Analyse how the poet uses language to convey ideas about human behaviour.

**Child Development**

Title’s implication is that chn learn and develop self-control – but poem reveals a certain satisfaction in childish name calling – if kept hidden.

Human development – reference to Darwin’s theory of evolution

As sure as prehistoric fish grew legs
and sauntered off the beaches into forests
working up some irregular verbs for their
first conversation, so three-year-old children
enter the phase of name-calling.

Every day a new one arrives and is added
to the repertoire. You Dumb Goopyhead,
You Big Sewerface, You Poop-on-the-Floor
(a kind of Navaho ring to that one)
they yell from knee level, their little mugs
flushed with challenge.
Nothing Samuel Johnson would bother tossing out
in a pub, but then the toddlers are not trying
to devastate some fatuous Enlightenment hack.

They are just tormenting their fellow squirts
or going after the attention of the giants
way up there with their cocktails and bad breath
talking baritone nonsense to other giants,
waiting to call them names after thanking
them for the lovely party and hearing the door close.

The mature save their hothead invective
for things: an errant hammer, tire chains,
or receding trains missed by seconds,
though they know in their adult hearts,
even as they threaten to banish Timmy to bed
for his appalling behavior,
that their bosses are Big Fatty Stupids,
their wives are Dopey Dopeheads
and that they themselves are Mr. Sillypants.

Deep voices imply maturity – oxymoron when combined with nonsense; ‘giants’ – childish view of adults matches their behaviour.

Notable English writer and poet of the 16th century.

Pretending to bestow a tone of analysis – gentle mocking

Complex description for the evolution of language contrasts with base use of words by chn

Informal diction – suggests don’t take this too seriously

Vocab is advanced (unlike name calling)

Names are more silly than mean – poking fun – harmless when kept to themselves ‘in their adult hearts’. Contrasts with strong vocabulary

Repetition of name calling – underlines that everyone is guilty of it, even if we only think it. Implies a double standard. It is not something we grow out of.

Billy Collins

Human behaviour = sometimes grown-ups behave like chn, despite knowing better; chn learn from copying adults; swearing and name calling as a form of emotional expression; for all our progress, not a lot has changed in this area.

The satisfaction derived from an impulsive outburst – does not harm ‘things’.

Awareness of double standards – irony perhaps

Language – diction – vocab choices for contrast; informality for a colloquial tone; reference to famous early writer; structure – still name calling at the end – began with the first conversations.