

AQA English GCSE

Poetry: Worlds and Lives

Homing – *Liz Berry*

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HOMING

Liz Berry

Brief Summary

Homing explores a speaker reflecting on how someone (likely a parent or older relative) has hidden or **suppressed** their **regional accent** over time. The poem shows how the accent was shaped by shame, punishment, and pressure to “speak properly”, but it still escapes in private moments. After the person’s death, the speaker clears their house and longs to reclaim that lost voice and **dialect**. The poem suggests accent is more than pronunciation: it represents identity, class, community, and home, and the speaker wants to carry it forward as part of their **inheritance**.



Synopsis

- The poem addresses someone who has spent many years hiding their **regional accent** and trying to speak in a more “proper” way.
- It explains that this change happened because of **pressure** at school and in society, where the accent was treated as something to correct or punish.
- The **accent** is remembered as occasionally slipping out in private or casual moments, especially when speaking to family or strangers.
- The poem shows affection for the accent and the way it sounded, presenting it as an important part of identity.
- After the person dies, their house is cleared out and there is a strong desire to recover the lost accent and **dialect** words.
- The speaker imagines the hidden voice being released after years of **suppression**.
- The accent is connected to **working-class** roots and the industrial place the person came from.
- It ends with a desire to carry the accent forward by speaking it again to keep it alive.



Context

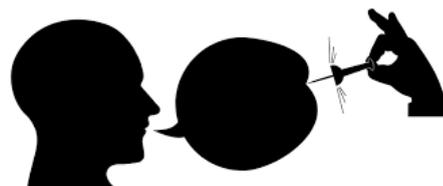
Liz Berry and the Black Country

Liz Berry is a poet from the Black Country in the West Midlands, a region shaped by heavy industry such as coal mining, iron, steel and brick-making. The area’s name is linked to the soot and smoke produced by factories during the **Industrial Revolution**, and its communities developed a **distinctive local dialect** and **accent**. Berry’s poetry often draws on this setting and language, **preserving** the sound and identity of the region as part of its cultural heritage.



Accent stigma and social class in Britain

Regional accents in Britain have often been judged through a **class lens**, with “strong” working-class accents **stereotyped** as rough, uneducated, or less professional. In contrast, **Standard English** and **Received Pronunciation** became associated with authority, education and higher social status. This has meant many people have felt pressure to change their speech to avoid being judged, especially in school or work environments.



Elocution, conformity, and “correct” speech

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, **elocution** lessons were used in British education to train children to speak in a more standardised way. This reflects wider **social expectations** that “proper” speech should replace **dialect**, treating regional language as something to correct rather than value. Berry’s poem is rooted in this cultural history of **linguistic conformity**, where accent becomes closely tied to belonging, identity, and the fear of standing out.

The title “Homing”

Suggests a return to “home”, but not just as a physical place. It hints that home can be something carried through voice, accent, and identity, especially when someone has been pressured to change how they speak.

“Homing” has connotations of instinct and direction, like an animal finding its way back. This implies the accent is natural and deeply rooted, and that reclaiming it is not forced or artificial, but a return to something original and true.

Homing

The title also implies something has been lost or suppressed and is now being recovered. It prepares the reader for the idea that the poem will explore the tension between fitting in and holding onto heritage, and that “home” may be emotional, cultural, and generational rather than simply a building.

Perspective and Tone

Homing is voiced in the **first person**, which makes it feel personal and intimate, like the speaker is remembering someone they loved while sorting through what they left behind. The poem is addressed directly to “**you**”, so it reads almost like a private message to the person who hid their accent for years. This **direct address** creates closeness, but it also highlights



what has been missing, because the voice and **dialect** have been **suppressed** and kept quiet for so long.

The tone is emotionally layered. There is bitterness and **tension** in the way the poem recalls school pressure and punishment, suggesting the accent was treated as something that needed to be controlled. This quickly **shifts** into affection and admiration, as the speaker listens for the accent escaping in small moments and describes it with warmth. Once the poem moves into the moment of clearing the house, the tone sharpens into longing and determination, as the speaker tries to **recover** a voice that was suppressed for most of a lifetime. By the end, it feels proud and **defiant**, as the speaker imagines the accent being spoken openly again, turning something once hidden into a form of **inheritance**.



Homing

The accent is treated like something hidden away, suggesting shame and suppression. Domestic imagery creates the sense of identity being privately stored, almost like a secret.

Elocution training reflects social pressure to conform to “proper” speech. The repeated phrase sounds childlike but also mechanical, suggesting forced correction through drilling.

Personification suggests the accent is still alive and can't be fully controlled. Sound imagery makes it feel raw and natural, and the family context suggests safety and comfort.

The house-clearing moment implies loss and grief without stating it directly. “Only thing” shows the voice is valued more than physical belongings, making it an inheritance. The forced opening suggests urgency, frustration, and determination to reclaim what was buried.

Language is made physical and metallic suggesting strength. Industrial imagery connects accent to working-class roots and labour. The sensory detail makes speech feel textured and real. It subverts disgust, turning coal into something meaningful. Enjambment creates a flowing feel as though the accent cannot be contained now it has been released.

For years you kept your accent

in a box beneath the bed,

the lock rusted shut by hours of elocution

how now brown cow

the teacher's ruler across your legs.

We heard it escape sometimes,

a guttural uh on the phone to your sister,

soft or blart to a taxi driver

unpacking your bags from his boot.

I loved its thick drawl, g's that rang.

Clearing your house, the only thing

I wanted was that box, jemmied open

to let years of lost words spill out –

bibble, fittle, tay, wum,

vowels ferrous as nails, consonants

you could lick the coal from.

I wanted to swallow them all: the pits,

railways, factories thunking and clanging

The idea of containment makes the voice feel controlled rather than natural.

The locked box suggests the accent has been sealed for so long it is difficult to recover. Rust implies time passing and long-term damage, not a temporary change.

Violent imagery shows language being controlled and shows institutional power in schools – how class prejudice can be enforced physically.

Dialect words act as proof of regional identity and belonging. The ordinary setting suggests the accent returns when speech is relaxed and unperformed.

The speaker's affectionate tone challenges the idea the accent is something to be ashamed of. Sound imagery makes the voice seem rich and powerful, like it deserves to be heard.

The idea of “lost words” suggests language can disappear through pressure and shame. Releasing them implies recovery, like something returning after years of silence.

The list celebrates dialect, making it sound playful, distinctive, and alive.

Desire to “swallow” suggests the speaker wants to absorb heritage completely, making it part of them. The industrial nouns show the accent carries the history of place inside it. Onomatopoeia recreates the soundscape of labour, making the past loud and alive. The accumulation creates intensity, as if the speaker is overwhelmed by what the accent contains.



Night work suggests hardship, endurance, and working-class sacrifice.

Creation imagery suggests the speaker is actively rebuilding what was suppressed.

The blacksmith metaphor links language to craftsmanship, tradition, and industry.

Making it “in my mouth” shows inheritance is physical and personal, not just remembered.

The ending feels tender and hopeful, as if the voice is finally free.

the night shift, the red brick
back-to-back you were born in.

I wanted to forge your voice
in my mouth, a blacksmith’s furnace;

shout it from the roofs,
send your words, like pigeons,
fluttering for home.

Housing detail reinforces poverty and restricted opportunity. The accent becomes inseparable from environment, showing identity shaped by place

The blacksmith metaphor links language to craftsmanship, tradition, and industry.

Making it “in my mouth” shows inheritance is physical and personal, not just remembered.

The simile suggests instinctive return, reinforcing the idea of home as natural belonging. Movement imagery makes the dialect feel alive, travelling forward rather than disappearing.

Structure

Free verse

- The poem is written in **free verse**, with no regular **rhyme scheme** or **metre**, which creates a natural, speech-like voice that suits a poem about accent and identity.
- This makes the opening feel conversational and personal, especially through **direct address** in “**you kept your accent**”, as if the speaker is speaking privately to someone rather than performing for an audience.

Shift from past to present

- The poem begins in the past with “**For years**”, then **shifts** into the present with “**Clearing your house**”, structuring the poem as a movement from memory into a present moment of loss and inheritance.
- This **time shift** makes the poem feel like it is uncovering something buried, as the past is brought into the speaker’s present.

Stanza progression

- Each **stanza** marks a new stage in the story: suppression through “**hours of elocution**”, brief moments of the accent slipping out in everyday life, and then the speaker trying to reclaim it after death.
- The final stanza becomes more active and outward, shown through the **structural shift** into strong verbs like “**forge**” and “**shout**”, making the ending feel like release rather than silence.



Enjambment

- **Enjambment** keeps the poem moving forward, mirroring how memories and voice begin to spill out once they return, for example **“Clearing your house, the only thing / I wanted”**, which creates **momentum** and urgency.
- Berry also uses enjambment to **emphasise** key sounds, such as isolating **“consonants”** at the end of a line so the reader pauses and focuses on the physical texture of language before the sentence continues.

Language and Imagery

Containment and concealment imagery

Berry presents the accent as something hidden and controlled through the **metaphor** of **“your accent / in a box beneath the bed”**. This makes the voice seem like an object that can be stored away, suggesting suppression and secrecy rather than natural expression. The image becomes even more powerful through **“the lock rusted shut”**, which implies the accent has been sealed for so long that recovery is difficult, as if time itself has damaged access to that identity.

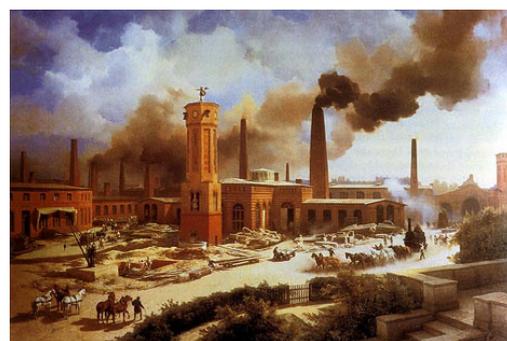


Education

The poem links accent loss to **institutional pressure** through the references to **“hours of elocution”** and the repeated phrase **“how now brown cow”**. The **childish rhythm** of the phrase reflects classroom drilling, while its **repetition** suggests speech is being trained into conformity. This is made more disturbing through the violent detail of **“the teacher’s ruler across your legs”**, where physical punishment becomes a **symbol** of how working-class voices are disciplined and silenced.

Dialect

Berry celebrates **dialect** as vivid and physical, using **sound imagery** and **listing** to bring the accent alive. The description of **“a guttural uh”** makes the voice feel raw and authentic, while **“thick drawl, g’s that rang”** presents it as musical and powerful rather than something to hide. The list **“bibble, fittle, tay, wum”** creates a **playful rhythm** and highlights how language carries culture through sound. At the same time, the accent is tied to industrial heritage through **tactile imagery**: **“vowels ferrous as nails”** suggests strength and endurance, while **“consonants / you could lick the coal from”** connects speech to soot and labour, turning industry into something intimate. The **onomatopoeic** **“factories thinking and clanging”** reinforces the idea that the accent contains the history and noise of working life.



Reclaiming voice

In the final section, Berry presents the accent as something the speaker wants to take on and carry forward. The **metaphor** in “*forge your voice / in my mouth*” suggests the voice can be rebuilt and re-made, turning speech into something crafted and powerful rather than corrected or erased. The image of “*a blacksmith’s furnace*” reinforces this, linking the accent to strength, labour, and industrial heritage. The desire to “*shout it from the roofs*” shows a **shift** from silence to confidence, as if the speaker is undoing years of suppression by making the voice public. Berry ends with the **simile** “*like pigeons*”, suggesting the words have an instinct to return home, and “*fluttering for home*” creates a final sense of movement and release, as though the accent is finally being allowed to belong openly again.

Themes

Identity and belonging

The poem presents accent as a deep marker of identity, suggesting voice carries where someone is from and who they are. “Home” becomes more than a location, because it exists in **pronunciation**, vocabulary, and the sound of everyday speech. The poem suggests losing an accent can feel like losing part of the self.



Class judgement and conformity

A key theme is the way society pressures people to change themselves in order to be accepted. The poem links “proper” speech to **authority** and respectability, implying that **working-class** accents are often treated as something to fix. This creates a tension between **conforming** and staying true to your background.

Heritage

The poem explores inheritance through language, showing that family history can be carried in words and sounds, not just in objects or stories. **Dialect** becomes a form of cultural memory, holding traces of the past, community, and upbringing. It also suggests that voice can preserve someone’s presence after they are gone, so **reclaiming** an **accent** becomes a way of keeping a loved one close.



Comparisons

pot - Shamshad Khan

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both poems explore how identity can be damaged when parts of culture are hidden, removed, or treated as unacceptable. In <i>Homing</i>, the accent is suppressed through “hours of elocution”, while in <i>pot</i> the speaker only knows fragments of the past, shown through “I know half of the story”, suggesting cultural loss and incomplete heritage. Both poets present heritage as something physical and sensory, not just historical. <i>Homing</i> makes dialect feel tangible through “vowels ferrous as nails”, while <i>pot</i> restores the object’s original life through touch and use, shown in “warm grain poured inside”. Both poems show a desire to reclaim what has been silenced. <i>Homing</i> shows the speaker wanting to recover “lost words,” while <i>pot</i> shows the speaker wanting to break barriers through “if I could shatter this glass”, suggesting frustration with separation from origins.
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>pot</i> ends in uncertainty and silence, shown through the repeated unanswered questions “pot?”, whereas <i>Homing</i> ends with a sense of release and return, with words “fluttering for home”. <i>pot</i> focuses on an artefact to explore displacement indirectly, while <i>Homing</i> focuses on voice and accent, making identity feel personal and embodied rather than object-based. <i>pot</i> is more openly critical of power and ownership, while <i>Homing</i> focuses more on social pressure and class judgement within Britain, especially through school and “proper” speech.

A Portable Paradise – Roger Robinson

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both poems show people protecting something precious in response to pressure from the outside world. In <i>Homing</i>, the accent is hidden away for years, while in <i>A Portable Paradise</i> the speaker is taught to keep paradise safe because “they can’t steal it”, showing how identity and comfort can feel under threat. <i>Homing</i> shows voice as a form of legacy, while <i>A Portable Paradise</i> links paradise directly to ancestry through “I’m speaking of my grandmother”. Both poems suggest that survival depends on carrying something internal that the world cannot easily destroy. In <i>Homing</i>, this is dialect and voice, and in <i>A Portable Paradise</i> it is imagination and memory, shown through the instruction to keep it “on my person”.
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Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Homing</i> focuses on recovering something that has been suppressed and buried over time, while <i>A Portable Paradise</i> focuses on actively building a refuge in the present, using imperatives like “get yourself to an empty room”. • <i>Homing</i> is rooted in one specific place and dialect, while <i>A Portable Paradise</i> suggests paradise can be carried anywhere, making home portable rather than fixed. • Berry’s poem moves from silence to expression, while Robinson’s poem is structured more like advice, guiding the reader towards resilience and hope.
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A Wider View – Seni Seneviratne

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both poems explore connection across generations, showing how the present is shaped by inherited history. In <i>Homing</i>, the speaker wants to carry a relative’s voice forward, while <i>A Wider View</i> ends with generational continuity in “the curve of past and future generations”. • Both poems link identity to working-class life and industrial environments. <i>Homing</i> evokes pits and factories through “thunking and clanging”, while <i>A Wider View</i> presents industrial hardship through “twelve hours combing flax” and the oppressive “din of engines”.” • Both poems show imagination as a form of escape and survival. In <i>Homing</i>, the speaker imagines rebuilding the voice, while <i>A Wider View</i> shows the ancestor replacing industrial noise with “imagined peals of ringing bells”.
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A Wider View</i> uses the city as a bridge between generations, showing identity as something rooted in shared streets and physical space. The speaker retraces the same environment their ancestor once walked through, so the poem suggests the past still exists within the modern world. <i>Homing</i>, however, is more tightly centred on voice, presenting accent as the key symbol of identity and inheritance, meaning “home” is carried through language rather than landscape. • The tone of <i>A Wider View</i> is calm and meditative, as the speaker gently imagines the ancestor’s life and finds meaning through connection and perspective. Even the industrial hardship is filtered through reflection, ending in continuity and quiet admiration. In contrast, <i>Homing</i> feels more emotionally intense because it confronts active suppression and loss, especially through memories of school pressure and punishment, and the speaker’s determination to recover what was hidden.



- Structurally, *A Wider View* ends in stillness and shared timelessness, creating a peaceful sense of connection across time. *Homing* ends in outward motion and release, imagining the **dialect** being sent back into the world, with “**fluttering for home**” suggesting return and freedom.

