**16-19 Critical – First Place**

**Freya Buxton, Queen’s School: ‘Day, with Hawk’**

Vahni Capildeo’s poem, Day, with Hawk, is an exploration of an encounter with a ‘peregrine’, in which a ‘stunned’ speaker grapples with language in a seemingly desperate attempt to express the moment.

The poem’s metalinguistic concerns are made apparent as the speaker draws attention to the inadequacy of language for expressing the profundity of the moment. Capildeo states she is left ‘hanging on

to language by its clichés’, which establishes a sense of uncontrollable struggle with language, that continues throughout the poem. Capildeo’s use of mimetic enjambment as she ‘hang[s] on to language’ is interesting, as it suggests that the speaker is required to employ a visual representation of language, as language alone cannot express the sense of spiralling out of control the speaker feels. Added to this, Capildeo suggests a difficulty in communicating the event to the reader through her need to revert to ‘clichés’. Yet this statement produces somewhat of a paradox, as the multiple neologisms and compound words throughout the poem, such as ‘singer-songwrite’ and ‘chestnut-stippled’, suggests the speaker is attempting to form a whole new vocabulary in order to describe the bird appropriately.

Through her exploration of language, Capildeo creates an interesting juxtaposition between herself and the bird. While she is described through a semantic field of loss of control, through verbs such as ‘tumbling’ and ‘hanging’, the hawk appears ‘princely’ with a ‘non-urgent flexing of chest muscles’. Capildeo conveys a sense of deep awe of the bird’s ease of movement which is further highlighted through his initial description as ‘Like the fire from bare twigs that twists a floral kiss on winter’s neck’. The soft sibilance used can be seen as reflective of both the bird’s elegance in the air, as well as the speaker’s infatuation. Moreover, the internal rhyme between the lines suggests a momentary drawing together of the two beings, who met ‘just once’, which alludes to the profundity of the moment. The rich imagery of this description, with compares the hawk’s energy to the new life heralded by spring, furthers the contrast between the speaker and the bird. The juxtaposition of expressive description with the fragmentary ending lines draws attention to the rift between the ‘princely’ bird and the struggling poet. Capildeo states that ‘Love, this is; no poem.’ This somewhat ambiguous line, punctuated by a caesura and end stopped, suggests that the speaker is struggling to maintain the flow of thought and speech as she is awestruck by the hawk’s majesty. This idea is furthered as Capildeo struggles to find the collective noun for a single peregrine, which could be ‘an embarrassment of poets.

An adoration. An abyss’. The poet exhibits her ‘embarrassment’ at her own confusion and the poem’s final word, ‘abyss’ marks the poet’s ultimate loss of control of her language.

Thus, Capildeo’s poem is so intriguing as a result of her exploration of communication, which leaves the reader grappling for understanding, just as the poet herself does.