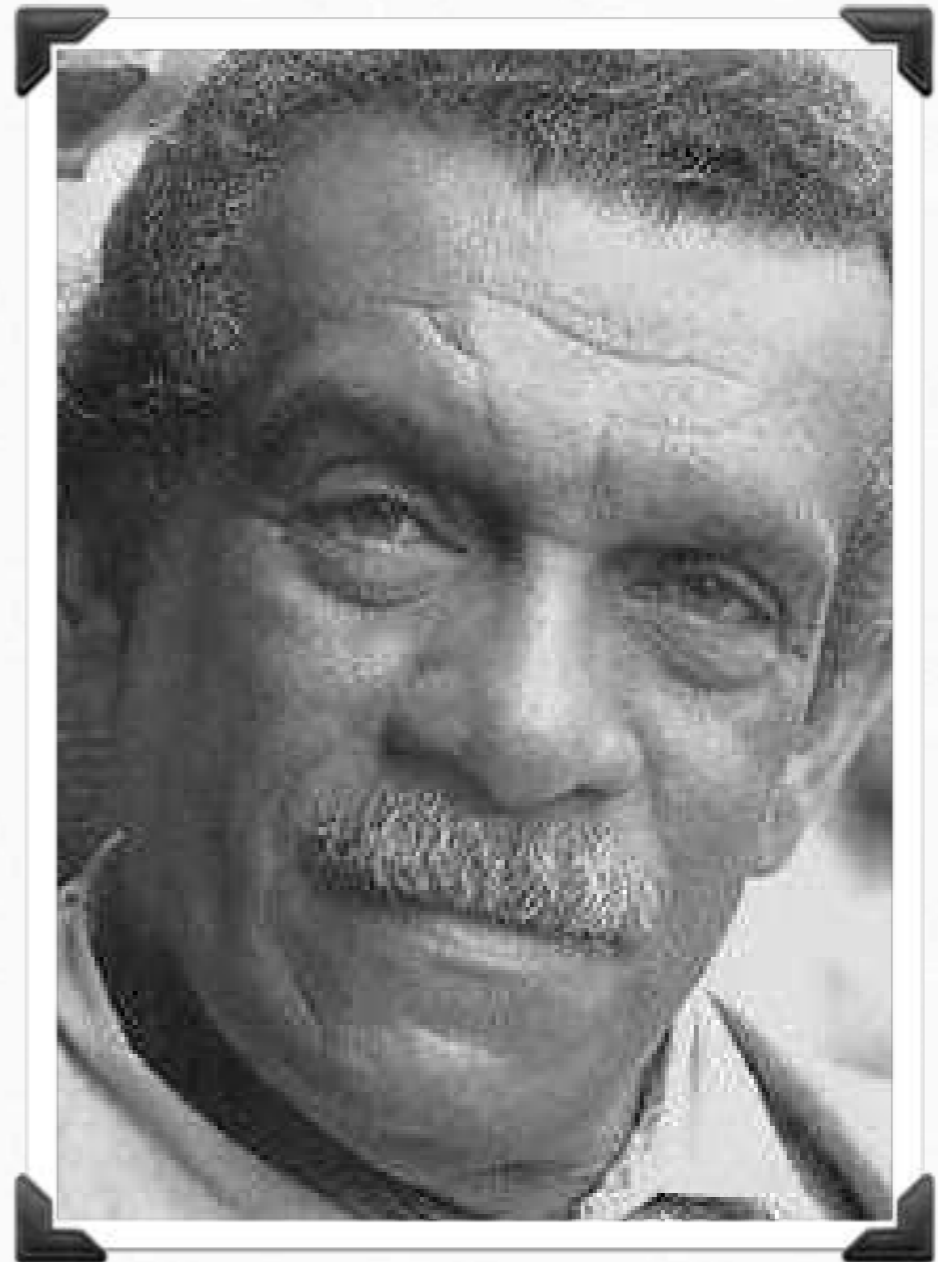
First Verse

- ❖ Pain of love is likened to a fist clutching his heart
- ❖ There is a sense that love might actually kill the poet
- ❖ There are moments of relief, like a drowning man breaking the surface of the water
- ❖ Relief is short-lived: the fist 'tightens again'



Duality

- ❖ The poet says he has always loved the pain of love.
- ❖ There is a difference, however, between the bittersweet intensity of new love and the deeply painful and damaging.
- ❖ The poet feels he is crossing over into dangerous territory.



Second Verse

- ❖ Vivid and horrifying image
- ❖ Fist clutching 'the ledge of unreason'
- ❖ One slip and he will fall
- ❖ Enjambment adds to sense of emotions hurtling out of control
- ❖ Long vowel sound in the word 'howling' adds to sense of fear

Last Line

- ❖ Change
- ❖ Steady rhythm gives a sense of control regained
- ❖ Poet seems to be holding on to reason
- ❖ Addresses heart as if it were a separate entity - detaches him somewhat from overwhelming emotion
- ❖ Words 'at least' seem to indicate that the decision to 'hold hard' is not without its own pain and is merely the lesser of two evils



- ❖ Last line stands alone: does this emphasise the poet's determination to maintain a certain distance in his relationship?
- ❖ He does not want to be dragged down into 'the abyss' of his emotion
- ❖ Regular rhythm: iambic pentameter gives a clear and controlled ending to the poem; contrasts with highly-charged, emotional, fast-paced previous stanza.

- ❖ Rhythm mirrors a steady heartbeat: does this signal that his heart is not racing any more?
- ❖ Simple, monosyllabic words add force to his declaration
- ❖ Sad message in a way: intense love is painful

Language

- ❖ Simple language to express a complex emotion
- ❖ Rhetorical question in first stanza draws us in and helps us to engage with Walcott's feelings
- ❖ Juxtaposition of 'pain' and 'love' as well as 'fist' and 'heart' make us think of love being connected with pain and emotional violence or hurt
- ❖ Startling metaphor comparing love to the 'strong clench / of the madman'

- ❖ Onomatopoeic word 'howling' with its long 'ow' sound effectively conveys the agony and fear the poet sees in surrendering to the 'mania' of this type of love
- ❖ Repeated 'h' sounds in the first alliterative sentence of the last line mimic the exhalation of breath - sense of relief / breathing freely?