

Love and Relationships

AQA Poetry Anthology

GCSE Poetry
Revision Guide

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Welcome to our GCSE Poetry Revision Guide

This booklet includes notes on every poem in the AQA Love and Relationships cluster for GCSE English Literature along with prompt questions to help you to revise each poem.

We know that learning all of the anthology poems is never an easy task and this booklet is here to help you. This resource should lead you to a better understanding of each poem, its context and the key language and structural elements that might be discussed in an exam.

The poems are in the same order that you'll find in the Love and Relationships part of the anthology published by AQA. The revision notes for each poem include general information, some contextual thoughts, analysis of structure and tone and then an in-depth look at the language and ideas of the poem. The revision questions should help you to explore the poem further and practice writing effective exam answers.

You can use this GCSE Poetry Revision Guide in a number of ways. If you have missed the important analysis lessons on key poems, you can create or supplement your own analysis with these notes. If you find certain poems difficult, you might concentrate on reading the overviews of those poems only for revision. If you want a more comprehensive revision task, you could read all 16 poetry overviews and answer the revision questions as you go. When you first begin practicing full exam questions you could use these notes for reference to help to form a good, solid analysis.

We know that studying poetry can seem very daunting, so we hope that you will find this GCSE Poetry Revision Guide a useful and valuable resource for exam preparation.

When We Two Parted

by Lord Byron

Summary

When We Two Parted is a poem by the English Romantic poet, Lord Byron. Lord Byron was an English aristocrat who wrote about love, romance and great adventure in his poems. His most famous creation is probably Childe Harold from 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage', the poem that made him instantly famous. In it, he records the travelling adventures and misadventures of Harold, who is loosely based upon himself. Harold is melancholy, passionate and damaged. He is the first of many Byronic heroes created by the poet.

When We Two Parted expresses the love, grief and anger of Byron at his separation from his lover. The lover in question here is believed to be Lady Frances Webster with whom he had a secret relationship. Though married, Lady Webster had a number of affairs with prominent men including Byron and the Duke of Wellington. Byron may have penned this poem after hearing about her affair with the Duke.

Title

The title **When We Two Parted** reflects the poem's structure. **It tells us that this is a poem in the first person in which the narrator speaks not to us, the readers, but directly to his lover.** It shows us that the event, the parting, was in the past and that the poet is reflecting on events from some point in the future. **The separation is termed a 'parting' which might be seen as a wish – a parting normally infers that there will be chance of a reunion.** The word is not so final as 'farewell' for instance.

Structure

The poem takes a very measured and stately pace. **It is composed of four 8-line stanzas which follow a strict ABAB rhyme scheme.** Line length is occasionally altered for effect, as in the line 'Pale grew thy cheek and cold'.

The poet speaks directly to his lover, asking rhetorical questions about the nature of his love for her and her indifference to him. He speaks variedly of the past, the present and the future, showing that he is still not over the separation. He speaks of feeling the same grief now and in the future as he did when the parting occurred and in the last lines he restates the ideas of the first stanza, saying that he would still greet her 'with silence and tears' as though no time at all had passed. **Repetition of the word 'long' on line 23 enhances the sense of the word as the poet explains how 'long' he 'shall rue' the relationship** (whether simply its demise or the entire thing is not clear).

Ideas and Language

The poem deals with feelings of loss and anger. The poet speaks from a point 'after long years' from the time in which the events detailed in the poem took place. **He reflects on the way he felt then and the way he feels at the time of the writing of the poem** – it seems things have not changed for him, he feels the loss as deeply as when it first occurred.

The language is quintessentially that of loss and grief. **He relates the idea of a failed relationship to that of a death using words like 'knell' to draw the language of the grave into the poem.** He talks about his lover ('Pale grew thy cheek and cold,/ Colder thy kiss') as though she were already dead, reflecting the idea that a failed relationship should

be treated like a death. It is unlikely that the two will see one another again and the separation is felt like the separation of dying. **The use of the word 'sever' brings an element of violence into the actions that separated the lovers, as though the parting was physically damaging.** This mirrors the idea of the 'broken-hearted'.

The relationship was a secret one and Byron talks of this and the required silence of his grief: 'In silence I grieve'. Because no one knew of their relationship there is no one to help him mourn her loss. Although their relationship was secret it appears that she has had other, not so discrete, affairs. He refers to her 'vows' being broken and we do not know whether he refers to her original marriage vows or the vows and promises she made to him as her lover. **'Light is thy fame' reflects the fact that she is shamed and found out – people are aware of her affairs and 'they name thee' before Byron.** He is not only mourning her loss as a lover but having to listen to the malicious gossip about her. Though their relationship was private he still has a 'share in its (her name's) shame' inferring that he may feel responsible, in part, for the position she finds herself in. **The 'sh' in 'share' and 'shame' remind us of the secret of the relationship, since the 'sh' sounds like the hushing of a whispered conversation.**

While he mourns the loss of his lover, Byron is also angry with her. **He talks about their parting being 'Half broken-hearted', perhaps telling the lover that she was not as in love with him as he was with her and so could not lose her heart as he lost his.** He says 'long, long shall I rue thee' showing that some parts of the relationship will be regretted by him forever. It may be that he regrets the end of the relationship, her attitude towards him or even the starting of the relationship in the first place. We are left to wonder how far his anger and sadness go. **He accuses his lover of deception ('Thy spirit deceive')**

and forgetfulness ('thy heart could forget') while he is the exemplar of a broken-hearted man. He reflects at the end that he would greet his lover in the same way now as when they first separated: 'with silence and tears'. Perhaps he would like her to see exactly how much she managed to hurt him.

When We Two Parted

Expert Exam Prep

Read **When We Two Parted** by Lord Byron, in AQA's Love and Relationship cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. Whose point of view is the poem from? **AO1**
2. What is implied by 'half broken-hearted'? **AO1, AO2**
3. Who were the Romantics? **AO3**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. What rhyme scheme do we see in the poem? What is the effect of it? **AO2**
6. Which words or phrases in the poem relate to death? **AO1, AO2**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective in a poem about the end of a relationship. **AO2**
8. Why does the poet shift constantly between the past, present and future in the poem? **AO2**
9. There is an implication that the relationship was a secret one. What do you know about the background to the poet and who he wrote it for? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the loss of a relationship in **When We Two Parted** and one other poem from the Love and Relationship cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

When answering the Paper 2 poetry question, you will be tested on the following Assessment Objectives:

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Neutral Tones

by Thomas Hardy

Summary

Neutral Tones was written in 1867 but published years later in 1898. Thomas Hardy was a Dorset born poet who struggled with an unhappy marriage for many years. In this poem, the narrator speaks of a memory of a winter's day when he and his lover stood by a pond. **It is clear that the relationship was on shaky ground and, in the last stanza, it becomes clear that the narrator learned bleak lessons about love from the event.** Much of Hardy's poetry and fiction is regarded as pessimistic in tone.

Title

The poem represents troubled romantic relationships. It refers to memories from the past. **The title Neutral Tones implies a lack of deeper feelings – everything is neutral.** Set in winter, the season reflects the coldness of the couple. The neutrality extends beyond the feelings of the couple on this particular day and refers also to Hardy's feelings about love and relationships in general.

Structure

The poet addresses his former lover. **The poem begins and ends with the image by the pond but, while the first three stanzas discuss a specific event, the final stanza deals with his feelings in the years since the experience by the pond.** This makes the poem a more general poem about negative experiences of love. The final two lines return the poet to the scene by the pond creating a cyclical feel to the poem. This reminds us that this type of relationship breakdown may have

occurred again and again for the poet throughout his life.

The rhyme scheme is an unusual one. **The first and last lines of each stanza rhyme, in the form ABBA.** This may show the nature of relationships – sometimes couples can be close (the BB rhyme) and at other times they are separated by feelings or space (the AA rhymes). **The stanzas are further enhanced by the pause and indentation of the final line of each stanza.**

Ideas and Language

The neutrality of the poem reflects the lack of deep feelings between the pair in the poem. This is enhanced by the 'grey' nature of the environment. It is winter, reflecting the coldness of the couple towards one another. **Even the 'sun was white' as though bleached of colour, life and warmth.** This is reflected in the lover's smile, described as the 'deadest thing'. Eyes, normally a feature relished and praised in love poems, are here used to reflect the feeling of misunderstanding and distance between the lovers.

Despite the poem maintaining a 'neutral' tone throughout, the poet still has strong emotions of anger. The pain and bitterness he sometimes feels about love is clear from phrases like 'wrings with wrong' and 'God-curst' and 'chidden of God'. **The tone is bitter throughout as the poet resents his lover and the 'keen lessons' that love has taught him over the years.**

The theme of romantic love's end is also found in **When We Two Parted** and the idea of troubled relationships is found in **Winter Swans**. Memories are also explored in **Follower**, **Eden Rock** and **Walking Away**.

Neutral Tones

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Neutral Tones** by Thomas Hardy, in AQA's Love and Relationships cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What is implied by the title of the poem? **AO1, AO2**
2. How would you describe the speaker's tone? **AO1**
3. What is pathetic fallacy? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. In what ways is this an unconventional love poem? **AO1, AO2**
6. Identify three words or phrases which evoke nature. **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words or phrases you picked in the last question are effective. **AO2**
8. How does the form and structure of the poem enhance its meaning? **AO2**
9. How might the poem be reflective of its author's life and times? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets explore memories in **Neutral Tones** and one other poem from the Love and Relationships cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

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AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Winter Swans

by Owen Sheers

Context

Winter Swans is a poem by Welsh poet Owen Sheers. Sheers is not just a poet, he is a playwright, journalist, novelist and TV presenter as well. His work is characterised by being written in easy to understand English but used in a way which makes it heavy with meaning.

Winter Swans is a poem rooted in nature and explores the renewal of love between two people. Nature plays a role in this renewal which is a link back to the poets of the Romantic era.

Structure and Form

The poem has no regular or controlled structure – there is no rhyme and no regular rhythm. In fact, you could argue that it is written more like prose than a poem and the sentences would work perfectly well as prose in some respects. However, it is the arrangement of the lines in threes and finally a couplet which give the poem its poetic structure and controls the sense of it.

Stanza two begins with 'until' and this signals that the status quo of the first two is coming to an end – this is the start of the turning point where the couple see the swans and seem to reaffirm their relationship. If this were prose, 'until' would be hidden in the middle of a sentence but because this is poetry, the poet is able to make 'until' the beginning of a line and draw attention to it.

The break in structure with the final two lines give the poem a sense of closure and a sense that the whole poem led to this point.

Language

Stanzas one and two - the personification of the clouds and earth first of all link the sky and the ground, as if they are both characters in the scene. **It could also suggest that nature and people are all part of the same sphere and are also linked.**

Stanzas three and four - the poet uses an effective description of movement when he talks about the swans 'rolling weights' – this shows the smooth and elegant movement of the swans and also suggests an element of skill. **The word 'unison' shows that the swans move as one and this is reinforced later with the metaphorical 'halving' of the swans.**

The iceberg image, as well as obviously referring to the colour of the swans, adds to the environmental coldness, as this is winter and these are 'winter swans'.

The final simile comparing the swans to boats in stormy conditions has connotations of the swans being steady and able to withstand any disruption – perhaps because they are together and that keeps them strong.

Stanzas four and five - the word 'porcelain' gives the impression that the swans' bodies are now very still even though they are moving away – possibly because the water hides their paddling feet – this is a common image that swans look serene but all the while are paddling madly beneath the surface. 'Stilling' is a deliberate choice of a verb we don't use very often. The 'ing' ending gives a feeling of movement on the water even as it settles after the swans have finished diving. **'Slow-stepping' lends rhythm to this part of the poem as if echoing the footsteps of the two people in the scene.** The 'shingle and sand' nouns continue this rhythm and almost the sound of shoes on the soft

surface. **The hands that 'swim' is significant – it links the people in the poem to the swans directly as it is as if both are in water.** Water is also sometimes symbolic of love, so the hands could 'swim' through the love that is between the couple. It symbolises the closing of the distance that was between them earlier in the poem 'silent and apart'.

Stanza seven - the word 'folded' suggests that the hands are almost entwined in each other and are close together.

The hands being compared to a 'pair of wings' helps the reader to see that the two people have now come together and like the swans, seem like two halves of one whole. **The fact that the 'wings' have been flying, but have now settled suggests that there may have been a problem in the relationship (alluded to earlier when the distance between them is mentioned) which is now over and the couple are truly together again.**

It is a neat conclusion to the poem and gives it a sense of completeness, which maybe the couple also feel now that they have come back together.

Themes

There are several themes in the poem: love/relationships, nature/seasons, cold/weather. We are going to look at just one in detail.

Nature - **The personification of clouds and earth in stanzas one and two makes nature seem alive and something that interacts with the two people in the poem.** However, the entrance of the swans signals a change in focus as the poet then concentrates on them – also part of nature of course. **The reference to 'icebergs' and 'rough weather' gives a sense of nature as dangerous in some respects and possibly suggests that the relationship between the couple has been on dangerous ground.** In stanza five, the swans are compared to

'porcelain' – the first time a man-made substance is included in all the natural imagery. This links to the later reference to the hands becoming wings in stanza seven – human and swan become one and the same thing showing that the human world is as much a part of nature as an animal is. **This image also shows the restorative power of nature – the two people renew their love after spending time in nature and that links to the poetry of the Romantic era.**

Winter Swans

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Winter Swans** by Owen Sheers, in AQA's Love and Relationship cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. This poem comes from a poetry collection called **Skirrid Hill**. Skirrid is based on a Welsh word. Find out what it means. **A03**
2. What is personification? **A02**
3. How are the two people feeling at the beginning of the poem? **A01**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **A01**
5. What is the effect of using one short piece of direct speech in the poem? **A02**
6. Which words or phrases show the use of personification in the poem? **A01, A02**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **A02**
8. How does the structure enhance the sense of a couple coming back together after a disagreement? **A02**

9. Why did the poet choose swans as the birds in the poem? Consider what literary technique is being used here as well. **A02, A03**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present distance in relationships in **Winter Swans** and one other poem from the Love and Relationship cluster. **A01, A02, A03**

Remember!

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A01: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

A02: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

A03: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Singh Song

by Daljit Nagra

Context

Singh Song is a modern poem by the poet Daljit Nagra, an English man of Indian descent. The poem first appeared in **Look We Have Coming to Dover!**, a collection of poems published by Faber and Faber in 2007. Nagra chooses the world of the Punjabi immigrant as his inspiration. He attempts to create the realistic voice of the Punjabi narrator in a number of his poems. This can be heard in **Darling & Me!** as well as **Singh Song**.

The Title

Nagra chooses a pun for the title of this poem. **He uses the words 'sing-song', often used to describe the up and down inflection of the native Punjabi speaker speaking English.** The word 'sing' is changed to 'Singh' to reflect the Punjabi descent of his narrator. Singh is a traditional Sikh last name for a male once they have become khalsa or initiates of Sikhism. The name means 'lion' and was traditionally intended to replace the caste surname of the man to reflect the egalitarian nature of Sikhism. The corresponding female name is 'Kaur' meaning 'princess'. **By stating that this is a 'song' Nagra references odes and traditional British poems of the Romantics.** The name also reflects the poem's nature as a love song to the narrator's new bride.

Structure and Form

Singh Song uses a varied stanza form which reflects the pitch and change of the narrator's voice and attitude. He spends a number of lines reflecting on the complaints of his customers in their own voices

and, later, adds his bride's voice to the writing. **At line 43 the style changes with the narrator reflecting more romantically on the magical nature of the shop at night.** A calm comes over the poem just as calm comes to the shop. The final lines (from 51 to 58) use repetition for a more soothing quality to the end of the poem. **Here, the use of rhyming couplets (each line spoken alternately by the narrator and his bride) show the romantic nature of the poem and the closeness of the pair of young lovers.** The technique echoes the use of rhyming couplets in the ballroom scene in 'Romeo and Juliet'.

Ideas and Language

The syntax of the poem is meant to reflect the 'Punglish' voice of the narrator with the change of 'w' to 'v' and the odd addition of adverbial phrasing: 'my newly bride' and 'brightey moon'. There are a number of other elements that reflect the unusual accent of the native Punjabi speaker here.

The characters in the poem are surprising. The narrator is a second generation child. He resents the work in his father's shop which is long and arduous: 'from 9 o'clock to 9 o'clock/and he vunt me not to hav a break'. He runs only one of his father's ('daddy's) shops, implying that the previous generation is hard working and committed and has created something of an empire. **The narrator seems far more interested in his 'newly bride' who is always referred to as 'my bride' rather than as a wife.** This increases the impression that the pair are only recently married. There is a possessiveness to the use of 'my' and the use of 'bride' implies that the narrator thinks of her as different from a 'wife' which is a more solid, lasting familial connection. The narrator makes clear distinctions between his mother and father as well, calling his mother 'my mum' (a rather western, adult term of endearment) and his father 'daddy', implying that, although grown,

the narrator still feels like a little boy in the presence of his father.

The bride herself is intriguing. With her 'red crew cut' and her 'Tartan sari' she appears in the mind's eye as a punk Indian, far removed from the stereotype of an Indian bride that one might have. **She is disrespectful to both the narrator's father and mother: 'effing at my mum' and 'making fun at my daddy'**. She spends her spare time on the computer. This section of the poem is interesting as it seems to deal with the bride trapping young Sikhs on some type of dating site. There are plays on the word 'web' (since she is 'netting' the men) and also the word 'mouse' here (since she is 'playing wid di mouse' and trapping 'two cat' for 'di meat at di cheese ov her price'). **She has the 'tiny eyes ov a gun' implying sureness and cold precision but also the 'tummy ov a teddy' which reflects comfort and warmth.** Neither of these metaphors is particularly attractive or expected. She is a creature of contradictions, clearly fascinating to the narrator of the poem.

Towards the end of the poem, when the shop is closed, the narrator allows us to see the couple together. The language becomes more romantic and magical in nature: the shoppers are 'wrap up quiet' like characters in Sleeping Beauty and the couple come down 'whispering stairs' and sit together on a 'silver stool' looking at the moon. The two transform the common-place setting into something magical with their love for one another. **The last lines are a set of rhyming couplets, an interchange between the pair showing their closeness and attachment.** They use the language of the shop 'How much do yoo charge' and 'How much does dat come to' to discuss their love for each other.

Singh Song

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Singh Song!** by Daljit Nagra, in AQA's Love and Relationship cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What is Punglish? **A03**
2. What impression do you get from 'Tartan sari'? **A02**
3. What does the phrase 'I run just one ov my daddy's shops' show us about the young narrator? **A02**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **A01**
5. Who is speaking in the italicised sections of the poem? What is the effect of these additions? **A02**
6. Which words or phrases are humorous in the poem? **A01, A02**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **A02**
8. What is effective about the title of the poem? Do you think this was a good choice? **A02**
9. How does the poem reflect the poet's upbringing as a British Indian? **A02, A03**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present family relationships in Singh Song! and one other poem from the Love and Relationship cluster. **A01, A02, A03**

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- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

A02: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

A03: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Love's Philosophy

by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Summary

Love's Philosophy is a poem by the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. It was written in 1820, when he was living with Mary Godwin (later Mary Shelley), who wrote 'Frankenstein'. Shelley was a renegade of his times: he left his wife for Mary Godwin, and he believed in revolutionary ideas about the world, including atheism. He had to live outside Britain for much of his adult life to avoid scandal. Shelley was a poet of the Romantic movement. This was a movement of poetry begun in the late 1700s by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge and their friends. Romantic poets believed in the importance of the natural world and aimed to show the beauty and supremacy of nature at all times. Emotion above all else was important. In the poem **Love's Philosophy**, Shelley tries to explain how the young woman should be involved romantically with him because it goes against the laws of nature for her not to.

The Title

Philosophy means 'love of wisdom' and it tries to make sense of the meaning of life. **In this poem, Shelley is trying to make sense of the meaning and purpose of love.** The poet speaks directly to his love in the poem. We, the readers, are simply observers of this intimate persuasion. The poem is about both longing, on the part of the poet, and playfulness. It can be read rather light-heartedly and is a rather simple expression of the ideas of love. **Simply because things in nature come together in the way that they do, does that mean this couple should, too?**

The Structure

The poem consists of two 8-line stanzas which use direct speech to address the woman at the heart of the love poem. It uses a strong ABAB rhyme scheme, although there is a place in each stanza where the rhyme isn't exact, reflecting how all things in nature come together except for the poet and his loved one.

The poet uses the majority of each stanza to be persuasive. **Only at the end of each stanza does he pose a short, rhetorical question to his lover.** Since these lines are questions directed to the loved one, they stand out from the rest of the text, and this emphasises their importance.

Ideas and Language

Love's Philosophy is a poem written in the first person. It is a direct appeal to a young lady of the poet's acquaintance. **Like many Romantic poets, Shelley uses the language of nature to talk about other things - in this case, love.** He puts forward the argument (philosophy) that, since all things in nature combine and come together, the woman should consider him a suitable suitor and kiss him. **It is interesting to note that he speaks of a 'law divine' making this God's will, although Shelley was an atheist.**

Shelley uses language throughout the poem to persuade his loved one to kiss him. **Most often, he uses the technique of personification (describing something that is not human as having human attributes) to accomplish this. He speaks of 'fountains mingl(ing) with the river', and 'waves clasp(ing) one another' in an effort to show that all things in nature come together in a sublime and passionate embrace.** He speaks of the 'winds of heaven' mixing with 'sweet emotion', as though the wind is never biting or cold. All of the effects he chooses

are passionate but enjoyable, such as 'kiss' and 'clasp', and they reflect what he would like to do with his lover. **The consideration of both the 'sunlight' and the 'moonbeams' shows that this love and affection is not simply a daytime thing but should expand into the night as well.** Also, by turning his phrases towards the celestial sphere, Shelley shows that these 'laws of nature' are not simply earthly but eternal. Even the Sun and Moon are affected by them.

In the phrase 'No sister-flower would be forgiven/ If it disdain'd its brother' we see that Shelley is showing the presence of a divine force again – what is it that will be unforgiving? **If the woman does not give into his love for her, Shelley suggests that she is going against nature and against God.** Each stanza ends with a plea, a rhetorical question for the lover to consider her position. The final words of each stanza are short and monosyllabic. **They have an increased impact upon the reader and are separated from the rest of the poem by hyphens, just as Shelley is separated from his lover.**

Love's Philosophy

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Love's Philosophy** by Percy Bysshe Shelley, in AQA's Love and Relationship cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What is personification? **AO1**
2. What is meant by 'a law divine'? **AO1, AO2**
3. What is philosophy? **AO3**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. How are rhetorical questions used in the poem? **AO2**
6. Which words or phrases in the poem show the personification of nature? **AO1, AO2**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective in a poem about receiving love. **AO2**
8. What rhyme scheme do we see in the poem? Look carefully. What is the effect of this? **AO2**
9. How does this poem reflect some of the basic interests of the Romantic poets? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the theme of longing in **Love's Philosophy** and one other poem from the Love and Relationship cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

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AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

The Farmer's Bride

by Charlotte Mew

Context

The Farmer's Bride is an Edwardian poem by the poet Charlotte Mew. It was first published in *The Nation* in 1912 and received much acclaim, making Mew quite well known. Although she was well received by other writers and poets, Mew never received commercial success. She committed suicide a year after the death of her remaining sibling, Anne, from cancer. Her poetry reflects mental illness, anguish, loneliness and bereavement.

The Title

The title **The Farmer's Bride** represents what the poem is meant to be about - the narrator's wife. The poem itself however tells us as much about the farmer as it does about his 'bride'. The title adequately demonstrates the feelings of the farmer towards his 'bride'. She is never named, therefore never given a sense of individuality. She is only referenced in her connection to the farmer and the entire poem is redolent of his possessiveness over her.

The Structure

Much of the poem is in iambic tetrameter (8 syllables with an unstressed and then stressed sound in each line) giving the majority of the poem a singing, simple phrasing. It is reminiscent of a folk song or ballad. Certain lines of the poem however deviate from this standard metre – these include the line 'So over seven-acre field and up-along across the down' in which the farmer gives chase to the wife who has run away across the fields. Another line in which the metre

changes is the last: 'The brown of her – her eyes, her hair, her hair!' **This line enhances the effect created by the previous lines of this stanza so that the reader can be left in no doubt by the end of the poem of the farmer's failing control over his emotions.** The final line is fraught and uses repetition to show the heightened emotions the farmer is feeling. We are left wondering, after this last line, what the farmer's next move will be.

The stanzas of the poem are of varying lengths throughout. **Most lines work either as a rhyming couplet with the line below, creating an AABCC rhyme scheme or in an ABAB scheme.** Where this varies it is for particular effect, as on lines 27-29 in which three lines rhyme. This accentuates the last line of the stanza: 'I've hardly heard her speak at all'. **Here the line is allowed to stand apart from the rest of the verse as it doesn't fit with the linked pairs – accentuating the despair and solitude of the narrator's line.**

Ideas and Language

The poem is a dramatic monologue, written from the perspective of the farmer. He writes about his young bride who will not have sexual relations with him although they have been married for three years. His misery and dissatisfaction at his domestic life is clear throughout the poem. Although London born and from a privileged home, Mew attempts to show the rural qualities of her narrator by using a regional dialect. **He says: 'When us was wed' and 'she runned away' in the first stanza but then the language becomes more poetic and the narrator loses some of his own voice to the demands of the poem.** Mew attempts to maintain the pastoral nature of her narrator through the use of natural and animalistic imagery, showing that he draws his inspiration from the world around him.

The bride is never blamed and her side of the story is never explored by the narrator. **While he accepts that perhaps she was 'too young maybe', he sees that he is little to blame for the situation he now finds himself in.** He notes that there is more to do at harvest-time than 'bide and woo' and so shows us his unromantic soul. The choosing of a bride seems to have been looked upon as any other task which may explain the vexing nature of his marriage.

Quickly the poem takes a sinister turn as it becomes apparent that the bride has run away when she should 'properly have been abed'. The men of the village chase her across the local fields and her panic is evident in the lines 'flying like a hare' and 'in a shiver and a scare'. **By the end of the second stanza it is clear that the farmer's bride is now kept in the house where the farmer has 'caught her' and 'turned the key upon her, fast.'**

Throughout the poem the bride is compared to animals and natural things, things that the farmer knows and cares for. **She is 'like a little frightened fay' or fairy after the marriage and is compared to a 'hare' and a 'mouse' and a 'leveret' or young hare.** When trying to find words to describe how she looks, the farmer relies on natural images again. She is 'straight and slight as a young larch tree' and 'sweet as the first wild violets' and is clear that the farmer desires her. She however will not have him and sleeps, in this third year of their marriage, in the attic. Reminders of Mrs Rochester in Jane Eyre or Thomas Hardy's own wife spring to mind here.

In the third stanza the description of the 'bride' seems to delve into the world of fairy tales. She works hard in the home, is locked up like a princess in a tower and happily chats and plays 'with birds and rabbits and such as they'. **Indeed she seems to enchant the farm creatures:**

'The women say that beasts in stall/Look round like children at her call'. This may be a further reference to the enchantment she holds over her own husband but he has 'hardly heard her speak at all'.

The fourth stanza reflects the natural world and the changing of the seasons. **The narrator focuses on the Christmas season, one that is all about the celebration of birth.** He however, with a wife who will not join his bed, has no joy at Christmas and no children to share it with: 'What's Christmas-time without there be/Some other in the house than we!

By the final stanza the farmer's self-control is beginning to weaken. He tells us that his wife sleeps above him and with 'tis but a stair/ Betwixt us' he reflects on their physical proximity to one another. **She is described as having 'down', furry, short hair – almost like a small animal and again the comparison to the natural world is seen.** From here the poem loses control of metre and sense as he repeats the phrases 'the down', 'the brown' and 'her hair' over again. The internal rhymes of 'down' and 'brown' as well as the repetition show a growing frustration and despair on his part. **He even cries out 'Oh! my God!' in frustration at his situation and we are left wondering if he will continue to respect his wife's wishes or whether he will soon take her by force.**

The Farmer's Bride

Expert Exam Prep

Read **The Farmer's Bride** by Charlotte Mew, in AQA's Love and Relationship cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What is patriarchy and how does the poem represent this? **AO3**
2. What is the effect of the phrase 'turned the key upon her, fast'?
AO1, AO2
3. What is dialect? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. The farmer speaks throughout the poem but his wife is not given a voice. Why is this effective? **AO2**
6. Which words show the language of fear? **AO1, AO2**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **AO2**
8. What is the effect of using dialect in the poem? **AO2**
9. How does the poem reflect the times in which Charlotte Mew lived? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the theme of emotional and physical distance in **The Farmer's Bride** and one other poem from the Love and Relationship cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

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- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Porphyria's Lover

by Robert Browning

Porphyria's Lover is a poem by the English Victorian poet, Robert Browning. Robert Browning became one of the foremost poets of the Victorian period and is equally well remembered for his love affair and marriage with the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Robert Browning wrote for the stage before turning to poetry and his most famous poems are dramatic monologues, a dramatic form in which one character speaks for an extended period of time.

Porphyria's Lover expresses the longing and dangerous desire of the narrator for the woman named Porphyria. The porphyrias are a group of metabolic conditions which can affect the nervous system and cause temporary psychosis. Porphyria's Lover certainly makes some very strange and deadly choices in the poem and the reader is left to wonder if Porphyria is real or the figment of a diseased mind. The poem was published in 1836.

The Title

The title **Porphyria's Lover** immediately introduces this element of madness. **By naming the loved one 'Porphyria' Browning has perhaps explained his narrator's issues early on.** The title then gives us the nature of our narrator – we are never told his own name and he is shown in the poem only in connection with Porphyria. **It is as if he does not exist without her.**

Structure

The poem is a dramatic monologue spoken by the narrator. It is through him that all the ideas and action of the story are told to us.

This makes us question at times his reliability as the narrator of his story and we wonder, by the end, how much of what he tells us is **actually true.** The poem has a steady and regular rhythm reflecting the outer calmness of the narrator as he relays his story. This is tempered by the asymmetrical rhyme scheme (ABABB) however, which shows lack of control. **Through the poem's structural form, we see the narrator's two sides fighting for dominance – will the madness erupt and take over or will the narrator be able to tell his tale without breaking down?**

The poem is in two halves – the first in which Porphyria is the active participant of the drama. Although she has no voice of her own in the poem, Porphyria is highly active in the first part of the poem, shutting 'out the cold' and manoeuvring the narrator about like a puppet: 'stooping, made my cheek lie there'. **In the second half however, Porphyria becomes the puppet – the speaker strangles her with her own hair and then props up her head.** The narrator makes specific mention of this reversal: 'Only, this time my shoulder bore/ Her head, which droops upon it still'.

Ideas and Language

The poem deals with feelings of longing and desire. It opens with the use of pathetic fallacy, using the natural world to display the narrator's feelings as he awaits Porphyria. **The wind 'tore the elm-tops down' and vexed the lake, just as the narrator's longing causes a tumult of emotions within him as he waits for the woman to arrive.** The speaker is shown to be at an emotional breaking point as she enters: his heart is 'fit to break' as he wonders what she will be like with him, what she will say, whether she will love him.

As Porphyria enters, the narrator describes her actions in minute

detail as he follows her with his eyes about the room. In a trance-like way he describes his lover's physical features, the use of the word 'And' at the beginning of each line here perhaps representing the building up of feeling within the narrator as he watches her. In this section the narrator is the observer, while Porphyria acts. **She brings with her a sense of magic: she 'glided in' and domesticity: 'she shut the cold out' and 'made the cheerless grate/Blaze up'.**

There is repetition of 'her yellow hair' indicating that this is a thing of obsession for the narrator and foreshadowing what will happen later. **The narrator is quite critical of the way Porphyria, perhaps from a higher class or social standing, has behaved with him.** She has not known her own mind in the past and this troubles the speaker. He references her 'murmuring' how she loves him, as though she isn't quite convinced of it herself and he calls her 'weak'. When, at last, it becomes clear to him that Porphyria loves him and that his longing and patience has been rewarded he takes the drastic and unforeseen step of killing her. **It is clear from the repetition of the words 'mine, mine' that the narrator wishes to possess Porphyria entirely and realises that the only way to keep this moment forever is to make it the last moment that Porphyria has.** Longing and desire have become deadly. There is a chilling matter of fact quality about the way he explains the killing: he 'found/A thing to do' as though it were the most natural occurrence in the world, an after-thought. **The use of her 'yellow hair' to effect the killing reflects the obsession with this part of her that we had seen previously.**

We are left wondering, as the reader, whether the events of the poem actually take place as the narrator tells them. As soon as we see him refer to 'I am quite sure she felt no pain' we begin to re-evaluate the worth of all of the statements he has uttered. For example, did

Porphyria really enter the cottage and declare her love for him or did she in fact reject him and he killed her for this? **Perhaps he reimagines the events of the evening to suit him since he is now the only one who knows the truth.**

Porphyria's Lover

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Porphyria's Lover** by Robert Browning, in AQA's Love and Relationship cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What is porphyria? **AO3**
2. What is the effect of 'glided' in the phrase 'When glided in Porphyria'? **AO1, AO2**
3. What is pathetic fallacy? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. The active participant in the poem shifts from the beginning to the end. Why is this effective? **AO2**
6. Which words show the language of possession? **AO1, AO2**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **AO2**
8. What is the effect of using both enjambment and a regular rhythm within the poem? **AO2**
9. Browning was known as the master of the dramatic monologue. What do you know about this poetry form? Why was it effective to use the first person in this poem? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the theme of longing in **Porphyria's Lover** and one other poem from the Love and Relationship cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

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AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Sonnet 29: I Think of Thee

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Context

Sonnet 29 – I think of thee! is a poem from the collection 'Sonnets from the Portuguese' by the English Victorian poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Elizabeth Barrett Browning became one of the foremost poets of the Victorian period and is equally well remembered for her love affair and marriage with the poet Robert Browning.

'Sonnets from the Portuguese' are a series of 44 love sonnets written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning to her future husband, Robert Browning in the years 1845-46. While Elizabeth Barrett Browning felt the poems were too personal for publication, her husband Robert convinced her to publish them in 1850 on the understanding that they would appear to the public as if they were translations of much earlier European works. Barrett Browning had originally focussed on the Bosnian culture as the one that the poems would ostensibly be from. Robert Browning convinced her to call them Portuguese however, since she admired the early Portuguese poets and because his pet name for her was 'My Little Portuguese'. Robert Browning was convinced that the poems were the finest collection of sonnets in the English language since those of Shakespeare and they have proved immensely popular.

The Title

The title of the poem includes the number 29 because this is one of a group of 44 sonnets written for the poetess's fiancé. **A sonnet is a specific poetic form, often used for love poetry.** The poetess, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, is speaking directly to her lover in the poem and talks about

how she feels when she thinks about him when he is not near her. **The title is actually the first line of the poem itself and, with its use of exclamation, highlights the excitement she feels when thinking about Robert Browning.**

The Structure

The poem is a sonnet, an old-style love poem. **The specific style of sonnet used here (and in all the sonnets in Barrett Browning's collection) is the Petrarchan sonnet.** This type of sonnet is written in iambic pentameter (each line having ten syllables with five stressed syllables). This type of poem includes an eight line (octave) to begin which sets out a problem. **Commonly this type of poem will have a volta or turn in the ninth line, and the end of the poem (last six lines referred to as the sestet) offers a solution.** In Barrett Browning's poem however, the volta appears in the seventh line, perhaps expressing the excitement and impatience of the poet to see her lover.

Throughout the poem, the poet's excitement is expressed in the use of exclamation marks and the breaks in the regular iambic pentameter through the use of punctuation in the middle of lines. The effect is one of breathless anticipation on the part of the poet. **Caesura and enjambment are used throughout to break up the standard monotony of the sonnet form and to express her deepening excitement as the poem progresses.**

The transition between the problem of the first half of the poem and the solution of the second is mirrored in the repetition of the line: 'I think of thee!' This is changed at the end of the poem to 'I do not think of thee' as the poet has decided that she would rather see her lover in the flesh than simply think about him.

Ideas and Language

Sonnet 29 – I think of thee! is a love poem, a sonnet of 14 lines in which the poet, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, expresses her deep desires for her fiancé, Robert Browning. She discusses how much he is in her thoughts when they are not together and worries at first that her imaginings of him may obscure what he is really like. **She wishes for him to be a strong, solid presence in her life (the tree imagery) and wants to be with him (physical longing) rather than just thinking about him.**

The metaphor used throughout the poem is an extended one in which Robert Browning is seen as a tree, reflecting the solid, secure presence he represents in her life. He is, at varied points in the poem, a 'palm-tree' and a woodland species with broad leaves. Her use of the tree metaphor is mixed and varied. Some elements of the poem seem overpowering – she is the 'wild vines' that twine around him, her thoughts for him are constantly growing and unrestrained in their enclosure: 'insphered'. **She sees these 'wild vines' of her thoughts being broken and shattered by him, since she dreams of a time when they can be together properly and not simply in her mind.** They are 'straggling' and thus inferior to the real thing she dreams will be theirs one day.

Some of the language of the poem reflects her deep physical longing for her lover and works well in comparison to similar feelings in 'Love's Philosophy'. **Language such as 'Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare, And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee, Drop heavily down' could be read in a number of ways.**

Sonnet 29: I Think of Thee

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Sonnet 29** by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in AQA's Love and Relationships cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. Who is the narrator in the poem? **AO1**
2. What extended metaphor is used in the poem? **AO2**
3. What is caesura? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events and characters. **AO1**
5. What message is the narrator attempting to relay to the person she is speaking to? **AO1**
6. Which words or phrases in the poem convey a sense of the narrator's excitement? **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. Use appropriate terminology in your answer. **AO2**
8. How does the structure and form of the poem enhance its meaning? **AO2**

9. Barrett Browning wrote her **Sonnets from the Portuguese** about her future husband, Robert Browning. What evidence is there that this is an immensely personal poem? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the power of romantic love in **Sonnet 29** and one other poem from the Love and Relationships cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

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AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Walking Away

by C. Day-Lewis

Context

Cecil Day Lewis was born in 1904 and died in 1972. He was born in Ireland, but moved to England with his family when he was a young child. He was educated at Oxford and was appointed Professor of Poetry there in 1951. This was followed by his recognition as Poet Laureate in 1968 until his death in 1972. His second marriage was to an actress, Jill Balcon, and he had four children, including the Academy Award-winning actor Daniel Day-Lewis. Many of his poems are about his personal experiences and nature.

In his autobiographical poem **Walking Away**, Day-Lewis recalls the difficulty of experiencing his child becoming increasingly independent. He remembers a football match 'eighteen years ago' when he became aware of the beginning of the change in the dynamics of their relationship. Whereas before his child had been a 'satellite', he becomes aware that they are now 'drifting away'. As the poem continues, he becomes more accepting of the situation and acknowledges that part of growing up is increased independence from parental support and control as well as the evidence of trust from the parent 'in the letting go'. The poem explores the autobiographical situation of Day-Lewis as a parent experiencing this movement within his own relationship with his son.

The Title

The title Walking Away has a number of different connotations. The first is the literal account of the poet watching his child physically moving in the opposite direction away from him.

It also refers to the inevitable change in relationship between a parent and child, and the deliberate movement of the child away from the parent in order to successfully move from childhood to adulthood.

The title might also explore the acceptance of the parent that they should become more trusting in leaving their child to make their own choices and develop maturity. **Although the parent will not abandon their child, they do need to accept and understand the importance of allowing their child to stand on their own two feet.**

The Structure

The poem is made up of four stanzas that are consistent in length.

The poem moves chronologically through the difficulties that the poet faces in accepting the changes in their relationship. In the first stanza, he explores his feelings and the realisation of the changes when he first became aware of them. The second stanza recalls the experience of watching his child walk to school by himself and how this became a major change in his life as a parent. The third stanza becomes more accepting and explores the idea of his child in their determination to be more independent and to liberate themselves from their parent. The poem ends in the final stanza with the acceptance of Lewis that the change in their relationship is a natural, although difficult, part of life that must be faced as a parent.

Ideas and Language

The poem demonstrates that the difficulty of accepting changes in the relationship between parent and child is not one that improves with the passing of time. The poet recalls how 'it is eighteen years ago, almost to the day' showing that his son must be well in to adulthood but that the memory is still vivid in his mind. The poet

remembers how it was 'a sunny day with the leaves just turning', using the image of nature and the season of autumn to show that this is a time of change and development for the poet and his child. **He is watching his child play football and the 'touch-lines new-ruled' show that the writer feels that there is now a new set of rules that he must apply now that his relationship is changing with his son.** The use of the hyphens to connect the words could be a visual symbol, optimistically to represent the parent/child bond that remains even when there is physical or time difference between them; however, it could also signify the distance that is building between the father and his son and the fact that it is then followed by a dash to add 'since I watched you play' could suggest that the gap is going to get bigger between them. **It could also represent the time that has passed since the memory took place for the parent, showing that the process is one that takes years.**

He uses the simile 'like a satellite' to describe his son, suggesting that he considers the relationship between them to be like the connection between Earth, larger and ultimately in control, and a satellite that is a short distance away, constantly in contact and still drawn to the larger object through gravity or bond. However, this satellite is 'wrenched from its orbit'; the use of the vivid verb 'wrenched' shows the difficulty in drawing the father and son apart and, perhaps in the most part, the struggle for the parent to accept the separation.

The word 'away' is repeated again at the start of stanza 2 in the line 'I can see / you walking away from me towards the school', sharing a literal memory of his son walking back to school on his own. This sharing of the difficulty of this separation is made all the more intimate for the reader through the use of the personal pronouns 'I'

and 'you'. The poet is speaking directly to his child and this makes the reader feel the closeness of the relationship. The poet acknowledges that this separation is something that is a natural part of the world when he compares his son to a 'half-fledged thing set free'. This suggests that his son is like a bird that is only partly matured and ready to leave the nest. **The fact that he follows this line with the phrase 'into the wilderness' shows that the poet is concerned about his son moving into a different era of his life and therefore away from his father.** It seems that his son does share some of his worries or difficulties in accepting the situation because he has 'the gait of one who finds no path where the path should be', suggesting that he is unsure or unaware of the changes and what to expect. **There is a lack of confidence in his walk.**

This is further emphasised through the phrase 'that hesitant figure, eddying away' suggesting the uncertainty of the boy as well as the suggestion of the lack of control that the father feels. Again, the word 'away' is repeated and this is a key idea in the poem, that to the father, his son is constantly retreating physically and also symbolically from his care and instruction. The use of the word 'eddying' suggests something that is moving in a different direction to a main current, such as a whirlpool, so there is also the indication that the father feels that his son moves away but returns; he is still needed at times, but is also aware of the movement and change of the relationship with his son and his needs.

His son is compared to a 'winged seed loosened from its parent stem', showing that the separation of parent from child is a natural part of life. However, this change is something that the poet finds difficult to accept, shown by the phrase 'I never quite grasp to convey / About nature's give-and-take', showing his struggle in being accustomed to

these changes. **The verb 'grasp' suggests the physical as well as the symbolic connection he has with his son and suggests his desperation to remain the same despite the inevitable changes their relationship faces.** The pain of this situation is shown in the metaphor 'the small, the scorching / Ordeals which fire one's irresolute clay'. **The alliterative phrase 'the small' highlights the typicality of the situation alongside 'the scorching', which shows the discomfort that it causes, showing how unbearable the father finds it and perhaps that he is branded and scarred by this 'ordeal'.** The poet uses the symbol of firing clay to show that despite being 'irresolute' and unsure of the changes, it is something that is going to become permanent and will have a lasting impact on his life.

In the final stanza, the poet admits that he has 'had worse partings', but that it is this parting that 'gnaws' at his mind, showing its persistent distress. He has had to accept the situation, but it is still something that bothers him. Despite this, he understands that 'selfhood begins with a walking away / And love is proved in the letting go', showing that he recognises that part of his son's development and growth as a person requires independence to make his own decisions and to build his own life, and that his role in this as a father is to show his love and care for his son through the trust that is 'proved' through letting the natural development of their relationship take place. **The ending of the poem is conclusive and shows that the poet has become accustomed to the situation.**

Walking Away

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Walking Away** by Cecil Day Lewis, in AQA's Relationship cluster, then answer the following questions

One sentence answers:

1. Why might a parent find it hard to watch their child grow up? **AO1**
2. Write down three facts that you learn from the poem about the day the poet watched his son play football. **AO1**
3. What is a metaphor? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events and characters. **AO1**
5. What is the moral or message of the poem? **AO1**
6. Which words or phrases in the poem convey a sense of loss or difficulty in the change in their relationship? **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **AO2**
8. How does the structure and form of the poem enhance its meaning? **AO2**

9. When reading Day Lewis' poem, how does the fact it is written about the poet's eldest son make a difference to our reading of it? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the change in relationship between father and son in **Walking Away** and **Follower** by Seamus Heaney from the Relationship cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

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AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Follower

by Seamus Heaney

Context

Seamus Heaney was born in 1939 near Castledawson in County Derry, Northern Ireland and was brought up on his father's cattle farm. The majority of the work in the area was in the agricultural industry.

In this early stage of life, Heaney wanted to follow in his father's footsteps, and this would have been expected of him; traditionally, boys would take on their father's farmland.

However, as he grew up, Heaney found himself following an altogether different direction to his father. He studied English at Queen's University in Belfast, then trained as a secondary school teacher. He began to publish poetry in 1962. His first major collection of poems, *Death of a Naturalist*, was critically acclaimed and won several awards. His poems were influenced by his childhood in Northern Ireland and the rural surroundings he grew up in.

Heaney went on to become a professor at both Harvard University and Oxford. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995, and continued writing poetry until his death in 2013 at the age of 74.

In his autobiographical poem 'Follower', Heaney affectionately recalls the childhood memory of following his father around as he worked and the admiration he felt for him. Sometimes he would stumble on the uneven ground and his father would carry him. At this stage, Heaney's ambition was to be like his father. Later in the poem, he explores the gap between his father's generation and his own, and like many of his other poems, touches on his feelings of guilt that he did

not continue the family tradition and follow his father into farming.

The Title

The title 'Follower' has a number of different connotations. The first interpretation is Heaney's literal description of following his father around the farm as a child while his father was working, which is why the poem is able to give such a detailed account of the work that his father skilfully performed on the farm.

The title may also refer to the traditional expectation that a son should follow in his father's footsteps, something that Heaney himself did not do. In fact, although the poet and his father both became experts in their fields, they are polar opposites in terms of the careers that they followed.

Another interpretation from the title could also be the representation of the relationship between a parent and child, where Heaney is following his father as a role model in his childhood. However, later in the poem, there seems to be a reversal in this role when his father is following him and is stumbling, much like Heaney had done behind his own father in his earlier years.

The Structure

In the first five stanzas, Heaney reflects on a childhood spent following his father around the farm as he purposefully and expertly completes his work. He has uncompromising admiration for his father and the reader is able to experience this from Heaney's own point of view.

In the final stanza, Heaney explores the change in his relationship with his father. **The change from past tense into present tense highlights the change in their relationship and demonstrates the passing of**

time. The opening of the poem emphasises the power and capability of his father when he is performing manual labour; however, this is contrasted with the description at the end that suggests his father has lost some of this strength and stability in his old age. **The poem suggests that their roles have reversed and now his father looks to him for help and support.** It might also suggest that Heaney longs for his father to respect his work as he respects his father's.

Ideas and Language

The poem demonstrates the poet's admiration of his father through his use of positive and complimentary language that emphasises his skill, calling him an 'expert' and explaining how he could control the horse and plough with a 'single pluck'. Heaney praises his father's strength and hard work through phrases like 'the sweating team' and 'his broad shadow', and again this language displays his obvious respect and pride for his father. He emphasises his precision and skill through phrases like 'his eye narrowed' and 'mapping the furrow exactly'.

Heaney uses an agricultural semantic field to show his understanding of his father's role, using technical vocabulary for the plough such as 'wing' and 'headrig', showing how he learned from his father when he was a child and understands about farming and his father's work. However, this is contrasted in the final stanza by the reference to his father 'who keeps stumbling behind me'; this might suggest that Heaney's father does not understand Heaney's work the way that the poet understands farming, or that the bond with his father has decreased because he can't keep up with Heaney's work and interests.

Imagery of sailing is used within the poem, with the simile 'globed like a full sail strung' to suggest his shirt is like a billowing sail, and

the 'sod rolls over without breaking' to mimic waves. This suggests the sense of adventure that the poet feels when he is with his father, joining him in his work and following in his 'wake', like following a navigator or leader.

In the final line, the poet's statement that his father 'will not go away' could be seen as implying irritation that his father has become needy in his old age, as Heaney was as a child. **However, it could also be interpreted as saying that their bond has remained throughout their lives and will not go away even as their circumstances change.**

Follower

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Follower** by Seamus Heaney, in AQA's Love and Relationships cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. Why might you follow in your parents' footsteps? **AO1**
2. Pick three words which describe the environment that the father works in. **AO1**
3. What is a verb? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events and characters. **AO1**
5. What is the moral or message of the poem? **AO1**
6. Which words or phrases in the poem convey a sense of strength? **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **AO2**
8. In what ways does the structure of the poem show the passing of time? **AO2**

9. When reading Heaney's poem, how does context enhance our understanding of its message? Has the poet followed in his father's footsteps? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the relationship between a parent and a child in **Follower** and one other poem from the Relationship cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

When answering the Paper 2 poetry question, you will be tested on the following Assessment Objectives:

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Mother, Any Distance

by Simon Armitage

Mother, Any Distance by Simon Armitage is taken from his poetry collection, **Book of Matches**, a collection of short poems without titles, which are meant to be read in the same amount of time it would take for a match to burn down.

Armitage was born in West Yorkshire in 1963. He graduated from Portsmouth with a degree in geography, and later completed an MA at Manchester University, where he wrote his dissertation about the effects of television violence on young offenders. He had several jobs before becoming a freelance writer, including: shelf stacker, disc jockey and lathe operator.

Armitage has published several poetry collections, such as: **Zoom** (1989), **Kid** (1992), **Book of Matches** (1993), **The Dead Sea Poems** (1995), **Moon Country** (1996), **Cloud Cuckoo Land** (1997), **Killing Time (The Millennium Poem)** (1999), **Travelling Songs** and **The Universal Home Doctor** (both 2002). Armitage has also written for TV, stage and radio.

Armitage's distinctive style features conversational, street-wise language and often dark use of humour. 'Mother, Any Distance' explores some of the poet's recurring themes – adolescence and family relationships, taking a look at the close bond between mother and child.

The Title

As all of the poems in **Book of Matches** have no title, the poem is commonly referred to by its first line. The distance referred to here on

a literal level is an arm span – the space that one person can measure without help from another person. **However, on a metaphorical level, the distance refers to the distance put between mother and child by the child's desire for freedom and independence and how this changes the nature of their relationship.**

Structure

The poem is almost structured into sonnet form – a traditional form to explore love and relationships. However, it has an extra line, which draws the reader's attention to what is contained here 'to fall or fly.' This suggests a sense of apprehension from the speaker about what the future holds and highlights the uncertainty about whether the mother has adequately equipped her child with the skills to survive without her.

The sonnet-like structure allows the poet to deal with two separate thoughts: the first eight lines describing the speaker and his mother still connected by the literal tape measure and the last seven lines describing the speaker moving away from his mother, literally, into the loft and metaphorically away from his childhood dependence on his parents. **Ultimately, the mother lets go of the tape measure as the distance grows too great and the speaker is left to discover an 'endless sky'.**

Armitage chooses not to use the traditional ABBA rhyme scheme of a sonnet, instead using an irregular and unpredictable arrangement for both. This helps reflect the ambivalence of the speaker's feelings about the future, that his new-found independence is exciting, but also slightly frightening. **This idea is summed up neatly in the rhyming couplet at the end of the poem: 'towards a hatch that opens on an endless sky/to fall or fly.'**

Ideas and Language

The extended metaphor of the tape measure – ‘You at the zero-end, me with the spool of tape, recording length, reporting metres, centimetres back to base,’ – runs throughout the poem. We begin to understand this as both the lifespan and dependency of the child; the mother is there right from the beginning and the distance slowly increases as the line is ‘still feeding out, unreeling years between’ them.

The speaker calls upon his mother to help him measure the large areas of his new home and record its dimensions. **Quickly, however, the mother is left pinching the final ‘inches’ of the tape, barely keeping hold of her child as he still needs her.** As the speaker makes his way up to the loft, they reach ‘breaking point, where something has to give.’ One person has to let go of the tape measure, almost like cutting the umbilical cord. **It is the speaker’s time to cope with the demands of life alone.**

Some of the other metaphors used in the poem draw on the dichotomies of excitement/fear and freedom/restriction. **The mother is referred to as an ‘anchor’ and the son a ‘kite.’** An anchor is a stabilising force, it prevents a ship from drifting away, keeping it safe. However, it also limits where a ship can go and prevents it from sailing, suggesting that a mother who keeps too tight a grip on her child, will inhibit them and prevent them from achieving their full potential. **Similarly, a kite has the potential to fly where it wants – within limits – but it has a grounding influence in the shape of the person at the other end of the string.** Here, the mother could be viewed in two ways: as a guiding influence, ensuring her child is safe and supported, or as a controlling and limiting figure, preventing the child from straying too

far, keeping them close at all times.

Other metaphors in the poem, such as the ‘acres of the walls, the prairies of the floors’ hint at the speaker’s ambivalent feelings about his impending change in circumstances. Acres and prairies are both vast expanses of space, implying freedom and room to run and explore with a sense of no boundaries or barriers. **However, they also suggest empty space that needs to be filled, which can be daunting for a young person.** They can also be quite lonely and isolated places, implying a sense of anxiety about leaving the family home.

The final lines ‘I reach towards a hatch that opens on an endless sky/ to fall or fly’ throw up the image of the speaker bravely leaping to his new life of independence and freedom, leaving the reader to ponder whether he will indeed fall, but secure in the knowledge that there will be someone there to catch him if he does.

Mother, Any Distance

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Mother, Any Distance** by Simon Armitage, in AQA's Love and Relationships cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. How would you describe the speaker of the poem? **AO1**
2. Identify words belonging to the semantic fields of space and distance. **AO1**
3. What is an extended metaphor? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. How is the speaker's new home presented? **AO1, AO2**
6. Identify three words or phrases which convey how the speaker is feeling. **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words or phrases you picked in the last question are effective. **AO2**
8. How does the poem's form and structure enhance its meaning? **AO2**
9. How might an understanding of context affect your interpretation of the poem? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets represent family bonds in **Mother, Any Distance** and one other poem from the Love and Relationships cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

When answering the Paper 2 poetry question, you will be tested on the following Assessment Objectives:

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Climbing My Grandfather

by Andrew Waterhouse

Context

Climbing My Grandfather is a late 20th century poem by the Northern English poet Andrew Waterhouse. The poet, Andrew Waterhouse, was born in Lincolnshire in 1958. He lived in Northumberland where he worked as a teacher and freelance writer. In 2000 he won a prestigious poetry prize for his first collection of poetry, *In*. Following this, he gave up his job teaching so that he could devote himself to writing full time. Sadly, he had always struggled with depression and, whilst working on poems for a second collection in 2001, he took his own life. The poem **Climbing My Grandfather** is a memorable portrait of his own grandfather and the relationship he had with him.

The Title

The title of the poem is precisely the subject of the poem. **The poem describes, in detail, the poet's grandfather.** The poem takes place in the present tense, implying that the action of 'climbing' his grandfather is happening now. **It may be that the poet is remembering an actual occasion when he was a small boy, playing with or 'climbing up' his grandfather.** Alternatively, he may be using the idea of climbing simply as a metaphor for getting to know his grandfather now that he is older. **In this case, the language of mountain climbing is used as an extended metaphor throughout the poem.**

Structure

Climbing My Grandfather is a free verse poem, free from the constraints of a regular rhyme or rhythm. This, and the first person narration, makes the reader feel a part of the poet's own memories and emotions.

Long sentences and enjambment (the extension of a line or phrase of poetry into the next line) are used to reflect the long and steady nature of the metaphorical climb the poet is taking. The poem is written as a journey up the man's figure. Each line takes us closer to the 'summit', learning more about the grandfather and allowing us to feel the extraordinary effort of the progress. **Visually, the poem is solid and stable in shape – like the mountain and like the man.**

Ideas and Language

Climbing My Grandfather focuses on the relationship between the poet and his grandfather. We are left with a rather ambiguous interpretation – on the one hand we can imagine he is describing the real life events of climbing up onto his grandfather's lap and shoulders as a small boy. On the other hand we can see the comparison between his relationship with his grandfather and climbing to be a metaphorical one, an example of an extended metaphor that continues throughout the poem and expresses the growing bond and connection that the poet feels with his grandfather. **The metaphor of climbing gives the poet the opportunity to show the difficulties in traversing and knowing a man he describes as a mountain.**

This is not an easy relationship; like most familial relations it has hardships and worries. **From the first line: 'I decide to do it free' we see a level of confidence in the relationship with the grandfather, but also an element of risk.** The poet does not take the easy option of the 'rope or net' and seems to experience more of his grandfather because of it. Later, he describes the reach for the 'summit', the knowing of his grandfather as physically draining. It causes him to gasp 'for breath' and he 'can only lie watching' after the exhaustive trial.

The grandfather's physical appearance is lovingly described from his

old brogues, 'dusty and cracked' to his 'soft and white' hair (compared to snow). The old man's hands are 'earth-stained' implying a love of the soil and the outdoors and the nails 'give good purchase' perhaps showing that the grandfather is always there for the poet; he gives a 'helping hand' so to speak.

The grandfather's body is used as a crutch for the young man as he climbs up the old stitches and scars ('the glassy ridge of a scar'), implying that he learns from the grandfather's experiences. **The grandfather's shoulder is 'still firm' and the poet can 'rest for a while in the shade' showing us that the relationship between the poet and his grandfather is a strong, encouraging and harbouring one.** The poet feels safe in the grandfather's physical and metaphorical embrace.

Later the poet describes himself drinking 'among teeth' referring to the conversations the pair have. **The grandfather clearly gives good advice as the poet feels 'refreshed' after this.** At the end of the poem, the poet has clearly completed a metaphorical journey – he has gone from 'trying to get a grip' and discovering his relative to 'knowing' his grandfather and 'his good heart'.

Language that relates back the childlike wonder of the actual climb up the grandfather appears throughout the poem too: 'finger is smooth and thick like warm ice', 'a smiling mouth', 'watch a pupil slowly open and close'; each reflect the simpler language of a small child and the things they focus on, such as the fascination with the opening and closing pupil.

The theme of family bonds is one that pops up in a number of the poems in this collection and there is wealth of poems to compare this one to including **Letters From Yorkshire, Follower** and **Before You Were Mine.**

Climbing My Grandfather

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Climbing My Grandfather** by Andrew Waterhouse, in AQA's Love and Relationship cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What are brogues? **A03**
2. What is an oxymoron? **A02**
3. What extended metaphor is being used in this poem? **A02**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **A01**
5. What do you think is meant by 'the slow pulse of his good heart'? **A02**
6. Which words or phrases use mountaineering terms? **A01, A02**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **A02**
8. How does the structure and form of the poem reflect the idea of scaling a mountain? **A02**
9. Do you think this is an autobiographical poem? Why or why not? **A02, A03**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present strong bonds in relationships in **Climbing My Grandfather** and one other poem from the Love and Relationship cluster. **A01, A02, A03**

Remember!

When answering the Paper 2 poetry question, you will be tested on the following Assessment Objectives:

A01: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

A02: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

A03: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Eden Rock

by Charles Causley

Context

Eden Rock is a 20th Century poem by the Cornish poet, Charles Causley. The poet, Charles Causley, was born in Launceston, Cornwall in 1917. Causley was an intensely private man whose poetry achieved greater acclaim after his death. Regardless of his private and quiet nature, Causley knew many of the great writers of the 20th century and was friends with Siegfried Sassoon, Susan Hill and Ted Hughes among others. Apart from war service, Causley spent most of his life in the same small town he was born in and worked as a school teacher at the local primary. He wrote extensively for adults and children.

Causley was an only child and was very close to his parents. His father had returned from the First World War with long term, debilitating injuries. He died when Causley was only seven.

The poem **Eden Rock** seems to be an early memory of Causley's childhood but it can be interpreted as an allegory for both birth and death as well.

The Title

The title of the poem reflects the nature of the piece as an allegory about death. The place **Eden Rock** was invented by Charles Causley specifically for the purposes of the poem and so one can assume that he meant the title and place name to figure symbolically. When asked where **Eden Rock** might be, Causley was said to answer: 'I have no idea, I mean I made it up! 'Dartmoor', I said – that's always a safe answer.'

The Structure

The poem **Eden Rock** is made up of five stanzas of fairly regular length. Only the last of the stanzas is broken up with the last line being on its own.

Eden Rock is written in the first person and seems to be occurring in the present tense. This gives the impression of a memory or dream being experienced by the poet as he writes. **The regular lines of the poem are broken eventually by the final line, which is separated from the rest of the text.** This line's separation may indicate the poet's own separation from his parents or that he has actually now stepped over and is on his parents' side of the stream.

The half-rhymes make the poem seem more realistic and easy going as does the effective use of enjambment at the line: 'Leisurely,/They beckon to me' which seems to mirror the leisurely way in which the parents greet the poet.

Ideas and Language

The poem seems to relate a memory of a picnic long ago. The poet is remembering his parents in their youth, his father only twenty-five, his mother twenty-three. **They seem to be waiting for him to join them by a stream where the poet's mother has set out the picnic.** There is an emphasis on the clothing the pair are wearing as the poet lovingly remembers his parents in their youth. The ordinariness of the day and the picnic itself is offset by the loving way in which the poet describes the simple things: the mother's clothing and the 'screw of paper for a cork' in the bottle used for milk.

The poem can also be seen as an allegory or metaphor for either being born or dying. The parents seem to be waiting for the poet. They are on one side of a river while he is on the other. **Rivers are often**

seen as symbols of crossing over, taking a journey or transitioning from one phase of life to another. The poem's words take on new meaning if you interpret the poem as the parents waiting for the son to join them (either in life or in death). The parents are 'waiting' for the poet, near a location he calls 'Eden Rock'. **This reminds us of the garden of paradise and the picnic location is indeed idyllic.**

His parents are described in vivid and loving detail and are young again in his 'memory'. The colour white infuses the poem with a reminder of burial shrouds: 'the stiff white cloth' and heaven: 'the sky whitens'. The mother's hair 'takes on the light' making her appear angel-like. The reference to 'three suns' reminds us of the three members of the family, now equal in death.

The parents seem comfortable and happy and they are clearly waiting for the poet to arrive: 'sets out/The same three plates'. They are, however, separated from him by a stream which represents the transitional journey between life and death in mythology. **One is reminded of the River Styx that must be traversed, in ancient Roman literature, to reach the land of death.** The mother and father beckon to the poet from the 'other bank' and tell him that 'Crossing is not as hard as you might think' making death seem like a simple transition, a short crossing over a languid stream. **The last line of the poem is separated from the regular scheme, making it appear as though time has now passed and the poet has moved to the other side to join his parents.** He states ambiguously that 'I had not thought it would be like this.' We are not told whether he refers to life, the transition to death or the afterlife itself in this line.

Eden Rock

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Eden Rock** by Charles Causley, in AQA's Love and Relationship cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. Give one piece of information you know about the poet, Charles Causley. **AO3**
2. Find one phrase that uses the imagery of light in the poem. **AO1, AO2**
3. What is caesura? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. What type of narration do you see in the poem? Why is this effective? **AO2**
6. Which words or phrases show the concentration on ordinary things in the poem? **AO1, AO2**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **AO2**
8. Why do you think the poet adds the phrase 'as if lit by three suns'? What effect does this have? **AO2**

9. What is Eden and how does this make **Eden Rock** an appropriate name for the poem? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present the theme of parents and children in **Eden Rock** and one other poem from the Love and Relationship cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

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AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Before You Were Mine

by Carol Ann Duffy

Context

Before You Were Mine was written by Carol Ann Duffy, who is the first female British Poet Laureate. Duffy was born in Glasgow in 1955 to a Scottish father and an Irish mother. She was raised as a Catholic and attended Catholic school. She was brought up in Staffordshire after moving there with her family.

Duffy's love of literature started as a child when her mother invented fairy tales for her and this love was later encouraged by her teachers at school. Duffy attended the University of Liverpool, graduating with a degree in Philosophy. It was in Liverpool that she met and fell in love with the poet Adrian Henri, who encouraged her love of poetry writing. Her big break came when she won the National Poetry Competition in 1983. She has since gone on to publish many books for adults and children and is also an acclaimed playwright and editor.

Duffy's work often features a sense of ritual, stemming back to her Catholic school days. She also explores feminine stereotypes, challenging historical male superiority in her collection **The World's Wife**. Her relationship with her mother also features in much of Duffy's later work, as does her relationship with her own daughter, Ella, whose arrival changed her life beyond recognition. **Before You Were Mine** is an exploration of the relationship between mother and child and a tribute to the sacrifices mothers make for their children.

The Title

The title is a bold assertion to her mother about the nature of their relationship. We tend to think of a child as 'belonging' to the parent, since they generally choose to bring them into the world. However, the word 'mine' inverts this dynamic, implying the mother belongs to her child.

The Structure

The poem is neatly organised into four stanzas, each containing five lines of a similar length. This reminds the reader of a similarly neatly organised photograph album which seems to have been the stimulus for the poem. The lack of rhyme in the poem creates a conversational tone suggestive of a close mother/child bond.

The tightly organised structure is also reminiscent of the steady, predictable passage of time, also neatly organised into weeks, months and years. This sense of time passing is further emphasised by the use of enjambment in the poem: 'Marilyn/I'm not here yet.' The enjambment draws our eyes quickly through the poem creating a sense of haste, tying it in with the idea of time passing by at speed.

The repetition of the word, 'pavement' in the first and last stanza gives the poem a circular structure, meaning that the poem starts and begins in the same place. This reminds the reader of the 'circle of life' where we all experience our fun, carefree years as teenagers and then have to grow up and take on adult responsibility as parents.

The poem is mostly told in the present tense, as the speaker remembers past events. This is unusual in the first two stanzas, given these cannot be the speaker's own memories; 'I'm not here yet' implying that the speaker has seemingly travelled back in time to look at her mother's younger self. We come to see this photograph as a kind of

bookmark in time, as the speaker looks back to an early chapter; the young lady in the photograph is almost a completely different person to the speaker's mother today.

Ideas and Language

The language creates a stark contrast between the mother's life as a teenager and her life as a parent. The description of her young life is full of references to her being lively, happy and bright. The teenager is described as 'laughing' and 'shrieking.' **Her daughter can visualise her 'under the tree, with its lights.' She is 'winking in Portobello,' and she sparkles and waltzes her way through life.**

The mother is also described using images of glamour, wearing 'high-heeled red shoes,' she dreams of 'fizzy movie tomorrows' and is compared to the most glamorous film star of all – 'Marilyn.' There is a sense of optimism and a bright future for the poet's mother, that this bold confident, rebellious young woman could conquer the world if she wanted to. **She enjoys being the centre of attention, 'in the ballroom with the thousand eyes.'** She is a 'bold girl' who stays out late to meet boys, who takes risks and lives life for the moment.

However, her life as a parent is described very differently. The words 'ghost' and 'relics' hint at guilt from the poet that her arrival into the world signalled the end of this vibrant, young woman with the glittering future ahead of her. **The poet declares 'The decade ahead of my loud, possessive yell was the best one, eh?'** The rhetorical question here lends the poem a conversational tone, but also hints at a darker truth: **the mother's youthful glee was lost after childbirth.**

The continual use of the personal pronoun 'I' creates a self obsessed, demanding speaker, whose need for attention and time seems to have sucked the life from her mother. However, the reference to a childhood

memory towards the end of the poem: 'Cha cha cha! **You'd teach me the steps on the way home from Mass,'** suggests that becoming a parent did not dim the mother's sparkle altogether and, despite her adult responsibilities, she still managed to maintain her sense of fun and adventure at times. Whether the mother would see the birth of her daughter in the same negative terms as the poet, is up for debate.

Before You Were Mine

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Before You Were Mine** by Carol Ann Duffy, in AQA's Love and Relationship cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. Give one piece of information you know about the poet, Carol Ann Duffy. **AO3**
2. What is caesura? **AO2**
3. The Marilyn mentioned in the poem is Marilyn Monroe. Why is this an effective comparison for her mother? **AO2, AO3**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. The poem is written in the first person and in present tense. Why is this effective? **AO2**
6. Which words or phrases show possessiveness in the poem? **AO1, AO2**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words and phrases you chose in the last question are effective. **AO2**
8. What is unusual about the structure of this poem? Why is this effective? **AO2**

9. How does the consistent stanza and line structure impact on the poem? **AO2, AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets present vivid childhood memories in **Before You Were Mine** and one other poem from the Love and Relationship cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

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- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

Letters From Yorkshire

by Maura Dooley

Context

Letters from Yorkshire is a modern poem by the poet, Maura Dooley. She was born in Truro in Cornwall in 1957 but is of Irish descent. She grew up in Bristol and then attended the University of York.

She has published a number of poetry collections over the years. In 1997, her poem **The Message** won the Forward Poetry Prize. Both the **Kissing a Bone** anthology (1996) and **Life Under Water** (2008) were short-listed for the T. S. Eliot Prize.

She has lived in a number of places in her life, although she has now settled in London where she teaches Creative Writing at Goldsmiths University. She once lived in Yorkshire and **Letters from Yorkshire** is possibly influenced by the homesickness felt upon receiving letters from a friend in Yorkshire.

The Title

The title of the poem reflects the subject matter exactly. Dooley writes about the experience of receiving letters from a friend in Yorkshire while living in London. She contrasts her daily life of 'feeding words' into her computer with the letter writer's life of quiet, physical pursuits ruled by the seasons. **In the opening stanza, the letter writer is planting potatoes and looks up to see some birds returning in their annual migration.** He goes inside to write to her. Dooley describes what he writes as 'pouring air and light' into an envelope, indicating that the letters give her hope and a sense of the fresh air of the countryside.

The Structure

The poem is written in first person and probably reflects the poet's own experiences as we know she once lived in Yorkshire and remembers it fondly. This first-person narration makes the poem's message more potent and personal and we feel the connection between the pair. While the letter writer is referred to as 'he' in the first stanza, he quickly becomes 'you', again indicating a closer relationship as she turns to speaking to him directly.

The poem is written in free verse, meaning there is no regular rhyme, rhythm or line length. Everything is varied and changeable in the poem, just like the seasons she writes about. The lines flow from one to the next with much use of enjambment. **This gives the sense of real speech or perhaps the style of the letter written by the man in the poem.** The lack of formality in the poem suggests the personal closeness of the pair. Enjambment is used to particular effect in the words 'seasons/turning' as the change of the seasons is mirrored in the change from one stanza to the next.

Ideas and Language

The poem is one of contrasts, her life in London and the letter writer's in Yorkshire. **The letter writer's actions are discussed at length, allowing for much use of verbs throughout the descriptions of his life.** This gives his life an added potency and vitality that hers does not seem to have. **He is described as 'digging', 'planting', 'pouring', 'breaking' and 'clearing' while she is simply described as 'feeding words' into her computer.**

We see the poet mulling over the ideas of connectedness to nature. She writes about a male friend who might have a 'life more real' because he plants and grows and works with his hands in the natural

environment. **Dooley may question whether his life is more real than hers because of this but she clearly romanticises the life lived close to nature.** The line 'It's not romance, simply how things are' might actually indicate a discussion the two really had, him stating that his life is not romantic while she insists on painting it in a rosy hue.

She sees his actions as more noble than her own: she is 'feeding words' into the computer (a thankless task perhaps) while he is 'planting potatoes' and feeding people. **The screen is 'blank' indicating its mundanity and lifelessness. It has none of the lyrical quality of his 'knuckles singing' from the cold.** In the lines about the letter writer you feel the cold and then the contrast of the warmth indoors. The image of his knuckles 'singing' or stinging and then reddening in the warmth is so much more real than anything the narrator says about her own life.

For the narrator, the natural world the letter writer lives in is 'that other world'. It is so different from the one where she sits with a 'heartful of headlines', perhaps indicating a lack of ability to take in anything else as she works. **The term 'heartful' is interesting when used with something so clinical like 'headlines'.** The alliteration here highlights how wrongly the two words seem to go together as though she struggles with the concept of finding passion and 'heart' in her work.

She uses the words 'word' and 'world' close together in the second last stanza. These two alliterative words remind us of the connectedness/closeness of the pair in the poem but also the difference in their lives and situations. **The otherworldliness of his life is further enhanced when she explains that it is him who sends word of his life and that this news of the natural world is like 'pouring air and light' into**

the envelope. His world of nature is all that is 'light' and airy in the world, a wonderful separation from, what she sees as, the mundanity of her daily grind.

Their closeness with one another is reworked in the last line when she describes 'our souls' tapping out messages. Their letter writing is not a simple act of friendship, their 'souls' are connected through it in a kind of magical way. **Finally, the miles between his natural world and her in her office are 'icy', indicating that this distance is not a welcome one.**

Letters From Yorkshire

Expert Exam Prep

Read **Letters from Yorkshire** by Maura Dooley, in AQA's Love and Relationships cluster, then answer the following questions.

One sentence answers:

1. What is meant by 'my heartfelt of headlines'? **AO1**
2. What is the relationship between the narrator and the person they're addressing? **AO1**
3. How would you describe the poetic voice? **AO2**

Three sentence answers:

4. What is happening in this poem? Briefly explain the events. **AO1**
5. What ideas is Dooley trying to impart to readers? **AO1**
6. Pick three words or phrases which indicate how the narrator is feeling. **AO1**

Paragraph answers:

7. Explain how the words or phrases you picked in the last question are effective. **AO2**
8. Explain how the form and structure of the poem help Dooley to convey her ideas. **AO2**
9. How is Yorkshire shown to be significant to Dooley? **AO3**

Mini-essay answer:

10. Compare how poets explore the theme of distance in **Letters from Yorkshire** and one other poem from the Love and Relationships cluster. **AO1, AO2, AO3**

Remember!

When answering the Paper 2 poetry question, you will be tested on the following Assessment Objectives:

AO1: Read, understand and respond to texts. Students should be able to:

- maintain a critical style and develop an informed personal response.
- use textual references, including quotations, to support and illustrate interpretations.

AO2: Analyse the language, form and structure used by a writer to create meanings and effects, using relevant subject terminology where appropriate.

AO3: Show understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written.

