1. Characterisation

In *All that Glisters*, first person narration is used and is significant to our understanding of the story and of the main character, Clare.

**What is first person narration?**

- The reader will see phrases such as “I said, I thought,” rather than “he said, she thought.” Everything is experienced through the eyes of a single character, and all thoughts and observations are limited to that one person. There can be no outside observer. If the narrator does not see or experience an event first-hand, it cannot be a part of the story. All scenes in the story are filtered through this person’s unique perception.
What are the Advantages of Writing in First Person?

- First person makes the narrator close up and personal. The reader can identify with the character and experience their deepest, innermost thoughts and feelings. While third person and omniscient points of view distance the reader, first person allows the reader to enter the world of the narrator, privy to his personal thoughts and feelings.

These advantages are clear when looking at All that Glisters as one of Anne Donovan’s main purposes is to create a warm and positive character that readers can relate to. The first person narrative is used throughout the story allowing the reader to establish a better connection and deeper understanding of Clare. We hear all her thoughts and feelings: “the coldness shot through me till ah felt ma bones shiverin,” and so we are able to sympathise with her plight (troubles) all the more because we are told, and so understand, exactly what she is going through.

Furthermore, Clare’s narrative is told in the Scots dialect, rather than in Standard English. This makes her all the more real and believable because she is speaking a ‘real’ language, rather than the language of books or of the BBC – this means the reader is more likely to be in touch with Clare. The recognisable setting, of the school classroom, added to the recognisable Scots dialect, makes Clare seem real and brings out her charm, leading the reader to having more sympathy for the situation she is in.

Clare’s character is admirable, especially so when the reader considers her young age (she is only in second year in school). She is honest, straightforward, positive, quietly confident, respectful of adults yet knows her own mind and is reflective.

Honest and Straightforward
Clare is straightforward and tells things exactly how they are. Her straightforward honesty shines through when she explains that although she understands the principles behind stealing from large companies because her friend does it and is “aye on at” her to do it, she “canny”:

“...even though ah can see the sense in whit Jimmy’s sayin, well, ma daddy says stealin is stealin, and ah canny go against his word.” Here, she proves not only that she is honest, because she will not go behind her dad’s back and steal when he has told her not to, but also that she loves and respects her father far too much to upset him, even if she disagrees with what he is saying. This pure, honest love for her father tells us that she is a very loving, caring person. She would rather starve herself for a week to make her dad happy than go against his word and steal the glitter pens for the card she is making him: “...all week ah wis starving for ah only hud an apple or a biscuit ma ma gied me fur a playpiece. But on Friday it wis worth it...” The lengths she goes to here are quite extraordinary: a homemade Christmas card is a very small, insignificant thing, yet the effort, determination and love that go into getting the pens for making the card makes this gesture of Clare’s extraordinary. She loves her father very purely and very simply and will do absolutely anything that “cheers him up even a wee bit.” She is content to starve herself for a week for even just a “wavery wee smile.” The word choice of “wavery” tells us that he only smiles at her weakly, so she does not get much thanks for her effort because he is so ill. However, that is enough for her.

**Quietly Confident but Respectful of Adults**

Clare has been brought up to respect the experience and knowledge that her elders have and to respect them as people who have lived longer in the world and know more than she does. She obeys her Aunt Pauline without a fight even though she disagrees and probably feels most strongly about this incident than she has ever felt about anything in her life: “My daddy would have hated tae see me like this but ah didny dare go against ma auntie’s word.” However, although she does not disobey her aunt, she still proves that she knows her own mind and is quietly confident in her own decisions. She also proves herself to be both clever and resourceful. Although she does not wear the red clothes than she initially wanted to, she finds another way - a better way which is more appropriate to her dad’s memory and which will also not upset her aunt:
“Ah covered the dull cloth so it wis bleezin wi light, patterns scattered across it, even put some on ma tights and ma shoes.” By subtly covering herself in glitter, Clare is still able to pay a tribute to her father in the way that she wanted to: she is still going to the funeral in colour and therefore celebrating her dad’s life rather than mourning his death by wearing black, which he would have hated. As well as this, the glitter turns out to be more appropriate to his memory as it links back to the last conversation that they had together, when they appreciated how subtle things can be more beautiful: “Subtle, Daddy? Aye hen, subtle.” She proves that she is confident and knows her own mind by still going ahead with wearing colour to the funeral but shows she is still respectful of her elders by obeying her aunt and not wearing the red. Her resourcefulness and intelligence shines through when she manages to find a way that pleases both her and her Aunt Pauline.

**Clare’s Positivity**

Another feature of Clare’s personality which makes her stand out as such an admirable and extraordinary person is her positivity in the face of such tragedy. Donovan portrays Clare’s positivity through a wonderful collection of colourful, bright images and word choice. As Clare is narrating in the first person, we know the colourful imagery she uses to describe things is how she actually views the world. Words such as “gleamin”, “glisterin” and “glitter” are peppered throughout the story and have connotations of life, positivity and cheerfulness. In this story, glitter represents Clare’s spirit (or her soul) and her enthusiasm for, and celebration of, life itself. The clothes that she wears to her father’s funeral are significant because colour is used to represent life. Clare is devastated when she is told she cannot wear her red clothes that both she and her father had liked. Red is a warm colour and has connotations of love, passion and life (e.g. blood, the ‘life’ which flows through our veins, is red), but the “dull, drab” coat that her aunt wants her to wear has connotations of death, depression and coldness. The rainbow coloured glitter which she smears on her clothes and hair allows her to ‘sparkle’ and represents the ‘spirit’ of life.

Clare’s positivity is so admirable and heartrending that we can’t help but like her. Her entire narrative, even after the death of her father, displays a colourful way of looking at the world:
“The strands of hair stood oot roon ma heid like a halo, glisterin and dancing in the light.” - word choice and personification.

“A sunbeam came through the windae and ah watched the dustspecks dancing in its light.” - word choice and personification.

Clare is remarkable because she is able to look past the sadness and tragedy and see that the world, and life in general, is truly beautiful.

2. Relationship Between Father and Daughter
Despite her dad’s serious illness, he and Clare have a very close and loving relationship. This relationship can be analysed through just a few key scenes:
   a) Clare making him a Christmas card
   b) The conversation about subtlety that they have
   c) Clare’s memory of the ‘ghosties’ game which they played

The Christmas Card

Clare is introduced to us as she is making her dad a Christmas card at school. She spends a long time over it and we understand her to be really pleased that her dad gave her a “wavery wee smile” when he received it. She loves him deeply and wants desperately to do anything to make him happy. The lengths she goes to to obtain the glitter pens shows this, e.g. when she starves herself and saves up for a whole week just to buy them. They are such small things but become very important to Clare as a gesture of her love for her dad.

Another way by which we are led to understand just how deeply Clare feels for her father is through her decision to starve herself so that she can buy glitter pens to make him this card: “…all week ah wis starvin for ah only hud an apple or a biscuit ma ma gied me fur a playpiece. But on Friday it wis worth it…” Donovan characterises Clare as a person who loves her father enough to quite literally starve herself in order to do “sumpn that cheers him up even a wee bit.” A homemade Christmas card is a small thing, yet the determination and love that Clare puts into getting the glitter pens for it makes this a beautiful, huge gesture, even though the card itself is an insignificant thing. Again, Clare’s actions speak louder than words ever could and we are led by the author to feel an admiration, and later a deep sympathy, for this little girl.

The Conversation about ‘Subtlety’

This scene is important because it shows a closeness between Clare and her father. Firstly, Clare is sharing the events of her day with her father, who of course is very sick. She is around twelve years old and one might normally expect a girl of her age to be out playing, but instead she sits by her father and talks to him. She shares with him her simple likes and
dislikes, e.g. drawing with the glitter pens, and her conversation with him and her demonstration of the ‘subtle’ glitter is her way of trying to brighten up his day. This also scene helps to build a picture of the relationship between Clare and her dad because it is a very intimate moment. Here, Clare is teaching her dad. Rather than using words, she uses actions. Holding hands is an intimate, affectionate gesture and Clare touches her dad’s hand to demonstrate how the glitter is more subtle when blotted. Quite literally, her actions speak louder than words. Donovan uses this private, personal moment between them to show the reader how close they are.

The Memory of the ‘Ghosties’ Game

This is a rather touching moment in the story. Clare thinks back to happier times when her dad was not ill and they used to play together. Here, Clare tells the reader about the happy memories she has of her dad, before he got ill. This scene depicts the good relationship that they have, as they play a game, meaning that they obviously enjoy each other’s company. The word choice of ‘kid oan’ suggests a playful, light-heartedness and that they feel totally comfortable with each other. Furthermore, Donovan shows how this is a special game that they share because only they can play it. However, this scene also has a darker meaning, as the asbestos which her father is covered in gives the reader a sense of foreboding (e.g. apprehension): we understand that the asbestos will later kill Clare’s father but Clare and her father, at that stage, do not. It also foreshadows the final scene when Clare covers herself in glitter to honour her father at his funeral.

3. Disassociation Techniques
What is disassociation?

**Dissociation** is an unexpected partial or complete disruption of the normal integration of a person’s conscious or psychological functioning. Dissociation is a mental process that *severs a connection* to a person’s thoughts, memories, feelings, actions, or sense of identity. Dissociation can be a response to trauma, and perhaps *allows the mind to distance itself from experiences* that are too much for the psyche to process at that time.

**Disassociation in the Story**

Clare disassociates from the pain of losing her dad. It is her body’s initial way of coping with his death and the consequent pain that she feels from his loss. Her brain is quite literally blocking the truth, and thus the pain, out so that it can protect itself from the shock.

When Clare is told of his death, her narration tells us how she disassociates from the news:

1. “...the coldness shot through me till ah felt ma bones shiverin and ah heard a voice...”

Firstly, the feeling of loss and shock is described as a “coldness”, which has connotations of numbness. This tells us that Clare literally felt numb from the shock of it all. The word choice of “shot” has connotations of moving quickly and makes the reader think of guns. This suggests that the feeling of shock went through her as fast and with as much impact as a bullet from a gun. Furthermore, this feeling of numbness, or disassociation from the pain of it all, is continued by the phrase “ah heard a voice”. Here, Clare says “a” voice, not “my” voice, which tells us that she has disassociated from her pain. It is as though she is watching somebody else react.

2. “Blue veins criss-crossed the back of her haun. Why were veins blue when blood wis red?”

Clare is shown to be thinking trivial thoughts about veins on people’s hands when the reader would expect her to be so overcome with grief
that all she could think about was her dad’s death. This is Clare’s way of trying to deal with the death: if she does not think about it, then she will not feel any pain.

By using disassociation techniques, Donovan is exploring how death can affect people in very real, very traumatic ways.

3. “The shouts were muffled as if in a fog.”

This simile suggests that a fog makes everything unclear and dark, as Clare’s life must seem like now her father is gone, as he had been everything to her.
4. **Word Choice and Imagery**

Word choice and imagery are extremely important in this story as Clare’s positivity shines through with every description. She describes very ordinary, dull things as bright and colourful and this tells us that she views the world as a wonderful place and sees life as something to be treasured. Her use of word choice and imagery are crucial to this story and her final tribute to her dad is immensely important to our understanding of Clare as a character: she quite literally cannot bear to be ‘dull’ and ‘drab’ and she knows that wearing such colours is stripping her of her personality - something which her father would not want.

1. “The imprint of my finger left sparkly wee trails of light.”

In *All that Glisters*, the writer uses word choice and imagery to show Clare’s spirited personality in spite of all the bad that happens to her: “A sunbeam came through the windae and ah watched the dustspecks dancin in its light.” The word ‘sunbeam’ has connotations of bright light, cheerfulness and warmth. This suggests Clare’s personality is warm and cheerful, even in the face of tragedy. As well as this, the writer uses personification when she describes ‘the dustspecks dancin in its light’. This brings to life something dull - the dustspecks - which are usually associated with the colour grey, and makes the reader think that they are happy and full of life, just like Clare. Because Clare’s descriptions of normal things are so colourful and happy, we warm to her because it shows us that she is positive and warm, despite just having lost her dad.
Remember, when you are writing about word choice and imagery, you **must** use the following strategy to ensure that you analyse correctly. If you don't, you **won't get the marks**!

1. Identify the technique used (simile/metaphor/word choice/personification)
2. If it is a comparison (e.g. simile/metaphor/personification), then say what two things are being compared.
3. Say what the connotations of the image/word are (e.g. what it makes you think of)
4. Explain why you think the writer has chosen to use the image (e.g. to show Clare's relentless positivity).

**For Practice**

Practice explaining word choice and imagery by using the writing frames below:

2. “…ah saw this dull drab figure, skin aw peely-wally.”

The word ‘drab’ has connotations of...

...and contrasts with the warm red colour that Clare wants to wear.
The word ‘peely-wally’ has connotations of...

These words are effective because they show how Clare feels (explain how she feels wearing the dull clothes)...

3. “It was like the difference between a Christmas tree skinklin wi fairy lights and wan lyin deid an daurk in a corner.”

The word ‘skinklin’ has connotations of....

This suggests Clare’s personality is...

4. “The tears kept comin and comin till ah felt ah wis squeezed dry and would never be able to shed anither tear.”

The metaphor...

compares...to...(say what two things are being compared)

It is effective because...

5. “The strands of hair stood oot roon ma heid like a halo, glistirin and dancin in the light.”

6. “Ah covered the dull cloth so it wis bleezin wi light, patterns scattered across it, even pit some on ma tights and ma shoes.”

7. “...the glitter jist brought everythin tae life, gleamin and glisterin agin the flat cardboard.”

8. “The imprint of ma finger left sparkly wee trails a light.”
9. “Ah pressed ma fingers aw ower the bedclothes so they gleamed in the light fae the streetlamps outside, then ah fell intae a deep glistery sleep.”

10. “The only bit of me that had any life aboot it wis ma eyes fur the tears had washed them clean and clear.”

5. **Symbolism**

*Hauns*

In this short story hands, or ‘hauns’, are very important; they represent love and affection, and this is a story which is very much about both. Clare’s last conversation with her father is the conversation about subtlety, where she uses her finger to show her dad the meaning of the word. This is a lovely moment. By making Clare demonstrate this with her hands, Donovan is showing a physical closeness which depicts the intimacy of the relationship between the two. Clare uses actions rather than words and these actions quite literally speak louder than words.
Furthermore, when she is told of her dad’s death, Clare notices that her mum’s hands and “how loose [the wedding ring] wis on her finger. No long ago it wis that tight she couldny get it aff.” This tells us how stressful and traumatic her dad’s illness has been for her mum: she has been worrying so much about it she has lost a lot of weight.

Finally, the imprint of glitter leaves on her father’s hand suggests intimations of death reflected in this scene: Clare will soon only be left with an ‘imprint’ of her father; she is left with a memory of him.

*Stains*

When she sits with her father, Clare notices that he looks away from her and “stares at a patch on the downie cover where there’s a coffee stain that ma ma canny wash oot.” This stain is important as it represents her father’s illness - a stain which cannot wash out. He has been ‘stained’ by the asbestos and the effect of this is that it will never go away. He will never recover; the stain (illness) will never be washed away.

6. **Past Paper Questions for Practice**

Choose a novel or a short story in which a character is in conflict with his or her friends or relatives or society.
Show how the conflict arises and what effect it has on the character’s fate in the novel or short story as a whole.

Choose a novel or short story which has a turning point or moment of realisation for at least one of the characters.
Briefly describe what has led up to the turning point or moment. Go on to show what impact this has on the character(s) and how it affects the outcome of the novel or story.

Choose a novel or short story in which you feel sympathy with one of the main characters because of the difficulties or injustice or hardships she or he has to face.
Describe the problems the character faces and show by what means you are made to feel
sympathy for her or him.

Choose a novel or short story which has a striking opening. Show how the opening is effective in introducing the character(s) and/or the atmosphere and/or the setting.

7. Exemplar Essay

All that Glisters, by Anne Donovan, is a short story which deals with the important human issue of death. Over the course of the story Donovan explores how the main character, Clare, copes with the death of her father.

Donovan builds up to exploring this issue by depicting the close relationship between Clare and her father so that she can later examine the impact that his death has on Clare. Donovan builds a picture of this loving relationship through the key scene in which Clare and her father discuss the meaning of ‘subtlety’:

“What did she mean, subtle, hen? How wis it subtle?
...Ah took his haun in mines and turnt it roon so his palm faced upward...the imprint of ma finger left sparkly wee trails a light...
...Aye, hen, Subtle.”

This scene helps to build a picture of the relationship between Clare and her dad because it is a very intimate moment. Here, Clare is teaching her dad. Rather than using words, she uses actions. Holding hands is an intimate, affectionate gesture and Clare touches her dad’s hand to demonstrate how the glitter is more subtle when blotted. Quite literally, her actions speak louder than words. Donovan uses this private, personal moment between them to show the reader how close they are. Showing this closeness between them means that when Clare’s father eventually dies, the reader will understand more fully the impact his death has on her.

When Clare’s father dies from asbestosis, Donovan uses disassociation techniques to portray the utter shock and devastation that Clare feels on learning about his death. When her mum tells her the news, she - without meaning to - disassociates from her own shock: “...but when she said the words the coldness shot through me till ah felt ma bones shiverin and ah heard a voice, far away in anither room, shoutin but the shouts were muffled as if in a fog, and the voice wis shoutin naw, naw, naw!” Firstly, the feeling of loss and shock is described as a “coldness”, which has connotations of numbness. This tells us that Clare literally felt numb from the shock of it all. The word choice of “shot” has connotations of moving quickly and makes the reader think of guns. This suggests that the feeling of shock went through her as fast and with as much impact as a bullet from a gun. Furthermore, this feeling of numbness, or disassociation from the pain of it all, is continued by the phrase “ah heard a voice”. Here,
Clare says “a” voice, not “my” voice, which tells us that she has disassociated from her pain. It is almost like it is happening to somebody else as she has so little control over herself. Therefore, Donovan explores the impact of death on Clare by showing how the sheer shock of the news of her father’s death causes her to disassociate from her own pain, as it is almost too much for her to take.

Finally, Donovan explores how Clare comes to terms with the death of her father by paying her own personal tribute to him at his funeral in a mature and moving way. She tells us that she “wanted tae dae sumpn fur him” and so for the funeral she dresses all in red, an outfit which he had liked: “a red skirt, zip up jaicket wi red tights tae match.” The colour red has connotations of passion and of love and Clare shows here that she has both of these qualities and wants to please him by wearing the clothes that he liked. This is her way of dealing with his death and saying goodbye. When she is told to dress in “dull, drab” clothes, she finds a way of paying her own personal tribute to her dad without upsetting her aunt: “The strands of ma hair stood oot roon ma heid like a halo, glisterin and dancin in the light.” By covering her hair in the glitter, Clare is achieving a more subtle effect, something which both she and her dad understand to be more beautiful, so it makes sense for this to be her final goodbye to him. The personification of the glitter suggests happiness and a sense of life, rather than a sense of loss and depression, which tells us that this final tribute to her dad has allowed Clare to come to terms with and cope with his death. She is celebrating his life rather than mourning his death.

In conclusion, Donovan is successful in exploring the issue of death by firstly building a sense of the strength of the relationship between Clare and her dad. She then goes on to explore the impact of his death on Clare by using disassociation techniques and later shows how Clare copes with his death and moves on by paying her own, personal, last respects to him.

Word Count: 811