

A Level Literature Exam Revision Schedule 2025

Course Assessment Objectives are:

AO1: Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.

AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.

AO4: Explore connections across literary texts.

AO5: Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations

Paper 9ETO /1: Othello AO1, AO2, AO3, AO5. A Streetcar Named Desire AO1, AO2, AO3

Paper 9ETO/2: Prose Study. The Handmaid's Tale and Frankenstein. AO1, AO2, AO3, AO4

Paper 9ETO/3: Modern Poetry AO1, AO2, AO4. Romantic Poetry AO1, AO2, AO3

Here is a revision schedule to help you organise your time.

WEEK	REVISION ACTIVITIES
Week 1 wb 24 th February	Prescribed Modern Poetry and Unseen Poetry <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Re-read each prescribed poem from the Poems of the Decade collection.• Choose one prescribed poem and one unseen poem (see Unseen Poetry Anthologies) and find five connections between them.• Compose a thesis statement evaluating these poems and the most relevant ways you think they are connected. <p>There are three Unseen Poetry Anthologies you can use. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Unseen Poetry Preparation Anthology➤ Unseen Poetry Preparation Anthology II➤ South-Asian and other Diaspora Poems
Week 2 wb 3 rd March	A Streetcar Named Desire <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Watch the National Theatre production of the play – available on Planet EStream on the school website.• Re-read the play.
Week 3 wb 10 th March	Romantic Poetry <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Re-read the prescribed poems. Annotate and write down their central themes and concerns. Consider what message regarding life and society the poet is trying to convey.• Research the Romantic Movement on the British Library website.
Week 4 wb 17 th March	Othello <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Re-read the play script. Note down key words concerning the central themes and characters.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-read the Critical Anthology essays. What are the critics asserting regarding the text? What is your own academic response and opinion in relation to theirs? <p>There are two anthologies you can use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Shakespeare Tragedy Anthology ➤ Shakespeare Critical Anthology: Shakespeare and Diversity (two essays)
<p>Week 5 wb 24th March</p>	<p>Science and Society: The Handmaid’s Tale and Frankenstein.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-read key scenes and chapters from the texts. • Create a mind map or write a series of thesis statements evaluating central elements of the texts and the ways they connect to one another. <p>You might consider: narrative structure, narrative style and ‘voice’, contextual influences, the Enlightenment, Prometheus, gender, censorship, identity, cultural and religious allusions, family relationships.</p>
<p>Week 6 & Week 7 wb 31st March & wb 7th April</p>	<p>Prescribed Modern and Unseen Poetry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose two or three poems from the Unseen Poetry Anthologies. Decide which of the prescribed poems they fit best with. Write a short argument explaining why they should be studied together. • Compose an exam essay question for these poems. What do you think the focus might be? <p>Romantic Poetry Write a practice essay on Romantic Poetry. Try forming your own question and question focus. Here is the question structure:</p> <p>Explore the ways in which FOCUS is presented in NAMED POEM by POET and in one other poem. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors.</p> <p>Possible question focuses might be: love, justice, emotion, spirituality, the natural world, change, memory, place, freedom, innocence, suffering, inspiration, hope, independence, individuality</p>
<p>Week 8 wb 14th April</p>	<p>Science and Society: The Handmaid’s Tale and Frankenstein. Compose or plan strong evaluative arguments around these textual features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secrecy • Individuality or homogeneity – co-dependence or independence • Obsession or addiction – to experiences or ideas • Freedom and oppression • Selfishness or selflessness – our responsibility to others, society or ourselves • Cultural and societal values – the ways they are enforced, ignored or subverted • Longing and desire – what individuals want, how they attempt to achieve this or how they behave when denied these things • Power – how it is achieved or denied, what it is used for • How each text reflects our current and past reality • The ways each text echoes, parallels or contradicts the central messages of the other text.
<p>Week 9 wb 21st April</p>	<p>A Streetcar Named Desire</p> <p>Use a past essay question and compose an essay response which references only theatrical elements of the play (no dialogue). Evaluate their meaning, impact and contextual relevance. How do they further the story and convey Williams’ concerns?</p>
<p>Week 10 wb 28th April</p>	<p>Othello</p>

	<p>Compose an essay in response to a sample essay question. You might choose to compose your own question. The question structure is:</p> <p>Explore how Shakespeare presents FOCUS in Othello. You must relate your discussion to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.</p>
<p>Week 11 wb 5th May</p>	<p>Science and Society: The Handmaid’s Tale and Frankenstein.</p> <p>Write an evaluative essay focusing on these topics (taken from an earlier revision schedule).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge, education, ambition, propaganda, the nature of truth • Physical descriptions and costume – ugliness of the creature, Offred’s attire • Patronyms and naming – Offred, the creature, monster, devil etc • Identity and how it is created, changed, manipulated, broken • The epigraphs at the opening of each novel • Fire, the blasted stump, the Promethean flame – the Ceremony, Jezebels, the birthing ritual handmaids endure • Violence and its uses – physical, psychological, emotional, sexual etc • Appropriation of religious texts • Narrative methods – character narration, non-linear structure
<p>Week 12 wb 12th May</p>	<p>Choose some past essay questions (those that you are less comfortable with!) and plan an evaluative argument to answer them.</p> <p>Read some academic ideas online in relation to these topics. How far do you agree with their arguments?</p>
<p>Week 13 Wb 19th May</p>	<p>Plan practice essays – write practice essays – review previous practice essays and improve them</p>

Other revision, planning and preparation you can do:

1. Practise writing essays which meet all the Assessment Objectives for each exam component – stated at the top of this document. Ask your teacher for practice questions.
2. Re-read or re-watch the texts.
3. Purple pen redraft sections or all of Literature essays you have previously written.
 - Pay particular attention to the top band criteria descriptors for each applicable Assessment Objective on the mark scheme.
 - Redraft one or two sections from some of these essays to meet the AOs you have missed.



Pearson
Edexcel

A level English Literature

Shakespeare Critical
Anthology:
Shakespeare and
Diversity

Issue 1





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Using this Additional Critical Anthology

This Critical Anthology is not intended to replace, but rather to supplement the current Shakespeare Critical Anthologies on [Tragedy](#) and [Comedy](#). As such, it adheres to the principles set out in the original Critical Anthologies and so some reiteration of these principles is warranted here.

At the heart of our A level Literature qualification are literary texts, and A level depends upon the careful reading and re-reading of these. The study of Literature at A level, however, also requires you to read widely, deeply and independently to secure informed views about these texts. Reading critically means not just having opinions but understanding how and why other readers might think differently.

This collection of critical passages is designed to approach the reading of Shakespeare through lenses of diversity:

- gender
- sexuality
- ethnicity
- disability.

The critical views contained here will offer you a range of ways of considering Shakespeare, some general in their application, others related to specific set texts.

The texts have been selected to give you a taste of high-quality writing by literary critics about texts that you should know well. You and your teachers may wish to supplement them with other passages of criticism that you find illuminating, but this is not essential. We hope that your own critical writing style will be enriched by reading, and sometimes grappling with, these pieces. The arguments posed will enable you to consider the views of others and form, and perhaps re-assess, your own readings of Shakespeare.

There can be difficulties when reading texts using ‘politically-inflected’ critical lenses, especially when such lenses engage with sensitive topics or issues of diversity. There is always the potential under such circumstances that the proverbial cart can come before the horse. There is, in other words, the danger that rather than the critical approach being used as a means of unlocking new dimensions of the literary text (in this case Shakespeare), the text is instead used as a kind of ‘rubber stamp’ to ‘support’ the ideas the critic wishes to present.

This ‘health warning’ given, critical approaches related to issues of diversity provide audiences, readers and students with a variety of interesting and insightful ways of engaging with Shakespeare some 400 years after his death. The world has not stood still, but Shakespeare continues to play an integral part not only in literary education, but also in the cultural life of the UK and, indeed, the world as a whole. His continued presence ‘on the stage’ demonstrates the extent to which succeeding generations have continued to find in his work material that is both relevant and critically important to their lives, and the materials in this critical anthology are testimony to that fact.



So how might you use literary criticism within A level English Literature? This will vary from student to student, depending on your developing skills in the subject. There is no expectation for you to pepper your own responses to Shakespeare with quotations from the Critical Anthologies, or to ensure that a set percentage of your essay references this material. The intention is that your own responses to Shakespeare's writing will be enriched by considering the range of viewpoints offered here. Think of the perspectives offered here not as 'the answer' to reading Shakespeare, but merely as another reading of the text for you to engage with. You will certainly notice that literary critics do not always agree with each other.

All of the points below are valuable ways of using the extended reading offered in this collection – during class discussion, in personal essays, or ultimately in your examination responses:

- understand the interpretation being put forward about the literary text(s).
- compare the critic's position with your own reading of the text (or indeed that of another critic or a member of your class). Identify any points of connection or difference
- agree with the point made. Identify further evidence in Shakespeare's text to extend it.
- disagree with the critic's position. Identify evidence in Shakespeare's text that might support your opposing argument
- refine the critic's position. Identify one element that you can support and another that you would prefer to refine and qualify with evidence from the text
- select particular quotations that support or contrast with your own reading of the text to strengthen your discussion or literary essay.

It is not possible in a volume of this sort, of course, to cover all texts and all schools of thought, but the materials here provide a useful body of material from which to start thinking in critical terms about Shakespeare in relation to a variety of diversity issues.

We hope that you find these materials interesting and useful.



Coverage by Text and Topic

Topic: Historicist and presentist readings of Shakespeare

Text	Source
General	Howard, J. E., & O'Connor, M. F. (Eds.) 'Shakespeare reproduced: The text in history and ideology'.
General	'Introduction', Hawkes, T. <i>Shakespeare in the Present.</i>

Topic: Gender

Text	Source
General	Penelope Freedman 'Shakespeare and Gender'.
<i>Hamlet</i>	Jillian Luke 'What if the Play Were Called <i>Ophelia</i> '.
<i>Othello</i>	Breyan Strickler 'Sex in the City: An Ecocritical Perspective on the Place of Gender and Race in <i>Othello</i> '.
<i>Measure for Measure</i>	Manon Turban 'A creature that did bear the shape of man': hybridity and gender in <i>Measure for Measure</i> '.
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	Terence Hawkes 'Or' in <i>Meaning by Shakespeare.</i>



Topic: Sexuality

Text	Source
Measure for Measure	Mario Digangi 'Pleasure and Danger: Measuring Female Sexuality in Measure for Measure'.
Hamlet	Lee Edelman 'Hamlet's Wounded Name' in <i>Shakespeare: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare</i> , ed. Madhavi Menon .
Twelfth Night	Joseph Pequigney 'The Two Antonios and Same-Sex Love in Twelfth Night.

Topic: Ethnicity

Text	Source
General	Ruben Espinosa 'Diversifying Shakespeare'.
<i>Othello</i>	Karen Newman "And wash the Ethiop white": femininity and the monstrous in <i>Othello</i> '.
<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>	Theodora J. Jankowski's review of Carol Chillington Rutter's <i>Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage</i> .

Topic: Disability

Text	Source
King Lear	Christine M. Gottlieb "'Unaccommodated Man": Dismodernism and Disability Justice in King Lear'.
Twelfth Night	Alice Equestri ' This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen': Feste, Lear's Fool and the border between 'idiocy' and mental illness'.



Texts and criticism coverage

Play – tragedy	Gender	Sexuality	Ethnicity	Disability
<i>Antony and Cleopatra</i>			x	
<i>Hamlet</i>	x	x		x
<i>King Lear</i>				x
<i>Othello</i>	x		x	

Play – comedy	Gender	Sexuality	Ethnicity	Disability
<i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	x			
<i>Measure for Measure</i>	x	x		
<i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	x			
<i>Twelfth Night</i>		x		x



Section A: Historicist and Presentist readings of Shakespeare

Any consideration of diversity, whether it be related to Gender, Sexuality, Ethnicity or Disability inevitably brings to the fore the tensions that exist between **presentist** and **historicist** readings of Shakespeare. This is in many respects a good thing, as it encourages students to see that literary texts are not subject to singular interpretations, nor do interpretations remain static and immovable over time. Although it is not used in this anthology, *Shakespeare and the Urgency of Now* (eds Di Pietro and Grady, 2014) provides a very good basis for establishing the contingent nature of interpretation, thus knocking on the head any unhelpful notions of the ‘universality’ and ‘timelessness’ of Shakespeare’s works. Indeed, there is much to be said for exploring critical extracts relating to diversity issues which are not focused on any specific text(s); these can serve to encourage more diverse thinking about how Shakespeare signifies in the world or they might engage more specifically with broad areas such as genre. Catherine Belsey’s *Why Shakespeare?* (2007) is useful in both these respects.

Glossary

presentist – readings that are created using the terms and mores of the time at which the reading occurs (i.e., in the reader’s ‘present’).

historicist – readings that are created using the terms and mores of the time at which the text was produced (i.e., in the author’s time).



1. Shakespeare reproduced: The text in history and ideology.

Howard & Connor challenge the idea that Shakespeare can and should be seen as 'universal' in his meaning. Such an idea, they argue, is 1) to limit the range of human experience by reducing our sense of what it means to be human, and 2) our understanding of Shakespeare's work as literature which must, by its very nature, remain open to a plurality of readings.

Probably more than any other figure in western culture, Shakespeare has been used to secure assumptions about texts, history, ideology, and criticism He functions, in many quarters, as a kind of cultural **Esperanto**, a medium through which the differences of material existence — differences of race, gender, class, history, and culture — are supposedly cancelled. He is repeatedly presented as the writer who transcends such differences to get at the abiding truths of human existence, as 'not for an age, but for all time'. Claims about Shakespeare as the bearer of universal truths serve an oppressive function when they render illegitimate readings produced outside the **dominant ideologies** which secure a society's understanding of what the true is. As feminists and Third World critics, among others, have suggested, when texts are said to speak for humankind, humankind often shrinks radically to include only those within a traditional pale of privilege. [It is important] ... to question claims of Shakespeare's universality and to reveal ways in which historically specific factors determine the 'Shakespeare' produced in criticism, in the classroom, and on the stage. Accompanying the contention that Shakespeare depicts a universal and unchanging human nature are often two further claims: first, that the meaning of a Shakespearean text is **ineluctably** in that text (and consequently never changes); and second, that the Shakespearean text resides in an aesthetic zone above ideology. One stark link among these claims is their avoidance of history. To posit an unchanging meaning in texts, waiting to be found by 'good' readers, is to deny the **historicity** of the reading and theatrical practices through which a plural and opaque text is rendered variously intelligible at different historical moments and from different interested positions within the social formation. Similarly, to posit a category of self-evidently literary works, somehow above ideology, is to ignore the historicity of the very category of the literary, the way, that is, different works fall within that category at



different historical moments. Such a move essentializes what is socially constructed; and it arbitrarily places outside the arena of social contest certain pieces of writing and certain acts of reading. Again, the ideological function of such claims is to allow local and particular constructions of Shakespeare to enjoy the privilege of natural and unchanging truths, uncontaminated by the 'merely' political or parochial.

Glossary

Esperanto – a constructed language invented by L.L Zamenhof in 1887, intended to become a global medium of communication.

dominant ideologies – the ideologies and beliefs that are the most powerful and significant within a society.

ineluctably – undeniably and uniquely.

historicity – historical authenticity.

Source: 'Shakespeare reproduced: The text in history and ideology ', Howard, J. E., & O'Connor, M. F. (Eds.), Routledge 2005.



2. Shakespeare in the Present.

Hawkes asks us to reconsider the factors affecting contemporary readings of Shakespeare and to think again about how the present (and presentist readings) must be part of developing appropriate 21st century views of Shakespeare and historicism.

Currently prominent amongst [critical approaches] is one that urges us to read the plays ‘historically’: to reinsert them into the context in which they first came to be, and on which, it’s said, their intelligibility depends. Our aim for Shakespeare should be to ‘restore Shakespeare’s artistry to the earliest conditions of its realisation...’ and to ‘restore his works to the specific imaginative and material circumstances in which they were written and engaged’. Only when we do this, can we hope to confront **the Bard’s** ‘historical specificity’.

Of course, if the alternative is to deal with plays in blissful ignorance of their historical context, to impose on them, as many teachers unthinkingly seem to do, some kind of absurd contemporaneity with ourselves, usually justified by windy rhetoric about the Bard’s ‘universality’, then perhaps historical specificity of some sort is an acceptable antidote. However, that kind of artlessness doesn’t seem to be the main target. One of the biggest obstacles to reading Shakespeare historically ... is ‘theory’. Theory’s stress on the critic’s ‘situatedness’ in the present results in a self-regarding focus that irrevocably contaminates any contact with the past. Only if we confront the plays’ texts in terms, not of the critic’s present situation, but of the ‘actual conditions of their production and reception’, stressing both their ‘particularity and contingency’, can we defeat the Bard’s most sinister enemy. Its name is ‘presentism’.

The principal **talisman** capable of warding off this spectre is called ‘facts’: facts about specific historical conditions that have determined the reading and writing of literature, facts about the material circumstances of literary production, facts about how books and playscripts were actually produced, sold and received. Retrieved and analysed by the scholar, these facts will lay bare, not the author’s unique meaning, concealed within the text, but the extent to which the text itself speaks of ‘the corporate activities that have brought it into being’.



All well and good, but — a matter of tone — what does that reiterated ‘restore’ imply? Does it hint at the recovery of a lost purity, of a final arrival at truth-revealing origins, of the Restoration at last of the genuine monarchy of genius, even of a more fundamental confrontation, no longer in a glass, darkly, but now face to face? It’s true that a looming, obtrusive present would certainly blur the outlines of any **Grail** worth grasping. And if the aim of historical scholarship were simply to establish ‘how it really was’ ... then the present can only be an intervening, distracting fog that needs to be pierced or blown away. But the present’s relation to the past is surely a subtler matter than that. All restorations face one major problem. Reaching backwards, they can’t afford to examine the position in the present from which that manoeuvre is undertaken. As a result, they discount the nature of the choosing and the omission, the selections and suppressions that determine it. Yet to avoid the pitfall by taking one’s present situation fully into account seems inevitably to compromise the project. Genuinely to capture, or repeat, the past is of course fundamentally impossible for a variety of other reasons. In fact, the attempt to do so ... usually risks an engagement, not with sameness, but with the very motive forces that produce difference. Restoration may aim to be the thief of time, but it’s a notoriously unsuccessful one.

For none of us can step beyond time. It can’t be drained out of our experience. As a result, the critic’s own ‘situatedness’ does not — cannot — contaminate the past. In effect, it constitutes the only means by which it’s possible to see the past and perhaps comprehend it. And since we can only see the past through the eyes of the present, few serious historians would deny that the one has a major influence on their account of the other. Of course we should read Shakespeare historically. But given that history results from a never-ending dialogue between past and present, how can we decide whose historical circumstances will have priority in that process, Shakespeare’s, or our own?

Glossary

the Bard – Shakespeare

talisman – an object with magical powers thought to bring good luck

Grail – the chalice that supposedly contained the blood of Jesus Christ (i.e. a very desirable object)

Source: ‘Shakespeare in the Present’, Terence Hawkes, Routledge



Section B: Gender-based Readings

1. Shakespeare and Gender

Freedman introduces a nuanced way of thinking about feminist readings of Shakespeare and how these have developed.

‘Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.’ (**Virginia Woolf**, ***A Room of One’s Own***. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1945, p. 37)

Consideration of gender issues in Shakespeare over the past twenty-five years has, inevitably, been dominated by feminist critics. The huge reappraisal of women’s lives, from their histories and achievements to their very identities was extended to Shakespeare criticism as early as 1975 by Juliet Dusinberre (*Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996 [1975]), in an extraordinary book which challenged the premises of ‘male’ literary scholarship and asserted women’s right to share ownership of the literary text, to read from a personal perspective, to ask their own questions, to lay claim to the authoritative critical voice. In the flood of feminist writing on Shakespeare that has followed, the most successful has been that which, like Dusinberre’s, shed light not only on Shakespeare’s women but on his men, which has examined the cultural constructs of masculinity and femininity and the playing of gender roles. To return to Woolf’s mirror, in the binary relationship of male and female, examination of the one is reflected in a clearer picture of the other. The ‘Was Shakespeare a feminist?’ approach of some of the early feminist critics was superseded by more subtle approaches that opened up fruitful avenues now taken for granted in our mental maps of the plays. These included the freeing of women characters from simplistic performance stereotypes (**Cressida** the whore, **Lady Macbeth** the dominatrix, **Goneril and Regan** the monstrous daughters); greater interest in relationships between women characters; the re-assessment of marginal characters; interest in the overt exploration of role playing and gender performance by the ‘**androgynous**’ heroines of the comedies; exploration of male anxiety in the face of assertive and dominant women and the need to perform masculinity.



Glossary

Virginia Woolf – novelist and essayist, 1882–1941.

A Room of One's Own – a famous work on women writers and their place in literature by Virginia Woolf, 1929.

Cressida – eponymous heroine of Shakespeare's play *Troilus and Cressida*, 1602.

Lady Macbeth – wife of Macbeth in *Macbeth*, 1606.

Goneril and Regan – King Lear's elder daughters in *King Lear*, 1606.

androgynous – of indeterminate sex.

Source: Penelope Freedman 'Shakespeare and Gender', *Literature Compass* 1 (2004)

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1741-4113.2004.00017.x>



2. *Hamlet*: What if the Play Were Called *Ophelia*?

Luke encourages readers to reconsider how the character of Ophelia and her significance might be understood, arguing that even in her silences she speaks.

William Hazlitt may have described Ophelia as ‘a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon’¹, but modern feminist literary criticism knows that it cannot look away from her. The sense that the feminist critic must ‘absent [herself] from felicity a while’ and ‘tell [Ophelia’s] story’ (V.ii.331–3) has pervaded criticism at least since the publication of Elaine Showalter’s 1985 essay ‘Representing Ophelia’. Showalter’s original question — ‘what can we mean by Ophelia’s story?’² — remains a live critical enquiry, and one to which many critics have since tried to give an answer. No longer might it be said that Ophelia’s ‘visibility as a subject in literature, popular culture, and painting ...is in inverse relation to her invisibility in Shakespearean critical texts’³. Showalter’s own answer, given in response to Lee Edwards’s comment that, ‘without Hamlet, Ophelia literally has no story’⁴, is to say that ‘Ophelia does have a story of her own that feminist criticism can tell; it is neither her life story, nor her love story ..., but rather the history of her representation’⁵. Showalter’s response has considerable merit. Ophelia is in only four scenes of the play — five, if you ... include the graveyard scene — and she is not the protagonist of the plot in which she finds herself: the play is called *Hamlet*, not *Ophelia*. It seems to make sense, therefore, to locate Ophelia’s ‘story’ outside the playtext because of her disproportionate status in popular culture and, certainly post-1985, in literary criticism. Nevertheless, locating Ophelia’s story outside the text is another way of not listening to what she says in the play. Sandra Fischer⁶ argues that ‘one must listen for the repression of Ophelia’s voice as juxtaposed against Hamlet’s noisy soul-wrenching soliloquies’. A feminist reading which

¹ William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* (London 1818) p. 122.

² Elaine Showalter, ‘Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism’, in Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* (London 1985) pp. 77–94.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁴ Lee Edwards, ‘The Labours of Psyche: Toward a Theory of Female Heroism’, *Critical Inquiry*, 6 (1979) pp. 33–49; Showalter, ‘Representing Ophelia’, p. 79. 14 Rutter, *Enter the Body*, p. 27.

⁵ Elaine Showalter, ‘Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism’, in Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* (London 1985) p. 78.

⁶ Sandra K. Fischer, ‘Hearing Ophelia: Gender and Tragic Discourse in *Hamlet*’, *Renaissance and Reformation*, 14/1 (1990) pp. 1–10: 3.



only listens to Ophelia's silences could equally be condemned by Christy Desmet's⁷ criticism of **iconographic readings**: that 'Ophelia has complexity only when she is silenced and made an object of sight'. Fischer⁸ goes on to argue that 'hearing Ophelia requires a new set of critical ears' when, actually, using the old ones to listen as intently to Ophelia as we do to Hamlet will work perfectly well.

The underlying problem with all these critical approaches is that they assume the subject of Ophelia's story is Ophelia herself, and behind this premise is the idea that Ophelia can only speak for herself. Kate Zambreno touches on this in her account of **T. S. Eliot's** essay on *Hamlet*. Zambreno⁹ notes that even if Eliot considers Hamlet's grief to be, in her words, 'excessive', 'Hamlet is still allowed to be overcome by despair, however excessive, because it is still read as **existential**. He is the hero of the story. It's Ophelia who wails and moans and drowns in an inch of water.' In Eliot's view, Hamlet is the 'hero'; his suffering is existential. It reaches the threshold for Eliot's '**objective correlative**', and so approaches the depersonalisation that he so lauded. But to Ophelia, '[n]othing is objective ... It is all so, so subjective. She takes things so personally.' Zambreno¹⁰ ultimately concurs with Eliot, and argues that Ophelia's experience in *Hamlet* is highly subjective, even if she does not condemn her for it. I think this emphasis on Ophelia's assertion of her subjectivity is misplaced: that is not all she is doing, or even the activity in which she is most consistently engaged. ... [W]hen Ophelia is given the opportunity to tell her story, she consciously refuses to give her individual experience any special status. Instead, she acts as a **conduit** for an essential story of female experience: abandonment, **misogyny**, patriarchal oppression, and sexual double standards. Reading Ophelia's seeming lack of interest in establishing her own distinctive subjectivity and her conduit-like quality as a deliberate technique which calls into question the tragic project of *Hamlet* will allow us radically to reconceive the subject and purpose of Ophelia's story, as well as making clear its generically subversive form and content.

⁷ Christy Desmet, *Reading Shakespeare's Characters: Rhetoric, Ethics, and Identity* (Amherst, Mass. 2002) p. 11.

⁸ Sandra K. Fischer, 'Hearing Ophelia: Gender and Tragic Discourse in *Hamlet*', *Renaissance and Reformation*, 14/1 (1990) p. 3.

⁹ Kate Zambreno, *Heroines* (Los Angeles 2007) p. 37.

¹⁰ *Ibid*



Glossary

William Hazlitt – English essayist, 1778–1830.

iconographic readings – readings that centre on the visual properties of the text.

existential – relating to existence or being.

T. S. Eliot – American poet, dramatist and essayist, 1888–1965.

objective correlative – a situation or chain of events that symbolizes and seeks to evoke a particular emotion.

conduit – a channel or means of conveyance.

misogyny – hatred or contempt for women.

Source: Jillian Luke ‘What if the Play Were Called *Ophelia*? Gender and Genre in *Hamlet*.’
The Cambridge Quarterly, Vol. 49 (1), pp. 4–6.

<https://academic.oup.com/camqtly/article-abstract/49/1/1/5807541>



3. Othello: 'Sex in the City: An Ecocritical Perspective on the Place of Gender and Race in *Othello*'

Strickler explores the ways in which characters' gender in Othello can be understood in relation to ideas of 'the Wild'.

Simon Estok emphasizes the natural as a social force, emphasizing the construction of the female body, more directly in his 1998 article 'Environmental Implications of the Writing and Policing of the Early Modern Body: Dismemberment and Monstrosity in Shakespearean Drama'. Estok shows us the other side of Woodbridge's¹¹ coin: that rural England correlated the 'bodies of animals [with] women' (110). Furthermore, Estok links these depictions of women with other attitudes toward race. Quoting Keith Thomas's study *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England, 1500-1800*, he describes how 'women — like the Irish, **the First Nations**, the poor, the black, and the mad — "were also near the animal state"' (Thomas 43, Estok 110). Thus his analysis of *Othello* focuses on how Iago juxtaposes 'images of the women and blacks with images of animals', the most famous being 'an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe' (1.1.123-34; Estok 113). I am especially interested in Estok's work because it so clearly links attitudes toward women with attitudes toward the natural world, particularly because he makes the distinction between the urban, the rural, and the wild.

Jeanne Addison Roberts¹² perhaps most clearly articulates the relationship between women and the wild in Shakespeare's plays, but for my purposes, her analyses are important because they address issues of violent colonization. Working on the assumption that the 'Shakespearean Wild is represented by landscape, foreigners, animals, and especially women', Roberts posits that 'the Wild is the locale for the male's necessary, seductive, and terrifying confrontation with the female, his braving of the perils of maternal regression and destructive erotic abandon in order **to annex** a woman into his Cultural context' (117, 24-25). This image relies on a postcolonial **rhetoric** of race where war and conquest figure prominently: Men are a colonizing force intent upon taking over a

¹¹ Woodbridge, Linda. *Women and the English Renaissance : Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620*. d, 1540-1620. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press. (1984)

¹² Roberts, Jeanne Addison. *The Shakespearean Wild: Geography, Genus, and Gender*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press (1991).



woman's space. As Roberts suggests, 'the equation of women and Nature' is a common trope (25); however, this still serves mainly as a metaphor for describing gender roles during this period. Unfortunately, the equation does not fit the situation in *Othello*. Desdemona escapes the bonds of the city of Venice, but does not flee to the Wild. Instead, she flees to a figure who represents the Wild: Othello. ... the Wild space in *Othello*, independent of women or men, seeks to reclaim the land usurped by urban-scapes.

This freedom that the women claim is not based on **licentiousness** or bodily disregard, as characters like Iago would suggest. Instead, their vision of the Wild accepts their human culture, even perhaps requires their human culture; the **dichotomy** of Man/City versus Woman/Wilderness is not appropriate for the kind of liberty that Desdemona and Othello seek. They ultimately seek the truth, whether in the city or on the battlefield. Hence we see throughout *Othello* an obsession with truth. The Wild is an ethic that has been ousted from city environments like Venice, and the story of *Othello* aims to re-integrate that ethic across all these spaces. Othello's status as a warrior links him to the chaos that can infiltrate the ethics of the city, but also opens up a space within his identity to portray the battle of ethics, as it relates to race and gender, that the play addresses. Without an understanding of place and how a place is colonized, these relationships remain isolated and out of context.

Glossary

the First Nations – indigenous peoples of Canada

to annex – to appropriate

rhetoric – the art of effective speaking or writing

licentiousness – disregard of rules or 'correctness'

dichotomy – division into two exclusive or opposing groups

Source: <https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/oxford-university-press/sex-in-the-city-an-ecocritical-perspective-on-the-place-of-gender-and-isMge8IYhF>



4. *Measure for Measure* ‘A creature that did bear the shape of man’: hybridity and gender

Turban considers the ways in which the character of Angelo, for all his apparent ‘manliness’, may be considered a ‘feminised’ character.

When, at the beginning of *Measure for Measure*, Angelo is charged by the Duke to take care of the city in his absence, he is thus given a chance to assert his manhood. But the stern deputy fails in this endeavour by progressively trading piety for vice, charity for cruelty and chastity for lust. Unable to assert the virtues that were crucial to the construction of manhood in the early modern period, Angelo even grows feminine while in office. His feminisation derives from his transgressive desire for a woman, Isabella, a desire which overwhelms him as he himself confesses: ‘This virtuous maid / subdues me quite’ (2.2.188-189). At the time when Shakespeare wrote his plays, indeed, ‘strong heterosexual passion was not a sign of manliness, but could make one effeminate’¹³. Men who were ‘subdued’ by their attraction to a woman were deemed to be feminised because of their failure to prevail upon bestial impulses, a lack of control that was thought to be characteristic of women, and because it was more generally held that ‘lust effeminates, mak[ing] men incapable of manly pursuits’¹⁴.

Feminised because of his uncontrollable lust, Angelo also destabilises the gender divide as he proves to share women’s supposedly inherent duplicity. Indeed, as Isabella laments, the deputy displays the same ability to hide his evil behind a mask of righteousness:

ISABELLA. This outward-sainted deputy,
Whose settled visage and deliberate word

¹³ Merry Wiesner-Hanks, “Gender Theory and the Study of Early-Modern Europe”, in *Practices of Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Megan Cassidy-Welch and Peter Sherlock, Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies, Turnhout, Brepols Publishers, 2008, p. 7-24, p. 20.

¹⁴ Elizabeth A. Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage*, Women and Men in History, London, Longman, 1999, p. 29.



Nips youth i'th' head, and follies doth renew
As falcon doth the fowl, is yet a devil.

(*Measure for Measure*, 3.1.88-91)

In the play, Angelo's duplicity is expressed thanks to gendered representations of the vice, which helps feminise the character even more. His very name 'Angelo' and his evil deeds echo the dichotomy that structured female identity as well as the fears that this dichotomy meant to alleviate. In Shakespeare's time, indeed, 'women [were] imagined either as angels or whores as a psychological defence against the uncomfortable suspicion that underneath, the angel *is* a whore'¹⁵. Concealing his licentiousness behind his pious appearance and his name, Angelo thus revives this gendered representation of duplicity as inherent to women's nature.

Another female figure conjured up in the play also makes the gender of the character uncertain as it yet again associates him with women's deceitfulness. In act III, Lucio indeed turns the Duke's substitute into the son of a mermaid as he declares that: 'some report a sea-maid spawned him [Angelo]' (3.1.353). Suggesting that Angelo's outward moral rigidity is inhuman, and thus necessarily the fruit of unnatural breeding, Lucio's remark helps blur Angelo's gender as it reminds the spectator that the deputy proves as gifted as mermaids, and women in general, in the art of deception. Like his monstrous mother, he uses enchanting but dishonest words — like the promise he makes to Isabella to free her brother if she agrees to share his bed — to lure his victims into his dangerous arms.

Blurring his gender, Lucio also playfully feminises Angelo through this association, as fish are used as metaphors for the female genitals in *Measure for Measure*. When the clown describes the illegal sexual interaction between Claudio and Juliet, he indeed says that the young man is accused of 'groping for trouts in a peculiar river' (1.2.82). The connection which this remark establishes between the aquatic world and the female

¹⁵ Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 25.



genitals thus sheds new light on Angelo's hybridity. His metaphorical fish part is, in the context of the play, rather female than male. Questioned through the metaphors developed in *Measure for Measure*, Angelo's biological sex is also doubted as the physical characteristics of fish make his male physiology uncertain.

In the early modern period, one of the theories which explained the differences between men and women had it that the female and male sexes were distinguished, not by anatomical singularities, but by different degrees of dryness and of heat. According to the prevailing humoral theory:

The human body was thought to be made up of four humours — blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile — and it was their relative heat or moistness which determined maleness and femaleness. Men had a propensity to be hot and dry; women cold and moist. Men and women were anatomically the same, it was just because women were colder that their penis and scrotum were inverted inside their bodies as the uterus and womb.¹⁶

Questioning his male physiology, the associations of Angelo with a mermaid and other aquatic creatures propel the character into a state of sexual indeterminacy in Lucio's speech, an indeterminacy which is highlighted by the conclusion that the deputy is 'a motion generative' (3.1.356), a man who cannot use his male genitals, and 'an ungenitured agent' (3.1.409-410). This last remark puts the finishing touches to the character's sexual indeterminacy as it turns him into a strange hermaphrodite who, rather than being doubly enabled sexually, is deprived in both guises.

Source: Manon Turban 'A creature that did bear the shape of man': hybridity and gender in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Measure for Measure* <https://journals.openedition.org/shakespeare/4971#quotation>

¹⁶ Elizabeth A. Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage*, Women and Men in History, London, Longman, 1999, p. 28.



5. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'Or' in Meaning by Shakespeare

Hawkes considers the build-up and significance of elderly female characters in the play.

Surprisingly perhaps, for a play so taken up with youth, love, procreation and marriage, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seems haunted by the shadowy images of older women. The play begins with Theseus complaining, like an impetuous legate, of

how slow

This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,

Like to a step-dame or a dowager

Long withering out a young man's revenue.' (I, i, 3–6).

Of course, 'dowagers', older women who possess 'endowments' or sums of 'revenue', can be **benign** creatures. Lysander's elopement with Hermia will be facilitated by such a 'widow aunt',

a dowager

Of great revenue, and she hath no child —

From Athens is her house remote seven leagues —

And she respects me as her only son.

(I, i, 157–60)

But these women are largely invisible, excluded from the main action and firmly exiled to its borders. I am not here drawing on those 'silences' in the play whose very existence is mocked by Richard Levin, in which the text is said actively to 'repress' or 'conceal' a feminine or maternal 'subtext', conflicting with and contradicting the imperatives of its patriarchal world. The 'hidden mother' that Coppélia Kahn¹⁷ aims to retrieve in *King Lear* is perhaps suppressed in that play in a way that Nedar is not in this. A personage called

¹⁷ Coppélia Kahn, 'The Absent Mother in King Lear' in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe* (1986), edited by Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers, pp. 239-62.



Nedar is not 'hidden', but overtly referred to twice in the text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Lysander's 'widow aunt', crucially important to the plot, has a similar claim to existence, even though she never appears on the stage. And she inhabits the same shadowy zone as Thisbe's mother (a part assigned to Robin Starveling, the tailor, in *Pyramus and Thisbe* (I, ii, 55)) who also never appears. The 'votaress' of Titania's order, the mother of the disputed **changeling**, whose 'swimming gait' in pregnancy is so strikingly reported (II, i, 130–4) dwells there too.

Of course, there are male absentees announced by the text: Pyramus's father (to be played by Tom Snout), Thisbe's father (a part claimed by Peter Quince), the Indian Boy demanded by both Oberon and Titania. But these are outweighed by a growing and finally tumultuous crowd of older women who gradually accumulate on the play's margins: the 'breathless housewives', the gossips, the 'wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale' (II, i, 37ff.) all routinely tricked by Puck, the 'ladies or Fair Ladies' (III, i, 38) congenitally afraid of swords and lions, confronted by Bottom and Snug, and the 'mothers' with whom the ambitious 'mother's sons' of the mechanicals consistently assert their **filiation** (I, ii, 73 and III, i, 69). All this takes place in the shadow of what Louis Adrian Montrose¹⁸ calls the 'pervasive cultural presence' of the ageing Queen Elizabeth, who functions as 'a condition of the play's imaginative possibility' and might even have been physically present as part of its first audience.

Glossary

benign – of a gentle disposition.

changeling – a child believed to have been substituted by fairies.

filiation – being the child of particular parents.

Source: 'Meaning by Shakespeare', Terence Hawkes, Routledge 1992.

¹⁸ 'Shaping Fantasies': Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture. Louis Adrian Montrose. *Representations* No. 2 (Spring, 1983), pp. 61-94.



Gender-based Readings: suggested other reading

- Dympna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women* (Routledge, 2000).
- Terri Power, *Shakespeare and Gender in Practice* (Macmillan, 2016).
- Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare* 2nd Edition (Prentice-Hall, 1989).



Section C: Sexuality

1. Pleasure and Danger: Measuring Female Sexuality in *Measure for Measure*

Digangi explores the roles of Mistress Elbow, Isabella, Mariana and Juliet, considering the ways in which marriage and sexual status are used to define women in the play.

I will argue that the relentless definition and manipulation of female sexuality in *Measure for Measure* is the graphic symptom of male anxiety about female agency: to unravel male-constructed meanings for erotic pleasure, pregnancy, and abortion is to discover a fear of the dangers thought to ensue from a woman's control over her own body. Because it measures the perceived cost of a woman's autonomy in marital and reproductive affairs, *Measure for Measure* foregrounds female sexual desire only to deny the desirability of seeking pleasure for pleasure's sake. **Paradoxically**, the central emblem of this dangerous desire is the pleasure-seeking body of a woman who is excluded both from the personae of the drama and from the pages of critical texts: Mistress Elbow.

Mistress Elbow, as one might well not recall, is the only legal wife in the play. In order to understand the significance of her status, we must first determine what is at stake in play's implicit and explicit allusion to the commonplace Renaissance marital **paradigm** — maid/wife/widow — whose central space is occupied by Mistress Elbow alone. Mariana, who is 'nothing', according to the Duke, because 'neither maid, widow, nor wife', frustrates but does not subvert the paradigm, as McLuskie¹⁹ notes, for the logic of comedy ultimately maneuvers her into the central slot.' Nevertheless, in privileging the 'coherent maleness' of the maid/wife/widow paradigm to which the Duke heavy-handedly directs (male?) attention, McLuskie loses the opportunity to demonstrate the paradigm's failure as an ideological measuring device. As Lucio observes, the Duke's seemingly comprehensive list of female socio-sexual roles is incomplete: 'My lord, she may be a **punk**; for many of them are neither maid, widow nor wife' (5.1.180-81). Likewise, a reading that places

¹⁹ Kathleen McLuskie, "The Patriarchal Bard: Feminist Criticism and Shakespeare: King Lear and Measure for Measure," in *Political Shakespeare*.



pressure on the conventional system can superimpose upon the Duke's **tripartite** measure of marital status a parallel and more problematic measure of sexuality. What I am calling the measure of female sexuality would account for the number and kind of a woman's sexual partners: the virgin (none), the wife (one/legal), and the whore (more than one/ illicit). Following this line of inquiry allows not only the examination of an early modern discourse surrounding and constructing the barren or pregnant female body, but a re-examination, through Mistress Elbow, of the normative category of 'wife', the middle term of both systems, as inherently unstable and challenged.

It is crucial to maintain the analytic distinctness of these two 'measures', even while noting their areas of overlap or intersection. We then realize that, before her marriage, Mariana threatens order not only because she disrupts the maid/wife/widow paradigm, but because she simultaneously and equivocally occupies the sexual position of 'wife' in the virgin/wife/whore paradigm. Juliet, before she legally becomes a wife, occupies the sexually charged space between 'wife' and 'whore'. And Isabella occupies the space of resistance and loss between 'virgin' and 'wife' — a space that is collapsed by the apparently seamless passage from 'maid' to 'wife'. Such ideological gaps between fixed, normative roles and shifting, unruly sexualities are smoothed over by Carol Thomas Neely's²⁰ argument that 'women are defined and contained through their place in the marriage paradigm. ... These roles are in turn defined by the mode of sexuality appropriate to them: virginity for maidens, marital chastity for wives, and abstinence for widows'. Because it attaches an 'appropriate' sexuality to the marital roles through which women are always already defined, this formulation does not acknowledge that the marital paradigm, with its chronological progression of essential roles in which the 'wife' can never be a 'maid' or 'widow', itself obscures the resistances that Mariana, Isabella, and Juliet pose to its containing and defining strategies — the resistances posed in the overlapping and contested spaces between virgin and wife, between wife and whore.

As the only wife in the play, Mistress Elbow most powerfully and paradoxically represents the unruly resistance within marital sexuality: the possibility of the wayward wife, who is at once promiscuous (like the stereotypical widow), and, as I hope to show, opposed to fertility (like the maid). The logic of comedy may require that Isabella, Mariana,

²⁰ Carol Thomas Neely, *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press (1985).



and Juliet progress from their unstable marital roles and sexualities into the nominally stable marital role and sexuality of the 'wife'. Yet Mistress Elbow demonstrates that such a resolution is fictive, for she provokes, instead of dispelling, the anxieties that surround and interpret (Juliet's) active sexual desire on the one hand and (Isabella's) virginity on the other. Since female sexuality in *Measure for Measure* is tendentiously 'read' through specific bodily characteristics, the 'gross characters' inscribed in Juliet's pregnant, ideologically whorish body reveal 'all th'effect of love' and incite others volubly to evaluate all the causes. Isabella's virginal body, by contrast, allows others (and herself) only veiled, sublimated, allusions to a deferred sexuality that will blossom with ripe time.

Glossary

paradoxically – in a seemingly self-contradictory way

paradigm – a standard, perspective or set of ideas

a punk – a female prostitute

tripartite – in three parts

Source: ELH Vol. 60, No. 3 (Autumn, 1993), pp. 589-609 (21 pages) published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press.



2. Hamlet's Wounded Name

Edelman explores how Hamlet finds himself sexually and personally 'placed' in Hamlet, considering the extent to which conventional sexual and relational fulfilment is unavailable to him.

Disdaining the **putrid carrion** as which he recognizes flesh, Hamlet dismisses life and sex as equally **excremental**. 'We fat ourselves for maggots' (4.3.22–23), he notes and traces the course of Alexander's dust to find 'it stopping a bunghole' (5.1.192). He may pray for sublimation, 'O that this too too sullied flesh might melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew' (1.2.129–30), and imagine himself as standing apart from any earthly appetite — 'I eat the air' (3.2.90–91), he jests — but his mind is drawn to dirt and stench with what we must call a vengeance. His revulsion in the face of embodiment, redoubled at the very thought of sex, leads him beyond the paternal charge to root out 'damned incest', even to the point of **decrying** conception and demanding 'no more marriage' (3.1.147). Fanning the flames of Hamlet's loathing for all that 'flesh is heir to' (3.1.63), the ghost, to which Hamlet is heir, as well, leaves Hamlet, as son, asunder, torn between the enforcement of sexual norms to repair what is out of joint and the extravagance of his passion for enforcing those norms, which exceeds all normative bounds. By being too much his father's child, he would have no children be fathered; defending too well the institution of marriage, he would have no marriage at all.

Stricken by this excess of **filial passion** for the reassertion of norms, Hamlet is truly 'too much in the sun' (1.2.67), or too much his father's son, for his brief against breeding not to breed, as he claims the sun does, maggots — the maggots, I mean, that taint his mind as it feasts on decay and corruption, leaving Hamlet as much out of joint as the time, as perverse as his father's restless ghost that refutes by its presence the order of 'or' it returns from the grave to defend, mocking the very distinction pronounced in 'to be, or not to be'. The inwardness, construed as **psychic** depth, for which Hamlet provides the model, responds therefore to the impossible task he confronts as his father's child: to live from the outset an afterlife as ambassador of the dead without, in the process, becoming merely an ambassador of death.



But Hamlet learns that success in the one means failure in the other. In accepting the duty to set time right, he keeps it out of joint, becoming thereby the prototype of the modern subject as Child whose efforts to make present a ghostly past in the space of an infinite future produce instead the emergent order of **hetero-temporal repetition**. If the Child thus effectively keeps time out of joint, how can Hamlet hope to put time to rights without putting an end to the Child? ‘Why would’st thou be a breeder of sinners?’ (3.1.121–22), Hamlet inquires of a startled Ophelia, who seems **to intuit** that breeding as such is what Hamlet seeks to prevent. And he does so because he knows full well, as a subject in the form of the Child, that breeders of life prevent life, too — and literally, by coming before. ‘Remember me’ is the fatal text the past inscribes on the Child, preventing the Child from living a life not out of joint with time. This out-of-jointedness positions Hamlet between two versions of generational succession: an older model of heroic, because unfathered, subjectivity (whose final exemplar may be Fortinbras) and that of the Child commanded by the father to preserve this older model but unable, because subservient to the force of that command, ever to fulfill it. No wonder the question of Hamlet’s age exerts such fascination; something keeps him from ever escaping the role of his father’s son.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare names that something and bequeaths it to us all. Beckoned to follow his father’s ghost but held back by Marcellus and Horatio, Hamlet cries out: ‘By heaven, I’ll make a ghost of him that lets me!’ (1.4.85). Playing on the double sense of ‘let’ — to permit or allow, on the one hand, and to hinder or prevent, on the other — these words free Hamlet to follow his father, the ‘ghost of him that lets me’; the ghost of him who gave life and preempts it; the ghost who confirms, in more ways than one, that time is out of joint; the ghost whose example dooms Hamlet at once to be and not to be — that is, to be and not to be ‘Hamlet’, the name by which he is prevented from being what it gives him leave to be. But that, of course, is what Hamlet means, perhaps even literally: ‘[I] am let’. It is also what **normativity** means in the world we inherit from Hamlet: to be let, constrained, or prevented by the power that gives us permission to be, even while it incites, perversely, our passion to constrain what appears as perverse. ‘Let not the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damned incest’, the ghost enjoins his son. And by way of ‘let not’, Hamlet is let and left in the knot of his name, which he, though left without children, must leave to the world he leaves behind, affirming a hetero-temporal



subjectivity so deeply in debt to the dead that it needs to invent the future to pay off what is mortgaged to the past.

Glossary

putrid carrion – rotting dead flesh

excremental – unpleasantly like bodily waste

decrying – disparaging, belittling

filial passion – the passion of a son or daughter

psychic – mental

hetero-temporal repetition – complex repetition of time

to intuit – to work out by instinct

normativity – relating to the normal

Source: 'Hamlet's Wounded Name' in *Shakespeare: A Queer Companion to the Complete Works of Shakespeare*, Lee Edelman ed. Madhavi Menon, Duke University Press 2011



3. The Two Antonios and Same-Sex Love in *Twelfth Night*

Pequigney considers how the 'bisexuality' of characters plays a central role within the exploration of romantic love in Twelfth Night.

Sebastian's amorous involvement with members of both sexes falls into a broader configuration of the plot and **derives substantiation from** different dramatic situations. Bisexual experiences are not the exception but the rule in *Twelfth Night*, and they are vital to the course of love leading to wedlock for the three principal lovers other than Sebastian: Orsino, Olivia, and Viola.

Near the close of the play, Orsino asks Cesario for his/her hand. He proposes marriage to someone he knows and has come to love only as a male servant, seen only in masculine clothes, whose feminine name he never once utters, and whom in the scene he twice addresses as 'boy' (5. 1. 127, 264) — even at the proposal itself — and refers to as late as his final speech as being still a 'man' (385). Early on, despite the cross-dressing, he does perceive Viola's true gender, noting her girlish lip and voice and 'all' as 'semblative to a woman's part' (1.4.30-34). The response, though, may do less to establish his heterosexual credentials than to symptomatize homoerotic **proclivities**, for according to **Freud**, 'what excited a man's love' in ancient Greece (and still may do so) 'was not the masculine character of a boy, but his physical resemblance to a woman as well as his feminine mental qualities', with the 'sexual object' being 'someone who combines the characters of both sexes' and 'a kind of reflection of the subject's own bisexual nature'. This theory seems clearly borne out by Orsino; and, further, his capacity to love the youth Cesario and the girl Viola is crucial to the happy ending for them both. His attraction to Olivia, where he is heterosexually straight, like the other would-be wooers Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Malvolio, is a disaster. The love for Cesario could not have changed instantaneously with the revelation of his femaleness; if it is erotic then it would have been erotic before; what does change is that marriage suddenly becomes possible, and hence the immediate proposal. This love that commences as homoerotic and conducts Orsino into nuptial heterosexuality is an unbroken curve, a bisexual continuity.

Olivia ends up engaged to marry a perfect stranger, Sebastian, and not the one she fell madly in love with and thought she had become betrothed to, who all along had been a



male-impersonating girl. If she misses the tell-tale signs of femaleness that Orsino picks up on, that is because it is in her erotic interest to fantasize Cesario as virile, yet the feminine subtext, however ignored, remains legible. In Sebastian's last speech to her, coming just after the confusion of identity has been straightened out, he says, almost tauntingly,

So comes it, lady, you have been mistook.
But nature to her bias drew in that.
You would have been contracted to a maid;
Nor are you therein, by my life, deceiv'd:
You are betroth'd both to a maid and man.
(5. 1.257-61)

She has been 'mistook' in two related senses: 'mistaken' in taking Cesario for a male, and 'taken amiss' in being captivated by a female (cf. 2.2.34). But in 'that' matter of being 'mistook', nature 'drew' 'to her bias' or described a curved course (like the curve of a bowling ball that the noun denotes), and this homoerotic swerving or lesbian deviation from the heterosexual straight and narrow cannot be considered unnatural since it is effected by nature herself. 'Would' in the third line above, indicative of a contrary-to-fact condition, may also connote 'would like [to]', a condition of wishing. That 'you are betroth'd both to a maid and man' is not a deception but precisely right: to 'both' twins, the maid who elicited your love and whom you thought you were contracting to marry, and the man who accidentally and unbeknownst to anyone substituted for her and to whom you are in fact engaged. The line (261) may also bear this alternate reading: Sebastian could be referring only to himself, as a maiden man, a girl/boy, a master (to Olivia) — mistress (to Antonio).

Glossary

derives substantiation from – gains its substance form, is embodied in

proclivities – inclinations, predispositions

Freud – Sigmund Freud, Austrian psychoanalyst, 1856-1939



Other suggested reading

- Useful passages on the issue of sexuality in Shakespeare's comedies can be found in C.L. Barber's classic *Festive Comedy* (1959), in which he discusses what he sees as Shakespeare's returning the audience to the security of heteronormativity in the play's conclusion.
- Guy Patricia, Anthony. 'The visual poetics of gender trouble in Trevor Nunn's *Twelfth Night*, Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet* and Michael Hoffman's *William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream*.' In *Queering the Shakespeare Film: Gender Trouble, Gay Spectatorship and Male Homoeroticism*. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017. 89–134.
- Goran Stanivukovic, *Queer Shakespeare: Desire and Sexuality* (Bloomsbury 2017) provides a useful overview of issues relating to Shakespeare and sexuality.
- Chapter 4: 'How Queer Is the Shakespearean Canon?' in Melissa E. Sanchez's *Shakespeare and Queer Theory* (London: Arden, 2019) includes some interesting queer readings of *Hamlet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Othello*; they're quite densely theoretical, however, so extracts need to be carefully chosen to ensure accessibility.
- Emma Smith's *This is Shakespeare* (2019) has a very good chapter on transgressive desire in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Source: Vol. 22, No. 2, SPRING 1992 – Studies in Shakespeare, The University of Chicago Press.



Sexuality: suggested other reading

- Useful passages on the issue of sexuality in Shakespeare's comedies can be found in C.L. Barber's classic *Festive Comedy* (1959), in which he discusses what he sees as Shakespeare's returning the audience to the security of heteronormativity in the play's conclusion.
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Section D: Ethnicity

1. 'Diversifying Shakespeare'

Espinosa identifies a set of difficulties surrounding ethnicity and race as critical lenses for reading historically distant texts, such as Shakespeare's plays. This captures the historicist/presentist dichotomy identified on page 9.

Mappings of modern-day meanings of 'race' onto readings of early modern literature and culture were initially met with critical scrutiny, and scholars of race in Shakespeare often had to defend their use of such methodological practices. In their volume, *Post-Colonial Shakespeares*, for example, Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin address this scrutiny and justify critical readings of early modern texts that employ modern-day meanings of 'race' and 'colonialism'. Responding to Emily Bartels' assertion that post-colonial critics are often inclined to 'start with struggle and work backward' and 'read identity through conflict, cross-cultural encounters through conquest, race through racism' (47), Loomba and Orkin acknowledge that critics 'must not flatten the past' by reading it through our own 'assumptions and imperatives' but are quick to point out that 'neither is it desirable nor even possible entirely to unhook the past from the present' (5–6). In other words, Loomba and Orkin suggest, there is a clear value in drawing on the energies of the present to understand the past, especially when it comes to the subject of race:

We read the past to understand our own lives, and equally, our own commitments direct us to the 'truth' about the past. The relationship between societies separated in time is as complex as the one between societies that are spatially and culturally apart — in both cases 'difference' is a category that should be neither erased nor valorized.

Uncovering that 'truth' about the past and about the present is the impetus for many scholars in Loomba and Orkin's collection and for many scholars of race and Shakespeare thereafter.

There is a tendency to situate the issue of race and racism comfortably in the early modern world and to see Shakespeare's works as merely reflecting attitudes where, strictly speaking, 'race' had yet to be defined. But this approach, of course, belies the long history of struggles and social inequities surrounding racial difference. To this end, some



scholars have turned their attention to exploring how best to employ readings of race in Shakespeare while allowing for cross-historical approaches to drive the conversation. In his thoughtful attention to the value of a cross-historical approach in Shakespeare studies, Peter Erickson writes,

The difference between the past and the present is not that the past qualifies as history and the present does not. The present is also historical. Both histories are in motion. Our contemporary interests are enhanced by the perspectives we bring from our early modern involvements. ('Race Words' 172)

Erickson's interest in this two-way street comes after a richly crafted analysis of race words in *Othello*, a play that he sees as rendering Shakespeare inadequate for critical race studies if it 'is considered, by itself, to exemplify and constitute a full critical race framework' ('Race Words' 174). Recognizing the limits of Shakespeare is a key and most certainly is not an impediment. The distance between our world and his, Erickson argues, is precisely 'what it means to begin to do critical race studies in the early modern period' ('Race Words' 174). Erickson sees in the recognition of distance something beneficial, and he eventually gestures at our obligation as race scholars in Shakespeare: 'My hope is that we might create pedagogies that enable us to extend this experience of distance, which is both a freedom and a responsibility, to our students' ('Race Words' 174). Erickson, here, echoes a long line of scholars who have pushed readers to think beyond mere historical context when exploring an issue as significantly charged as race.

To move beyond the seemingly self-contained genius of Shakespeare and to acknowledge why difference and distance matters can only enhance our understanding of Shakespeare's value, both to us and to our students.

Source: Ruben Espinosa 'Diversifying Shakespeare' *Literature Compass* 13/2 (2016): 59–60 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/lic3.12303>



2. “And wash the Ethiop white”: femininity and the monstrous in *Othello*

Newman considers the ways in which images of ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’ appear in Othello and the troublesome human, artistic and critical discomforts that arise.

Much of the disgust Rymer²¹, Coleridge²², and other critics betray comes not from the fact of Othello's individual blackness, but from the relation of that blackness to Desdemona's fair purity. Coleridge calls it ‘monstrous’. Embedded in commentaries on the play which seek to ward off Othello's blackness is the fear of **miscegenation**, and particularly the white man's fear of the union of black man with white woman. Such commentators occupy the rhetorical position of Roderigo, Brabantio, and Iago who view the marriage of Othello and Desdemona as against all sense and nature: ‘I'll refer me to all things of sense, / . . . Whether a maid, so tender, fair, and happy, / . . . Would ever have (to incur a general mock) / Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom / Of such a thing as thou?’ (I.2.64, 66, 69–71).

In *Othello*, the black Moor and the fair Desdemona are united in a marriage which all the other characters view as unthinkable. Shakespeare uses their assumption to generate the plot itself — Iago's ploy to string Roderigo along is his assurance that Desdemona could not, contrary to nature, long love a black man. Even his manipulation of Othello depends on the Moor's own prejudices against his blackness and belief that the fair Desdemona would prefer the white Cassio. Miscegenation is an issue not only on the level of plot, but also of language, for linked oppositions, especially of black and white and their cultural associations, characterize the play's discourse. ‘Black ram’ tups ‘white ewe’; ‘fair’ Desdemona runs to Othello's ‘sooty bosom’. The Duke **mollifies** Brabantio with ‘Your son-in-law is far more fair than black’. Desdemona is described, in what for the Renaissance would have been an oxymoron, as a ‘fair devil’, and as ‘fair paper’ and a ‘goodly book’ across the white pages of which Othello fears is written ‘whore’. In the final scene Emilia exclaims in response to Othello's confession that he has killed Desdemona,

²¹ Rymer, Thomas (1693) “A Short View of Tragedy,” in Spingarn, J.E. (ed.) (1957) *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, II.

²² Coleridge, S.T., *Shakespearean Criticism*, ed. Thomas M. Raysor (1960) London, J.M. Dent. First published in 1930.



'O, the more angel she, / And you the blacker devil!' Like the proverb 'to wash an Ethiop white', Emilia's lines exemplify what I will term rhetorical miscegenation, for despite the semantics of antithesis, the **chiasmus** allies the opposing terms rhetorically.

In the Renaissance no other colors so clearly implied opposition or were so frequently used to denote polarization. As Winthrop Jordan²³ points out in his monumental study, *White over Black*, the meaning of black even before the sixteenth century, according to the OED, included 'deeply stained with dirt, soiled, dirty, foul. . . . Having dark or deadly purposes, malignant; pertaining to or involving death, deadly, baneful, disastrous . . . iniquitous, atrocious, horrible, wicked . . . indicating disgrace, censure, liability to punishment, etc.' (Jordan, 1968, 7). . . . White represented the opposite. The emphasis in *Othello* on Desdemona's fairness and purity, 'that whiter skin of hers than snow / And smooth as monumental alabaster' (V. ii. 4–5), and the idealization of fair female beauty it implies — the entire apparatus of **Petrarchanism** — is usually said to point up the contrast between Desdemona and Othello. But I want to argue to the contrary that femininity is not opposed to blackness and monstrosity, as white is to black, but identified with the monstrous, an identification that makes miscegenation doubly fearful. The play is structured around a cultural **aporia**, miscegenation.

Glossary

miscegenation – a term for interracial sexual relationships

mollifies – placates, soothes

chiasmus – a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order

Petrarchanism – the poetic style introduced by Petrarch and characteristic of his work, marked by complex grammatical structure, elaborate conceits, and conventionalized diction

aporia – an irresolvable internal contradiction or logical disjunction in a text, argument, or theory

Source: Karen Newman (Howard, J. E., & O'Connor, M. F. Eds), Routledge, 1st edition (1 Dec. 2008).

²³ Jordan, Winthrop (1968) *White Over Black*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press.



3. Antony and Cleopatra: Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage

Jankowski uses a number of salient productions of Antony and Cleopatra in order to explore issues of ethnicity in the casting of Cleopatra.

Rutter²⁴ provides a long history of the problems inherent in erasing Cleopatra's blackness. While the playtext contains almost as many references to the title character's blackness as does *Othello*, the location of the historical Egypt as a source of white Greco-Roman civilization — the precursor to white Euro-American civilization — makes it essential to reinforce Cleopatra's **Ptolemaic ancestry** rather than her Shakespearean blackness. While Othello may be a part of black Africa who found himself on the shores of white Europe, Cleopatra, as ruler of the only "white" part of Africa, must be similarly "white." Rutter's reading of the racial politics of casting Cleopatra — there can be black or tawny members of the Egyptian court, but the queen herself cannot be a woman of color — is cogent, especially given the fact that Rutter approaches the play through performances by some of the black actors who portray Charmian and Iras. Her history of these actors' movement from invisibility to visibility — from somewhere out at the edge of the stage to centerstage — is compelling. Equally compelling are her comments on the Talawa Theater Company's production of *Antony and Cleopatra* and on the single performance (in John Caird's 1992 production) of a black Cleopatra on the Royal Shakespeare Company stage, when Claire Benedict, understudy to Claire Higgins's Cleopatra, went on as the queen of Egypt. Though Rutter often moves away from her stated critical purpose, she presents many challenging readings of specific contemporary performances of Shakespeare's plays.

²⁴ Carol Chillington Rutter. *Enter the Body: Women and representation on Shakespeare's stage*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001.



Glossary

Ptolemaic ancestry – a line of Egyptian pharaohs from 305BC–30BC.

Source: Theodora J. Jankowski's review of Carol Chillington Rutter's *Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare's Stage* (2001) in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 2003, Volume 54, Issue 1. <https://academic.oup.com/sq/article-abstract/54/1/107/5073383?redirectedFrom=fulltext>



Ethnicity: suggested other reading

- Other useful materials on *Othello* can be found in: Steggle, Matthew, 'Othello, the Moor of London: Shakespeare's Black Britons' in Robert C. Evans, ed., *Othello: A Critical Reader* (London: Arden, 2015), 103–124.
- Ridley's introduction to the Arden 1st edition of *Othello*, for example, gives a very different view of race in the play to that provided by Ayanna Thompson in the revised edition of Arden 3rd edition.
- Celia Daileader's *Racism, Misogyny, and the Othello Myth* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- Sonia Massai *Shakespeare's Accents: Voicing Identity in Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), which has a good deal to say about a range of diversity issues, including social class and ethnicity.
- On *Macbeth*, there are African-American perspectives in Ayanna Thompson, Scott L. Newstock, *Weyward Macbeth: Intersections of Race and Performance* (Palgrave, 2010).
- Delia Jarrett-Macauley, *Shakespeare, Race and Performance: The Diverse Bard* (Routledge, 2017).
- Ian Smith, 'White Skin, Black Masks: Racial Cross-Dressing on the Early Modern Stage.' *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2003): 33–67.
- Kim Hall *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Cornell University Press, 1995).
- Ayanna Thompson *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race* (Cambridge University Press, 2021).



Section E: Disability

1. “Unaccommodated Man”: Dismodernism and Disability Justice in *King Lear*

Gottlieb addresses Shakespeare’s use of the ‘broken’ human body as a means of exploring King Lear’s re-evaluation of how individuals relate to their societies, and how societies seek to ‘place’ individuals living with disabilities of different kinds.

In many ways, *King Lear*’s treatment of disability is embarrassing. The play relentlessly intertwines disability and tragedy, depicting the journeys of temporarily-able bodies becoming disabled as central to its tragic arc. Disability is used as a narrative **prosthesis** in every one of *King Lear*’s multiple plots. Gloucester is blinded, Lear experiences madness, Edgar feigns madness as ‘Poor Tom’, and the Fool is ambiguously aligned with intellectual disability. Additionally, disability is used as a problematic metaphor for characters’ figurative ‘sight’, rationality, and decision-making. Edgar’s unconvincing moral gloss interprets his father Gloucester’s blindness as a sign of divine **retribution**. The play has been cited as a central example of how literature is biased against blind people.

While all of this is true, I argue that the play also contains a radical view of disability — a perspective that not only makes disability central to the human condition, but also voices an awareness of the social responsibilities that stem from such an understanding. The play’s exploration of what it means to be human and what distinguishes humans from other animals has significant implications for Disability Studies that have not yet been explored. *King Lear* is an important play for the emerging field of Shakespearean Disability Studies, not only because the play’s problematic (and conventional) deployment of disability requires critical analysis, but also because the play’s radical approach to disability and poverty has the potential to align the field with disability justice.

In three significant speeches, Lear exposes human beings’ fundamental reliance on things, animals, and each other. Through these definitions of what it means to be human, *King Lear* unsettles the construct of the able body and presents a view of



humanity that anticipates Lennard Davis's²⁵ concept of **dismodernism**, which makes disability central to a postmodern view of identity. Davis foregrounds the 'partial, incomplete subject whose realization is not autonomy and independence but dependency and interdependence' (*Bending over Backwards* 30). He continues: 'Rather than the idea of the complete, independent subject, endowed with rights (which are in actuality conferred by privilege), the dismodernist subject sees that **metanarratives** are only 'socially created' and accepts them as that, gaining help and relying on legislation, law, and technology' (*Bending over Backwards* 30). As Lear shifts from power to powerlessness, he begins voicing similar views of human subjectivity. He draws from embodied knowledge to critique the social institutions that distribute accommodations **inequitably** and expresses a desire for a more equitable human society. After Lear and Gloucester experience disability, they start defining humans as interdependent and link this understanding to social justice by advocating for poor and oppressed people.

We can also say the play makes the privileged experience disability; in fact, disability and homelessness are relentlessly coupled in the play. The play invites us to consider disablement as primarily a social process. For both Lear and Gloucester, disability coincides with the loss of familial support, social status, and a place to live. Further, both characters experience advanced age and face the contempt of many who view old men as having no place in society.

The play aligns aging and disability with **disaccommodation** by society. For Lear and Gloucester, this disaccommodation prompts an awareness of the injustice of routinely leaving so many bodies unaccommodated. Both men begin caring about economic inequality after they experience social disablement. While many critics have explored the play's concern with poverty and economic inequality, I argue that the play's exploration of disability and views of the body that anticipate dismodernism are integral to its concern for economic justice. Disability is central to what Peter Holbrook terms the play's 'utopian countermovement' (356) — its subtle exploration of 'social hope' (355) amidst its depiction

²⁵ Davis, Lennard J. *Bending over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism, and Other Difficult Positions*. New York University Press, 2002.



of individuals' tragedies. In *King Lear*, disability is not represented solely in relation to individuals (as is conventional in representations that cast disability as 'tragic'), but also in relation to the social world and political resistance. Embodied knowledge of disablement sparks Lear's and Gloucester's social justice awakenings.

The play brings an awareness of social oppression to its exploration of body-mind difference by exploring the basic need that all bodies have for accommodations and depicting the tragedies that ensue when these needs are not met. Lear draws attention to Poor Tom's body, 'the thing itself' (3.4.106), to create a binary not between able bodies and disabled bodies, but rather between accommodated bodies and 'unaccommodated' (3.4.106-7) bodies. The play exposes the fantasy of the independent, able body and prompts audiences to consider the universal need for accommodations that human embodiment entails. These accommodations are routinely taken for granted by those privileged enough to have them — until they are removed.

Glossary

prosthesis – an artificial body part.

retribution – punishment.

dismodernism – the idea that 'difference' is what all people have in common.

metanarratives – overarching accounts or interpretations.

inequitably – unfairly.

disaccommodation – unsuitedness.

Source: Christine M. Gottlieb "Unaccommodated Man": Dismodernism and Disability Justice in *King Lear* *Disability Studies Quarterly* vol. 38, no 4, 2018 <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/6079>

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2. 'This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen': Feste, Lear's Fool and the border between 'idiocy' and mental illness'

Equestri considers 'idiocy' and 'madness' and relates both to the mental health and well-being of Feste and Malvolio in Twelfth Night.

The terms 'idiocy' and 'lunacy' reveal a seemingly **proto-modern** separation between 'intellectual disability' and 'mental illness', to use terms of modern psychology. Both conditions are and were 'disabling', where 'disability' indicates 'the social process' that turns a physical defect 'into a negative by creating barriers to access'. Seeing early modern folly through the presentist lens of disability studies shows that 'difference' can be described through a 'medical model of disability', which **pathologises nonnormativity**, or a 'social' one, which considers how society defines it. Shakespeare's characters can thus be used to probe the early modern **idiosyncratic** ways of defining human variation. ...

Feste refuses to be called a fool ('I wear no motley in my brain', 1.5.52–3), but proclaiming, 'Wit [...] I am sure I lack thee' (1.5.29–32), he jests on his own irreversible witlessness. Intellectual capacity, as he suggests in hoping that Olivia's unborn child's 'skull Jove cram with brains' (1.5.109), was in fact innate and unchangeable, because it was determined by God's power over the laws of Nature. Foolishness was regarded as a condition of the soul and therefore, unlike madness, was incurable by medicine. Yet, it could be described in **physiognomical** terms, as Olivia shows by calling Feste 'dry fool' (1.5.37). Early modern doctors who commented on the dryness of the soul spirits linked it to a faulty brain structure and cognitive performance. While the adjective 'dry' may be taken also as a synonym of 'dull', Feste quickly rejoins it to its basic meaning as lacking water when he proposes to 'give the dry fool drink, then is / the fool not dry' (1.5.41–2). The irony of this proposed solution to mend folly was apparent to Shakespeare's audience, in that a natural fool, by medical as well as by legal definition, could not improve.

Idiota pointed at the meaning of the Greek word as 'private person', someone without status or literacy; at the same time a well-off fool with property could also be legally nominated an 'idiot' if the Court of Wards dispossess him of his inherited possessions. ...

As *idiotia*, the fool was also an individual lacking the common ideas, an expression derived from Stoic philosophy indicating the nobles' knowledge, especially regarding



religion, mathematics, the soul and society. Fools, as uneducated and uneducable, were incapable of abstracting, and so they lacked the vital knowledge to access the honourable society. When Feste says to Cesario ‘who you are / and what you would are out of my welkin. I might say “element”’ (3.1.56–8), he shows class-consciousness in acknowledging both Viola’s superiority and his own lack of common knowledge. He accepts that, as a fool, he lives in his own ‘element’ with no apparent interest in crossing boundaries, at least until he faces madman-Malvolio.

A confrontation between them at the border of madness and foolishness is staged from Act 1. Malvolio attacks: ‘Infirmity, that decays the wise, doth ever make the better fool’, to which Feste retorts: ‘God send you, sir, a speedy infirmity, for the better increasing your folly!’ (1.5.74–5). ‘Infirmity’ is an interesting word choice because, meaning both weakness and disease, it marks the liminality between foolery and illness. Though it signals mobility, ‘infirmity’ can overturn only the wise man’s **cognition**, whereas the fool’s disability cannot be changed – at most it can be intensified. Later, in opposing lunatic-Malvolio, Feste takes his revenge for being called ‘barren rascal’ (1.5.80), an expression fusing **physiological** and spiritual folly, dryness of spirit and moral ignorance.

The fake letter is forged to ‘make a contemplative idiot of [Malvolio]’ (2.5.18). Contemplation was the highest faculty of the rational soul, a concept that scholastics associated with mystical experience of the divine and with true discernment: possessing it, Malvolio would straddle the representations of the **gull** and the melancholic (a madman with a meditative pose). Yet, what initially is envisioned as a trick to turn Malvolio into a fool actually ends up making him a lunatic: ‘possessed’ (3.4.9), ‘tainted in’s wits’ (3.4.13), sleepless, cross-gartered, ranting and doing ‘nothing but smile’ (3.4.11), a clear indication of madness at the time because it consisted of a continuous unmotivated action and betrayed a sinful soul. Malvolio, saying he is ‘not black in my mind, though yellow in my legs’ (3.4.24–5), rejects his former melancholy to embrace his present madness, allegedly caused by an excess of choler (yellow bile). Unlike Feste, whose foolery can at the very best be punished through whipping but can never be reverted, Malvolio can recover his wisdom. ...

Rather than a demoniac, Feste is an exorcism-performing holy curate, which is reminiscent of the fool’s spotless Pauline purity. The innocent thus visits the butler in his dark prison, a treatment far more common for dangerous lunatics than for natural fools at



the time, and their confrontation showcases how the natural fool is free while the madman is locked up. The prison is a token of physical and psychological dislocation, a condition more observable in madmen than fools. There is little evidence that in Shakespeare's England idiots were hospitalised: this treatment was dedicated to violent madmen or to **destitutes** who were also disabled but needed primarily economical support. Idiots were generally free to wander, so sometimes they would even be perceived as beggars. Feste is indeed a wanderer: he is reproached for minding his own business instead of being where he should be, and he gets away from Olivia's control to end up as far as Orsino's palace. Because 'foolery [...] does walk about the orb like the sun' (3.1.37), he wanders about asking for tips, like roaming fools asking for alms in the city streets. To prevent the assimilation of madness to foolishness, Shakespeare blocks Malvolio's visual contact with Sir Topas, something in itself unnecessary because Feste is disguised. Like Imogen, Feste champions the separation of idiocy and lunacy: he says that 'the fool shall look to the madman' (1.5.132–3), that 'the fool delivers the madman' (5.1.233–4); and as Sir Topas, he repeatedly distances himself from Malvolio by accusing him of devilry – 'Hyperbolic fiend', 'dishonest Satan' (4.2.26, 32) – and of having hallucinations. Yet he alludes to some characteristics madness and folly share: both entail lack of knowledge – he says to Malvolio that 'there is no darkness but ignorance' (4.2.42–3) – and flawed wits – 'you are mad indeed, if you be / no better in your wits than a fool' (4.2.88–9). Malvolio himself unintentionally plays on the liminality between the two notions, saying to Sir Topas/Feste 'I am no more mad than you are' and 'I am as well in my wits, fool, as thou art' (4.2.48–9, 90). The claims are inevitably ironic, yet they simultaneously remind the audience that a fool is not, legally speaking, mad, and that a professional fool is actually in full command of his wits. The expression 'to be in one's wits' stresses again the mobility of lunacy: Malvolio suffers from temporary fits and can therefore intermittingly fall in or out of his five wits. The 'stable' fool conversely stands as a healer of madness who entreats Malvolio to leave his 'bibble babble' (4.2.99), the type of frenzied talk Feste later imitates as he reads the lunatic's letter to Olivia. While the lady sees this as a symptom of madness ('How now, art thou mad?'), by snapping 'I do but read madness' (5.1.290–1) he finally rejects any association with mental illness.



Glossary

proto-modern – a state approaching the modern

pathologises – regard as psychologically abnormal

nonnormativity – things not perceived as ‘normal’

idiosyncratic – personal, individual

physiognomical – relating to the practice of assessing a person’s character or personality from their outer appearance, especially the face

cognition – the process of acquiring knowledge

physiological – relating to the normal functions of living things

gull – dupe, fool

destitutes – people who are extremely poor

Source: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0184767819835561>



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Introduction

When we chose *Poems of the Decade, an Anthology of the Forward Books of Poetry 2001–2010* as a prescribed text on our A level English Literature, we wanted A level English Literature students to be immersed in the writing of their own time, as well as the work of long-established writers. This has led to many of you experiencing English Literature first-hand, through live and online performances by the poets themselves. You will continue to witness the live growth of this body of poetic work, as you move through this course. Many students and teachers have enjoyed finding new poets to read, to extend their knowledge of poetry. This resource will provide you with yet more opportunities for doing that.

The prescribed Forward anthology captured work from the first decade of the twenty-first century. Since then, both you, as students, *and* our contemporary poets, have lived through a time of intense political and social change: the global pandemic and its related lockdowns; a heightened awareness during that time of the presence of nature; related concerns about climate change; the Black Lives Matter movement; the Grenfell Tower disaster; the #MeToo movement and the vigils and speeches that have come about as a result of violent crime and a desire for equality.

It seems fitting, if not urgent, therefore, that we capture and share some of this recent important writing, as well as widen your knowledge of new contemporary voices in the world of poetry. This resource includes a range of voices that today's literature students should read and know about. These poets are carrying poetry forward in the twenty-first century and their work is for you to take forward in your own literary journey.

Our consideration of contemporary poetry and indeed, these poets' writing, builds on knowledge of established cultural foundations. At times this is explicit and direct, such as Turnbull's reflections in 'Ode on a Grayson Perry Urn' on its relationship with Keats's writing and Inua Ellams's poem 'Fuck / Drums' which considers the relationship between past and present music culture. Contemporary poets continue to build on the poetic voices that have preceded them, using poetry as a vehicle to make political comment. Notable here is the work of Roger Robinson in his writing about the Grenfell Tower disaster, and Jay Bernard who has revisited the events of the New Cross fire of 1981 and considered the human and political cost that still reverberates today. There are a range of writers here who are exploring sexual or cultural identities which offer rich poetic reading.

The prescribed *Poems of the Decade* are merely the starting point for your thinking. Wider reading in contemporary poetry is a crucial part of the independent reading required of all our A level English Literature students. This resource will prepare you for the unseen element of the examination but, more importantly, immerse you in the Literature of your own time – here and now. The list here offers you a springboard for your wider reading. The activities will help you secure confidence in reading and writing about poems. At this level, poetry will often present you with ambiguity and resistance to a single fixed reading.; this is a challenge to be welcomed and relished. We urge you to read and listen to more of the poets included here, most of whom are very active online and have recent new collections you can read. The suggestions at the end of each poem will help you with this.

We wish you well in your preparation for the examinations but more than this, hope that this element of the course will fuel a passion for the writing of the poets around you.



Special thanks to Judith Palmer, Director and Julia Bird, Learning and Participation Manager from The Poetry Society and Chris McCabe, the National Poetry Librarian The South Bank Poetry Library for their collaboration in putting this resource together.



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Section A

This section of the resource provides you with a range of contemporary poems alongside some questions to support your skills in reading and responding to poetry.

You will read a range of contemporary poems and work through some activities to extend your knowledge of contemporary poetry.

After each set of activities, you will find a pairing of exam-style questions, linking the unseen poem you have studied with a poem from your prescribed text *Poems of the Decade, an Anthology of the Forward Books of Poetry 2001–2010*.



'The Missing', Roger Robinson,

(For the victims of the Grenfell Tower fire disaster)

As if their bodies became
lighter, ten of those seated
in front pews began to
float, and then to lie
down as if on
a bed. Then pass down the
aisle,
as if on a conveyor belt of
pure air, slow as a funeral
cortege,
past the congregants, some
sinking to their knees in
prayer.
One woman, rocking back and
forth, muttered, *What about me Lord,*
why not me?

The Risen stream slowly, so
slowly out the gothic doors
and up to the sky, finches
darting deftly between them.

Ten streets away,
a husband tries to hold onto the
feet of his floating wife. At times
her force lifts him slightly off the
ground,
his grip slipping. He falls
to his knees with just her high-
heeled shoe in his hand.



He shields and squints his
eyes as she is backlit by
the sun.

A hundred people start floating
from the windows of a tower
block; from far enough away
they could be black smoke
from spreading flames.

© 'The Missing', Roger Robinson, Peepal Tree Press



Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
 - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
 - One reading might note the line breaks.
 - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
 - Notice the space between stanzas.
 - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
 - It's important to establish this foundation.
 - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

Thinking/talking points

1. Whilst this poem arises from a real event, it presents a surreal perspective, straddling the harsh reality of the Grenfell disaster and the fantastical.
 - Identify the words and phrases that reflect reality and the surreal.

Consider the effect of this combination.

2. Pinpoint the tone of this poem.
You might like to choose from the words below or select your own:
 - melancholy
 - celebratory
 - religious
 - angry
 - hopeful
 - tragic.

Do you identify any change in tone at any point in the poem? Think carefully about the evidence for this and its effect.

TIP Take care to identify the tone of a poem. It is easy to make assumptions based on the topic of a poem. Just because a poem is about loss does not mean it is sad. Just because a poem focuses on a topic that has raised political anger, does not mean that the poem itself is angry and indignant. Look at the web of words in the poem itself to gain the evidence.



3. An elegy is a poem associated with death and is a public acknowledgement of loss. It has no fixed form but offers a style of lament which tends to represent its culture or community.

This term could be used for the poem 'The Missing'. 85% of those who died in the fire were from ethnic minorities.

Identify patterns of language in Robinson's poem which may reflect the multi-ethnic community of those who perished. Discuss their effect.

4. Consider the theme of movement in the poem and how it contributes to the overall impact of this poem.

Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'The Missing' by Roger Robinson and reread the anthology poem 'Effects' by Alan Jenkins. Compare the methods both poets use to explore death.

OR

Read the poem 'The Missing' by Roger Robinson and reread the anthology poem 'History' by John Burnside. Compare the methods both poets use to explore human loss.

Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

Roger Robinson's 2021 collection 'A Portable Paradise', won the prestigious T.S. Eliot Poetry prize. A number of the poems in the collection, including 'The Missing'; refer to the Grenfell Tower tragedy of the 2017 in West London.

You can listen find several readings of Roger Robinson reading from this collection online. Go to [his website](#).

A reading from 'A Portable Paradise', at the T.S. Eliot Prize shortlist readings held on 12 January 2022 at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall is [available on YouTube](#).

For students interested in the crossover between poetry and music, you might like to hear Robinson as the lead vocalist for the musical crossover project [King Midas Sound](#).



‘To the Welsh Critic Who Doesn’t Find Me Identifiably Indian’, Arundhathi Subramaniam

You believe you know me,
wide-eyed Eng Lit type
from a sun-scalded colony,
reading my Keats – or is it yours –
while my country detonates
on your television screen.

You imagine you’ve cracked
my deepest fantasy –
oh, to be in an Edwardian vicarage,
living out my dharma
with every sip of dandelion tea
and dreams of the weekend jumble sale...

You may have a point.
I know nothing about silly mid-offs,
I stammer through my Tamil,
and I long for a nirvana
that is hermetic,
odour-free,
bottled in Switzerland,
money-back-guaranteed.

This business about language,
how much of it is mine,
how much yours,
how much from the mind,
how much from the gut,
how much is too little,
how much too much,
how much from the salon,
how much from the slum,
how I say verisimilitude,
how I say Brihadaranyaka¹,
how I say vaazhapazham² –
it’s all yours to measure,
the pathology of my breath,
the halitosis of gender,
my homogenised plosives
about as rustic
as a mouth-freshened global village.



Arbiter of identity,
remake me as you will.
Write me a new alphabet of danger,
a new patois to match
the Chola³ bronze of my skin.
Teach me how to come of age
in a literature you've bark-scratched
into scripture.
Smear my consonants
with cow-dung and turmeric and godhuli.
Pity me, sweating,
rancid, on the other side of the counter.
Stamp my papers,
lease me a new anxiety,
grant me a visa
to the country of my birth.
Teach me how to belong,
the way you do,
on every page of world history.

Glossary

¹Brihadaranyaka – a Sanskrit word for great wilderness.

²vaazhapazham – a Tamil word for banana.

³Chola – one of the most important longest-ruling dynasties of South India which conquered many countries outside of India and was a key ancient empire.

© 'To the Welsh Critic Who Doesn't Find Me Identifiably Indian' from *Where I Live: New and Selected Poems*, Arundhati Subramaniam, Bloodaxe Books, 2009



Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
 - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
 - One reading might note the line breaks.
 - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
 - Notice the space between stanzas.
 - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
 - It's important to establish this foundation.
 - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

Thinking/talking points

1. What do you understand by the following terms:
 - the literary establishment?
 - the academic establishment?

How has the established literary canon been developed?

- What kind of people have held the power to define that from medieval times to the present day? Has that change and if so how?
 - What has the role of gender and race been in that?
2. Consider the experience of reading words in Indian languages (Tamil and Sanskrit) and English in this poem.
 - How does that make you feel as a reader? How might your experience of reading the poem aloud be different from the poet's?
 - Is there a difference between reading it on the page and aloud?
 - Consider the effect of the poet's combination of these words.
 3. Think carefully about the title of the poem in relation to the points above. This is a poem written to address a reviewer or academic critic.
 4. Pinpoint the tone of this poem.
Which stanza in particular most strongly reflects the tone you have identified?

TIP: when a poem deals with important political topics you must take care not to jump to unsupported conclusions. You cannot assume what the poem conveys or the poet's intention, by relying on societal truisms and assumptions. You must instead look for a pattern of evidence in the poem itself.



Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'To the Welsh Critic Who Doesn't Consider Me Identifiably Indian' by Arundhati Subramaniam and reread the anthology poem 'Look We Have Coming to Dover' by Daljit Nagra. Compare the methods both poets use to explore identity.

OR

Read the poem 'To the Welsh Critic Who Doesn't Consider Me Identifiably Indian' by Arundhati Subramaniam and reread the anthology poem 'Chainsaw Versus the Pampas Grass' by Simon Armitage. Compare the methods both poets use to explore power.

Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

A good place to start exploring Subramaniam's poetry is her collection *Where I Live* which contains both newer and selected poems from her other collections.

For students interested in India and spirituality, you might like to try her non-fiction essays on independent Indian women who have taken spiritual journeys, *Women Who Wear Only Themselves*.



'The Perseverance', Raymond Antrobus

'Love is the man overstanding'

PETER TOSH

I wait outside THE PERSEVERANCE.

Just popping in here a minute.

I'd heard him say it many times before
like all kids with a drinking father,
watch him disappear
into smoke and laughter.

There is no such thing as too much laughter,
my father says, drinking in THE PERSEVERANCE
until everything disappears —
I'm outside counting minutes,
waiting for the man, my *father*
to finish his shot and take me home before

it gets dark. We've been here before,
no such thing as too much laughter
unless you're my mother without my father,
working weekends while THE PERSEVERANCE
spits him out for a minute.
He gives me 50p to make me disappear.

50p in my hand, I disappear
like a coin in a parking meter before
the time runs out. How many minutes
will I lose listening to the laughter
spilling from THE PERSEVERANCE
while strangers ask, *where is your father?*



I stare at the doors and say, *my father*
is working. Strangers who don't disappear
but hug me for my perseverance.
Dad said *this will be the last time* before,
while the TV spilled canned laughter,
us, on the sofa in his council flat, knowing any minute

the yams will boil, any minute,
I will eat again with my father,
who cooks and serves laughter
good as any Jamaican who disappeared
from the Island I tasted before
overstanding our heat and perseverance.

I still hear *popping in for a minute*, see him disappear.
We lose our fathers before we know it.
I am still outside THE PERSEVERANCE, listening for the laughter.

©'The Perseverance' from *The Perseverance*, Raymond Antrobus, Penned in the Margins,
2018



Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
 - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
 - One reading might note the line breaks.
 - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
 - Notice the space between stanzas.
 - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
 - It's important to establish this foundation.
 - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

Thinking/talking points

1. Notice the title of the poem.
 - How does this work with the story of the poem?
 - How is it used to support structure in the body of the poem?
 - Name the poetic device that is being used here.
2. In considering the typography of the poem, you should have noticed the use of italics.
 - What do they represent?
 - How are they used to present the relationships between the boy, the community and the father?
3. The poem appears to be about the poet's relationship with his father.
 - Do we know this is autobiographical?
 - Is the 'I' of the poem definitely the 'I' of the poet?
 - How can you write about this using tentative language, to ensure you are not making assumptions when you are responding to an unseen poem in exam conditions, since you are not expected to have knowledge of the poet's biography?

TIP remember that for the purposes of classwork and this collection you may want to find out more about poets and specific events. However, in exam conditions context (AO3) is not examined for this component. If you are aware of specific events or details that will support your analysis of the poem in focus, these might indeed support your AO2 analysis and may form part of the judgement for AO2.



4. Consider the final two lines of the poem.
 - How does the meaning and tone turn on these two powerful lines?
 - How does the poem shift from the personal to the universal?

Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'The Perseverance' by Raymond Antrobus and reread the anthology poem 'To My Nine-Year-Old Self' by Helen Dunmore. Compare the methods both poets use to explore the relationship between past and present.

OR

Read the poem 'The Perseverance' by Raymond Antrobus and reread the anthology poem 'Material' by Ros Barber. Compare the methods both poets use to explore relationships between parents and children.

Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

Raymond Antrobus's collection *The Perseverance* won the Ted Hughes poetry award 2019. It is a collection well worth reading.

You can hear Antrobus read his own poems online. A great place to start is the beautiful version of his poem 'Happy Birthday Moon' on the album of poetry and music 'We Come From the Sun,' which you can find on Spotify.



'Fuck / Boys', Inua Ellams

It starts early / A man compliments the tight nut of his grandson's fist / Hit Me / he says / holding open his palms / The boy strikes and winces / The man says / Shake it off / We are men / We feel nothing / The boy tucks the tiny fracture into the sleeve of himself and strikes again / The fracture burrows deeper / Over the years others join | This when older boys squash butterflies | This when the teacher ridicules his painting / This when the fairy's light dims in the film / They swarm inward / a shoal of needles through meat / shredding the vicissitudes of himself / At twenty they are a nest of thorns around his heart / They flatten to a hard shell / They close and crush him in / At thirty he is imprisoned for a fight he can't justify / His heart is a gnarled knuckle now / but holds a spot of light / thin as spiritskin / in which the boy he was and the man he could have been / whisper / in hushed starlight / in dimmed symphonies | of other ways of being

© 'Fuck/Boys' from *The Actual*, Inua Ellams, Penned in the Margins 2020



Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
 - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
 - One reading might note the line breaks.
 - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
 - Notice the poet's method of noting line divisions.
 - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
 - It's important to establish this foundation.
 - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

Thinking/talking points

1. Notice the title of the poem.
 - How does this work with the story of the poem?
 - How is it used to support structure in the body of the poem?
 - Name the poetic device that is being used here.
2. Ellams has been described as a storyteller in much of his literary work. This poem outlines the story of a boy.
 - What is that story?
 - Why do you think it is presented using the third person?
3. There is a contrast in the poem between the delicate and the harsh.
 - How is this conveyed by the language and imagery of the poem? Pick out specific examples to reflect the delicate and the harsh.
 - What is the effect of this opposition, in relation to the poet's concerns?
4. Ellams's poetry is noted for the way it draws on rap. Aspects of rap include alliterative techniques and rhythm.
 - Speak the poem aloud and consider where you would emphasise particular words. Mark up the words you would emphasise in each line of delivery.
 - Compare your mark-up with another student's. Discuss any differences in your responses.



Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'Fuck / Boys' by Inua Ellams and reread the anthology poem 'From the Journal of a Disappointed Man' by Andrew Motion. Compare the methods both poets use to explore masculinity.

OR

Read the poem 'Fuck / Boys' by Inua Ellams and reread the anthology poem 'Ode to a Grayson Perry Urn' by Tim Turnbull. Compare the methods both poets use to convey the relationship between youth and society.

Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

Inua Ellams's collection *The Actual*, from where 'Fuck / Boys' is taken, contains a range of poems that use this word structure for all the titles. They address a range of contemporary issues from Batman to Donald Trump.

You can hear Ellams discuss his poetry on [his website](#).



'Stamping Grounds (Later)', Zaffar Kunial

Could I behold those hands which span the poles...

– JOHN DONNE, 'Good Friday, 1613, Riding Westward

My English grandfather. Stanley. Stan.

The first ground I ever held was yours.

I can see the earth leave my fist, beneath a sleeve
of my first school blazer. Further west, twenty years
after, the only other handful of earth I've let go
was for Mum, who you raised behind the counter

of the Polesworth post office on Bridge Street
in that village you'd be buried in. The same village
John Donne saddled up in, one Good Friday,
riding westwards towards the Welsh Marches –
where Mum would be buried – in days
when messages went on the hoof, and by hand.

In these unsaddled, unsolid, quickened times
I read the words POST OFFICE with the POST
first meaning 'after'; post-millennial, post-dated ...
In the blank, unsorted space between other thoughts
something has occurred to me I picture you
signing your name on what passes across a small changed

counter -Stanley Arthur Evetts – and there it is, writ large
in your imagined hand SAE To you and Mum
it must have been as familiar as old weather in the sky
but those first letters are new ground to me. As I stand
on a planet you've both passed from, it's like a present
in the post -a coin of earth -held up to this day.

© 'Stamping Grounds (Later)' from *Us* by Zaffar Kunial, Faber & Faber 2018



Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
 - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
 - One reading might note the line breaks.
 - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
 - Notice the poet's method of noting line divisions.
 - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
 - It's important to establish this foundation.
 - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

Thinking/talking points

1. Notice the title of the poem.
 - How does the title work with the story and setting of the poem?
 - Name the poetic device that is being used here.
 - What is the effect of the bracketed word 'Later'?
2. The theme of time runs through this poem. Track its development and significance through the poem.
3. Consider the poet's use of proper nouns throughout the poem.
4. Consider the final two lines of the poem.
 - How does the meaning and tone turn on these two powerful lines?
 - How does the poem shift from the personal to the universal?

Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'Stamping Grounds (Later)' by Zaffar Kunial and reread the anthology poem 'History' by John Burnside. Compare the methods both poets use to explore the idea of history.

OR

Read the poem 'Stamping Grounds (Later)' by Zaffar Kunial and reread the anthology poem 'Material' by Ros Barber. Compare the methods both poets use to explore family bonds.



Extending your knowledge of contemporary writers

Read the skilful analysis of another poem about identity, 'Us' by Zaffar Kunial, in *The Guardian* newspaper: The analysis is written by the poet Carol Rumens. See what you can learn from the way she analyses the poem.

Underline the three sentences in this analysis that you are most impressed with. Notice her precise written expression, use of literary terminology, and the quality of the reading. Discuss your sentence choices with a partner.



'Our Parents' Children', Selina Nwulu

April 21, 2016

All immigrants are artists – re-creating your entire life is a form of reinvention on par with the greatest works of literature.

Edwidge Danticat

Theirs was the first gamble.
Hopes stitched into suitcase linings
before being searched at customs.
An airport poster:
We cannot assume responsibility for lost belongings.
Many will not speak of what was lost and found.
How tectonic plates shift the roots of home,
how their cracks give birth to:
border control
the smack of periphery
a dangerous refuge.
They will not speak of this,
of the daily artistry needed to survive,
of how home is hard to grow
on barren ground.
But we carry this journey through our veins.
Their footsteps are woven into our birthmarks;
their struggles, the skin under our nails.
This is our inheritance,
passed down like guilt heirlooms
we carry this through to
the other side of reinvention.
They will not speak of this,
yet we know these truths through
the cracks on the ground we try not to walk on.
They will put their hopes into our hands,
the pain is in letting them go.

© <http://www.selinanwulu.com/poetry/2016/4/30/our-parents-children>



Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
 - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
 - One reading might note the line breaks.
 - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
 - Notice the space between stanzas.
 - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
 - It's important to establish this foundation.
 - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

Thinking/talking points

1. Notice the epigraph the poet has chosen.
 - Explain the meaning of the quotation in your own words.
 - Consider its relationship with Nwulu's craft and poem.
2. Explain how the theme of movement links to the topic of first and second generation immigrants.
 - Track the development and significance of this theme through the poem.
3. Consider the poet's use of pronouns throughout the poem.
 - Where is the poet positioning 'they' and 'we' and what is the effect of this?
4. Consider the final two lines of the poem.
 - How does the meaning and tone turn on these two powerful lines?

Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'Our Parents' Children' by Selina Nwulu and reread the anthology poem 'The Furthest Distances I've Travelled' by Leontia Flynn. Compare the methods both poets use to explore past and present generations.

OR

Read the poem 'Our Parents' Children' by Selina Nwulu and and reread the anthology poem 'Look We Have Coming to Dover' by Daljit Nagra. Compare the methods both poets use to explore immigration.



Extending your knowledge of contemporary writers

Find out more about this young contemporary British writer via [her website](#). Her work is powerful and thought provoking, about contemporary issues such as race, mental health, world politics and the environment.

Select one of her poems, poem films or non-fiction pieces that resonates with you and discuss what you find interesting with someone in your class.



'Girls are Coming out of the Woods', Tishani Doshi

for Monika

Girls are coming out of the woods,
wrapped in cloaks and hoods,
carrying iron bars and candles
and a multitude of scars, collected
on acres of premature grass and city
buses, in temples and bars. Girls
are coming out of the woods
with panties tied around their lips,
making such a noise, it's impossible
to hear. Is the world speaking too?
Is it really asking, *What does it mean
to give someone a proper resting?* Girls are
coming out of the woods, lifting
their broken legs high, leaking secrets
from unfastened thighs, all the lies
whispered by strangers and swimming
coaches, and uncles, especially uncles,
who said spreading would be light
and easy, who put bullets in their chests
and fed their pretty faces to fire,
who sucked the mud clean
 off their ribs, and decorated
their coffins with briar. Girls are coming
out of the woods, clearing the ground
to scatter their stories. Even those girls
found naked in ditches and wells,
those forgotten in neglected attics,
and buried in river beds like sediments
from a different century. They've crawled
their way out from behind curtains
of childhood, the silver-pink weight



of their bodies pushing against water,
against the sad, feathered tarnish
of remembrance. Girls are coming out
of the woods the way birds arrive
at morning windows—pecking
and humming, until all you can hear
is the smash of their miniscule hearts
against glass, the bright desperation
of sound—bashing, disappearing.
Girls are coming out of the woods.
They're coming. They're coming.

© 'Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods' from *Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods*, Tishani Doshi, Bloodaxe Books 2018



Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
 - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
 - One reading might note the line breaks.
 - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
 - Notice the space between stanzas.
 - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
 - It's important to establish this foundation.
 - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

Thinking/talking points

1. Consider the notion of girls and woods in fairytales.
 - Explain the connection between the girls in traditional tales and those presented by Doshi?
2. This poem was written just before the rise of #MeToo, but nevertheless encapsulates an uprising of female anger in response to violence against women.

The poem has been described as a 'call to arms'. What evidence can you find to justify that in this poem? Think about language, tone and form as well as ideas.

3. This poem considers the nature of power and the physical body.
 - Listen and watch [the reading](#) given by Tishana Doshi during her TED talk in India which is accompanied by her performance of Indian dance.
 - As you watch, consider the words of the poem and the relationship between words, music and the physical body in this presentation.
 - What impact do you think it has on the audience of that talk and why?
4. Can you identify tension in this poem between the fragile and the assertive?
 - Where does this reside?
 - Trace these threads through the poem and discuss the relationship between the two.



Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods' by Tishani Doshi and reread the anthology poem 'Guiseppe' by Roderick Ford. Compare the methods both poets use to explore violence in society.

OR

Read the poem 'Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods' by Tishani Doshi and reread the anthology poem 'Eat Me' by Patience Agbabi. Compare the methods both poets use to explore power and submission.

Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

In her essay [Breast or Tooth?](#) Doshi writes about the context of this poem: 'In December 2012, after Jyoti Singh was brutally raped on a bus in Delhi, the international spotlight was turned to gender violence in India. Laws around sexual assault were tightened, cases were fast-tracked, and rape became part of mainstream conversation. I wrote a poem 'Girls are Coming Out of the Woods', imagining all the mutilated girls and women coming out of the forests, crawling out of attics and river beds, clearing a ground to scatter their stories, making so much noise the world would have to listen.'

The poem was written as a battle cry, clarion. An act of reclamation for our past, present, future. A way of shifting horror back to the perpetrators in the way those naked protestors shifted the gaze back onto those who mete out the broken spine, broken tongue, broken body.'

Read the rest of this essay for your own education about the politics of the body in India. There are some shocking facts in the essay about sexual violence and the politics of the body so be aware of this and its suitability for you personally, before choosing to do this reading.



‘Adventure Flight’, Lemn Sissay

Third planet from the sun, this spinning earth.
Thousands of football cups but only one is first.
Here comes the light to break the pitch: the new day.
Crowds wake! Clouds break! The adventure is under way.

I will not waiver. I will not fall. I will not cower.
When under great pressure the great overpower.
We are equal in dreams – underdogs and over achievers.
We are nothing without adventures and believers.

There's everything to gain: everything to prove.
Touch and be touched, move and he moved.
Summon all resources, steal chance, take risk.
The challenge, the adventure, the grit.

One game, one destiny, one goal, one curved ball of Earth.
One and all, young and old, more than gold is worth.
All four corners, this field this cup – our number one –
When against all odds carry on, shout, 'Carry on.'

Make wings of your arms with the heart. At its centre
The challenge, the flight, the adventure.

© ‘Adventure Flight’ by Lemn Sissay from *Gold from the Stone*, Canongate Books; 2016



Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
 - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
 - One reading might note the line breaks.
 - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
 - Notice the space between stanzas.
 - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
 - It's important to establish this foundation.
 - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

Thinking/talking points

1. You should have already considered the layout and structure of this poem.
 - Think carefully now about the tone of the poem.
 - How is this supported by the orderly structure and carefully punctuated writing?
2. Consider the poet's use of repetition in this poem. What is the effect of this?
3. This poem was used for the Football World cup.
 - Trace the language and ideas that are relevant to this specific context. (Remember, in an exam context you wouldn't have this information and are not tested on context anyway. Might you have picked up this language without being told?)
4. The poem also encompasses the more general idea of achieving against the odds.
 - Track this idea through the poem. What evidence can you find?
 - Write about how the poem addresses both the specifics of football and the broader notion of life and achievement.

***Tip*:** As you write your answer, focus on your academic writing to address the poem being about more than one topic at the same time. This is an important skill for writing about poetry which often resists one fixed meaning.



Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'Adventure Flight' by Lemn Sissay and reread the anthology poem 'The Furthest Distances I've Travelled' by Leontia Flynn. Compare the methods both poets use to explore the value of human experience.

OR

Read the poem 'Adventure Flight' by Lemn Sissay and reread the anthology poem 'History' by John Burnside. Compare the methods both poets use to consider how to live well.

Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

Listen/watch two very different presentations of this poem. The first you will find on Sissay's [own blog](#) and shows the world cup official film of the poem.

The second is [on Spotify](#), using Sissay's own reading of his poem. It suggests a very different setting from the first.

Look and listen very carefully.

- Notice any differences in the reading of the poem.
- Consider how sound and voice are used to convey different interpretations.
- Discuss the different interpretations with your partner. Which do you prefer and why?



'Mother Tongue 母语', Nina Mingya Powles

I wake to the sound of
blue mosque morning prayers
I have never known what the words mean
but I can hear the ache
in the kitchen every morning
I peel jackfruit with my fingers
while they talk over and around me
in a language so familiar but so far away
in the kitchen every night
I eat pink rice cakes with my hands
the powdered sugar sticks to my lips
and popo says *is it good?*
yes, it is good I reply in hakka¹
because it is all I can say
and we sit there with the quiet burning
of the mosquito coils
she hands me a paper napkin
she gestures towards her mouth
she touches my hand without speaking

what if my mother never left this place
where the heat pours down
between the coconut palms
if I had grown up here
I would have different-coloured hair
and different-coloured eyes
I would speak to popo all the time
we would chop vegetables together
and peel the shells off quail eggs
on blue evenings we would sit
looking out for distant lightning
above the hills where plastic flowers
fall against coloured graves
see how it lights up her face
as the rain cools off the surface
of my skin
of this dream
where I am not trapped
in any language

Glossary

¹hakka – a Chinese language spoken by the Hakka people.

© 'Mother Tongue: A poem in two voices' from *Magnolia*, Nina Mingya Powles, Nine Arches Press 2020



Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
 - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
 - One reading might note the line breaks.
 - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
 - Notice the space between stanzas.
 - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
 - It's important to establish this foundation.
 - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

Thinking/talking points

1. Consider how the descriptive details of the poem convey the setting.
 - How does this convey the speaker's experience in this place?
2. This poem focuses on communication and speech.
 - Trace the patterns of language in the poem that support this and consider what they suggest.
3. Consider the balance of silence and speech in the poem. How is this conveyed?
4. You have already looked at the form of this poem on the page.
 - How does the poet exploit the split form of the poem and the relationship between the two stanzas to convey meaning?

***Tip*:** to consider this, look at the 'story' of each stanza and why they have been placed in parallel, on the two sides of the page with space in between. What possibilities does this present for the reader and why? What similarities and differences are clear between the two stanzas?



Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'Mother Tongue' by Nina Mingya Powles and reread the anthology poem 'Genetics' by Sinéad Morrissey. Compare the methods both poets use to explore the links between family.

OR

Read the poem 'Mother Tongue' by Nina Mingya Powles and reread the anthology poem 'On Her Blindness' by Adam Thorpe. Compare the methods both poets use to consider human relationships.

Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

Nina Mingya Powles is a New Zealand poet and nonfiction writer of Malaysian-Chinese and Pākehā descent now based in London.

Her first poetry collection, from which this is taken, is called *Magnolia*, 木蘭. Read more of her poems on [her website](#):



'ETA'¹, Ella Frears

Bastard
grey road.
Empty sky.
Radio – dull.
dull songs.
Even you,
who I love
fiercely, are
fucking me
off. On our
way to a party.
Family party.
Obligatory.
Last time
I saw Uncle
I shouted *you
are the patriarchy!*
Driving home
post summit
post pride –
swallow
I talked
and talked.
Exeter Services.
cried :again.
You, tired,
told me
 I was right.
 Didn't help.

Box of bad
cocktail sausages,
Diet Coke.
Now, it's
Taunton Deane.
the present.
no
less tired.
Coffee smell.
The urge
to punch
a nice old
man, a child.
Cry
uselessly
at 60mph.



Watching
your eyes
watch
the road.
Indicator,
tick, tick, tick.
off.
T-minus ten.
In the flip-
down mirror.
Fixing
mascara,
my smile.

Glossary

¹ETA – stands for estimated time of arrival

© 'ETA' from *Shine Darling*, Ella Frears, Offord Road Books 2020



Initial activities

1. Read the poem slowly at least twice.
 - Read it aloud if you can or hear it in your head (which is what you will need to do in exam conditions).
 - One reading might note the line breaks.
 - Another might focus on the punctuation and sense of the text without the poetic line breaks. This can help you understand the choices the poet has made.
2. Look at the shape of the poem on the page.
 - Notice the space between stanzas.
 - Notice any changes in typography or line length.
3. Consider the 'story' of the poem: What is happening? What is the setting?
 - It's important to establish this foundation.
 - Establish this and consider the focus of the exam question, before you start noticing finer details and writing your analysis.

Thinking/talking points

1. The poem combines a journey now and a past experience.
 - Mark up, on the poem, where the poet's description of a past event begins and ends.
 - Why might this be placed at this point in the poem?
2. Pinpoint the overall mood and tone of this poem. Identify evidence in the poem to support this.
3. Read the poem aloud in sentences, deliberately removing the line breaks crafted by the poet. This will remove the slight pauses and delays of the line breaks, as the eye of the reader moves round to the next line.
 - Select 2 examples where the poet's use of caesura effectively support the poem's tone and mood.
 - What are the effects of the poet's frequent line breaks in this poem? How do caesura and end stops support the poet's intentions?
4. Consider the final three lines of the poem and explain their meaning. Consider their relationship between the previous two lines.



Exam-style questions

EITHER

Read the poem 'ETA' by Ella Frears and reread the anthology poem 'The Furthest Distances I've Travelled' by Leontia Flynn. Compare the methods both poets use to present journeys.

OR

Read the poem 'ETA' by Ella Frears and reread the anthology poem 'Please Hold' by Ciaran Carson. Compare the methods both poets use to explore human emotion.

Extending your knowledge of contemporary poets

Listen to the YouTube recording of Ella Frear's Forward Arts ['Meet the Poet' session](#) (begin listening at 5.45).

You will hear reading a range of her poems from her collection *Shine, Darling* addressing such topics as violence, relationships and sex as well as talking about the process of poetry.



Section B

The poems in this section unseen poems are collected for you to read and then create your own questions. Use the questions in Section A as a model for this work.

Creating your own questions requires you to think carefully about the key methods used by the poets as well as the poems' meanings.

You might like to choose a poem that immediately appeals to you or share out these poems within your class.

You might work in pairs, or independently, to consider the key issues and then develop a set of questions accordingly.

Some of these poems might encourage you to look up a couple of references or words, such as the references to popular culture in the Ellams' poem if you are unfamiliar, or the glossed words for 'Cynghanedd' and 'Balikbayan Box'.

In the actual exam, glossaries and further references would not be required, but you might want to do a little of this for a couple of these poems as part of your independent work.

Activities

1. Read the poem.
2. Identify the key areas of poetic method for the given poem, on which to focus questions. Write four questions that will help other students access the poem.
3. Consider links and connections with the prescribed poems from *Poems of the Decade* anthology. Then craft your own comparative question, using the format of the Pearson Edexcel exam questions.
4. Answer a set of questions on a different poem, authored by someone else in your class.



'Cynghanedd'¹, Robert Minhinnick

for Robert Hopes

Fathers?

Is this what they did?

Built walls?

Maybe around themselves.

But mine had an eye for stones
and understood, yes,

the souls of stones
and the cynghanedd that stones

demand. No, not for Albert
an exquisite jointing

and pointing, but stones'
mineral surfaces upon his palms

stones and stonedust
and then how his wall might look

and whether its line
would read well.

So who were his walls for?
Other builders, of course,

those few privy to the language
with an instinct for stones,

builders who might scan and then
reread and maybe

memorise his wall
and understand its baffling

syntax, the harmonies
they heard within his craft.

Porthcawl, Wales: 5 April 2020

Glossary

¹Cynghanedd – a traditional complex form of patterning of consonants, accents, and rhyme used in Welsh-language poetry.

© Robert Minhinnick



'The First Time you Hold a Gun', Caleb Femi

I held it in my hands: it was soft
like my mother's teet. My gums
still remembered that sensation,
and gave my hands the memory.

Amid the dull chiming of an evening light
I sat as a beggar boy would, knowing

the press of metal heavy in my palms,
near my own as a new-born; my spine
remembered the weight of my infant body
and gave my hands the memory.

As I moved to tuck it into a corner
dark enough to muffle its blushing coat,

I sensed it glint between my fingers, shimmering
like my mother's skin during a cradle song;
my eyes remembered the view from a cot,
and gave my hands the memory.

One thing must be given for one thing:
that is the nature of bartering.

Now all that is	soft
	weighted
	shimmering
carries the echo of a	gun
and not my	mother.

© 'The First Time you Hold a Gun' from *Poor*, Caleb Femi, 2020



'How I Abandoned my Body to his Keeping', Kim Moore

What happened sits in my heart like a stone.
You told me I'd be writing about it
all my life, when I asked
how to stop saying these things to the moon.
I told you how writing it makes the dark
lift and then settle again like a flock of birds.

You said that thinking of the past like birds
who circle each year will make the stone
in my chest heavy, that the dark
that settles inside me will pass. You say it
is over, you say that even the moon
can't know all of what happened, that to ask

to forget is to miss the point. I should ask
to remember. I should open myself to the birds
who sing for their lives. I should tell the moon
how his skin was like smoke, his hand a stone
that fell from a great height. It
was not what I deserved. The year was dark

because he was there and my eyes were dark
and I fell to not speaking. If I asked
him to leave he would smile. Nothing in it
was sacred. And I didn't look up. The birds
could have fallen from the sky like stones
and I wouldn't have noticed. The moon

was there that night in the snow. The moon
was waiting the day the dark
crept into my mouth and left me stone
silent, stone dumb, when all I could ask
was for him to *stop, please stop*. The birds
fled to the trees and stayed there. It



wasn't their fault. It was nobody's fault. It
happened because I was still. The moon
sung something he couldn't hear. The birds
in my heart silent for a year in the dark.
This is the way it is now, asking
for nothing but to forget his name, a stone

that I carry. It cools in my mouth in the dark
and the moon sails on overhead. You ask
about birds, but all I can think of is stones.

© 'How I Abandoned my Body to his Keeping' from *The Art of Falling*, Seren 2015



'Losers', Jay Bernard

We losers are winning now that the losers have lost.
The moaning is getting annoying, let's get back to the winning.
The thing that we won when the losers were kneeling and begging,
before they came with their losing and coming to us with the cost.

The loser it is the riper it is for the losing. My sorrow lets loose
on the nation, opens its arms to the weeping, a basket of beans
for the wounded, nappies and sugar and fish cakes and coupons
are paving the road for the moving: we winners with winners
And losers out there with their losing.

To lose and to lose. To be last in the lotto of loss. I send my sorrow
to mingle with yours. To meet at the pub and lessen the pain of your losing. It's the only
question we ask. Will anyone lessen the losing?

Will anyone lessen the loss?

You can't make the boss listen to us, the boss never spends
lunchtime with us, only when profit and cost and money or
money or us comes into the balance and toss of a coin is enough.
I have school but I don't have a house. My mother's confused

as to how I can shout the answers to Mastermind but nothing
is working out. "The English have won in the lotto of life"

aren't we all English now? This coast is great 'cos our cots were in it, our passport as good
as it got. Now someone else wins the lot.

You're either or neither or not. There's no middle ground,
there's no way round and some of us gave all we got.

Get lost with your truth and your news which never speaks for our lot. We lessen the loss
with a curry, a pint and a curry for mummy,

who can't understand all the fuss, she can't understand why we must.

© 'Losers' from *Surge*, Jay Bernard, Chatto & Windus; Illustrated edition 2019



'My Mother's Wedding Shoes', Liz Berry

I try on your silver stilettos; ones you bought
Before I was born, to wear at a wedding perhaps.

I can see you at nineteen, dancing
in the disco lights of the Working Men's Club,

your hair still long then, loose for the night.
Not knowing these shoes would send you dancing.

Still a kid yourself, to that mithering bed of marriage;
Six months later, you'd be stepping in them again

from the Mini's front seat to the registry office
a handful of flowers from the back garden

standing in for confetti, your mom crying
through her make-up, your bump not showing yet.

As a girl I longed to be fairytaled by shoes like these
while you kept me in lace-ups, classroom brogues

you'd polish each Sunday so your face shone back.
Now I understand what those plain soles meant;

*Walk away, mah wench, from this town, that wedding.
Tek yer books an' yer sense an' keep on walking.*

Even if you hear me blarting, dow ever turn back.

© 'My mother's wedding shoes' from *Black Country*, Liz Berry, Chatto & Windus 2014



'Notes Inside a Balikbayan Box', Romalyn Ante

Dear son,

In my place, here is a Balikbayan box¹.

Here are the LeBron James rubber shoes (size 9)
and the video game tapes to replace all the palm cakes
I owe you for every Simbang Gabi and PTA meeting
I could not attend. I promise I'll be there for Christmas.
I know I've been saying this for a decade now.

Find the E45 cream for your grandma's tissue-dry skin,
a stack of incontinence pads and tubes of barrier balm.
Between you and me: every time I roll old people
onto their sides and lift their knees to their chests
for suppositories, I ask myself, *Who does this for her?*

Tell Tita to leave her husband. Her *school sweetheart*
whose mistresses are *mah-jong* and *sabong*. Tell her
not to bear the stink of his armpits. In the box
find the Gucci Bloom perfume and scar creams. Tell her
I haven't forgotten our vows when we were young
and our fingers smelled of *li hing mui* candies.
Our *Walang Iwanan* oath to never leave each other.

Dear son,

In my place, here is a Balikbayan Box.

Rip all the packaging tape – every gift inside is yours.

Work your hands hard until there's nothing left.

Learn that to survive we must have strong arms.

To carry a tray full of medicine and not let one
drop, to push a hyperventilating woman (with speed
and care) to the Maternity Wing, to lift and sit
a skin-and-bone man down on his chemo chair,
to gauge the weight of a rose before you lay it
onto a coffin. Take this box inside our house –
that is all I ask you to carry, for now, my son.



Glossary

¹Balikbayan box – a box of gifts sent by Filipino adults working abroad to their children, left back at home. These adults were often working in nursing roles.

© 'Notes Inside a Balikbayan Box' from *Antiemetic for Homesickness*, Romalyn Ante, Chatto & Windus 2020



'7', Bhanu Kapil

Night garden + two coca plants. The soft green leaves are like pleats in a complex skirt. Though it rained this morning, the mullein is still pressing out multiple tiny, papery lemon-yellow blossoms. My son is with his dad, and so I don't have to make a proper dinner, and so I don't. Stilton, grapes.

Night has fallen in fact and so there's nothing to abate, stop, prevent: the night's rose, which is blossoming now.

I am trying to write about something that is private to my family.

Someone I love is gone.

I can't write about this here, but I want to mark it.

To press it in this poem.

Just as the night eats every flower.

Just as memory resembles floral output or energy.

And as I write these words, my son bursts through the gate and we end our evening like this: drinking tea from tall glasses in the glittering shade.

This is the zero where the beloved once was.

It's time to go to bed.

Rose, close your beak.

Night, stop writing your name in silver ink on the dark brown paper.



Who are we when we are not with each other?

Who are we when we are not alone?

© First published in Mal Journal.



Section C

This final section is focused on providing unseen poems and exam-style questions, that have comparisons with *Poems of the Decade anthology*

It is for use in timed conditions or for independent homework. These will consolidate the skills you develop in the first two sections of this resource, using poems by key contemporary poets.



'Fuck / Drums', Inua Ellams

When I claim hip hop as afrofuturist expressionism / Exhibit A
is the ancient West African Sankofa symbol / of a bird walking
forward whilst looking back / like a rapper following a beat's
forward progression / whilst recalling lyrics / anticipating the
future whilst conjuring the past / and the rapper is the gasp of
stillness between / the ghost in the time machine / Say time is
marked by drums / and each strike stakes its signature / The
rapper's task is to find within its solid lines / equilibrium / to fuck
up the drum's ubiquitous significance by rhyming / on / within /
or off its beat / to render it inaudible / invisible / fluid as if a bird
dancing through a stave of barbed wires / its wings aflutter / like
a tongue between gritted teeth / twirling urban narratives into
timeless myth / shit / it's the stuff of science fiction / ain't it / each
rapper's mouth a Quantum realm / a Tardis / a Delorean / and the
beat maker a mad scientist / Y'all don't see how all electricity is
Sango's lightning pulse / that Dr Emmet Brown is Grand Master
Flash in disguise / that Andre 3000 is the greatest Time Lord /
who grabbed a mic / to spit

© 'Fuck / Drums' from *The Actual*, Inua Ellams, Penned in the Margins 2020

Exam-style questions

1. Read the poem 'Fuck / Drums' by Inua Ellams and reread the anthology poem 'To My Nine-Year-Old-Self' by Helen Dunmore. Compare the methods both poets use to present the relationship between past and present.
2. Read the poem 'Fuck / Drums' by Inua Ellams and reread the anthology poem 'Ode on a Grayson Perry Urn' by Tim Turnbull. Compare the methods both poets use to consider modern culture.



'The Wasps', Mona Arshi

Suddenly they were on him. He was ten, the cricket game abandoned, but already they drizzled over his limbs, plunging into his ears, his eyes, trying to break into his body. The children stood around him screaming, stamping them out though he didn't howl or stagger even, he was shaking his head moving his arms – swiping in wide semi circles in some horrible dance, just blind panic, adrenaline.

His hair was on fire. His dark boy-fringe lit by their frenzy as these maniacal creatures, this colony, loaded with pheromones ruffled around his neck. I was crying held back by an aunt till someone brought the hose-pipe and drowned them all. His lips were blue, red, swollen, the ball still in the nest as the sober boy stood dripping into the soil, into their soused bodies, spent.

© 'The Wasps', Mona Arshi, Liverpool University Press

Exam-style questions

1. Read the poem *The Wasps* by Mona Arshi and reread the anthology poem *The Lammis Hireling* by Ian Duhig. Compare the methods both poets use to present a violent event.
2. Read the poem *The Wasps* by Mona Arshi and reread the anthology poem *Chainsaw versus the Pampas Grass* by Simon Armitage. Compare the methods both poets use to examine the power of nature.



'The Little Miracles', Malika Booker

After 'A Winter Night' by Thomas Tranströmer (trans Robin Roberston)

Since I found mother collapsed on the kitchen
floor, we siblings have become blindfolded mules

harnessed to carts filled with strain, lumbering
through a relentless storm, wanting to make

our mother walk on her own again, wanting to rest
our palms on her left leg and arm like Jesus, but

constellations do not gather like leaves in a teacup,
so what miracle, of what blood, of what feeble wishes

do we pray, happy no nails hammer plywood, building
a coffin, to house her dead weight, happy her journey

crawls as we her children hold on like drought holds out
for rain, learning what it is like to begin again, start

with the, the, the dog, the cat, the date, the year, the
stroke, the brain, the fenced in walls, she struggles

to dismantle brick on brick. *She cannot break this,*
we reason, watching her left hand in her lap, a useless

echo. We chew bitter bush, swallow our howling storm,
reluctantly splintering under the strain of our mother's

ailing bed-rest. We smile at each of her feats: right hand
brushing her teeth in late evening, head able to lift



without the aid of a neck-brace, her off spring's names
Malika, Phillip and Kwesi are chants repeated over

and over as if staking us children as her life's work,
her blessings, showing how much we are loved. The days

she sings *walk with me oh my Lord*, over and over, *walk
with me oh my Lord, through the darkest night...* and I sing

with her, my tones flat to her soprano, *just as you changed
the wind and walked upon the sea, conquer, my living Lord,*

the storm that threatens me, and we sing and sing until
she says, *Maliks, please stop the cat-wailing before*

*you voice mek rain fall, and look how the weather nice
outside eh!* Then we laugh and laugh until almost giddy,

our mood light momentarily in this sterile room, where
each spoonful of pureed food slipped into her mouth

like a tender offering takes us a step away from feeding
tubes, and we are so thankful for each minuscule miracle.

© 'The Little Miracles' by Malika Booker <https://magmapoetry.com/archive/magma-75/>

Exam-style questions

1. Read the poem *The Little Miracles* by Malika Booker and reread the anthology poem *A Minor Role* by Ursula Fanthorpe. Compare the methods both poets use to present caring for others.
2. Read the poem *The Little Miracles* by Malika Booker and reread the anthology poem *On Her Blindness* by Adam Thorpe. Compare the methods both poets use to present disability.



'Tame', Sarah Howe

It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters.

- CHINESE PROVERB

This is the tale of the woodsman's daughter. Born with a box
of ashes set beside the bed,
in case. Before the baby's first cry, he rolled her face into the cinders -held it. Weak from
the bloom
of too-much-blood, the new mother tried to stop his hand. He dragged her out into the
yard, flogged her
with the usual branch. If it was magic in the wood, they never
said, but she began to change:

her scar-ridged back. beneath his lashes, toughened to a rind; it split
and crusted into bark. Her prone
knees dug in the sandy ground and rooted, questing for water,
as her work-grained fingers lengthened
into twigs. The tree - a lychee - he continued to curse as if it
were his wife - its useless, meagre
fruit. Meanwhile the girl survived. Feathered in greyish ash,
her face tucked in, a little gosling.

He called her Mei Ming: No Name. She never learned to speak. Her life
maimed by her father's sorrow.
For grief is a powerful thing - even for objects never conceived.
He should have dropped her down
the well. Then at least he could forget. Sometimes when he set
to work, hefting up his axe
to watch the cleanness of its arc, she butted at his elbow - again,
again - with her restive head,



till angry, he flapped her from him. But if these silent pleas had meaning, neither knew.

The child's only comfort came from nestling under the lychee tree. Its shifting branches whistled her wordless lullabies: the lychees with their watchful eyes, the wild geese crossing overhead.

The fruit, the geese. They marked her seasons. She didn't long to join the birds, if longing implies

a will beyond the blindest instinct. Then one mid-autumn, she craned her neck so far to mark the geese wheeling through the clouded hills - it kept on stretching - till it tapered in a beak. Her pink toes sprouted webs and claws; her helpless arms found strength in wings. The goose daughter soared to join the arrowed skein. kin linked by a single aim and tide, she knew their heading

and their need. They spent that year or more in flight, but where - across what sparkling tundra! wastes - I've not heard tell. Some say the fable ended there. But those who know the ways of wild geese know too the obligation to return, to their first dwelling place. Let this suffice: late spring. A woodsman snares a wild goose that spirals clean into his yard - almost like it knows. Gripping its sinewed neck

he presses it down into the block, cross-hewn from a lychee trunk. A single blow. Profit, loss.

© 'Tame' from *Loop of Jade*, Sarah Howe, Chatto & Windus; UK ed. edition (7 May 2015)



Exam-style questions

1. Read the poem *Tame* by Sarah Howe and reread the anthology poem *The Deliverer* by Tishani Doshi. Compare the methods both poets use to present infanticide and its consequences.
2. Read the poem *Tame* by Sarah Howe and reread the anthology poem *The Lammas Hireling* by Ian Duhig. Compare the methods both poets use to present fantasy and folklore.



'what was said at the bus stop', Danez Smith

lately has been a long time

says the girl from Pakistan, Lahore to be specific
at the bus stop when the white man
ask her where she's from & then
says *oh, you from Lahore?*
it's pretty bad over there lately.

lately has been a long time

she says & we look at each other & the look says
yes, i too wish dude would stop
asking us about where we from
but on the other side of our side eyes
is maybe a hand where hands do no good
a look to say, *yes, i know lately has been*
a long time for your people too
& i'm sorry the world is so good at making
us feel like we have to fight for space
to fight for our lives

"solidarity" is a word, a lot of people say it
i'm not sure what it means in the flesh
i know i love & have cried for my friends
their browns a different brown than mine
i've danced their dances when taught
& tasted how their mothers miracle the rice
different than mine. i know sometimes
i can't see beyond my own pain, past black
& white, how bullets love any flesh.
i know it's foolish to compare.
what advice do the drowned have for the burned?
what gossip is there between the hanged & the buried?



& i want to reach across our great distance
that is sometimes an ocean & sometimes centimeters
& say, look. *your people, my people, all that has happened to us*
& still make love under rusted moons, still pull

*children from the mothers & name them
still teach them to dance & your pain is not mine
& is no less & is mine & i pray to my god your god
blesses you with mercy & i have tasted your food & understand
how it is a good home & i don't know your language
but i understand your songs & i cried when they came
for your uncles & when you buried your niece
i wanted the world to burn in the child's brief memory
& still, still, still, still, still, still, still, still, still
& i have stood by you in the soft shawl of morning
waiting & breathing & waiting*

© 'What was said at the bus stop' from *Homie*, Danez Smith, Graywolf press 2020

Exam-style questions

1. Read the poem *what was said at the bus stop* by Danez Smith and reread the anthology poem *Genetics* by Sinéad Morrissey. Compare the methods both poets use to present identity.
2. Read the poem *what was said at the bus stop* by Danez Smith and reread the anthology poem *From the Journal of a Disappointed Man* by Andrew Motion. Compare the methods both poets use to present observing human interaction.



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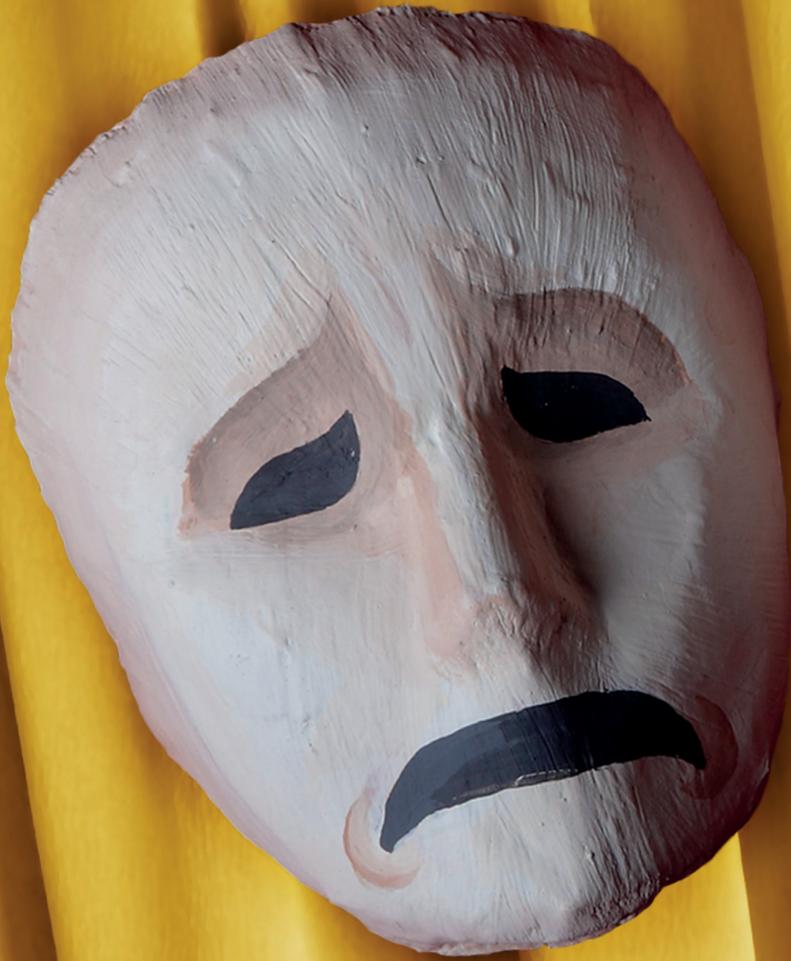
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Shakespeare Critical Anthology: Tragedy

AS and A Level English Literature

The Pearson Edexcel AS and A level English Literature Shakespeare Critical Anthology can be used to prepare for Component 1 of your assessment

Pearson Edexcel GCE English Literature

Component 1a: Drama

Shakespeare Critical Anthology: Tragedy

For use with:

A level English Literature (9ET0) Component 1a – Drama (Shakespeare)

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The Edexcel Shakespeare Critical Anthology

Introduction

At the heart of Edexcel's A level Literature specification is the literary text. Teachers and academics tell us that, above all, A level should encourage you to read and re-read your literary texts and to know them well. They also want students to read widely, deeply and independently to secure informed views about these texts. Reading critically means not just having opinions, but seeing that other readers might think differently.

This collection of critical passages is designed to extend and illuminate your reading of your set Shakespeare play. It results from our extensive research to understand what teachers and university English departments really believe are the most important skills and knowledge for students of literature at A level. The critical views contained here will offer you a range of perspectives on tragedy, as well as three specific passages on your chosen Shakespeare play. In total you will have seven passages that are relevant to your A level Shakespeare text (Component 1 – Drama).

The texts have been selected to give you a taste of high-quality writing by literary critics about a text that you should know well. They have been chosen by academics at one of the leading university English departments in the country, University College London, led by Professor John Mullan. Teachers may wish to supplement them with other passages of criticism that they think are illuminating, but this is not essential. We hope that your own critical writing style will be enriched by reading, and sometimes grappling with, these tightly crafted pieces by skilled literary thinkers. The arguments posed will enable you to consider the views of others and form, and perhaps re-assess, your own readings of your studied Shakespeare play.

So how might you use literary criticism within A level Literature? This will vary from student to student, depending on your developing skills in the subject. There is no expectation for you to pepper your own responses to Shakespeare with quotations from this anthology, or to ensure that a set percentage of your essay references this material. The intention is that your own responses to Shakespeare's writing will be enriched by considering the range of viewpoints offered here. Think of reading this criticism as rather like having a conversation; we offer each of these perspectives not as 'the answer' to reading Shakespeare, but merely as another reading of the text for you to engage with. You may find that some of the critics do not seem to agree with each other.

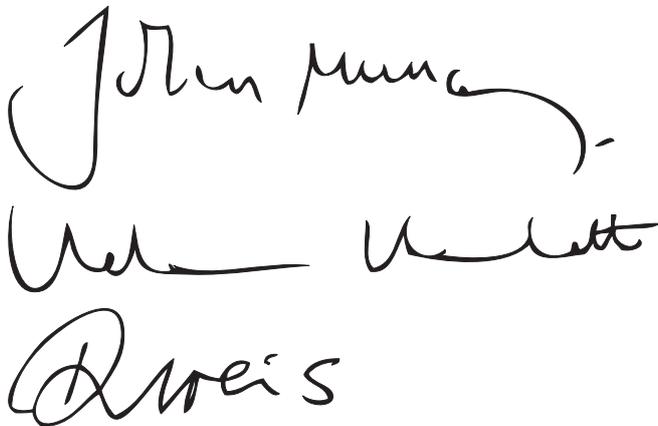
All of the points below are valuable ways of using the extended reading offered in this collection – during class discussion, in personal essays, or ultimately in your examination responses:

- Understand the interpretation being put forward about the literary text(s).
- Compare the critic's position with your own reading of the text (or indeed that of another critic or a member of your class). Identify any points of connection or difference.
- Agree with the point made. Identify further evidence in Shakespeare's text to extend it.
- Disagree with the critic's position. Identify evidence in Shakespeare's text that might support your opposing argument.
- Refine the critic's position. Identify one element that you can support and another that you would prefer to refine and qualify with evidence from the text.
- Select particular quotations that support or contrast with your own reading of the text to strengthen your discussion or literary essay.

Remember that, for all today's students, with ready access to the internet, the issue of plagiarism is an important one. You can, and should, draw on both the literary text and your wider reading to craft your own arguments. However, once you use others' words, or specific ideas, you must acknowledge them by use of a footnote or bracketed reference within your text. While Shakespeare borrowed many of his stories from other writers, academic essay-writing must be your own!

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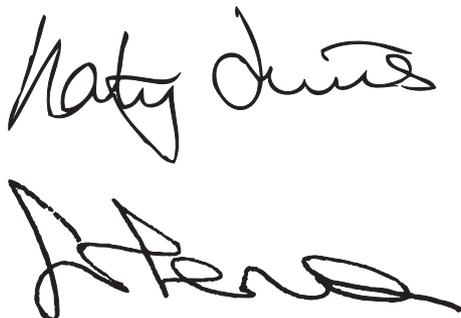
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Section A: Tragedy

1 Shakespearean tragedy

Kastan sees Shakespeare's tragedies as intense treatments of age-old questions about whether the causes of suffering lie in human weakness, divine retribution, or arbitrary fate. He asserts that the absence of clear answers to these questions is central to Shakespearean tragedy. While Shakespeare did not have a fully worked-out theory of tragedy, his coherent and powerful sense of tragedy develops and deepens with each tragic play.

If any theoretical pressures existed to shape Shakespeare's understanding of tragedy they came more from medieval articulations of the genre than classical ones. Chaucer was seemingly the first to use the English word "tragedy," in a gloss in his translation (ca. 1380) of **Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae***: "**Tragedye is to seyn a dite of a prosperite for a tyme that endeth in wrecchidnesse.**" The felt need for a gloss suggests that tragedy was then an unfamiliar concept in English, but quickly the idea of tragedy as the fall from prosperity to wretchedness became commonplace. Chaucer's definition is perhaps so limited as to seem obvious and unhelpful, especially in our **hypertheoretical** age, but in its very simplicity it calls attention to tragedy's power, marking it as universal and inexplicable. It defines the inescapable trajectory of the tragic action but not its cause, and in its reticence about who or what is responsible for the dire change of fortune it speaks tragedy's fearful incomprehensibility.

... Chaucer's definitional reserve finds its most powerful **analogue** in the agonizing silences of Shakespeare's tragedies. "Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life / And thou no breath at all?" (5.8.307–8), King Lear cries, holding his broken child. No answer is forthcoming, though it lies in the incalculable murderousness of the world. And directly questioning that world produces no more satisfying responses. "Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" (3.6.74–5).

Glossary

Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* Boethius (480–524AD) was a Roman philosopher. The *Consolation of Philosophy*, written when Boethius was in prison, is an imaginary conversation between Boethius and Philosophy, who is depicted as a woman.

'**Tragedye is to seyn a dite of a prosperite for a tyme that endeth in wrecchidnesse.**'
'Tragedy means a literary composition written in happier times recalling events that ended in misery.'

hypertheoretical tending to produce lots of theories

These are the unanswered (perhaps unanswerable) questions of the tragic world. Are there reasons for the intolerable suffering? Is the tragic motor human error or **capricious** fate? Is the catastrophe a just, if appalling, retribution, or an **arbitrary** destiny reflecting the indifference, or, worse, the **malignity** of the heavens? ...

For Shakespeare, anyhow, the uncertainty is the point. Characters may commit themselves to a confident sense of the tragic world they inhabit; but the plays inevitably **render** that preliminary understanding inadequate, and the characters struggle unsuccessfully to reconstruct a coherent worldview from the ruins of the old. And it is the emotional truth of the struggle rather than the **metaphysical** truth of the worldview that is at the center of these plays. Shakespeare's tragedies provoke the questions about the cause of the pain and loss the plays so agonizingly portray, and in the refusal of any answers starkly prevent any confident attribution of meaning or value to human suffering.

Perhaps here we can begin to discover the logic of Shakespeare's tragic practice. Kenneth Muir's oft-quoted comment that "There is no such thing as Shakespearian tragedy: there are only Shakespearian tragedies" merely begs the question of how "Shakespearian" modifies "tragedy," either as an individual exemplar or a group. If Muir is only saying that Shakespeare does not seem to have written tragedy driven by a fully developed theoretical conception of the genre we can easily **assent**, but a coherent and powerfully compelling sense of tragedy can be seen to develop through the plays.

Tragedy, for Shakespeare, is the genre of **uncompensated** suffering, and as he writes in that mode the successive plays reveal an ever more profound formal acknowledgment of their **desolating** controlling logic.

From David Scott Kastan, "'A rarity most beloved': Shakespeare and the Idea of Tragedy", 2003.

analogue parallel, or quality of being similar to something else

capricious unpredictable

arbitrary determined by chance or whim

malignity quality of being highly dangerous; full of malice or hatred

render to cause to become; make

metaphysical theoretical or philosophical

assent agree; consent

uncompensated unrewarded; not compensated

desolating devastating

2 The pleasure of tragedy

In this extract Nuttall considers the tension between pleasure and pain in tragic drama. Early critical responses to tragedy considered audience pleasure in relation to the pain they were witnessing on stage. Contemporary reviewers more commonly praise the playwright's ability to disturb the emotions of the audience and render them uncomfortable.

If we were all wicked, there would perhaps be no problem. A world of torturers would naturally be pleased by the blinding of **Oedipus** or else, to take a cooler form of wickedness, it would not be surprising if an audience inwardly driven by envy were to delight in the fall of one greater than they. But why does tragedy give pleasure to 'people like ourselves'?

A cruel or sadistic pleasure in the blinding of Oedipus is immediately distinguishable from what **Aristotle** called the *oikeia hedone*, 'the proper pleasure' of tragedy (*Poetics*, 1459 a 21) and I fancy that the same is true – though less obviously true – in the case of the gloating, envious spectator. In the tragic theatre suffering and death are perceived as matter for grief and fear, after which it seems that grief and fear become in their turn matter for enjoyment.

'The pleasure of tragedy' is an immediately uncomfortable phrase. Quite apart from the original basic collision between terrible matter and a delighted response, there is an awkwardness, somehow, in the very mildness of the term 'pleasure' – it seems a puny word to set beside the thunderous term 'tragedy' – adding a species of insult to injury. The **Nietzschean oxymoron**, 'tragic joy', is, oddly, easier to accept, because it fights fire with fire. I suspect moreover that the awkwardness has become more obvious in our century. For moral **Dr Johnson** it was self-evident that poetry and drama must please. A later kind of moralism taught a new generation of readers and theatre-goers to despise the pleasurable and to value the disturbing, the jagged, the painful work. It is now virtually unimaginable that a reviewer of a new play should praise it by saying that it offers solace or comfort. Conversely the adjective 'uncomfortable' is automatically read as

Glossary

Oedipus According to Greek myth, after realising that he had fulfilled a prophecy that he would both kill his father and sleep with his mother, Oedipus blinded himself with two pins from his mother's dress.

Aristotle Greek philosopher who in 335BC wrote *Poetics*, one of the first works of dramatic theory, in which he describes the features of drama and tragedy in particular

Nietzsche German philosopher (1844–1900) who wrote *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which he argues that Greek tragedy helped early audiences appreciate their own existence

oxymoron language device where two opposite words or meanings are used side by side, e.g. 'sour sweet'

Dr Johnson Samuel Johnson (1709–84) was a poet, essayist, moralist and critic who compiled *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), which had a far-reaching effect on modern English.

praise. Ancient **Stoics** and **Epicureans** argued about most things but they would be united in their bewilderment at this. I am a twentieth-century person and I share the general taste for discomfort. But the radical problem remains obstinately in place: if people go again and again to see such things, they must in some way enjoy them. Similarly, if you like the disturbing kind of play then *this* disturbance is something you like, must itself be a further mode of pleasure. The shift in taste does not resolve the problem of tragic pleasure; rather it sets an allied, similarly challenging problem – that of enjoyed discomfort – alongside it.

Many things, when looked at hard, seem to come to bits (or, as we now say, ‘to undergo deconstruction’). Certainly this is true of the notion of pleasure. ‘Quantity of pleasure being equal, push-pin is as good as poetry,’ said **Jeremy Bentham**, robustly. Here pleasure is offered for inspection as a luminously simple datum: of course poetry and push-pin are profoundly different things, but, meanwhile, pleasure is pleasure, *semper idem*. But the datum can prove strangely elusive. For example, while it may seem essential to the idea of pleasure that it be felt, pleasure need not occupy the foreground of *consciousness*, which will afford simultaneous space for objects of another kind. I mean by this only that one can enjoy an activity or process without at any point thinking consciously, ‘I am enjoying this’, or ‘this is very agreeable’; instead one may be thinking only of the activity itself. When two people converse we may observe that they enjoyed the conversation intensely, but if *per impossibile* one obtained entry to their fields of consciousness one would never find at any point a separately introspected element, ‘the pleasant’, but instead an unbroken preoccupation with the subject of the conversation itself.

From A. D. Nuttall, ‘Aristotle and After’, 1996.

Stoics Stoicism was a belief system founded in Greece. Stoics believed that learning to control your own will and suppress your emotions was the only way to understand the meaning of the universe. They thought people were equal in the eyes of the gods.

Epicureans Followers of a system of beliefs based on the writings of the philosopher Epicurus, Epicureans believed that pleasure could only be gained by modest living and tranquillity. They thought the gods were neutral and did not wish to interfere in people’s lives.

Jeremy Bentham British philosopher (1748–1832) who founded utilitarianism, a system of ethics based on ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number’

semper idem always the same

per impossibile through some impossible means

3 The Shakespearean tragic hero

More than a century after its first publication, A. C. Bradley's Shakespearean Tragedy continues to be respected and frequently quoted. In this extract, Bradley considers Shakespearean tragedy in relation to definitions of the genre offered by the ancient Greek writer Aristotle and by medieval writers. He argues that Shakespearean tragedy necessarily centres on a character of high rank and exceptional qualities who undergoes a reversal of fortune that leads to his own death and to a more general calamity.

In approaching our subject it will be best, without attempting to shorten the path by referring to famous theories of the drama, to start directly from the facts, and to collect from them gradually an idea of Shakespearean Tragedy. And first, to begin from the outside, such a tragedy brings before us a considerable number of persons (many more than the persons in a Greek play, unless the members of the Chorus are reckoned among them); but it is **pre-eminently** the story of one person, the 'hero', or at most of two, the 'hero' and 'heroine'. Moreover, it is only in the love-tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, that the heroine is as much the centre of the action as the hero. The rest, including *Macbeth*, are single stars. So that, having noticed the peculiarity of those two dramas, we may henceforth, for the sake of **brevity**, ignore it, and may speak of the tragic story as being concerned primarily with one person.

The story, next, leads up to, and includes, the *death* of the hero. On the one hand (whatever may be true of tragedy elsewhere), no play at the end of which the hero remains alive is, in the full Shakespearean sense, a tragedy; and we no longer class *Troilus and Cressida* or *Cymbeline* as such, as did the editors of the Folio. On the other hand, the story depicts also the troubled part of the hero's life which precedes and leads up to his death; and an instantaneous death occurring by 'accident' in the midst of prosperity would not **suffice** for it. It is, in fact, essentially a tale of suffering and calamity conducting to death.

The suffering and calamity are, moreover, exceptional. They befall a conspicuous person. They are themselves of some striking kind. They are also, as a rule, unexpected, and contrasted with previous happiness or glory. A tale, for example, of a man slowly worn to death by disease, poverty, little cares, sordid vices, petty persecutions, however piteous or dreadful it might be, would not be tragic in the Shakespearean sense.

Such exceptional suffering and calamity, then, affecting the hero, and – we must now add – generally extending far and wide beyond him, so as to make the whole scene a scene of woe, are an essential ingredient in tragedy and a chief source of the tragic emotions, and especially of pity. But the proportions of this ingredient, and the direction taken by tragic pity, will naturally vary greatly. Pity, for example has a much larger part in *King Lear* than in *Macbeth*, and is directed in the one case chiefly to the hero, in the other chiefly to minor characters.

Glossary

pre-eminently mainly or to a very great degree

brevity shortness; use of few words

suffice be enough

Let us now pause for a moment on the ideas we have so far reached. They would more than suffice to describe the whole tragic fact as it presented itself to the medieval mind. To the medieval mind a tragedy meant a narrative rather than a play... A total reverse of fortune, coming unawares upon a man who 'stood in high degree', happy and apparently secure – such was the tragic fact to the medieval mind. It appealed strongly to common human sympathy and pity; it startled also another feeling, that of fear. It frightened men and awed them. It made them feel that man is blind and helpless, the plaything of an inscrutable power, called by the name of Fortune or some other name – a power which appears to smile on him for a little, and then on a sudden strikes him down in his pride. Shakespeare's idea of the tragic fact is larger than this idea and goes beyond it; but it includes it, and it is worth while to observe the identity of the two in a certain point which is often ignored. Tragedy with Shakespeare is concerned always with persons of 'high degree'; often with kings or princes; if not, with leaders in the state like Coriolanus, Brutus, Antony; at the least, as in *Romeo and Juliet*, with members of great houses, whose quarrels are of public moment. There is a decided difference here between *Othello* and our three other tragedies, but it is not a difference of kind. Othello himself is no mere private person; he is the General of the Republic. At the beginning we see him in the Council Chamber of the Senate. The consciousness of his high position never leaves him. At the end, when he is determined to live no longer, he is as anxious as Hamlet not to be misjudged by the great world, and his last speech begins,

Soft you; a word or two before you go.

I have done the state some service, and they know it.

And this characteristic of Shakespeare's tragedies, though not the most vital, is neither external nor unimportant. The saying that every death-bed is the scene of the fifth act of a tragedy has its meaning, but it would not be true if the word 'tragedy' bore its dramatic sense. The pangs of despised love and the anguish of remorse, we say, are the same in a peasant and a prince; but, not to insist that they cannot be so when the prince is really a prince, the story of the prince, the triumvir, or the general, has a greatness and dignity of its own. His fate affects the welfare of a whole nation or empire; and when he falls suddenly from the height of earthly greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of contrast, of the powerlessness of man, and of the omnipotence – perhaps the caprice – of Fortune or Fate, which no tale of private life can possibly rival.

From A. C. Bradley, 'The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy', 1991. (First published as 'Lecture 1: The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy', 1904).

4 Tragedy and madness

Mack notes how frequently Shakespearean tragic heroes suffer madness or are associated with it. Madness often seems to be a form of divine punishment, but also brings with it special insight and freedom to speak the truth. This resembles Shakespeare's own use of art to reveal painful truths. Mack argues that art and madness both allow freedom of speech, but that their insights may be dismissed as merely fiction or nonsense.

I have kept to the end, and out of proper order, the most interesting of all the symbolic elements in the hero's second phase. This is his experience of madness. One discovers with some surprise, I think, how many of Shakespeare's heroes are associated with this disease...

What (if anything), one wonders, may this mean? Doubtless a sort of explanation can be found in Elizabethan psychological lore, which held that the excess of any passion approached madness, and in the general prevalence through **Seneca** and other sources, of the **adage**: *Quos vult perdere Jupiter dementat prius*. Furthermore, madness, when actually exhibited, was dramatically useful, as **Kyd** had shown. It was arresting in itself, and it allowed the combination in a single figure of tragic hero and buffoon, to whom could be accorded the licence of the allowed fool in speech and action.

Just possibly, however, there was yet more to it than this, if we may judge by Shakespeare's sketches of madness in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. In both these, madness is to some degree a punishment or doom, corresponding to the adage. Lear prays to the heavens that he may not suffer madness, and Hamlet asks Laertes, in his apology before the duel, to overlook his conduct, since 'you must needs have heard, how I am punish'd / With a sore distraction'. It is equally obvious, however, that in both instances the madness has a further dimension, as insight, and this is true also of Ophelia. Ophelia, mad, is able to make awards of flowers to the King and Queen which are appropriate to frailties of which she cannot be supposed to have conscious knowledge. For the same reason, I suspect we do not need **Dover Wilson's** radical displacement of Hamlet's entry in

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Seneca Roman dramatist, philosopher and statesman (4BC–65AD) whose dramas were very influential and are thought to have been the inspiration for the 'Revenge Tragedy', popular in both the Renaissance and the Restoration periods

adage proverb or saying

Quos vult perdere Jupiter dementat prius 'Those whom Jupiter wishes to destroy, he first drives mad'

Kyd Thomas Kyd (1558–94) wrote *The Spanish Tragedy*, which is regarded as one of the first Revenge Tragedies.

Dover Wilson 20th-century British scholar of Renaissance drama, whose text *What Happens in Hamlet* (1935) is one of the most influential studies of the play. However, Wilson often deviated wildly from his own textual principles if they did not support his preferred reading of a scene.

II. ii, so as to enable him to overhear Polonius. It is enough that Hamlet wears, even if it is for the moment self-assumed, the **guise** of the madman. As such, he can be presumed to have intuitive unformulated awarenesses that reach the surface in free (yet relevant) associations, like those of Polonius with a fishmonger, Ophelia with **carrion**. Lear likewise is allowed free yet relevant associations. His great speech in Dover fields on the lust of women derives from the designs of Goneril and Regan on Edmund, of which he consciously knows nothing. Moreover, both he and Hamlet can be privileged in madness to say things – Hamlet about the corruption of human nature, and Lear about the corruption of the Jacobean social system (and by extension about all social systems whatever), which Shakespeare could hardly have risked apart from this licence. Doubtless one of the anguishes of being a great artist is that you cannot tell people what they and you and your common institutions are really like – when viewed absolutely – without being dismissed as insane. To communicate at all, you must acknowledge the opposing voice; for there always is an opposing voice, and it is as deeply rooted in your own nature as in your audience's. Just possibly, therefore, the meaning of tragic madness for Shakespeare approximated the meaning that the legendary figure of **Cassandra** (whom Shakespeare had in fact put briefly on his stage in the second act of *Troilus and Cressida*) has held for so many artists since his time. Cassandra's madness, like Lear's and Hamlet's – possibly, also, like the madness *verbally* assigned to other Shakespearean tragic heroes – contains both punishment and insight. She is doomed to know, by a consciousness that moves to measures outside our normal space and time; she is doomed never to be believed, because those to whom she speaks can hear only the opposing voice. With the language of the god Apollo sounding in her brain, and the incredulity of her fellow mortals ringing in her ears, she makes an ideal emblem of the predicament of the Shakespearean tragic hero, caught as he is between the **absolute** and the **expedient**. And by the same token, of the predicament of the artist – Shakespeare himself, perhaps – who, having been given the power to see the 'truth', can convey it only through poetry – what we commonly call a 'fiction', and dismiss.

From Maynard Mack, 'What Happens in Shakespearean Tragedy', 1993.

guise disguise; pretence

carrion dead or rotting flesh

Cassandra In Greek mythology, Cassandra had the power to see into the future (prophecy) but she was destined never to be believed.

absolute complete; perfect; all-powerful

expedient appropriate (especially in an urgent situation)

Section B: *Antony and Cleopatra*

1 Antony's suicide

This extract concerns the suicide of Antony after his forces have been defeated by Caesar at the Battle of Actium. It discusses why Shakespeare makes it so difficult for Antony to do this, arguing that the indignity of the scene is a consequence of the devotion that Antony has earlier required from his men.

Antony, as we have seen, has not been good at **steeling** men for a long time now; making them weep is where he is strong. Eros is already well softened when Antony puts his awful request to him, and his initial reluctance is countered thus:

*Eros,
Wouldst thou be window'd in great Rome, and see
Thy master thus with pleach'd arms, bending down
His corrigible neck, his face subdued
To penetrative shame; whilst the wheel'd seat
Of fortunate Caesar, drawn before him, branded
His baseness that ensued?*

There is a strange, rather fleshly vividness in Antony's conjured image of himself and his shame here – 'pleach'd arms', 'corrigible neck', 'face subdued to penetrative shame'. It is an effect partly of imagining the compassion that there is to be felt on his behalf by another, of his knowing perhaps too well what a devotion to his own person is like and where it is susceptible. We might pass over in silence the success with which Antony reverses what we normally mean by sympathetic imaginativeness. But the speech is, for its further purpose, a failure; he makes himself, for anyone who loves him – and who indeed doesn't? – supremely unkillable...

Shakespeare might be plucking at our nerves when he has Antony botch his suicide, but there is nothing arbitrary about Antony's inability to find anyone who will mercifully – it's no longer a question of nobility – kill him. The excruciating indignities that attend his last hours are the price he pays for having made himself too much a man, too much a thing of emotion: for his followers an object of too piteous and reverential a love. Our moral sense easily accommodates the idea that penalties attach to hardness of heart; we are more reluctant to believe that nature also penalises its opposite. But could anything be more pointed than the preparedness of his guards to offer **laments** over a half-alive Antony, but not put an end to his pain?

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- steeling** creating a hard and resilient character or attitude
laments expressions of sorrow

First Guard *What's the noise?*
 Antony *I have done my work ill, friends: O make an end
 Of what I have begun.*
 Second Guard *The star is fall'n.*
 First Guard *And time is at his period.*
 All *Alas, and woe!*
 Antony *Let him that loves me, strike me dead.*
 First Guard *Not I.*
 Second Guard *Nor I.*
 Third Guard *Nor any one.*
 (Exeunt Guards)

The tributes and the tears that have flowed so freely through the play flow still; but their crazy inappropriateness here, their being the last things Antony now requires, their positive hindrance of what he does want, is given us with the sharp apparentness of something close to farce. Here is devotion indeed! Everyone, it seems, is too beautifully devoted to Antony to help him. 'Let him that loves me, strike me dead' – he might have fared better with an appeal to loyalties less warm and affections less intimate. As it is he could not have fared worse. There is more than just the prudence of the ordinary soldier in the frantic refusal and dispersal of the guards; they shy from Antony as from some untouchable. The murderous instincts that a Macbeth or Coriolanus calls up might strike us as paying, after all, a greater tribute. They certainly pay a more serviceable one. He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword; he who lives by love enjoys the same justice but dies at the hands of a crueller **antagonist**.

From Howard Jacobson, *'Antony and Cleopatra: Gentle Madam, No'*, 1987. (First published as same in 1978).

antagonist opponent; enemy

2 *Antony and Cleopatra*: the play's structure

Jones discusses the dramatic structure of the play. It boasts more scenes – many of them very short – than any other Shakespeare play. He attributes this to Shakespeare's desire to deliver a more detached, at times even ironic, perspective on the protagonists and the action. The play's scenic structure becomes a game of point and counterpoint; we are urged to measure reality against perception by a series of dramatic snapshots.

Antony and Cleopatra heaves ripplingly like the sea in a quiet mood. Most of its scenes are short and **circumscribed**; they have no room for the grander movements of feeling, such as occur in most of the other great tragedies (like the forum scene in *Julius Caesar* or the temptation scene in *Othello*). With one possible exception, the last scene of all, there is nothing like this in *Antony and Cleopatra*. It makes its effects in quite a different way.

Shakespeare's technique of short scenes lends itself to a number of expressive purposes. In the first place, the practice of clearing the stage every hundred lines or so forbids – in the first movement of the play, at least – any very deep emotional engagement on the part of the audience. The constant changes of location (Egypt, Rome, Misenum, Syria, Athens), the contrasting evaluations of Antony's behaviour, as well as the **fluctuating** play of mood within the individual personality, all work to encourage an **ironical comparative response**, not quite detachment (because the play **kindles** a keen interest), but not a profound attachment of feeling either. The setting of the play is the entire world – the Roman empire and its **Levantine** neighbours, which is the world as its inhabitants see it. The dramatist may show us, in one scene, what is going on in that part of the world, but we can be sure that elsewhere, in many other places, many other things are also going on. From its opening scene the play establishes the simple fact that there are as many viewpoints as there are human beings. This is one of the points made by the scene, hardly necessary to the plot, in which Antony's lieutenant Ventidius is shown in Syria (III.I). We have scarcely met him before, and never see him again, but for a few moments we see Antony and Caesar through his eyes – and from this angle they look different. Public actions will always be interpreted in different ways, since every human being brings his own experience to what he sees, and what he sees may not be instantly intelligible to him. Indeed in this world, for all the **crystalline** clarity of the play's poetic

Glossary

circumscribed limited

fluctuating constantly changing

ironical comparative response a response that notices how one scene undermines or clashes with another

kindles arouses

Levantine Eastern Mediterranean

crystalline crystal-like; transparent

vision, human beings are intelligible neither to each other nor to themselves. Everyone moves in a mist of passion, driven by obscure pressures which may erupt in action seemingly involuntary. In the first scene Antony rejects the messengers, declaring himself wholly for Cleopatra and love. In the second, his mood has changed: he is all for breaking away and returning to Rome. When he takes leave of Cleopatra in the following scene he protests his **fidelity**, and in Act I, scene 5, we hear that he is still doing so through messengers. As soon as he arrives in Rome, however, he enters into a new understanding with Caesar and promptly agrees to marry his sister. We next see him assuring Octavia that he is a reformed man: 'that to come | Shall all be done by th'rule.' But a few moments later he has accepted his Egyptian destiny: 'I'th'East my pleasure lies' (II.3.6–7 and 41). Throughout the first half of the play the technique of short scenes is essential for putting across this view of human activity, with its stress on **discontinuity** and **multiplicity**, **volatility** and impulsiveness.

One effect of this technique, then, is to induce a moderately critical and ironical frame of mind: we keep on making comparisons. But there are other effects too. The short scenes are often **atomistically** constructed: they are often made up of even shorter discrete parts. In Act IV, scene 4, for example, Antony is shown going out to battle. The scene, though very short (under forty lines), contains several distinct units of action: Antony, in high spirits, is helped into his armour by Cleopatra; he is then greeted, first by a single soldier, and then by a number of '*Captains and soldiers*'; he takes a soldier's leave of Cleopatra and leads away his men; finally, alone with Charmian, Cleopatra muses on Antony's chances and shows that her real mood is one of low-spirited, clear-eyed detachment: 'Then Antony – but now. Well, on.' Such a technique makes possible a kind of quick close-up view of the speakers like the abruptly discontinuous shots of a news-reel. An illusion of intimacy is created, although we seldom if ever penetrate beneath the surface or overhear a speaker's unspoken thoughts. At the same time the illusion of life in free spontaneous motion is very powerful: the action becomes a succession of moments with a dream-like vividness. This is what life seems like, preserved in memory – brilliant snapshots surrounded by darkness.

From Emrys Jones, 'Introduction' *Antony and Cleopatra*, 1977.

fidelity faithfulness; loyalty

discontinuity lack of rational connection; breaks or interruptions

multiplicity great number and variety

volatility tendency to change suddenly

atomistically made up of many small components

3 Time and timelessness in *Antony and Cleopatra*

Tanner discusses the different ideas of time that we get from Antony and Cleopatra. In Egypt, time often seems suspended – or perhaps the leading characters wish it were so. In the wider world, ruled by Rome, historical events hurry onwards. He discusses how Roman ideas of time and an Egyptian state of timelessness clash in the play.

There is a great stress on 'time' in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and it is well to remember that this is a history play. The outcome of the events it dramatized was the so-called 'Augustan peace', during which Christ was born and the **pagan** Empire – which **Virgil** called the Empire without end – was established, according to later writers, as a divine preparation for the Christian Empire. Octavius Caesar, himself a pagan, unknowingly laid the way for the True City, so in Christian terms the struggles and battles in the play affect, not merely his society, but all human society, the *orbis terrae* of Augustine. The events of the play are indeed of 'world' importance – world-shattering, world-remaking (the word 'world' occurs at least forty-five times in the play). By the same token, an earlier pagan world is being silenced, extinguished, and history – as the audience would know – is on Caesar's side. He is in time with Time. Antony and Cleopatra are out of time, in more than one sense. Thus, at the beginning, when Antony decides that he must return to Rome, Cleopatra silences his apologies, referring to the time-out-of-time when they were together – 'Eternity was in our lips and eyes' – while Antony, thinking Romanly for the moment, refers to 'the strong necessity of time'. Egypt, in this play, is a timeless present, which is to say an Eternity.

It can hardly escape our attention that the play is full of messengers from the start – two in the first scene, some thirty-five in all, with nearly every scene having a messenger of some kind. The play itself is extremely episodic, with some forty-two scenes (no scene breaks at all in the Folio), which makes for a very rapid sequence of change of place. There are nearly two hundred entrances and exits, all contributing to what **Dr Johnson** called the 'continual hurry' and 'quick succession' of

Glossary

pagan non-Christian

Virgil Ancient Roman poet (70–19BC)

orbis terrae Latin phrase referring to the world

Dr Johnson Samuel Johnson (1709–84) wrote a number of poems, essays and literary criticism but is perhaps best known for producing the first *Dictionary of the English Language* in 1755

events, which 'call the mind forward without **intermission**'. This can all be interpreted in different ways, but it certainly depicts a world in constant movement, in which time and place move and change so quickly that the whole world seems in a 'hurry' and in a state of **flux** – fluid, melting, re-forming. Messengers and messages bring information from the outside – they are interruptions, **irruptions**, **precipitants** of change. History is going on, and on, and at an ever accelerating pace. Yet the remarkable thing is that time seems somehow to stand still in Egypt – both within and without the reach of 'messages'; both vulnerable to history yet outside it. When Antony is away, Cleopatra simply wants to 'sleep out this great gap of time' (I, v, 6). (When she first approaches Antony in her 'barge', the city goes out to see her, leaving Antony alone 'Whistling to th' air; which, but for vacancy,/Had gone to gaze on Cleopatra too,/And made a gap in nature' – II, ii, 222–4. It is as if Cleopatra creates 'gaps' – gaps in time, gaps in nature.) For Rome, Egypt represents a great waste of time while the 'business' of history is going on. The word 'business', more often than not, carries **pejorative** connotations in Shakespeare. It is notable that Caesar interrupts his formulaic (as I hear it), **elegiac** 'praise' of the dead Antony because of – a messenger: 'The *business* of this man looks out of him;/ We'll hear him what he says' (V, i, 50: my italics). He never completes the speech. Conversely, Cleopatra interrupts history to complete her poetic re-creation of Antony – from which no 'business' can distract her. From the Egyptian perspective, history itself is a 'gap of time', and Cleopatra, though growing physically older ('wrinkled deep in time'), seems to linger in Eternity, waiting for Antony to return from the trivial – though world-shattering – distractions of history.

From Tony Tanner, in *Prefaces to Shakespeare*, 1993.

intermission break

flux instability

irruptions sudden entrances

precipitants heralds; triggers

pejorative unpleasant

elegiac mournful

Section C: *Hamlet*

1 Memory and remembrance in *Hamlet*

This extract highlights the prominence in Hamlet of memory and acts of remembrance, of various kinds. These centre on the figure of Hamlet's dead father, whose ghost is a personification of the past, creating in Hamlet feelings of loss and of a duty to commemorate.

Hamlet never promises to revenge, only to remember.

The language of this play is full of 'memory' and its **cognates**. Hardly has it begun than it pauses to celebrate Old Hamlet as a representative of that lost and epic age in which political issues were decided by fierce, single combat, an age unlike that in which kings take power by poison and combat is a courtly exercise played with **bated foils**. After the nunnery scene, Ophelia recalls a lover whom we have never really known ('O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!' (III. ii. 150–61)), while the ballads which she sings in madness, remembering Polonius ('His beard was as white as snow, | All flaxen was his pole, | He is gone, he is gone . . .' (IV. v. 195–7)), are equally loyal to the past. Such memories divert and slow the play, giving it an eddying, onward inclusiveness which contrasts with the movement of Shakespeare's other tragedies and which significantly departs from the remembrance-driven **dialectic** of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Set against these recollective impulses, others appear more selfish. Though he admits that 'The memory' of his brother is 'green', Claudius insists on 'remembrance of ourselves' (I. ii. 1–2, 7). Rosencrantz and Guildenstern accept from him 'such thanks | As fits a king's remembrance' (II. ii. 25–6). And Fortinbras winds up the tragedy by saying: 'I have some rights, of memory in this kingdom, | Which now to claim my vantage doth invite me' (V. ii. 389–90).

Such true, false, and cynical remembrances all reflect on the play's chief link with the past. Even before he sees the ghost, the prince remembers his father. When he first meets Horatio, for example, he almost sees the apparition which his friend has come to announce:

My father – methinks I see my father.

Horatio *Where, my lord?*

Hamlet *In my mind's eye, Horatio.*

Horatio *I saw him once, 'a was a goodly king.*

Hamlet *'A was a man, take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again.* (I. ii. 184–8)

Hamlet fends off his friend's recollection of the public man – the shared, 'goodly king'. His words advertise a privacy which remains his throughout the play. We can show that remembrance haunts him, even to the point of madness, and call this the heart of his mystery. But that heart can never, as he assures Guildenstern, be plucked out. In memory, Hamlet eludes us. Plainly, however, his words to Horatio are consistent with a degree of suffering. Even when comfort is found in the past, that only makes the present more desolate, 'an unweeded garden | That grows to seed' (I. ii. 135–6).

Glossary

cognates other words closely related to it

bated blunted

foils swords used for fencing

dialectic conflict

The Spanish Tragedy play by Thomas Kyd which is regarded as one of the first Revenge Tragedies

In bereavement, as the psychologist John Bowlby observes, 'because of the persistent and insatiable nature of the yearning for the lost figure, pain is inevitable'.* It is a measure of the prince's anguish that loss produces an exaggerated estimate of 'the lost figure'. Old Hamlet becomes 'So excellent a king, that was to this | Hyperion to a satyr;... Heaven and earth, | Must I remember?' (I. ii. 139–43). Claudius calls his nephew's dejection 'unmanly', accusing him of 'obstinate condolment' (93–4). But he is not two months bereaved of a noble father, buried and replaced in the queen's bed with scandalous dispatch. In any case, we know that Hamlet, healthily enough, is trying to shake off at least part of the burden of his father's memory.

For the 'tenders' of 'affection' made to Ophelia 'of late' – which can only mean since his return from Wittenberg for the funeral of his father† – show the prince attempting to replace a dead love-object with a living one. His inky cloak is ambiguous: a mark of respect for his father, it also indicates his desire eventually to detach himself from him. As Freud points out in 'Trauer und Melancholie', mourning has a psychical task to perform: to detach the survivor's memories and hopes from the dead. A combination of things prevents Hamlet from effecting that 'severance' which Helena (in a related play of 'remembrance') achieves even before the action of *All's Well that Ends Well* gets under way. Despite her Hamlet-like garb of mourning, her first soliloquy (reversing the prince's) admits that, because of her devotion to Bertram, 'I think not on my father . . . I have forgot him' (I. i. 79–82). Ophelia's apparent rejection is one factor in Hamlet's distress: by returning his letters and refusing him access she throws his love back onto the father who has never (it would seem) emotionally betrayed him. Another is Claudius' refusal to let him return to school in Wittenberg: this leaves the prince surrounded by people and places which remorselessly remind him of the dead king. But most important, of course, is the injunction, 'Remember me!' With this command the ghost condemns Hamlet to an endless, fruitless 'yearning for the lost figure'. In the nunnery and closet scenes, we see the effect on his sanity.

'My lord,' says Ophelia, 'I have remembrances of yours | That I have longed long to redeliver. | I pray you now receive them' (III. i. 92–4). This confirms for Hamlet a suspicion bred of his mother's 'o'er-hasty marriage', that woman's love is brief and unworthy. It seems that Ophelia wants to divest herself of every shred of attachment. In this she is no better than Gertrude, glad to forget her first husband. Moreover, the girl's gesture, 'There, my lord' (III. i. 101), recalls an earlier situation: Old Hamlet, like Ophelia, had pressed on the prince remembrances that were too much his already. In saying her farewells, Ophelia is, in effect, forcing him to remember (and no doubt, though an instrument of Polonius' plots, she *does* want to reclaim his attention). Through the loss of Ophelia, Hamlet feels that of his father – which is why the hysteria which follows is in excess of its apparent object. The sexuality which the prince **denounces** is that of his mother as well as Ophelia; Claudius, as well as he, is an 'arrant knave'; and there is indeed a sad resonance to the question – whether or not Polonius' surveillance is suspected – 'Where's your father?' (129). 'Hysterics', wrote Freud and Breuer, 'suffer mainly from reminiscences.'

From John Kerrigan, in *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon*, 1996. (First published in 1980).

*John Bowlby, *Loss: Sadness and Depression* (Basic Books, 1980), p. 26

†I. iii. 91, 99–100

Freud Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), an Austrian neurologist and the founder of

psychoanalysis

denounces condemns openly

Breuer Josef Breuer (1842–1925), an Austrian physician who developed the talking cure which led on to psychoanalysis

2 Hamlet: Avenging his father or saving his mother?

Adelman finds that Hamlet's principal concern is not revenge for his father, but complex feelings towards his mother. His fears about her sexuality and maternal power create a desire to purify her, to convert her from sin. For Adelman this accounts for the delays in the revenge plot and the centrality of the closet scene. Understanding Gertrude as a source of imaginings and anxieties more than an independent character also helps to account for the puzzles surrounding her character and her knowledge of her husband's murder.

Hamlet initiates the period of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies because it in effect rewrites the story of Cain and Abel as the story of Adam and Eve, relocating masculine identity in the presence of the adulterating female. This rewriting accounts, I think, for Gertrude's odd position in the play, especially for its failure to specify the degree to which she is complicit in the murder. Less powerful as an independent character than as the site for fantasies larger than she is, she is **preeminently** mother as other, the intimate unknown figure around whom these fantasies swirl. She is kept ambiguously innocent as a character, but in the deep fantasy that structures the play's imagery, she plays out the role of the missing Eve: her body is the garden in which her husband dies, her sexuality the poisonous weeds that kill him, and poison the world – and the self – for her son... Hamlet's father has become unavailable to him, not only through the fact of his death but through the complex **vulnerability** that his death demonstrates. This father cannot protect his son; and his disappearance in effect throws Hamlet into the domain of the engulfing mother, awakening all the fears **incident** to the primary mother-child bond. Here, as in Shakespeare's later plays, the loss of the father turns out in fact to mean the psychic domination of the mother: in the end, it is the specter of his mother, not his uncle-father, who paralyzes his will. The Queen, the Queen's to blame. This shift of agency and of danger from male to female seems to me characteristic of the fantasy-structure of *Hamlet* and of Shakespeare's imagination in the plays that follow. The ghost's initial **injunction** sets as the prime business of the play the killing of Claudius; he specifically asks Hamlet to leave his mother alone, beset only by the thorns of conscience (1.5.85–87). But if Gertrude rather than Claudius is to blame, then Hamlet's fundamental task shifts; simple revenge is no longer the issue. Despite his **ostensible** agenda of revenge, the main psychological task that Hamlet seems to set himself is not to avenge his father's death but to remake his mother: to

Glossary

- preeminently** mainly or to a very great degree
- vulnerability** openness to emotional or physical hurt; lack of protection
- incident** relating
- injunction** command
- ostensible** apparent

remake her in the image of the Virgin Mother who could guarantee his father's purity, and his own, repairing the boundaries of his selfhood. Throughout the play, the **covert** drama of **reformation** vies for priority with the **overt** drama of revenge, in fact displacing it both from what we see of Hamlet's consciousness and from center stage of the play: when Hamlet accuses himself of lack of purpose (3.4.107–10), of failing to remember his father's business of revenge (4.4.40), he may in part be right. Even as an avenger, Hamlet seems motivated more by his mother than by his father: when he describes Claudius to Horatio as "he that hath kill'd my king and whor'd my mother" (5.2.64), the second phrase clearly carries more intimate emotional weight than the first. And he manages to achieve his revenge only when he can avenge his mother's death, not his father's: just where we might expect some version of "rest, perturbed spirit" to link his killing of Claudius with his father's initial injunction, we get "Is thy union here? / Follow my mother" (5.2.331–32).

This shift – from avenging the father to saving the mother – accounts in part for certain peculiarities about this play as a revenge play: why, for example, the murderer is given so little attention in the device ostensibly designed to catch his conscience, why the confrontation of Hamlet with Gertrude in the closet scene seems much more central, much more vivid, than any confrontation between Hamlet and Claudius. Once we look at "The Murder of Gonzago" for what it is, rather than for what Hamlet tells us it is, it becomes clear that the playlet is in fact designed to catch the conscience of the queen: its challenge is always to her loving posture, its accusation "A second time I kill my husband dead / When second husband kisses me in bed." The confrontation with Gertrude (3.4) follows so naturally from this attempt to catch her conscience that Hamlet's unexpected meeting with Claudius (3.3) feels to us like an interruption of a more fundamental purpose. Indeed, Shakespeare stages 3.3 very much as an interruption: Hamlet comes upon Claudius praying as he is on his way to his mother's closet, worrying about the extent to which he can **repudiate** the **Nero** in himself; and we come upon Claudius unexpectedly in the same way. That is: the moment that should be the **apex** of the revenge plot – the potential confrontation alone of the avenger and his prey – becomes for the audience and for the avenger himself a lapse, an interlude that must be gotten over before the real business can be attended to. It is no wonder that Hamlet cannot kill Claudius here: to do so would be to make of the interlude a permanent interruption of his more fundamental purpose. Not even Hamlet could reasonably expect to manage his mother's moral **reclamation** immediately after he has killed her husband.

From Janet Adelman, 'Man and Wife Is One Flesh: *Hamlet* and the Confrontation with the Maternal Body', 1992.

covert secret; hidden

reformation change for the better

overt open; visible

repudiate deny; reject

Nero Roman Emperor 37–68AD, reputedly a cruel man and ruler who killed a number of people, including his own mother, to gain power

apex peak; climax

reclamation the act of reclaiming or getting something back

3 The complexity of Hamlet

The great nineteenth-century essayist Hazlitt argues that we are all of us Hamlets because in that character, Shakespeare created someone who has felt, and lived through, the whole range of human emotions. Hamlet the character embodies humanity in all its complexity, and thereby reflects the full breadth of Shakespeare's concerns. He examines his own thoughts and actions in a way that we cannot help but identify with.

It is the one of Shakespear[e]'s plays that we think of the oftenest, because it **abounds** most in striking reflections on human life, and because the distresses of Hamlet are transferred, by the turn of his mind, to the general account of humanity. Whatever happens to him we apply to ourselves, because he applies it so himself as a means of general reasoning. He is a great moraliser; and what makes him worth attending to is, that he moralises on his own feelings and experience. He is not a common-place pedant. If *Lear* is distinguished by the greatest depth of passion, *HAMLET* is the most remarkable for the ingenuity, originality, and unstudied development of character. Shakespear[e] had more **magnanimity** than any other poet, and he has **shewn** more of it in this play than in any other. There is no attempt to force an interest: every thing is left for time and circumstances to unfold. The attention is excited without effort, the incidents succeed each other as matters of course, the characters think and speak and act just as they might do, if left entirely to themselves. There is no set purpose, no straining at a point. The observations are suggested by the passing scene—the gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. The whole play is an exact transcript of what might be supposed to have taken place at the court of Denmark, at the remote period of time fixed upon, before the modern refinements in morals and manners were heard of. It would have been interesting enough to have been admitted as a by-stander in such a scene, at such a time, to have heard and witnessed something of what was going on. But here we are more than spectators. We have not only 'the outward pageants and the signs of grief'; but 'we have that within which passes shew.' We read the thoughts of the heart, we catch the passions living as they rise. Other dramatic writers give us very fine versions and paraphrases of nature; but Shakespear[e], together with his own comments, gives us the original text, that we may judge for ourselves. This is a very great advantage.

Glossary

abounds is plentiful; has a lot of

magnanimity generosity

shewn shown

The character of Hamlet stands quite by itself. It is not a character marked by strength of will or even of passion, but by refinement of thought and sentiment. Hamlet is as little of the hero as a man can well be: but he is a young and princely novice, full of high enthusiasm and quick sensibility—the sport of circumstances, questioning with fortune and refining on his own feelings, and forced from the natural bias of his **disposition** by the strangeness of his situation. He seems incapable of deliberate action, and is only hurried into extremities on the spur of the occasion, when he has no time to reflect, as in the scene where he kills Polonius, and again, where he alters the letters which [Rosencrantz] and Guildenstern are taking with them to England, **purporting** his death. At other times, when he is most bound to act, he remains puzzled, undecided, and sceptical, **dallies** with his purposes, till the occasion is lost, and finds out some pretence to relapse into **indolence** and thoughtfulness again. For this reason he refuses to kill the King when he is at his prayers, and by a refinement in malice, which is in truth only an excuse for his own **want** of resolution, defers his revenge to a more fatal opportunity, when he shall be engaged in some act ‘that has no relish of salvation in it.’

*‘He kneels and prays,
And now I’ll do’t, and so he goes to heaven,
And so am I reveng’d: that would be scann’d.
He kill’d my father, and for that,
I, his sole son, send him to heaven.
Why this is reward, not revenge.
Up sword and know thou a more horrid time,
When he is drunk, asleep, or in a rage.’*

He is the prince of **philosophical speculators**; and because he cannot have his revenge perfect, according to the most refined idea his wish can form, he declines it altogether. So he **scruples** to trust the suggestions of the ghost, contrives the scene of the play to have surer proof of his uncle’s guilt, and then rests satisfied with this confirmation of his suspicions, and the success of his experiment, instead of acting upon it. Yet he is **sensible** of his own weakness, taxes himself with it, and tries to reason himself out of it.

From William Hazlitt, *‘Hamlet’*, 1916. (First published as *‘Hamlet’* in 1817).

disposition a person’s usual temperament or frame of mind

purporting intending; with the design of bringing about

dallies deals lightly; delays

indolence laziness; idleness

want lack

philosophical reasonable, wise or learned

speculators thinkers; people who wonder about the outcome of their actions

scruples hesitates about what is morally right

sensible aware

Section D: *King Lear*

1 Language and female power in *King Lear*

Rutter argues that the play explores deep anxieties about female power in relation to language, hence her comparison of women's tongues to the eels mentioned by the Fool in Act 2, Scene 4: they would not stay down in the paste to be eaten alive. Lear's daughters will similarly not be silenced. Meanwhile Lear himself is made to seem womanish by his tears and cursing. Rutter suggests that, at the time, these were associated with women, who wept or cursed because they had no real power.

Meanwhile, **patriarchal** anxieties about **effeminization** are played out with a vengeance in this most complicatedly feminized of all Shakespeare's tragedies. To begin with, Lear's story seems "overwhelmingly about fathers and their paternity" (in Janet Adelman's phrase) yet from first to last **adumbrates** "fantasies of maternal power." The theater, whose materializing practice is the **reification** of fantasy, embodies these fantasies: it gives its audience a long, hard look at them. What the audience sees in *Lear* is a series of disturbed images of the feminine that plays upon Lear's daughters even when they are off-stage, images that turn back upon men a terrible **inquisition**. At the beginning there is the recollection, relayed as a smutty joke whose punchline keeps being deferred, of "whoreson" Edmund's absent mother – a recollection from which Gloucester conveniently erases himself, only to have his role in the "sport" rematerialize in its retelling, as the stage picture makes male banter the site of (social) intercourse. At the end, there is a recollection, bizarrely recomposed, of the **Pietà**, Lear-as-Mary staggering onto the stage, arms full of Cordelia-as-Christ – a recollection whose **grotesquerie** challenges pity with the memory of paternity once disclaimed but now lavished upon the broken body of this **redemptive** child in whom the father at last professes himself to be well pleased. In between, the maternal is **reviled** (while the only hope the play offers to the future generation of man is that men should "grow pregnant to good pity"). The womb is "the dark and vicious place," the "sulphurous pit" that "is all the fiend's," all revulsion – "pah, pah" – all "burning, scalding, / Stench, consumption." Lust in the loins drives man to the fire where the mother incinerates him, dust to dust.

Glossary

patriarchal relating to a society in which men ruled over women

effeminization taking on the characteristics of a woman

adumbrates outlines; foreshadows

reification making something real or concrete

inquisition interrogation; aggressive questioning

Pietà work of art depicting the dead Christ being held by the Virgin Mary

grotesquerie distorted image

redemptive to be made a better person by being freed from sin

reviled condemned

Of course, the mother works by water, too. Lear knows his tears make a woman of him and that his daughters, causing him to weep, are to blame for having “power to shake my manhood thus.”

He is both right and wrong. His tears of **impotent** rage are indeed the sign of the female. But Lear unmanned himself much earlier when, recoiling from Cordelia’s refusal to mother his boyhood, he **appropriated** women’s discourse: he fell to cursing. Cursing is the language of political exclusion. It is impotence, frustration **rhetorized**. Yet it is threatening because it calls into being the ideas of a **Fury-ous** authority beyond the male control or political practice. Women curse. They curse because they cannot act. The scold, the **shrew**, the witch, the **drab**, all curse. Lear, cursing, is one of them. What he does not understand, however, is that his curses will be effective.

Lear’s elder daughters neither weep nor curse. They do not need to. For, from the opening scene when they are authorized to “Speak” they begin the **reactive** process to Lear’s effeminization. Having learned his language to survive his love test, they now assume the male voice, the male space Lear abandons. He dissolves into tears, they grow hard of heart. He rushes into the wilderness; they claim the castle seat. His words fail:

*I will have such revenges on you both
That all the world shall—I will do such things,
What they are, yet I know not, but they shall be
The terrors of the earth. (2.4.277–80)*

“Pah, pah!”, “Howl, howl, howl!” The daughters gain “large” speech. They manage words: “I will not speak with him”; “I’d have it come to question”; “I would breed from hence occasions, ... / That I may speak.” Managing words, they manage their father: “Deny to speak with me! Dost thou understand me, man?. ... The King would speak ... the dear father / ... speak.”

King Lear keeps coming back to the issue of speech and silence. So does my analysis, because what I want to say about the daughters returns constantly to their speech and to their speech withheld and to the opposition between speech and silence that the play always constructs as an opposition between mouth and heart. The eel pie of my title figures the daughters’ tongues. It is a grotesque image, an ugly image. But then the play makes the daughters ugly: the two who speak are monsters; the one who does not is monstered. I begin, then, with an interrogation of narrative strategy – Lear’s command that his daughters should speak – put against cultural practice, the audience’s expectation that good women keep their mouths shut. These ideas are held in tension, but they are further challenged by their position in the theater, for the theater’s **stock-in-trade** is speech; its practices and strategies are **inimical** to silence. What, then, does it mean in this theater to say “Nothing”?

From Carol Rutter, ‘Eel Pie and Ugly Sisters in *King Lear*’, 1997. (First published as same in 1995).

impotent powerless

appropriated took for his own use

rhetorized turned into speech

Fury-ous like one of the Furies: terrifying and destructive female beings in Greek mythology

shrew bad-tempered woman

drab prostitute

reactive responding to another action

stock-in-trade something constantly used by a professional or an institution

inimical unfavourable; hostile

2 Ways of speaking in *King Lear*

In Kermode's view this play, so full of pain and injustice, wrestles with human suffering and evil on a universal, apocalyptic scale. Its uses of language form an integral part of the way it explores good and evil. The power of Cordelia's 'nothing', when she refuses to join her flattering sisters, needs to be seen in the context of a play in which language strains to find words to express the pain of being.

In *King Lear* we are no longer concerned with an ethical problem that, however agonising, can be reduced to an issue of law or **equity** and discussed **forensically**. For *King Lear* is about suffering represented as a condition of the world as we inherit it or make it for ourselves. Suffering is the consequence of a human tendency to evil, as inflicted on the good by the bad; it can reduce humanity to a **bestial** condition, under an apparently indifferent heaven. It falls, insistently and without apparent regard for the justice they so often ask for, so often say they believe in, on the innocent; but nobody escapes. At the end the punishment or relief of death is indiscriminate. The few survivors, **chastened** by this knowledge, face a desolate future. The play demands that we think of its events in relation to the last judgement, the promised end itself, calling the conclusion an image of that horror (V.iii.264–65).

Apocalypse is the image of human dealings in their extremity, an image of the state to which humanity can reduce itself. We are asked to imagine the **Last Days**, when, under the influence of some Antichrist, human beings will behave not as a rickety **civility** requires but naturally; that is, they will prey upon themselves like animals, having lost the protection of social restraint, now shown to be fragile. The holy cords, however "**intrinsic**," can be loosened by rats. Gloucester may be **credulous** and **venal**, but his murmurings about the state of the world, which do not move Edmund, reflect the mood of the play: "in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond crack'd 'twixt son and father ... We have seen the best of our time" (I.ii.107–12). The voices of the good are distorted by pain, those of the bad by the coarse excess of their wickedness. The rhetoric of the play is accordingly more explicit, less ambiguous, except – and it is admittedly a large exception – in the apparent unreason of the Fool and Poor Tom and the ravings of the mad King, where the imaginations of folly flood into the language and give it violent local colour. These **wild linguistic excursions** come later; the opening scene is in cool, even bantering prose, but as

Glossary

equity fairness

forensically in minute detail

bestial animal-like

chastened subdued; tamed

Apocalypse the end of the world

Last Days the Last Judgment in the Bible

civility civilized behaviour

intrinsic tightly tied

credulous gullible

venal easily corrupted

wild linguistic excursions unconventional, colourful language

always in Shakespeare, it achieves much more than mere **exposition**. Coleridge understood its depth; the opening conversation between Gloucester and Kent makes it plain that Lear has already arranged the “division of the kingdom” before the ceremony in which he formally announces it, which was therefore intended to be less the declaration of a secret intention (“our darker purpose” [I.i.36]) than a self-gratifying charade. Lear can already be seen as **imperious** and selfish; we discover that even giving his kingdom away is a selfish act. And immediately we are offered a critical view of the other main sufferer, Gloucester, and his relations with his natural son, Edmund. Gloucester treats Edmund’s birth as an occasion for bawdy joking and does not explain why, unlike his legitimate brother, Edgar, he should have been so long absent or why “away he shall again” (32–33). All this has much to do not only with their characters but with the nature of the ensuing action in so far as it depends on the folly of Gloucester and the ingenious **unregenerate** wickedness of Edmund.

Such economical writing is perhaps no more than should be expected of a dramatist in his prime. The ceremonial love competition that follows of course requires verse. The verse of the daughters Goneril and Regan has to be formal, **manifestly insincere**. Goneril is using what rhetoricians called “the topic of inexpressibility,” standard fare in the eulogy of kings and emperors – “I love you more than words can wield the matter, / Dearer than eyesight ... A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable ...” (55–60). Regan follows with the well-established topical formula that **Ernst Curtius** calls “outdoing,” or the “*cedat-formula*” — “let her yield”: her sister has expressed Regan’s sentiments quite well, “Only she comes too short” (72). Cordelia, coming third in order of praising, would have a hard task, but shuns this competition, meaning nevertheless to outdo her sisters by exposing their **rhetorical falsity**. She would prefer to be silent, but the only way to announce that intention is to speak about it, which she does. She does not come out of the **archaic** and artificial contest well, defeated by the genuineness of her love, as France recognises; but she is far from passively yielding.



exposition laying out of the context; scene-setting

Coleridge Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) was an English poet, critic and philosopher who, with Wordsworth, founded the Romantic Movement.

imperious arrogant; domineering

unregenerate unreformed; unrepentant

manifestly insincere obviously hypocritical

Ernst Curtius German literary scholar (1886–1956)

cedat-formula a rhetorical device, meaning ‘let her give way’: Regan tries to outdo Goneril in her praise of their father

rhetorical falsity Cordelia refuses to play her sisters’ game, aiming instead to expose the hypocrisy in their speechifying.

archaic old-fashioned; antiquated

Section D: *King Lear*

Lear ... *what can you say to draw
A third more opulent than your sisters'? Speak.*
Cor *Nothing, my lord.*
Lear *Nothing?*
Cor *Nothing.*
Lear *Nothing will come of nothing, speak again.* (85–90)

She does speak again, but virtually only to say nothing. Here **rhetorical formulae** are used for a dramatic purpose. The rage of the King confirms that he cannot be **temperate** in the absence of ceremony; the love he seeks is the sort that can be offered in formal and subservient expressions, and he therefore rejects the love of Cordelia and of Kent. The rest of the scene is equally well **contrived**. The style of personal pronouns is worth attention: Lear is almost always, regally, “we,” until he loses his temper with his daughter, when he uses “I”. Kent is truly “unmannerly,” freely addressing the King as “thou”: “What wouldst thou do, old man? ... Reserve thy state, / And in thy best consideration check / This hideous rashness” (146–51).

From Frank Kermode, *King Lear*, 2000.

rhetorical formulae established set of words used in speeches

temperate mild; controlled

contrived devised

3 The morality of *King Lear*

O'Toole describes how King Lear upsets any comfortable moral assumptions on the part of the audience. In order to show this he focuses on the ending of the play, which seems to undermine the lessons that the play has set out to teach.

Conventional complaints about the ending of the play – that there is no convincing re-assertion of the moral and social order at the end – forget that this is precisely the effect that Shakespeare structured the play in order to achieve. For the ending of the play is in a sense a second ending. We have already had a conventional, moral ending, the one provided by the single combat of Edmund and Edgar. In this fight, good beats evil, the conventional moral triumph is completed. It is an ending like the ending of any number of Shakespeare plays. Except that it is not the end, that it is not enough, that we are suddenly faced with this old man who comes back on stage, literally howling.

Edgar's killing of Edmund in 5, 3 has all the signs that it is the end of the play. Everybody is concerned to tell us that it's all over. Edmund confesses his sins and says 'Tis past, and so am I.' Edgar draws the handy moral of the story, the brothers are reconciled to each other. Edmund says 'The wheel is come full circle; I am here', which is as much to say 'the story is over now'. Albany comes in to pick up the pieces and to be the figure of some kind of order at the end. Edgar tells us about Gloucester's death: all the plot lines are being wrapped up. But then he says 'This would have seemed a period... but...' This should have been the end, but... It is the biggest *but* in theatrical history. Things start to go wrong with the moral ending in which good has vanquished evil. Edgar tells us about his encounter with Kent in terms which we cannot take to mean anything other than that Kent is dead. Eight lines later, Edgar tells us casually 'here comes Kent', Kent wanders in, and the conclusion refuses to conclude. The man we thought was dead is back on stage looking for Lear. We are brought back from the brink of a comfortable conclusion, forced to remember Lear and his suffering. Then, '*Enter Lear with Cordelia in his arms.*' Shakespeare, as Stephen Booth has put it, 'presents the culminating events of his story after his play is over'. The story bursts out beyond the moral ending of the play, the overwhelming sense of injustice breaks through the even balancing of good and evil. And this isn't a failure of the play: it is the whole point of the play's structure.



There is no simple sense of morality – of what is virtue and what is vice – in *King Lear*. Take a very simple virtue, one on which the whole **feudal society** from which Shakespeare's times are only beginning to emerge is founded: loyalty. The loyalty of the servant to the master, of the **serf** to the lord, is a basic moral category in those times. Does *King Lear* endorse that morality or deny it? It does neither: it shows morality falling apart under the stress of the play's traumatic events and emotions. In the figure of Kent, who is loyal to his king even though treated outrageously by him, the play may seem to contain a relatively simple idea of faithful service. But it is an ideal that is utterly insufficient to the ferocious demands of the play. Goneril's loyal servant Oswald, for instance, is a moral wretch. The servant who kills Cornwall, on the other hand, breaks a lifetime's trust – we are told that he has been in Cornwall's service since he was a child – but on any human scale he is clearly a vastly better person than Oswald. The traditional morality of loyalty, of knowing one's place and keeping it, is no longer of much use.

From Fintan O'Toole, *'King Lear: Zero Hour'*, 2002. (First published as same in 1970).

Glossary

feudal society system in medieval Europe under which social relationships were based on land ownership in exchange for military service or labour

serf peasant labourer

Section E: *Othello*

1 *Othello*: The portrayal of Iago

This extract deals with the moral dilemma posed for audiences by Shakespeare's portrayal of Iago, who may be evil but is also witty and perhaps the cleverest person in the play. He resembles some of Shakespeare's comic characters even though his humour is wicked. The character of Iago therefore invites a complex and divided theatrical response that may conflict with our moral condemnation of him.

Liar, betrayer, mental torturer of Othello and Desdemona, murderer: if Iago were a straightforward villain he would arouse little **fellow feeling** in audiences, yet of course he is anything but straightforward and audiences have responded to him in different ways, depending on the actor. Readers, too, have disagreed. 'The character of Iago is so conducted, that he is from the first scene to the last hated and despised.' **Dr Johnson's** verdict was echoed by Bradley, who reacted to 4.2.112ff. with 'burning hatred and burning tears' (197). Not so **Charles Lamb**: 'while we are reading any of [Shakespeare's] great criminal characters – Macbeth, Richard, even Iago, – we think not so much of the crimes which they commit, as of the ambition, the aspiring spirit, the intellectual activity which prompts them to overleap those moral fences.'

There is much to be said on both sides. In the theatre our reactions are unlikely to remain the same 'from the first scene to the last'; they fluctuate, and may come close to sympathizing with a villain. Dramatic perspective can even make us the villain's accomplices: he confides in us, so we watch his plot unfolding from his point of view. This happens in the novel as well: in *Crime and Punishment* we tremble with Raskolnikov, the murderer. A good actor grips the audience more completely, being in control of timing: he dictates the mode of impact of his wickedness and can whirl the audience off its feet, whereas a reader controls his own timing.

Iago enjoys another important advantage, that he is the play's chief humorist. Most of Shakespeare's major characters are endowed with their own brand of humour (Falstaff, Touchstone, Hamlet, Lear; Rosalind, Viola, Cleopatra); Iago's, though related to the humour of Aaron and Richard III, is also quite distinctive. W. H. Auden called him 'the joker in the pack', a

Glossary

fellow feeling sympathy; agreement

Dr Johnson Samuel Johnson (1709–84) was a poet, essayist, moralist and critic who compiled *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), which had a far-reaching effect on modern English.

Charles Lamb English writer and essayist (1775–1834) best known for the children's book *Tales from Shakespeare*

Crime and Punishment 19th-century Russian novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Aaron 'Aaron the Moor' is the secret lover of Tamora and responsible for the downfall of the Andronicus family in *Titus Andronicus*.

'practical joker of a peculiarly appalling kind', partly because Emilia speaks of him as her 'wayward husband' and 'she must know Iago better than anybody else does'. Yet *wayward* does not mean joker (see 3.3.296n.), and Auden's loose label really identifies one of Iago's convenient masks, not the inner man, and may blind readers to Iago's essential sadism. His humour either intends to give pain or allows him to bask in his sense of his own superiority; very rarely is it at his own expense (contrast Falstaff, Cleopatra, etc.), and it is never merely delightful, as is Rosalind's or Puck's. When Iago says 'Well: happiness to their sheets!' (2.3.26) he deliberately **defiles** Cassio's image of Desdemona; deciding whimsically that it scarcely matters who kills whom –

*Now, whether he kill Cassio
Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
Every way makes my gain*
(5.1.12–14)

– he enjoys a godlike sense of power. In 2.1.100–60 we see Iago at his most playful; the impression that he *simply* enjoys himself, having fun and being sociable, is overshadowed by our awareness that he 'crowds' his companions, and then suddenly cancelled when he reveals, in soliloquy, that he hates the social games he took part in.

Nevertheless, since his victims lack humour, Iago appeals to us as more amusing: dramatic perspective compels us to see with his eyes, and to share his 'jokes'. His humour also makes him seem cleverer than his victims. His cleverness, however, should not be exaggerated, as by Harold Goddard, an otherwise perceptive critic, who thought that Shakespeare bestowed 'the highest intellectual gifts' on Iago. This might be Iago's opinion, but hardly Shakespeare's. Iago excels in short-term tactics, not in long-term strategy. The possibility that his own despised wife may accuse him publicly of 'a lie, an odious, damned lie' (5.2.176) and send him to his death has not occurred to him. This is because, despite his cleverness, he has neither felt nor understood the spiritual impulses that bind ordinary human beings together, loyalty, friendship, respect, compassion – in a word, love. Emilia's love (of Desdemona) is Iago's undoing.

From E. A. J. Honigmann, 'Introduction' *Othello*, 2001. (First published as same in 1991).

defiles corrupts; pollutes

2 The character of Othello

Leavis's highly influential interpretation of Othello refuses to believe in Othello's essential dignity and instead draws attention to his habit of self-dramatisation. He has not learned from his suffering and he does not really examine himself. On the contrary, argues Leavis, he dies still acting a part and relishing his own performance.

When he discovers his mistake, his reaction is an intolerably intensified form of the common 'I could kick myself':

*Whip me, ye devils
From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds! roast me in sulphur!
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!
O Desdemona! Desdemona! dead!
Oh! Oh! Oh!*

But he remains the same Othello; he has discovered his mistake, but there is no tragic self-discovery. The speech closing with the lines just quoted is that beginning

Behold, I have a weapon,

one of the finest examples in the play of the self-dramatizing trick. The noble Othello is now seen as tragically pathetic, and he sees himself as pathetic too:

*Man but a rush against Othello's breast,
And he retires. Where shall Othello go?*

He is ruined, but he is the same Othello in whose essential make-up the tragedy lay: the tragedy doesn't involve the idea of the hero's learning through suffering. The fact that Othello tends to sentimentalize should be the reverse of a reason for our sentimentalizing too.

For even, or rather especially, in that magnificent last speech of his Othello does tend to sentimentalize, though to say that and no more would convey a false impression, for the speech conveys something like the full complexity of Othello's simple nature, and in the total effect the simplicity is tragic and grand. The quiet beginning gives us the man of action with his habit of effortless authority:

*Soft you; a word or two before you go.
I have done the State some service, and they know't.
No more of that. I pray you in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice . . .*

Glossary

stoic-captain leader who is dispassionate or philosophical

sufficiency an adequate amount

epigrammatic quotable; wise-sounding

Othello really is, we cannot doubt, the **stoic-captain** whose few words know their full **sufficiency**: up to this point we cannot say he dramatizes himself, he simply *is*. But then, in a marvellous way (if we consider Shakespeare's art), the emotion works itself up until in less than half-a-dozen lines the stoic of few words is eloquently weeping. With

then must you speak

Of one that loved not wisely but too well,

the **epigrammatic** terseness of the **dispatch**, the **dictated** dispatch, begins to quiver. Then, with a rising emotional swell, description becomes unmistakably self-dramatization – self-dramatization as un-self-comprehending as before:

*Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
Perplex'd in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum.*

Contemplating the spectacle of himself, Othello is overcome with the pathos of it. But this is not the part to die in: drawing himself proudly up, he speaks his last words as the stern fighting man who has done the state some service:

Set you down this;

And say besides, that in Aleppo once,

Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk

Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,

I took by the throat the circumcised dog

And smote him, thus. [stabs himself]

It is a superb *coup de théâtre*.

As, with that double force, a *coup de théâtre*, it is a peculiarly right ending to the tragedy of Othello. The theme of the tragedy is concentrated in it – concentrated in the final speech and action as it could not have been had Othello 'learnt through suffering.' That he should die acting his ideal part is all in the part: the part is manifested here in its rightness and solidity, and the actor as inseparably the man of action. The final blow is as real as the blow it re-enacts, and the **histrionic intent** symbolically affirms the reality: Othello dies belonging to the world of action in which his true part lay.

From F. R. Leavis, 'Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero', 1937.

dispatch letter or report

dictated said aloud to be written down

coup de théâtre French term meaning sudden dramatic turn of events

histrionic intent deliberately over-dramatic

3 *Othello*, race and society

The book from which this extract is taken was an important contribution to discussions of race and colonialism in relation to Shakespeare's plays. In the first part of this extract Loomba discusses how Othello at once reinforces and questions early modern stereotypes of black people and Muslims. In the second part she explores the reputation of Venice as an open and cosmopolitan society, and how this might have been regarded in England as both a model and a warning.

Othello is both a fantasy of interracial love and social tolerance, and a nightmare of racial hatred and male violence. In this play, a white woman flouts the established social hierarchies of 'clime, complexion and degree' to marry a black man, an act that betrays, in the eyes of some beholders, 'Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural!' (3.3.235–8). Location, skin colour, and class are seen to add up to 'nature' itself. But the real tragedy of the play lies in the fact that these hierarchies are not external to the pair. Iago's **machinations** are effective because Othello is **predisposed** to believing his pronouncements about the **inherent duplicity** of women, and the necessary fragility of an 'unnatural' relationship between a young, white, well-born woman and an older black soldier. Ideologies, the play tells us, only work because they are not entirely external to us. Othello is a victim of racial beliefs precisely because he becomes an agent of misogynist ones.

The portrayal of Othello, the 'Moor of Venice' stands at the complicated **crux** of contemporary beliefs about black people and Muslims. As we have seen, black-skinned people were usually typed as godless, **bestial**, and hideous, fit only to be saved (and in early modern Europe, enslaved) by Christians. On the other hand, commentators such as Henry Blount wondered whether Muslims, with their tightly organized religion and sophisticated empires, were 'absolutely barbarous' or whether they had 'another kind of civility, different from ours'. Both blacks and Muslims were regarded as given to unnatural sexual and domestic practices, as highly emotional and even irrational, and prone to anger and jealousy; above all, both existed outside the Christian fold. *Othello* yokes together and reshapes available images of 'blackamoors' and Moors, giving us a black Moor who has both a slave past and a noble lineage, a black skin and thick lips as well as great military skill and rhetorical abilities, a capacity for tenderness as well as a **propensity** to violence... The English saw Venice not simply as a place for female deviance, but also as an ideal republic and hub of international trade. Whereas female 'openness' was dangerous and immoral, political

Glossary

- machinations** plots or schemes
- predisposed** inclined or given
- inherent duplicity** natural deceptiveness
- crux** vital stage or point
- bestial** brutal or savage
- propensity** natural tendency

and **mercantile** openness was much admired by an England in search of overseas markets and colonies. Despite its Catholicism, Venice became an ideal that was **invoked** by English writers subtly to critique domestic affairs. In 1599, Lewis Lewknor translated into English Contarini's *Commonwealth and Government of Venice*, a work with which Shakespeare was familiar. This book helped **propagate** a 'myth of Venice' in England which exalted the city-state as an open but ordered society, a model of civility which informs Brabantio's angry assertion: 'This is Venice | My house is not a grange' (1.1.107–8). Brabantio's choice of words is ironic, for Iago tells him that in fact his house *has* become a grange in which a 'black ram', a 'Barbary horse' is 'tupping' his daughter (1.1.88, 89, 113). Venetian civility has been built by letting in the very foreigners who now threaten to undermine it at a different level. Because Othello is needed in order to combat the Turks, the Senate is willing to regard him as 'more fair than black' but for Desdemona's father such colour-blindness is not possible. Here we see a tension between the state and the family, although the two were so often equated in contemporary political **rhetoric**.

How might an English audience have reacted to the Senate's pronouncements? As discussed earlier, England was increasingly hostile to foreigners, both officially and at a popular level, and London had witnessed several major riots against foreign residents and **artisans**. Would this play have unsettled or reinforced such hostility?

Did the play make the case for a tolerant society, or did it issue a warning not only to disobedient daughters but also to 'open societies' who let in outsiders, especially black ones? It might be useful to recall that if some English writers extolled the virtues of Venice, others found Italy a dangerous model for the English: 'the religion, the learning, the policy, the experience, the manner of Italy' were the 'enchantments of **Circe**, brought out of Italy, to mar men's manners in England'. Thus Venice's openness could also be viewed as dangerous by a society itself fairly suspicious of outsiders.

From Ania Loomba, '*Othello* and the Radical Question', 1998.

mercantile commercial; relating to trade or traders

invoked called upon, usually for inspiration

propagate spread or promote

rhetoric speeches or oratory

artisans craftsmen

Circe Greek goddess of magic

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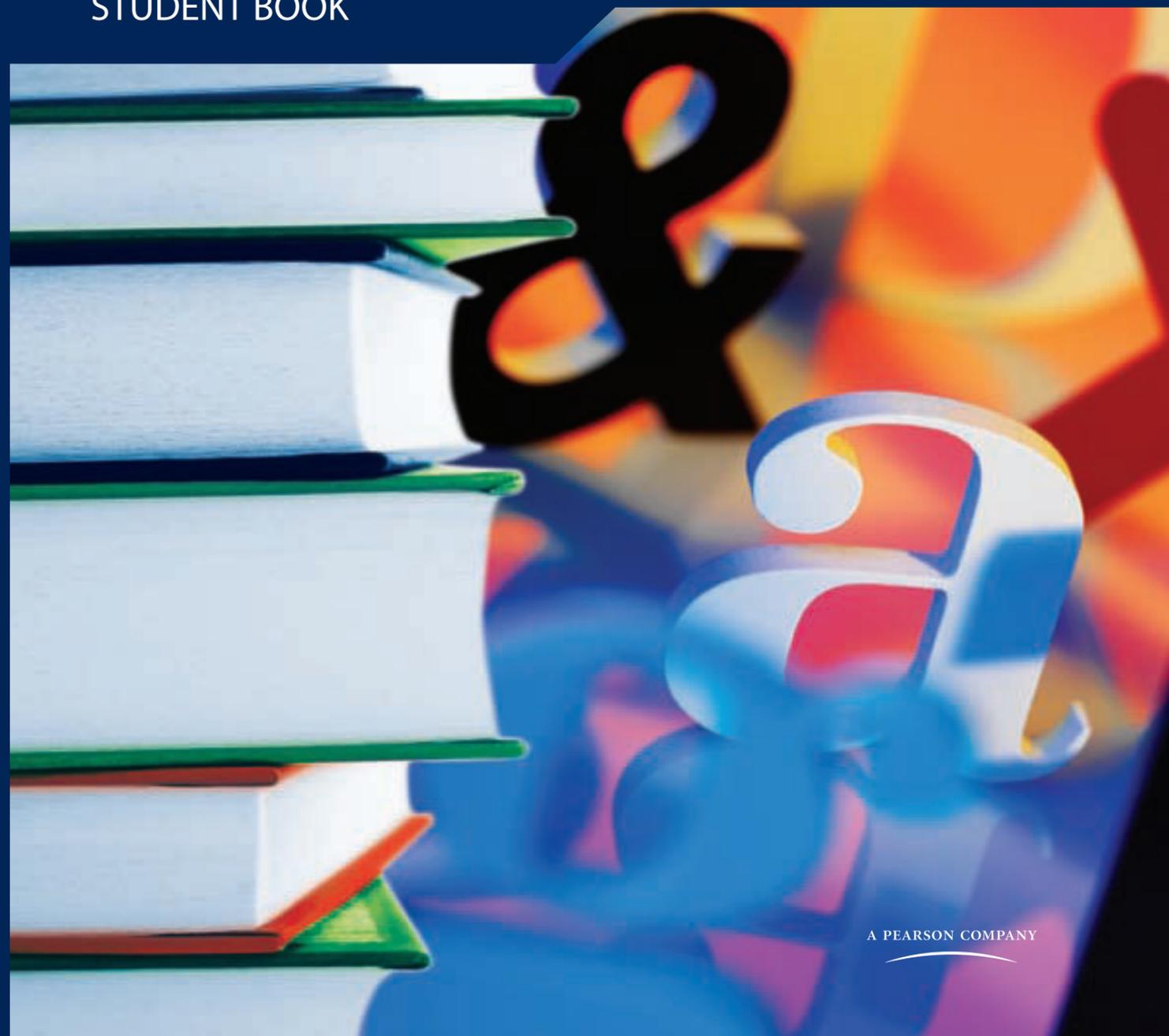
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Edexcel English Literature Part 1: Exploring Poetry

Sue Dymoke Ian McMechan Mike Royston Jennifer Smith
Consultant: Jen Greatrex

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Edexcel English Literature

Part 1: Exploring Poetry

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Part 1 Exploring poetry

This part of the book helps you develop your skills in reading and analysing poems

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1 What is poetry?

The word poetry originates from the Greek word 'poiesis' meaning 'a making' or 'a creating' and from a time when poetry was predominantly an oral form of carefully crafted, patterned language which was recited to listeners and then passed on to others through the medium of speech. Spoken poetry is with us all from birth, in the rhythms of words we babble when we are babies, and the word-play and rhymes we enjoy as children long before we have learned to read. Poetry of course comes in many written forms too and can serve a variety of functions in people's lives, such as to help them make sense of their grief or their joy, or to capture a key moment or experience.

Over the centuries, many people have attempted to define poetry. You have only to look in a dictionary or carry out an internet search to find that every definition has a slightly different take on what poetry is. Many of these definitions do share a sense that poetry contains language which has been crafted in some way. In this section you will discover more about the different aspects of this craft – for example how poets choose and use types and forms of poetry, how they make rhythmic and rhyming patterns with language, how they create images, tones, moods and a variety of voices to express what they wish to say. Poetry provokes many different reactions from its audiences and you will all have your own personal responses to the poems you are studying. This section will help you to develop an in-depth understanding of the different features of the craft and to express your views with confidence.

Activity 1

Think about the following comments. How easy would it be to replace the words 'poetry' or 'poet' with the words 'prose' or 'prose writer'? What do the comments reveal to you about the nature of poetry?

They said he was the last poet of the grass court era.

Look at his movement on the pitch! Sheer poetry!

The way that car purred along the open road was poetry in motion.

She's a poet and she doesn't know it!

The comments reveal something of the special nature of poetry and, at the same time, the way it is rooted within our consciousness and the rhythms of everyday life. It is interesting to see how sports journalists often use the word 'poetry' in their accounts of notable sporting performances. The poet Tom Leonard writes that 'if you dribble past five defenders it isn't called sheer prose'. What do you think he is saying about poetry in making this comment?

Activity 2

- 1 Read the following descriptions of poetry and the comments on the impact that poetry has on its readers. They were written by poets, critics and those involved in English teaching.

What is poetry?

'a verbal contraption'
W.H. Auden

'Like a microscope'
Richard Andrews

'a tough old bird'
David Horner

'The best words in the best order'
Samuel Taylor Coleridge

'a jigsaw puzzle'
Michael Baldwin

'a knit of words'
George Steiner

poetry demands of its readership
'a new effort of attention'
D.H. Lawrence

'Poetry can tell us what human beings are. It can tell us why we stumble and fall and how, miraculously, we can stand up.'
Maya Angelou

'Prose is like TV and poetry is like radio.'
Simon Armitage

'Poetry is ... speech with song in it, the song made by words made to dance.'
Robert Nye

Poems are 'objects crafted in a medium of riddling wordplay, yielding a range of meanings.'
Michael Benton and Geoff Fox

'Poetry is a concise way of participating in others' experience.'
Jay Rogoff

'Poetry cannot be defined, only experienced.'
Christopher Logue

'Poetry springs from a level below meaning; it is a molecular thing, a pattern of sound and image.'
Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill

'What is good poetry if not language awake to its own powers?'
Jane Hirshfield

- 2 Sort the descriptions into different groups (for example, you could group those that focus on the content or the language of poetry). You will find that some will fit into a number of different groups.
- 3 With a partner, discuss how you have grouped them. Explore together what you have found. What aspects of poetry do the descriptions highlight as being significant? Which groups and individual descriptions do you find most interesting? Which reflect your own views on poetry? Do the descriptions reveal any of the pleasures or difficulties with poetry that you have experienced so far?
- 4 Share your ideas with the rest of your group.

Take it further

Discuss whether you think there are any aspects of poetry that are not covered by the descriptions in Activity 2. If you think something is missing, try to write your own description and share it with the rest of your group.

Your previous experiences of poetry

In completing Activity 2 you have begun to explore some of your own views about poetry. In your discussions you may have touched on some of your previous experiences of reading, listening to and/or studying poetry.

We are now going to focus more fully on these previous experiences in order to highlight some of the skills and knowledge you need to develop further during your preparation for the exam.

Activity 3

- 1 With a partner or in a small group, briefly discuss the following:
 - a any poetry you have read or studied before and how you responded to it. Talk about specific poems that impressed you in one way or another, poems you found most challenging and poems you disliked at first, but then changed your view on
 - b the different ways in which your poetry study was assessed (eg as a coursework essay, writing your own poems in the style of another poet and providing a commentary, short answer questions in an exam, as part of a speaking and listening assessment)
 - c the methods of assessment you found the most difficult, the easiest, the most rewarding, and why.
- 2 Individually, read the statements in the chart and on a copy, tick the one box on each row which you think applies to your level of experience at this stage.

Poetry experiences				
Statement	A lot	Some	A little	None
a I can identify different types of poems (eg sonnet, ballad, lyric, free verse).				
b I have experience of talking and writing about rhyme and rhythm in poetry.				
c I have experience of talking and writing about forms and structures of poems and why they have been chosen.				
d I have experience of talking and writing about voice in poetry.				
e I have experience of talking and writing about a poet's use of imagery .				
f I have experience of talking about tone and mood in poetry.				
g I have experience of talking and writing about language choices made by poets and the impact that these have on audiences.				
h I have experience of writing about poems.				
i I have experience of reading poems aloud and sharing my ideas in class and small group discussion.				
j I have experience of selecting poems to link to one another .				
k I have experience of comparing and contrasting poems.				
l I have experience of writing a comparative exam essay about several poems.				
m I have experience of writing about unseen poems in an exam (poems not previously read or studied).				
n I have experience of using a 'clean' copy of a poetry anthology (ie one without my notes) in an exam.				
o I am familiar with and can use technical terminology when I am analysing poems (eg metaphor, caesura, onomatopoeia, personification).				

- 3 With a partner or with your teacher:
 - a explore your answers and identify which aspects of poetry (a–g in the chart) and which experiences or features of the way poetry is assessed (h–o) you feel most confident about at this stage
 - b focus on the points you need to gain more experience of for your exam. Talk about the boxes you ticked with specific reference to poems, classroom activities and assessments that you have previously completed. You may wish to colour code or shade in areas of particular strength or weakness and/or to add brief notes to your copy of the chart to remind you.

4 Keep your completed chart so you can revisit it later in the light of your developing experience.

In the rest of this section you will learn more about various poetic features (a–g in the chart above). You will also explore poems in different ways and begin to focus on how these areas will be assessed (h–o).

2 Type

When we talk, hear or read about a type of poetry, the word ‘type’ is being used to convey the general form, structure or distinguishing characteristics of a poem. Not all poems will conform to a ‘type’ but many do and there are many different types of poems. For example, one type is lyric poetry. This is poetry that expresses feeling and emotion rather than telling a story. It is the most commonly found type of poetry. Lyric poems are usually quite short and have a song-like quality due to their use of rhyming and rhythmical structures. ‘O, My Love is like a Red, Red Rose’ by Robert Burns and ‘Down by the Salley Gardens’ by W.B. Yeats are examples of lyric poetry.

Look at the chart below for some other different types.

Type of poetry	Examples
Metaphysical poetry	‘The Definition of Love’ by Andrew Marvell ‘The Flea’ by John Donne
Romantic poetry	‘Ode to a Nightingale’ by John Keats ‘She Walks in Beauty’ by Lord Byron
First World War poetry	‘Dulce et Decorum Est’ by Wilfred Owen ‘Glory of Women’ by Siegfried Sassoon
Protest poetry	‘The Rights of Woman’ by Anna Letitia Barbauld ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ by Percy Bysshe Shelley
Beat poetry	‘Howl’ by Allen Ginsberg ‘Constantly Risking Absurdity’ by Lawrence Ferlinghetti
Bush poetry	‘The Man from Snowy River’ by A.B. ‘Banjo’ Patterson ‘My Country’ by Dorothea Mackellar

The types above are all associated with particular philosophical movements, historical periods, events or (as with Australian Bush poetry) geographical locations. The poems contain distinctive features of **form, structure, rhythm, rhyme**, language or imagery. They are often concerned with particular topics or themes that were of significance to the time when and/or the place where they were written, although many speak at least as directly to twenty-first-century readers as they did to the people of their own time.

Here are some more different types of poetry.

Type of poetry	Examples
Performance poetry – written to be performed to a listening audience, it has a distinctive rhythm and can be about a wide range of topics.	‘Dis Poetry’ by Benjamin Zephaniah ‘R.A.W.’ by Patience Agabi
Kinetic, shape or concrete poetry – with a distinctive shape or pattern on the page, which reflects the topic, kinetic poems seem to make words move in lively ways and need to be seen to be fully appreciated.	‘The Honey Pot’ by Alan Riddell (page 19) ‘Quiet Secret’ by Robert Froman
Found poetry – written by selecting words and phrases from a found object such as an advert, road sign, newspaper article or recipe. No other words are added and, in strict found poetry, the words have to be used in the same order as the original.	‘My Greenhouse’ and ‘Found Poem: Glasgow’ by Edwin Morgan

Key terms

sonnet
ballad
lyric
free verse
imagery
form
structure
rhythm
rhyme
performance poetry
kinetic, shape or
concrete poetry
found poetry

Activity 4

- 1 As a group, each find a copy of a different poem from those listed in either of the charts on page 7. Make a list of the distinctive features that suggest the poem belongs to a particular type.
- 2 Use your school, college or local library or the internet to locate at least one other example of the same type of poem for yourself and identify any of the same distinctive features you have already listed in 1.
- 3 Present your findings to your group and agree on a list of distinctive features for each of the types of poetry you have investigated.

Take it further

What other types of poetry can you discover and what distinctive features do they have? Search for other types (e.g. syllabic, pastoral, Georgian, satirical or love poetry). Use your school, college or local library or the internet to help you in your search. Make notes on their distinctive features for future reference and report back on your findings.

Independent research

When researching, look in a library for poetry anthologies that feature poems from specific periods or on particular themes. The websites listed below also provide some useful starting points. Make sure that you always cross check information gleaned from internet sites and acknowledge your sources.

- www.thepoetryhouse.org/Petryrooms/rooms.html
- www.poets.org/
- www.poetryarchive.org
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_poetry_groups_and_movements
- www.bushverse.com/

Further research will help you to consolidate your understanding. You will find that the type a poem falls into is often closely (but not exclusively) linked to a particular form or structure, and distinctive use of language, rhythm or rhyme. However, not all poems conform to any particular type at all and others can be considered to belong to more than one type. For example, a kinetic poem such as 'Easter Wings' by George Herbert is also seen as a Metaphysical poem. Poets borrow ideas and develop their writing from many different influences and you need to be alert to the ways poems conform to any particular type or how they might break the mould through their use of language and form.

This section has introduced you to the idea of types of poems. In the following sections you will have the chance to develop your understanding of the specific features of poetry that contribute to the overall effects and meanings created.

3 Form and structure

Form is the shape of the poem on the page. As you will probably already know from your experiences of reading and writing of poetry in KS3 and at GCSE, poetry can be written in many different forms. Traditional forms with a set number of lines or syllables, like sonnets or haikus, can be very tightly structured. Alternatively poets can adapt these forms and use them in a looser way or choose to write in free verse.

As you will see in Activity 5, poets have very different views about form. They might begin writing spontaneously and shape the poem into a particular form at a later stage, or they might make a very conscious choice about the poem's form early on during the drafting process – even before they have written a word. The finished form is always an important factor in terms of the poem's meaning and impact on the reader.

Poets on form

Activity 5

- 1 Read the comments about form below, written by five very different poets.
- 2 From your analysis of each comment, what can you conclude about each poet's views on the importance of form? Or about the connection between poetic form and a poem's subject matter? Add your key points to a copy of the table below.

Comment	What views on the place and importance of form in poetry are expressed?	What views on the relationship between poetic form and a poem's subject matter are expressed?
A		
B		

A 'I believe content determines form, and yet that content is discovered only *in* form. Like everything living, it is a mystery. The revelation of form itself can be a deep joy; yet I think form *as means* should never obtrude, whether from intention or carelessness, between the reader and the essential force of the poem, it must be so fused with that force.' (Denise Levertov, an English poet who emigrated to the US and wrote tightly structured, clearly expressed free verse)

B 'Form is a straitjacket in the way that a straitjacket was a straitjacket for Houdini.' (Paul Muldoon, an Irish writer, a professor of poetry and long-term resident in the US)

C 'You can't write a poem until you have a form. It's like ... trying to play an untuned instrument.' (Les Murray, a prize-winning Australian poet)

D 'I think there is a 'fluid' as well as a 'solid' content, that some poems may have form as a tree has form, some as water poured into a vase. That most symmetrical forms have certain uses. That a vast number of subjects cannot be precisely, and therefore, not properly rendered in symmetrical forms.' (Ezra Pound, a controversial and highly influential American writer who emigrated to London in 1909 with a mission to reinvent poetry in a form which, in his view, was truer to the rhythms of everyday life and experience; he made a significant contribution to the development of Modernism in poetry)

E 'I like to write in a patterned arrangement, with rhymes; stanza as it follows stanza being identical in number of syllables and rhyme-plan, with the first stanza... I have a liking for the long syllable followed by three (or more) short syllables, – 'lying on the air there is a bird,' and for the inconspicuous or light rhyme, – 'let' in flageolet ... I feel that form is the outward equivalent of a determining inner conviction, and that the rhythm is the person.' (Marianne Moore, an American poet who frequently used complicated syllabic forms)

For some poets, form is their first consideration as soon as they start to draft a poem, whereas for others the form becomes increasingly apparent as they begin to shape their words on the page. Some poets choose to adopt a form in the way it has been used traditionally. Others might use the spirit of the form, but adapt elements of its structure to suit their own purposes (eg unrhymed sonnets or **haikus** with 20 rather than 17 syllables). All poets' choices of form will be closely allied to the effects they want to create in their poems and the meanings they wish to convey to their readers.

Key term

haiku

Poetic forms

There are many forms a poem can take. Those listed in the next activity are the most common ones you will encounter, but there are others too.

Activity 6

- Which forms do you recognise from the descriptions below? First, match the poetic forms you recognise with their jumbled descriptions. You can use a photocopy of the two lists and cut out the elements like cards so that you can match them easily and make a collage as a record for future reference.
- Discuss the unknown forms as a class and decide on the correct descriptions.

Haiku	A A poem, written as a lament in memory of a person, place or even a way of life, that has a melancholy tone, but does not follow any set metrical pattern.
Limerick	B A five-lined poem, which usually tells the story of a character from a particular place, and has a distinctive rhythm and an <i>aabba</i> rhyme scheme .
Ballad	C A poem that addresses an object, event or element of landscape or a person, sometimes in an elevated style; modern versions of the form can be witty or even irreverent.
Sonnet	D A 19-line poem with an <i>aba</i> rhyme scheme, and five three-lined and one four-lined stanzas , in which lines from the first stanza are picked up and repeated in the rest of the poem.
Ode	E A 39-lined poem with six stanzas and a final three-lined envoi (summary), in which the six words in each stanza are repeated in a set pattern but a changing order.
Sestina	F Originally a Japanese form, a three-lined poem of 17 syllables often capturing a tiny moment in time.
Villanelle	G A 14-lined poem in iambic pentameter, usually following either a Shakespearean or Petrarchan form.
Ghazal	H Rhyming pairs of lines usually in iambic pentameter with ten alternately stressed syllables and a rhyme scheme progressing <i>aa bb cc</i> and so on; the strong rhyme scheme and very regular beat made it a popular choice for satirical or epigrammatic poetry in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
Elegy	I A poem that tells a story or describes a series of events.
Free verse	J A narrative poem, often written in quatrains , with a tight rhyme scheme and a memorable rhythm, which usually tells a dramatic story (eg Broadside poetry, Literary and Folk ballads are all variations of this form).
Epigram	K A lengthy narrative poem that is heroic and written in an elevated style.
Blank verse	L A unrhymed poem written in iambic pentameter , said to mirror the rhythms of everyday speech.
Narrative poem	M A popular verse form in Urdu, which is increasingly used in English, consisting of at least five couplets; the first couplet has an <i>aa</i> structure with subsequent couplets <i>ba, ca, da</i> , etc; the final couplet traditionally includes a reference to the poet's real or literary name.
Epic	N Poetry that does not use traditional rhyme schemes or metrical arrangements.
Heroic couplets	O A short witty saying usually about an event or a person and written in very compressed language.

Forms can be governed or shaped by metrics, syllables, rhyme, the pattern to be created on the page or combinations of several of these factors.

Activity 7

- 1 Read the following poems, taking particular note of the form of each one and the effect this form has on the impact of the poem.
- 2 With a partner, discuss the following questions:
 - a What form do you think is being used in each case?
 - b The choice of form is integral to the meaning and the effects the poet wishes to create. Why do you think the poet chose the particular form?

Rain

On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me
Remembering again that I shall die
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been
5 Since I was born in this solitude.
Blessed are the dead that the rain rains upon:
But here I pray that none whom once I loved
Is dying tonight or lying still awake
Solitary, listening to the rain,
10 Either in pain or thus in sympathy
Helpless among the living and the dead,
Like a cold water among broken reeds,
Myriads of broken reeds all still and stiff,
Like me who have no love which this wild rain
15 Has not dissolved except the love of death,
If love it be for what is perfect and
Cannot, the tempest tells me, disappoint.

Edward Thomas

Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!

Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!
Give back my book and take my kiss instead.
Was it my enemy or my friend I heard,
5 'What a big book for such a little head!'
Come, I will show you now my newest hat,
And you may watch me purse my mouth and prink!
Oh, I shall love you still, and all of that.
I never again shall tell you what I think.
I shall be sweet and crafty, soft and sly;
10 You will not catch me reading any more:
I shall be called a wife to pattern by;
And some day when you knock and push the door,
Some sane day, not too bright and not too stormy,
I shall be gone, and you may whistle for me.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

In the village pond

In the village pond
the full moon is shaken by
the first falling leaf.

James Kirkup

Hoard

What kind of figure did he cut
huddled in the dusk, gut wound
packed with sphagnum,
as he sank into the bog
5 his offering of weaponry,
blades courteously broken,
his killed cherished swords?

Kathleen Jamie

The Sisters

We were two daughters of one race;
She was the fairest in the face.

The wind is blowing in turret and tree.
They were together, and she fell;
5 Therefore revenge became me well.
O, the earl was fair to see!

She died; she went to burning flame;
She mix'd her ancient blood with shame.

The wind is howling in turret and tree.
10 Whole weeks and months, and early and late,
To win his love I lay in wait.
O, the earl was fair to see!

I made a feast; I bade him come;
I won his love, I brought him home,

15 The wind is roaring in turret and tree.
And after supper on a bed,
Upon my lap he laid his head.
O, the earl was fair to see!

I kiss'd his eyelids into rest,
20 His ruddy cheeks upon my breast.
The wind is raging in turret and tree.
I hated him with the hate of hell,
But I loved his beauty passing well.
O, the earl was fair to see!

25 I rose up in the silent night;
I made my dagger sharp and bright.
The wind is raving in turret and tree.
As half-asleep his breath he drew,
Three time I stabb'd him thro' and thro'.
30 O, the earl was fair to see!

I curl'd and comb'd his comely head,
He looked so grand when he was dead.
The wind is blowing in turret and tree.
I wrapt his body in the sheet,
35 And laid him at his mother's feet.
O, the earl was fair to see!

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Preparing for the exam

- The ability to compare poems is a key skill you need to use in the exam. You may already have gained some experience at GCSE. Activity 9 will help you to develop your skills further.
- Make sure that you can identify the form of each of your chosen poems, and can comment on how the form impacts on its meaning.

- 3 Once you have explored the overall form and outer shape of each poem, reread them and look out for other distinctive features. Discuss the following questions with your partner.
- a Is there a noticeable rhyming pattern? If so, what effect does this have? If the poet has chosen not to rhyme, what does this enable the writer to do with lines and line ending?
 - b How would you describe the rhythm of each poem? How does it work to drive the poem along?
 - c What can you say about any other structural elements of each poem? Listen to the way the lines break up, stop, move and link together. What effect do they have on you and on the meanings conveyed?
 - d What other patterns or aspects of language do you notice?

Key term

Limerick	Epic
Ode	Heroic couplets
Sestina	rhyme scheme
Villanelle	stanza
Ghazal	envoi
Elegy	quatrain
Narrative poem	

Sonnets

Now let's look in more detail at the different ways poets use the sonnet form. The two most common forms – Shakespearean and Petrarchan – are outlined here, although you will also come across **Miltonic** and **Spenserian sonnets** as well as other unnamed variations on the form.

Key terms

Miltonic sonnet
Spenserian sonnet
volta

Shakespearean sonnets

Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem 'Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!' (page 11) is an example of a sonnet, in the form so expertly crafted by Shakespeare. Shakespearean sonnets have distinctive features:

- they consist of 14 lines
- each line is in iambic pentameter (a sequence of five soft and five hard stresses)
- they contain three quatrains which rhyme *abab cdcd efef*
- they contain a **volta**, a turn of thought in the poem which often occurs after the first two quatrains
- they end with a rhyming couplet: *gg*.

Activity 8

- 1 Reread 'Oh, oh, you will be sorry for that word!' and revisit what you have already discovered about its overall shape.
- 2 Now discuss other aspects of this poem with a partner. Use the following questions to help you:
 - a What effect does use of iambic pentameter have on how you hear the speaker's voice in the poem?
 - b How does the poet use the 'volta' in the poem to mark a change in mood?
 - c What impact does the final rhyming couplet have?
- 3 Write a short statement explaining how you think Millay has used the sonnet form.
- 4 Compare your statement with your partner's.

Activity 9

Now compare Millay's sonnet on page 11 with Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 138'; below.

- 1 First identify the features of the Shakespearean sonnet (as listed above), annotating a copy of each poem.

When my love swears that she is made of truth,
I do believe her though I know she lies,
That she might think me some untutored youth,
Unlearned in the world's false subtleties.
5 Thus vainly thinking that she thinks me young,
Although she knows my days are past the best,
Simply I credit her false-speaking tongue:
On both sides this is simple truth suppressed.
But wherefore says she not she is unjust?
10 And, wherefore say not I that I am old?
O love's best habit is in seeming trust,
And age in love loves not to have years told.
Therefore I lie with her, and she with me,
And in our faults by lies we flattered be.

William Shakespeare



William Shakespeare

- 2 Now think about how Shakespeare uses the sonnet form. Consider the following questions to help you.
 - a How does the speaker in the poem present the relationship between the two lovers?
 - b What final statement is made about the relationship in the concluding couplet?
- 3 How does the presentation of the relationship in Shakespeare's sonnet compare with the way the partnership in Millay's sonnet is portrayed? Write a short paragraph explaining how each relationship seems to be presented and drawing at least one comparison between them.
- 4 Which sonnet did you personally find most difficult and which the most thought-provoking to read? Jot down a list of reasons for your preferences and discuss them in your group.

Petrarchan sonnet

Another widely used sonnet form is the Petrarchan, so called because it was first used by a fourteenth-century Italian poet named Petrarch who wrote a sonnet sequence for his beloved Laura. Petrarchan sonnets also have distinctive features:

- they consist of 14 lines
- they are written in **iambic pentameter**
- they are divided into two distinct parts: the first eight lines are an **octet** (eight lines of two quatrains, rhyming *abba abba*) and the final six are a **sestet** (rhyming *cdcdcd*)
- they include a 'turn' after the octet with the sestet offering a kind of resolution or answer to the problem or idea explored in the octet.

Key terms

octet
sestet
iambic pentameter

Activity 10

- 1 Read the example of a Petrarchan sonnet below.
- 2 Annotate the distinctive features of Petrarchan sonnets on a copy of the poem.

Composed Upon Westminster Bridge September 3rd, 1802

Earth has not anything to show more fair;
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty;
This city now doth, like a garment, wear
5 The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
10 In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

William Wordsworth

Activity 11

- 1 Now read the following selection of four sonnets. Try to read each poem at least twice. Hear it in your head and also listen to it read aloud.

Grandfather

They brought him in on a stretcher from the world,
Wounded but humorous; and he soon recovered.
Boiler-rooms, rows upon rows of gantries rolled
Away to reveal a landscape of a childhood
5 Only he could recapture. Even on cold
Mornings he is up at six with a block of wood
Or a box of nails, discreetly up to no good
Or banging round the house like a four-year-old –

10 Never there when you call. But after dark
You hear his great boots thumping in the hall
And in he comes, as cute as they come. Each night
His shrewd eyes bolt the door and set the clock
Against the future, then his light goes out.
Nothing escapes him; he escapes us all.

Derek Mahon

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert ... Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
5 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
10 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Sonnets from the Portuguese XIV

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love's sake only. Do not say,
'I love her for her smile ... her look ... her way
Of speaking gently, ... for a trick of thought
5 That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
A sense of pleasant ease on such a day' –
For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
Be changed, or change for thee, – and love, so wrought,
May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
10 Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry, –
A creature might forget to weep, who bore
They comfort long, and lose they love thereby!
But love me for love's sake, that evermore
Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Poem

And if it snowed and snow covered the drive
he took a spade and tossed it to one side.
And always tucked his daughter up at night.
And slipped her the one time that she lied.

5 And every week he tipped up half his wage.
And what he did not spend each week he saved.
And praised his wife for every meal she made.
And once, for laughing, punched her in the face.

10 And for his mum he hired a private nurse.
And every Sunday taxied her to church.
And he blubbed when she went from bad to worse.
And twice he lifted ten quid from her purse.

Here's how they rated him when they looked back:
sometimes he did this, sometimes he did that.

Simon Armitage

- 2 After reading, write a short statement answering each of these questions:
- Which sonnets follow either the Shakespearean or the Petrarchan forms in a strict fashion?
 - Which other rhyming patterns and verse structures can you find?
- 3 Add an example from one of the poems as evidence to support each of your statements.
- 4 Think about the effects that the strict sonnet form and the other patterns and structures have on what is expressed. Add your analysis or conclusion to each statement.
- 5 Add a sentence or two, drawing some conclusions about the way the sonnet form is used by the different poets. The following questions may help you.
- Why do you think each poet has written about the chosen subject matter in the form of a sonnet?
 - What conclusions can you come to about the way poets use sonnet forms to explore ideas, emotions and experiences?

Structural features: the inner workings of the poem

We cannot really say a certain sort of car has been well made or would be a good vehicle to drive just by taking a casual glance at it on a garage forecourt. We need to look under the bonnet at the mechanics, the engine. In addition, if we want to understand what it would be like to drive a car or whether it would be comfortable, relaxing, safe or thrilling to be a passenger in it, we have to experience the car on the road, take it for a test drive to hear and feel it in action. In the same way, to understand a poem's form and the effect it has on us, the readers, we need to do much more than look at the form that the poet has used. We need to hear how the words sound and knit together to make the poem perform in a certain way. We need to soak up its atmosphere and experience how its elements work together (or perhaps in opposition) to create this effect.

In the previous sub-sections on type and form, you have already begun to piece together key elements of a poem's make up and to understand how these work. In the rest of this section you will focus even further on the inner workings of the poem. But remember that these should not be written about in isolation from what has gone before.

You may already be familiar with some of the technical terms in the next sub-section. If you are, then take a moment just to refresh your memory and try to recall how and where you have seen and heard each term being used previously.

End-stopped lines

The punctuation at the end of **end-stopped lines** of poetry demarcates a short or long pause.

Activity 12

Look back at Simon Armitage's 'Poem' on page 15. Every line in this poem is end-stopped.

- 1 How does this make the poem sound when you read it aloud? Which of the following descriptions seem appropriate?

clipped	hesitant	sarcastic	matter of a fact	vague
negative	doubtful	positive	questioning	bleak

- 2 Write a short paragraph on how the poet's use of end-stopped lines influences your understanding of the poem.

Enjambement

Enjambement is used when a poet wants a line to run on to the next line rather than complete a line to create a particular effect, as in these lines from 'Hunting Snake' by Judith Wright:

Cold, dark and splendid he was gone
into the grass that hid his prey.

This technique can be used to create a number of different effects. It can help to place emphasis on key words and can add variety to the sound of the poem by breaking up the lines and mirroring speech patterns. Enjambement can also be used to reflect the thought processes of the narrator or the movement of an object (in this case, the disappearance of the snake).

Key terms

end-stopped lines
enjambement

Activity 13

- 1 Reread aloud the first six lines of 'Rain' by Edward Thomas on page 11.
 - a These lines are all one sentence. What do you notice about how the poem's narrator seems to be speaking to you?
 - b What impact do you think the full stop at the end of line 6 has?
- 2 Now imagine that Thomas had decided to end-stop some of these lines, as shown below. Read them aloud.

On this bleak hut, and solitude, and me,
Remembering again that I shall die,
And neither hear the rain nor give it thanks
For washing me cleaner than I have been,
5 Since I was born in this solitude.

- a How different does this end-stopped version sound from your reading of the published version with enjambement?
 - b How does it change the way the narrator is talking to you?
- 3 Now look again at the rest of 'Rain'. Thomas uses enjambement extensively in this poem, but he has made a deliberate decision to use end-stopped lines at certain points in the poem. Write a commentary identifying the end-stopped lines and saying why you think Thomas has made the decision to use them in each case.

Activity 14

- 1 Reread Kathleen Jamie's poem 'Hoard' on page 11. Notice how she has used enjambement at very specific points in the poem.
- 2 What do you notice about the positioning of the words 'cut' and 'wound', 'huddled' and 'packed' in the opening three lines?

What kind of figure did he cut
huddled in the dusk, gut wound
packed with sphagnum,

With a partner, discuss how the positioning of these words could link with the poem's subject.

- 3 Write a short statement describing the effect of the enjambement on you and the way you might read the poem.
- 4 Compare your statement with your partner's.

Independent research

If you want to find out more about different poetic forms, refer to: *The Poet's Craft: A Handbook of Rhyme, Metre and Verse* by Sandy Brownjohn, *The Making of a Poem* by Mark Strand and Eavan Boland or the detailed glossary at www.poetryarchive.org.

Take it further

Read poems written in as many different forms and structures as possible and experiment with writing poetry in different forms yourself.

Activity 15

Enjambement is a very valuable technique in a poet's toolkit. Read the next two poems – one very light-hearted, the other much more serious in tone. They are both about people and make extensive use of enjambement, but to create very different effects.

Discuss the use of enjambement in the two poems. What conclusions can you come to about why poets might choose to use enjambement and end-stopping?

Uncle Jed

Uncle Jed
Durham bred
raised pigeons
for money.

He died
a poor man
however

as the pigeons
were invariably
too quick for him.

Roger McGough

Evans

Evans? Yes, many a time
I came down his bare flight
Of stairs into the gaunt kitchen
With its wood fire, where the crickets sang
Accompaniment to the black kettle's
Whine and so into the cold
Dark to smother in the thick tide
Of night that drifted about the walls
Of his stark farm on the hill ridge.

It was not the dark filling my eyes
And mouth appalled me; not even the drip
Of rain like blood from the one tree
Weather-tortured. It was the dark
Silting the veins of that sick man
I left stranded upon the vast
And lonely shore of his bleak bed.

R.S. Thomas

Key term

caesura

Caesura

A **caesura** is a slight pause that occurs approximately in the middle of a line of metrical verse (like a sonnet or heroic couplet). Sometimes the pause occurs naturally after a word, but on other occasions the line will be punctuated to dramatic effect and break up the rhythm. For example, the first line of Louis MacNeice's poem 'Prayer before Birth' is:

I am not yet born; O hear me.

The semi-colon in this line seems to stop the reader in their tracks and make them think about who is speaking, when and why.

Activity 16

Read the opening lines from 'My Last Duchess' by Robert Browning, a much-anthologised and terrific dramatic monologue, which uses the heroic couplet form to tell a very disturbing tale. (You can read the rest of the poem on page 36.)

What do you think is the impact of the pauses shown in bold? Jot down your ideas and compare them with a partner's.

That's my last duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: **Frà Pandolf's hands**
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
'Will't please you sit and look at her?' I said

Line length and use of white space

All poets make decisions about the length of the lines they use, whether they are adhering to particular metrical or syllabic forms or choosing to use a seemingly looser structure. Within free verse poetry especially, poets have the freedom to make use of space in a line and on the page as a whole in a variety of ways.

Activity 17

Read the following three contrasting poems.

The Red Wheelbarrow
so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
5 glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens.
William Carlos Williams

Opening the Cage

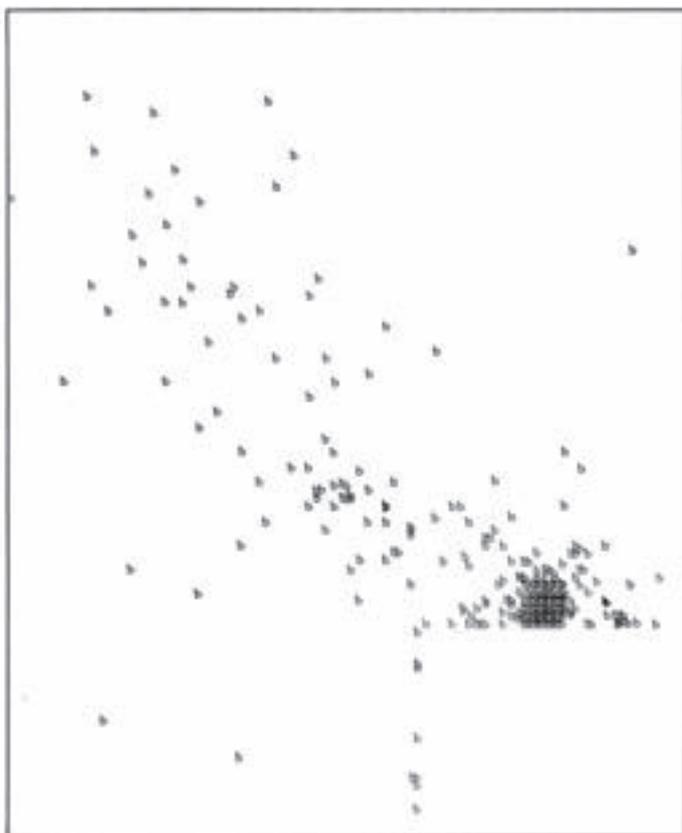
14 variations on 14 words

I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry

John Cage

I have to say poetry and is that nothing and am I saying it
I am and I have poetry to say and is that nothing saying it
I am nothing and I have poetry to say and that is saying it
I that am saying poetry have nothing and it is I and to say
5 And I say that I am to have poetry and saying it is nothing
I am poetry and nothing and saying it is to say that I have
To have nothing is poetry and I am saying that and I say it
Poetry is saying I have nothing and I am to say that and it
Saying nothing I am poetry and I have to say that and it is
10 It is and I am and I have poetry saying say that to nothing
It is saying poetry to nothing and I say I have and am that
Poetry is saying I have it and I am nothing and to say that
And that nothing is poetry I am saying and I have to say it
Saying poetry is nothing and to that I say I am and have it
Edwin Morgan

The Honey Pot



Alan Riddell

With a partner, discuss the following questions.

- What can you say about how the poets have used line lengths and spaces?
- What is your view of these poems?
- Are they poems? If you think so, what makes them poems? You might want to refer back to the section 'What is Poetry?' on page 4 to help you.

Activity 18

- 1 To conclude this section on form and structure, first read the following short text.

Midsummer, Tobago

Broad sun stoned beaches. White heat.
A green river. A bridge, scorched yellow
palms from the summer sleeping house
drowsing through August. Days I have held,
5 days I have lost, days that outgrow, like
daughters, my harbouring arms.

- 2 Now experiment with different ways of using form and line structure by turning the prose text into lines of poetry.
- 3 Read your draft aloud to a partner or to the rest of your group.
- 4 Compare your draft with other people's.
- 5 Discuss how and why you have made your decisions about form and structure and explore the different effects you have created.
- 6 Once you have shared your ideas, turn to page 28 and compare your poem with the original. Write a short statement or prepare a short presentation for the rest of your group in which you describe the differences and similarities, and explain why you think the poet has chosen to structure his words in this way.

4 Rhyme

Preparing for the exam

When you are writing about rhymes at the ends of lines or the rhyme scheme in a poem, you should use the common notation system. This is where you code each new rhyming word with a new letter of the alphabet. For example, if you look at the poems on the right, Herrick's poem would be annotated as *aa* and Dickinson's poem would be *abcb*.

Rhyme is when one sound is echoed by another sound exactly the same or very similar. It is a fundamental element of much of the language around us. It is important to remember that it is not exclusive to poetry: it is an essential part of the word play in many types of texts like adverts, slogans, sayings and football chants. In poetry, rhyme can be found in many different forms and is used for many different purposes and to create a variety of effects.

Different types of rhyme

Full rhyme

Full rhyme, or **perfect rhyme**, is where the vowel sounds at the end of lines echo each other exactly (eg 'sash/cash', 'imply/defy'). The rhyming words can be in different patterns such as in rhyming couplets, alternate lines or any of the more elaborate rhyme schemes found in sonnets, sestinas, villanelles, etc. For example:

Dreams

Here we are all, by day; by night we're hurl'd
By dreams, each one into a several world.
Robert Herrick

Pedigree

The Pedigree of Honey
Does not concern the Bee;
A Clover, any time to him
Is Aristocracy.
Emily Dickinson

Take it further

Invent a rhyme scheme of your own and then challenge yourself to write a poem using it. Annotate your finished poem to show the effects of the rhyme scheme.

Activity 19

- 1 Look at a small selection of other rhyming poems in your examination collection. Work out their rhyme schemes and think about why the poets might have chosen to use these schemes.
- 2 Discuss your findings with a partner and agree on your conclusions.
- 3 As a class or in a group, share your ideas for future reference.

Half rhymes

Half rhymes, or **para-rhymes**, usually occur where the consonant sounds at the end of lines match, rather than the vowel sounds (eg 'flesh/ flash', 'yours/years'). However, you will also hear this term used more broadly to refer to vowel sounds that sound similar, but are not an exact match (eg 'mask/pass' or 'sense/meant').

Sight rhymes

Sight rhymes are half rhymes that look on the page like they should be a full rhyme, but the words actually sound differently when spoken (eg 'now/know', 'plough/tough').

Key terms

full rhyme
perfect rhyme
half rhyme
para-rhyme
sight rhyme

Activity 20

Who in your class can come up with the longest list of potential half rhymes and sight rhymes? Individually, list as many as you can in two minutes. Compare your lists as a class and see who has got the longest list. Take a vote on the best and worst examples!

Activity 21

The First World War poet Wilfred Owen makes very assured use of full, half and sight rhymes in his work.

- 1 Read his poem 'Arms and the Boy' and, on a copy, highlight the different types of rhyme you have identified in different colours.
- 2 Say the half rhymes aloud and listen to their sounds.
- 3 Consider how you would write about them.
 - a How would you describe the sound of each pair of half rhymes? What differences are there in the sounds they make? For example, read the first stanza again. Listen to the difference between 'flash' and 'flesh' here. Both begin with the same 'fl' sound, but you might think that one seems to have an open expansive, lingering 'ash' sound whereas the 'esh' sound seems softer or quieter.
 - b Now think about the effect of the half rhymes. Why do you think Owen made these deliberate choices? In your view, how, if at all, do the sounds contribute to the overall meaning/effects of the poem? Is Owen perhaps wanting to say something about the nature of life and death, innocence and the grim reality of war, or something else through his use of these sounds?
- 4 Write a short commentary about Owen's choice of half rhymes and their effectiveness in the poem.

Arms and the Boy

Let the boy try along this bayonet-blade
How cold steel is, and keen with the hunger of blood;
Blue, with all malice, like a madman's flash;
And thinly drawn with famishing for flesh.

5 Lend him to stroke these blind, blunt bullet-leads
Which long to nuzzle in the hearts of lads,
Or give him cartridges of fine zinc teeth,
Sharp with the sharpness of grief and death.

10 For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple.
There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple;
And God will grow no talons at his heel,
Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls.

Wilfred Owen

Independent research

Refer to other poems by Owen for further examples of skilful rhyming. To consolidate your understanding, you might also want to investigate poems by Emily Dickinson, Elizabeth Jennings, Philip Larkin or W. B. Yeats, to explore how other poets use full and half rhymes to create different effect.

Key term

internal rhyme

Internal rhymes

Words that rhyme within a line or adjacent lines (rather than at the end) are called **internal rhymes**. This technique can help a poet to create a particular mood in a poem. Examples of internal rhyme being used for comic effect can be seen in this extract from 'The Cliché Kid' by Carol Ann Duffy.

Distraught in autumn, kneeling under the chestnut trees,
seeing childhood in the conkers through my tears.
Bonkers. And me so butch in my boots down the macho bars ...

Preparing for the exam

Always remember to use the term 'stanza', rather than 'verse', when discussing or writing about poetry. It is a much more precise term.

Take it further

- Look back at some of the poems in this section in the light of this room metaphor. What kind of building do you think the stanzas or rooms combine to create in each case?
- Next time you are listening to music, see if you can identify song lyrics that seem to make effective use of rhyme as well as those where a rhyming word seems to be out of place or just chosen for the sake of it.

Duffy is a poet who uses internal rhyme quite frequently in her writing, although not always in a comic way. Read her poems 'Disgrace' and 'Mean Time' on pages 33 and 44 to explore further how she uses this technique.

Other rhyme terms

When writing about rhyme, you will also want to use other terms that describe how rhyming lines are arranged into groups:

Couplet: a pair of lines

Quatrain: a group of four lines

Sestet: a group of six lines

Octave: a group of eight lines

Stanza: any unit of rhyme and/or metre used in a repeated pattern in a poem.

For example, Owen's poem 'Arms and the Boy' has three stanzas, all quatrains. Stanzas in a poem can consist of lines of the same or different lengths. They work separately, but also cumulatively to build the sense of the poem. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland have written a very helpful description of the stanza:

the word stanza in Italian means 'room'. In a simple, practical way, the stanza has that figurative purpose. It is as self-contained as any chamber or room. And yet to be in it is to have the consciousness at all times that it also leads somewhere.

Why use rhyme?

Sometimes rhyme can be almost unnoticeable in a poem, whereas on other occasions it contributes to the harmonious feel of the poem and helps it to move along. Sometimes a poet can over use a rhyme or a particular rhyming sound either for deliberate effect or unintentionally. Alternatively a poet might choose a word just because it rhymes rather than because it really contributes anything original to a poem.

In conclusion

Activity 22

- 1 Read the following poem by Jackie Kay, preferably two or three times and aloud at least once.
- 2 Share your ideas on these discussion points, making notes for later use.
 - a What different types of rhymes can you find in this poem?
 - b Do any of the rhymes have associations for you?
 - c What do you hear and notice in the lines where Jackie Kay has used rhyme and in those where she has chosen not to use it?
 - d How and what do you think the use of rhyme contributes to the mood of the poem?

- e What else do you want to say about the way this poem is written? You might want to consider the words Kay has chosen, the repetitions, the rhythms of the lines or her reasons for writing the poem.
- 3 Use your notes to help you write about Kay's use of rhyme and its effectiveness in the poem. Remember to describe the types of rhyme she uses, giving examples from the poem. You should explain how you have responded to the examples and analyse what effect they have.

Childhood, Still

The sun is out and so is childhood – remember
How the summer droned its song forever.

Three small girls tumble down the steep hill.
Grass skip, gust makes their skirts frill.

5 A wee boy scoots towards the big blue loch.
His fishing net bigger than his baw face.

It's hot; there's a breeze like a small caught breath.
This is it; these are the days that never stop.

10 *Childhood ticks, tocks, ticks. Metronome.
Speaking clock. Sand glass. Time bomb.*

A boy kicks a ball through a window, smashes
a gaping hole, but this is childhood still

where big things grow small; small as a petal
or a freckle, on a face, a speckle

15 on a egg, or as small as a tadpole,
small as the space where the ball missed the goal,

as dot to dot, as a crumb of Mrs Jack's cake,
small as the silver locket around her neck.

20 The long grass whines in the high wind.
Away in the distance, the church bells chime.

*Childhood ticks, tocks, ticks. Metronome.
Speaking clock. Sand glass. Time bomb.*

Suddenly: the clatter of boots in the street.
The sob of a white van speeding away.

25 The cries of a small boy alone in a stairwell.
This is childhood; this is childhood as well.

The policeman caught by the Candyman.
A town's sleep murdered by the Sandman.

30 There goes the janitor, the teacher, the priest,
Clergyworker, childminder, careworker. *Wheesht.*

The auntie, the uncle, the father, the mother;
opening and closing and opening the door.

*Childhood ticks, tocks, ticks. Metronome.
Speaking clock. Sand glass. Time bomb.*

35 *Oh There she goes.*

Oh There she goes.

Peerie heels and pointed toes.

Look at her feet. She thinks she's neat.

Black stockings and dirty feet.

40 Remember the toadstool, the promise of a chrysalis,
the taste of lemon bonbons, the taste of liquorice.

The past keeps calling the children back.
Number six: pick up sticks. Tick tack. Tick tack.

The clock hands crawl, August's slow talk.

45 Autumn comes: the snap and crackle of amber leaves.

There's a brand new friend waiting in the school,
a gleam in her eye, ready for Tig or marbles.

Skip, skop to the barber's shop, Keepie-Uppie, Kerbie.
Be Baw Babbity, Following Wee Jeannie.

50 Green peas and Barley. Okey Kokey. My mummy told me.
Stotty. Peever. Thread the needle. The Big Ship sails.

This is childhood, let it be childhood still.

Jackie Kay

5 Rhythm

Poets can make many choices about the way they want their poems to sound. One of the major decisions they make is about the rhythm – the flow and beat of the sounds within the poem and the way these are grouped together to create an effect – just as musicians arrange patterns of sounds to make music.

The rhythm of a poem is what drives it along. Philip Hobsbaum describes rhythm as 'the working machinery of poetry as its metre is its ground plan or blueprint'. The number of times a dominant rhythm occurs in a line of poetry gives it its **metre**, governed by the number of stresses or strong syllables in a line and the pattern that they form. The metre is just one element of the rhythm of a poem. Think of it as being the framework or skeleton that supports it.

Key term

metre

Iambic pentameter

The most common form of metre in English poetry is iambic pentameter. This is a pattern of one weak or lightly stressed syllable followed by one strongly stressed syllable. Each **iamb** (the pattern of soft hard) forms one **foot**. Iambic *pentameter* therefore has five feet, which sets up the familiar pattern:

di Dum	/di Dum	/di Dum	/di Dum	/di Dum
soft <u>hard</u>	/soft <u>hard</u>	/soft <u>hard</u>	/soft <u>hard</u>	/soft <u>hard</u>

You can see iambic pentameters at work in the following extracts from 'Sonnet 130' by William Shakespeare and 'The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales' by Geoffrey Chaucer, where the stressed syllables have been underlined:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun ('Sonnet 130')

Ful big he was of braun, and eek of bones ('The General Prologue')

Iambic pentameter is the metre used in **blank verse** and in the rhymed forms, the villanelle and the sestina. (For more on blank verse, see Part 3, pages 139–141 (in a separate volume).)

Independent research

Find copies of the four poems referred to on this page (they are all widely available). Read them aloud and listen to the way their rhythms work.

Iambic tetrameter

Iambic tetrameter is the metre used in most ballad forms.

Activity 23

- 1 Look at the following example from Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress'. How many iambic feet does it have? What effect does the rhythm have?

Had we but world enough, and time
This coyness, lady, were no crime.

- 2 Find a copy of the poem. Read it aloud and listen to the rhythm. What effect does it have on the subject of the poem?
- 3 The first and third lines of most traditional ballads will have four stresses. The second and fourth will have three stresses (**iambic trimeter**). Here is an example from the ballad 'Sir Patrick Spens' (Anon) which should help to confirm for you how many iambic feet there are in each line:

They had not sailed a league, a league,
A league but barely three,
Came wind and weet and snow and sleet
And gurly grew the sea.

gurly – rough

Other patterns

It can be helpful to identify other patterns of stresses in poetry, although the iamb is the most important type of metre for your exam. Other patterns found in feet are:

- **Trochee** – two syllables: one stressed followed by one unstressed syllable
- **Spondee** – two stressed syllables in succession
- **Anapaest** – three syllables: two unstressed followed by one stressed syllable
- **Dactyl** – three syllables: one stressed followed by two unstressed syllables
- **Amphibrach** – three syllables: one unstressed followed by one stressed and rounded off with one unstressed syllable.

Metre is just one element of a poem. Poets play around with it to create different effects and emphases, but a lot more than its metre goes into creating a poem's movement (eg also think about the use of enjambement (page 16) and caesuras (page 18) to link together or to break up lines).

Key terms

iamb
foot
iambic tetrameter
trochee
spondee
anapaest
dactyl
amphibrach
blank verse
iambic trimeter

Take it further

- Look at the following words and say them aloud. Which are iambs, trochees, anapaests, dactyls or amphibrachs?

understand	fingers	impound
mobile	confetti	builder
aloud	argument	mesmerise
backward	orange	incline

Now suggest another word as an example in each category.

- Write a brief description of rhythm and metre explaining these two poetic features in simpler terms, eg for a course guide for GCSE students.

Preparing for the exam

When you are writing about the rhythm of a poem, you need to be able to comment on the impact that it has on you as the reader. How do the words work together to create the rhythm? What effect does this have on the tone and mood of the poem, and on its overall meaning? You will need to read poems aloud to hear this at first. Even though you will not be able to do this in the exam, it is a good habit to get into before discussing any of the poems in this section.

Activity 24

- 1 Read the following poems aloud to a partner or in a small group. If you are in a group, you could practise reading them together as a chorus or by using different volumes and combinations of voices, and by varying your pitch and tone so that you bring the poems off the page and can hear their rhythms.

simple tings

(for Miss Adlyn and Aunt Vida)

de simple tings of life, mi dear
de simple tings of life

she rocked the rhythms in her chair
brushed a hand across her hair
miles of travel in her stare

de simple tings of life

ah hoe mi corn
an de backache gone
plant mi peas
arthritis ease

de simple tings of life

leaning back
she wiped an eye
read the rain signs
in the sky
evening's ashes
in a fireside

de simple tings of life

Jean 'Binta' Breeze

	Men Talk (Rap)		I like A Woman
	Women		Who likes me enough
	Rabbit rabbit rabbit women	25	Not to nitpick
	Tattle and titter		Not to nag and
	Women prattle		Not to interrupt 'cause I call that treason
5	Women waffle and witter		A woman with the Good Grace
	Men Talk. Men Talk.	30	To be struck dumb
	Women into Girl Talk		By me Sweet Reason. Yes –
	About Women's Trouble		A Man Likes a Good Listener
	Trivia 'n' Small Talk		A Real
10	They yap and they babble		Man
	Men Talk. Men Talk.		Likes a Real Good Listener
	Women gossip Women giggle	35	Women yap yap yap
	Women niggle-niggle-niggle		Verbal Diarrhoea is a Female Disease
	Men Talk.		Women she spread she rumours round she
	Women yatter		Like Philadelphia Cream Cheese.
15	Women chatter	40	Oh
	Women chew the fat, women spill the beans		Bossy Women Gossip
	Women aint been takin'		Girlish Women Giggle
	The oh-so Good Advice in them		Women natter, women nag
20	Women's Magazines.		Women niggle niggle niggle
	A Man Likes A Good Listener.	45	Men talk.
	Oh yeah		Men
			Think First, Speak later
			Men Talk.
			<i>Liz Lochhead</i>

- 2 Discuss what you have noticed about the way the words work. Make notes or annotate copies of the poems as you discuss them. Start with the following questions and then broaden your discussion to include other aspects you have noticed.
 - How does Breeze convey a rocking rhythm in her poem through her choice of words and the way she has constructed the lines?
 - How does Lochhead create the different sounds of the women's and men's speech through her language?
- 3 Discuss how the punctuation and/or the line breaks help to shape meaning, again making notes or annotating copies. The following questions may help to get you started.
 - Why do you think Breeze uses so few punctuation marks in the whole of her poem?
 - How does Lochhead use the caesura in the penultimate line?
 - How is she representing her view of the way men speak?
 - How does this contrast with her lines about women's speech?
- 4 Discuss the effects any repetitions have on the way you read and understand each poem. Record your thoughts as before.
- 5 Write three short paragraphs in response to the poems, comparing the effects that the words, punctuation and line breaks, and repetition have on their rhythm. For each feature, make a point about how it is used in one of the poems, giving an example. Then compare the use of the same feature in the other poem, giving another example. Draw a conclusion about the effectiveness of the feature, before moving on to the next one.

6 Language

When you discuss or write about a poet's choice and use of language, you are exploring the essence of a text: without the words (and the spaces between them), there would be no poem.

Looking closely at diction

Activity 25

- 1 With a partner, investigate the bank of words in the box below by answering the following questions. You might like to use coding or highlighting on a photocopy or even to cut out the individual words to help you. Make notes on your findings.
 - a What do the words reveal to you about the choices the poet made?
 - b What conclusions can you come to about the language used? Are there, for example, particular types of words? Could you group them in different ways? Do certain words occur very frequently?
 - c Does the poet perhaps seem preoccupied with a theme or subject?

Words from 'Children's Song' (including the title)

A adult all amused an analytic and and And and And
asleep blue cannot centre Children's closed cupped dance
eavesdrop eggs enter Even eye faded find flower For hands
heaven in in is is knees life live look mock nest Of Of
on our our own play probe pry remoter shell small smooth
Song still stoop subterfuge Talk that That The the the the
the the though to too Under Under We we we Where
where Where With With world world you you You your

- 2 Present your ideas to the rest of your group.
- 3 Either individually or with a partner, use the words in the box to draft your own poem entitled 'Children's Song'. You can organise the words in any way you wish and add any punctuation you require.
- 4 Share your draft poem with another reader. Ask them to read it aloud to you. Discuss how you have ordered the words and why, including:
 - the effects you were striving for
 - which lines or phrases you are most happy with
 - which lines need further development
 - which words you found most challenging to include and why
 - if you were tempted to add other words, why and what they were.

Activity 26

- 1 Now read the original poem 'Children's Song' by R.S. Thomas.
- 2 Make notes on how the poet has ordered the words, punctuated them and structured the poem. Add your ideas on what effects and/or meanings have been created.
- 3 Now compare the effects and meanings of Thomas' poem with those of your own draft. How has Thomas used the words in his poem? Write one sentence about each point you want to make about Thomas' poem, adding evidence from the poem to support your point. Now look at your own draft. What effects have you created through your use of language? How does your version compare with the original? You may have used the words very differently! Make a separate comment on each effect you have created and then, where possible, make a comparison between the two poems, before moving on to your next point.
- 4 How do you think the activities in this section (your word bank investigation, the drafting of your own poem and the comparison of two versions) have helped you to develop your understanding of the language of poetry more fully?
- 5 There is another poem on the subject of childhood by Jackie Kay on page 27. Compare it with 'Children's Song'. Which do you prefer? Which do you think uses language in the most interesting ways? Write a commentary, comparing the two poems.

Children's Song

We live in our own world,
A world that is too small
For you to stoop and enter
Even on hands and knees,
5 The adult subterfuge.
And though you probe and pry
With analytic eye,
And eavesdrop all our talk
With an amused look,
10 You cannot find the centre
Where we dance, where we play,
Where life is still asleep
Under the closed flower,
Under the smooth shell
15 Of eggs in the cupped nest
That mock the faded blue
Of your remoter heaven.
R.S. Thomas

Many of you will already be familiar with much of the terminology you need to use in discussing and writing about the language used in poetry. Indeed, many of the terms are not used just to talk about poetry texts. You should aim to use them confidently in all aspects of textual study.

Midsummer, Tobago

Broad sun stoned beaches.

White heat.

A green river.

5 A bridge,
scorched yellow palms

from the summer sleeping house
drowsing through August.

Days I have held,
days I have lost,

10 days that outgrow, like daughters,
my harbouring arms.

Derek Walcott

Solution to
Activity 18, page 20.

Activity 27

Working in a small group, decide which of the following definitions most accurately describe each technical term. Be careful – in some cases two of the three answers are correct.

Terms	Definitions
Alliteration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • repetition of consonant sounds • repetition of hyphenated words • repetition of 'lit' sounds
Assonance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • repetition of consonant sounds • repetition of vowel sounds • repetition of 'a' sounds
Diction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the correct use of English • the choice of words made by a writer • a synonym for the word 'vocabulary'
Ellipsis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a phrase or sentence where words are missed out but can be inferred from the surrounding context • three dots to show words are missed out or to indicate suspense • the repetition of 'el' sounds
Irony	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • language that says one thing but means another • language that lacks emotion • language that is flat and uninspiring
Onomatopoeia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • words that make a booming sound • words that make an echoing sound • words that replicate or mimic the sound they are making
Oxymoron	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a contrasting word or phrase that contains two elements with opposite meanings • a phrase that makes something difficult seem easy • a phrase used by someone to show their anger
Sibilance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the sound of snakes • repetition of 's' sounds • the use of sinister sounds in poetry

If you are uncertain about any of the terms, refer to the glossary and discuss them with your teacher. If you are already confident about these terms, ensure that you use them in class discussion as well as in your writing about poetry.

Preparing for the exam

Find examples of the techniques listed in Activity 27 in use in your exam collection.

Write a short commentary on the effects created through their use.

Language toolkit for writing in the exam

When you talk about the language of a poem, you should be able to focus on a number of different aspects, many of which are interlinked. You should be concerned with:

- the choice of words a poet makes and why they have chosen particular words rather than others
- the **syntax** of the poem (the way the words are arranged into phrases, questions, statements, commands, dialogue, sentences, lines, stanzas and whole poems)
- how the language is punctuated (or not)
- the patterning of words (eg whether words are repeated, contrasted with one another or juxtaposed)
- the sounds of the words (the way they rhyme, create a particular tone and mood, might echo other words in the poem, introduce, repeat or reinforce specific sounds)

Key terms

diction
 ellipsis
 irony
 onomatopoeia
 oxymoron
 sibilance
 syntax
 simile
 metaphor
 personification

- whether the vocabulary and/or the phrasing are associated with a particular time, place, situation, person, group of people (and/or whether it is being used to deliberately evoke such things)
- who (or what) is speaking the words and how their language addresses the reader
- what may be left unsaid but can be inferred from the language that is present
- the types of lexical and grammatical words used (eg verbs and/or adjectives extensively or rarely used).

Activity 28

Now use the toolkit above as a checklist to help you to explore the language of at least one of the poems in the form and structure pages (8–20) of this section. Choose one poem, reread it several times and write at least two sentences for each of the bullet points in the toolkit.

7 Imagery

Preparing for the exam

Whenever you are writing about any aspect of language or literature you must do more than simply identify the features used. To write a successful answer you should explore *how* and *why* a poet uses language. What is the purpose? Why has the choice been made? How do the effects that the poet creates impact on you, the reader?

Imagery is the creation of pictures in language, which help us to visualise something or appeal to our senses so that we can hear, feel or see an idea or subject for ourselves. The best images help us to view or experience the idea afresh or in a different way. A lot of poetry is rich in imagery and some critics have argued that contemporary English poetry is essentially poetry of the eye, whereas poets from other nations (or those writing in other times) can be more concerned with writing for the ear.

Simile and metaphor

You should already be familiar with the terms '**simile**', '**metaphor**' and '**personification**', which are essential when writing about imagery in poetry. We will look at simile and metaphor in more detail here, and personification on page 34. A simile is a comparison between two things that are not usually compared and uses the words 'as' or 'like' (eg in the poem 'Wind', Ted Hughes describes the movement of the wind as 'flexing like the lens of a mad eye'). Metaphor is a comparison between seemingly unrelated things. Metaphors create a much stronger, more definite image than a simile because one object is transformed into the other, eg 'she was my rock'. The use of the verb 'to be' in some form or tense can be an indicator that there is a metaphor in a poem.

Activity 29

- 1 Read the poem 'Praise Song for My Mother' by Grace Nichols at least twice and note her use of powerful metaphorical language to praise her mother.
- 2 Reread the poem and identify the metaphors in it. What can you say about the metaphors Nichols has created? What might they reveal about her feelings for her mother or about the context of their relationship?
- 3 The metaphors are interspersed throughout the poem in each stanza apart from the last. What impact does this seem to have on:
 - the rhythm of the poem
 - the overall effects and meanings created?

Praise Song for My Mother

You were
water to me
deep and bold and fathoming

You were
moon's eye to me
pull and grained and mantling

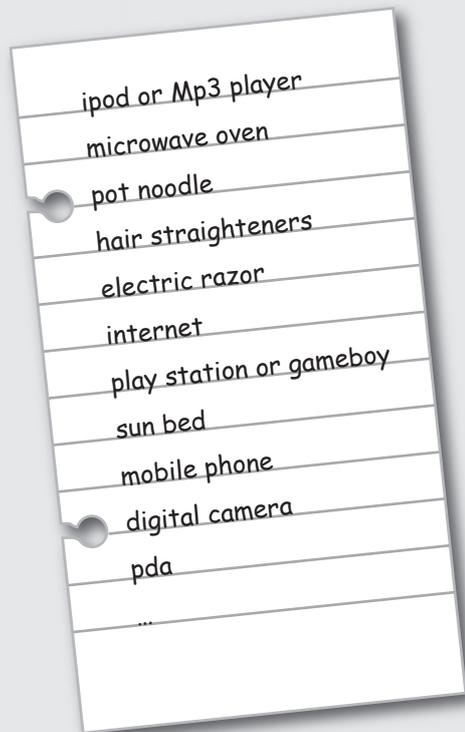
You were
sunrise to me
rise and warm and streaming

You were
the fishes red gill to me
the flame tree's spread to me
the crab's leg/the fried plantain smell

replenishing, replenishing
Go to your wide futures, you said
Grace Nichols

Activity 30

- 1 Another poet whose early work is particularly rich in metaphorical imagery is Craig Raine. Read his poem below.
- 2 After this poem was published, some critics said Raine belonged to the Martian school of poetry because of his particular use of metaphor which enabled readers to look at the world through different eyes.
 - a In a sequence of metaphors in this poem, Raine is describing aspects of everyday life. List the everyday aspects or objects he includes.
 - b Write a sentence or two about each object, explaining how Raine's use of metaphor makes you think about it differently.
- 3 If this poem had been written in the twenty-first century, it may well have included other everyday items. Choose two or three from the list on the left and draft some additional stanzas for the poem. Try to imitate Raine's style (including his use of metaphor) as closely as you can.
- 4 Now share your metaphors with other readers. Which are the most successful?



A Martian Sends a Postcard Home

Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings
and some are treasured for their markings –

they cause the eyes to melt
or the body to shriek without pain.

5 I have never seen one fly, but
sometimes they perch on the hand.

Mist is when the sky is tired of flight
and rests its soft machine on the ground:

10 then the world is dim and bookish
like engravings under tissue paper.

Rain is when the earth is television.
It has the property of making colour darker.

Model T is a room with the lock inside –
a key is turned to free the world

15 for movement, so quick there is a film
to watch for anything missed.

But time is tied to the wrist
or kept in a box ticking with impatience.

20 In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,
that snores when you pick it up.

If the ghost cries, they carry it
to their lips and soothe it to sleep

with sounds. And yet, they wake it up
deliberately, by tickling with a finger.

25 Only the young are allowed to suffer
openly. Adults go to a punishment room
with water but nothing to eat.
They lock the door and suffer the noises
alone. No one is exempt
30 and everyone's pain has a different smell.

At night, when all the colours die,
they hide in pairs

and read about themselves –
in colour, with their eyelids shut.

Craig Raine

The term '**extended metaphor**' might be new to you. This is when the metaphor, the comparison between two objects, is developed throughout the poem, rather than in just a line or two, in order to explore it more fully.

Activity 31

- 1 Read William Blake's poem below. See if you can identify the extended metaphor within it, which explores an aspect of human nature.



William Blake

A Poison Tree

I was angry with my friend;
I told my wrath – my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe;
I told it not – my wrath did grow.
5 And I watered it in fears,
Night and morning with my tears,
And I sunned it with my smiles.
And with soft deceitful wiles.
And it grew both day and night,
10 Till it bore an apple bright,
And my foe beheld it shine,
And he knew that it was mine,
And into my garden stole
When the night had veiled the pole.
15 In the morning glad I see
My foe outstretched beneath the tree.
William Blake

- 2 Write a short statement to explain how you think Blake has used the extended metaphor to explore an abstract human emotion. To begin to answer this question you will need to:
 - a look at how he has used and developed the metaphor in each stanza in order to focus on different aspects of the emotion he is representing;
 - b think about why he might have chosen a natural image to represent this human feeling.

Take it further

The literary critic I. A. Richards suggests the following three part model for analysing metaphor (his system is not agreed on by everyone, however):

- Tenor – the thing which the metaphor is describing or characterising – its first term;
- Vehicle – the thing which is being used to describe or characterise the tenor – its second term;
- Ground – the quality which the tenor and vehicle share which makes the metaphor 'work'.

For example, in the metaphor 'No man is an island, entire of itself', the tenor is 'man', the vehicle 'an island' and the ground could be said to be 'separateness' or 'isolation'.

Look again at some of the poems you have been exploring. What does thinking about metaphors in this way add to your understanding of the ways in which imagery is used?

Preparing for the exam

Imagery is a prominent feature of many poems. It contributes to the richness of poetry and enables us to experience ideas and events differently through language. Explore how other images have **been created** in the poems in your collection. Why have the poets chosen them and what effects they have created?

Personification

Writers and poets use personification when they present an inanimate object or an idea as having human qualities and feelings.

Activity 32

- 1 Read the following poem by Carol Ann Duffy several times.

Disgrace

But one day we woke to disgrace; our house
a coldness of rooms, each nursing
a thickening cyst of dust and gloom.
We had not been home in our hearts for months.
5 And how our words changed. Dead flies in a web.
How they stiffened and blackened. Cherished italics
suddenly sour on our tongues, obscenities
spraying themselves on the wall in my head.
10 Woke to your clothes like a corpse on the floor,
the small deaths of lightbulbs pining all day
in my ears, their echoes audible tears;
nothing we would not do to make it worse
and worse. Into the night with the wrong language,
waving and pointing, the shadows of hands
15 huge in the bedroom. Dreamed of a naked crawl
from a dead place over the other; both of us. Woke.
Woke to the absence of grace; the still-life
of a meal, untouched, wine-bottle, empty, ashtray,
full. In our sullen kitchen, the fridge
20 hardened its cool heart, selfish as art, hummed.
To a bowl of apples rotten to the core. Lame shoes
empty in the hall where our voices asked
for a message after the tone, the telephone
pressing its ear to distant, invisible lips.
25 And our garden bowing its head, vulnerable flowers
unseen in the dusk as we shouted in silhouette.
Woke to the screaming alarm, the banging door,
the house-plants trembling in their brittle soil. Total
disgrace. Up in the dark to stand at the window,
30 counting the years to arrive there, faithless,
unpenitent. Woke to the meaningless stars, you
and me both, lost. Inconsolable vowels from the next room.
Carol Ann Duffy

- 2 Write a response to this poem, identifying where and how Carol Ann Duffy has used personification and, most importantly, why you think she has used this technique. Remember to use evidence from the poem to support your views. The following questions may help you.
 - What inanimate objects and concepts have been given human attributes and feelings?
 - How has Duffy used the personification of these things to explore the breakdown of a relationship?
 - What else do you notice about Duffy's use of imagery in this poem?
 - What are your views about the poem's title?

8 Voice

Key term

voice

The term 'voice' is often used in relation to poetry and refers to the speaker or thinker who is expressing a view, the person who is talking to you, the reader. The voices used in poetry can be many and varied. Be careful not to assume, when reading a poem for the first time, that the poet is speaking in their own voice and that everything they express directly reflects their own feelings or experiences. To some extent, all writers draw on their own lives in their writing, but remember that poems are constructed creations and the voices a poet chooses to use are part of this construction.

Decisions about voice are not made in isolation: in creating a voice for a poem, a poet draws on all the other aspects that we have explored so far. A poet chooses the voices that are most appropriate for what they want to express and select the form, language, imagery, etc. that best fits each voice.

Creating a voice

There are no taboos in terms of what poetry can give voice to. Poets can give all kinds of objects, concepts and people voices in their poems.

Activity 33

- 1 Choose one of the voices and situations in the box below. With a partner, and jotting down significant words and phrases as you talk, discuss:
 - a how the voice might speak in this context
 - b how it might view the world
 - c what concerns it might have about past or future events
 - d how it would express these views and concerns.

A traffic cone in motorway roadworks.
A young horse taking part in the Grand National.
A single coathanger in an empty wardrobe.
A father who is holding his child for the first time.
A grandmother thinking back to her childhood.
A fox on the prowl in a city.
A fire fighter entering a burning building.
A ten pence piece down the back of a sofa.
A student waiting outside the head teacher's office.
A pond filled with frogspawn.
Someone preparing to claim asylum in an airport terminal.
An identical twin on his or her 18th birthday.
A parachutist waiting to jump.
A tree about to be chopped down.

- 2 Shape your words and phrases into the rough draft of a poem. File your draft safely while you read and discuss the following poems. They should give you some ideas about how different voices can be brought to life on the page, so that you can revise and finish your poem later.

Activity 34

- 1 Working in a small group, read the six very different poems that follow and then choose one for your group to work on in more detail.

A Fish-Hook

You have put a fish-hook in my chest behind the breast bone,

5 and one barb is around my gullet, and one around my wind-pipe and the third is embedded in the root of the aorta.

There is a cord attached, of tantalum-hardened steel, marvellously supple,

10 and the least movement you make, that cord tightens, the tip of each barb jerks deeper, the blood eddies around the metal.

You have the other end of that cord, you have hidden it, inside your skull or at the base of your spine, and though your hands are empty, you are winding it in, and my mouth is dry as I flounder towards you.

Gael Turnbull

Mirror

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.

Whatever I see I swallow immediately
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.

I am not cruel, only truthful –

5 The eye of a little god, four-cornered.

Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.

It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long

I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

10 Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,
Searching my reaches for what she really is.

Then she turns back to those liars, the candles or the moon.

I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.

She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.

15 I am important to her. She comes and goes.

Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.

In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

Sylvia Plath

The Self-Unseeing

Here is the ancient floor,
Footworn and hollowed and thin,
Here was the former door
Where the dead feet walked in.

5 She sat here in her chair,
Smiling into the fire;
He who played stood there,
Bowing it higher and higher.

10 Child-like, I danced in a dream;
Blazings emblazoned that day;
Everything glowed with a gleam;
Yet we were looking away!

Thomas Hardy

My Last Duchess

That's my last duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
5 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
10 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
15 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat': such stuff
20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace – all and each
30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men – good! but thanked
Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech – which I have not – to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark' – and if she let
40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and make excuse,
– E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
50 Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Robert Browning

9 Tone and mood

Tone and **mood** are the aspects of a text that some students find most challenging to write about. The activities on the following pages should confirm that you do already know something about these terms and will help to develop your understanding of them.

Activity 36

Let's start by thinking about tone. Individually or with a partner, think about or discuss the following points.

- If someone says to you 'Don't speak to me in that tone of voice!', what do you think they are implying about the way you have spoken to them? Read the sentence aloud. Does that give you any further clues?
- How do you think the speaker has arrived at that view of your tone? Is it because of your choice of words? Is it because of how you have spoken to them? Is it as a result of something else?
- What do you think they mean by the word 'tone'?

Activity 37

- 1 Working in a small group, take it in turns to say the sentence 'Please, will you help me?' aloud in different tones from the box below and others you can think of. Note that some of the tones have very subtle differences (eg sinister and mysterious). Don't tell the rest of the group what tone you are using – let them guess.

desperate	sarcastic	uncertain	resigned	puzzled
hopeful	angry	romantic	bored	grieving
casual	sinister	mysterious	confident	enigmatic

- 2 Discuss:

- how your voices changed when you adopted different tones
- how you used the punctuation in the sentence
- what different emphases you placed on the words depending on the tone you chose.

Key term

tone
mood

In real life, when we adopt different tones, they reveal different facets of our personality in different situations. In literary texts, writers use a variety of tones to help to convey the complexity of the voice(s) or situations as well as the mood in an individual work (whether it is a poem, play or any other form).

Definitions

The *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines tone as 'a characteristic sound made by a voice, instrument etc ...; a sound having a definite pitch or character ...; the quality or luminosity of colour, a shade, a tint ...; a style of speech or writing regarded as reflecting a person's mood, attitude or personality; a mood or attitude conveyed by an author's style'.

Mood is defined as 'the atmosphere or pervading tone of a place, event, composition, etc; one inducing a certain state of mind or emotion'.

The words 'tone' and 'mood' are often used interchangeably. However, the definitions above show that the mood of a poem or the overriding feeling it invokes is created *through* a writer's use of tone. Therefore, tone encompasses sound, word choices and the many other features of language that contribute to the writer's style.

When you are looking and listening for tone in a poem, pay close attention to the following aspects, which all make a contribution. The questions will help you analyse each aspect.

Looking and listening for tone

Voice

(also refer to the section on voice on pages 34–37)

- How does the speaker talk to you, the reader?
- Is the speaker speaking directly or are they recalling what someone else has said?
- Can you trust what you are hearing?
- Do you sympathise with the speaker?
- Do they make you feel uncomfortable?

Rhythm

(also refer to the sections on rhyme on pages 20–23 and rhythm on pages 23–26)

- What can you say about the rhythm of the lines? What impact do they have?
- Are there frequent pauses or end-stopped lines that break up the lines?
- Does the poet use enjambement so that the lines, images or arguments flow coherently together?
- How else does the punctuation seem to contribute to the rhythm and tone of the piece?

Diction

- What can you say about the words used (eg are they simple, ordinary, unusual, old-fashioned, hard to understand, official sounding, conversational, child-like, contemporary)?
- How do the words combine together? What impact do they have?

Sound

(also refer to the sections on rhyme on pages 20–23 and rhythm on pages 22–26)

- What can you say about the sounds of the words used? Listen to the consonants and vowels. Does the poet use assonance or alliteration in any way? Are there soft or hard sounds in the poem? Are there repetitions of sounds, words or phrases? Is the sound quickly over or are there moments when a sound lingers?
- Does the poem have a rhyme scheme? If so, what effect does this have on the tone?

Structure

(also refer to the section on form and structure on pages 8–20)

- How are the words laid out on the page?
- Is the poem arranged in stanzas? Do these indicate changes in tone?

Content

- What does the poem seem to be about? Are there things you seem to be told?
- Does the poet use imagery? How does this contribute to tone?
- Does the poem leave you with questions?
- How does it make you feel?

Once you have identified the tone a poet is using, you are well on your way to developing a clearer understanding of the piece as a whole. Tone can be very obvious or very elusive. Sometimes it will take you several readings to be clear about what you have heard. Hearing the poem read aloud by different people and reading the poem aloud yourself will help you to recognise how tone works in a poem.

Independent research

If you would like to hear a wide range of modern and contemporary poets reading their work aloud, go to www.poetryarchive.org

Activity 38

If possible, listen to the four poems in Activities 39 and 40 being read by their poets at www.poetryarchive.org. Refer to the word bank of tones in the box below and to the 'Looking and listening for tone' box on page 39 to help you describe the tone of each poem. (These tone words are only suggestions to help you. You can add other ideas of your own.)

desperate	bored	grieving	careworn	casual
sinister	sarcastic	triumphant	mysterious	confident
enigmatic	distracted	uncertain	resigned	puzzled
hopeful	proud	angry	smug	argumentative
passionate	defiant	nostalgic	satirical	bleak
happy	ironic	indifferent	optimistic	edgy
sad	conspiratorial			

Activity 39

- 1 Read the following poem by Owen Sheers, and if possible, listen to him reading it on www.poetryarchive.org.
- 2 What do you notice about the different tones he uses to convey his father's feelings first when visiting the fort with his son and then on returning years later to scatter someone's ashes?
- 3 How would you describe these tones?

The Hill Fort (Y Gaer)

On a clear day he'd bring him here,
his young son, charging the hill
as wild as the long-maned ponies

who'd watch a moment
before dropping their heads to graze again.
When he finally got him still

he'd crouch so their eyes were level,
one hand at the small of his back
the other tracing the horizon,

pointing out all the places lived in
by the fathers and sons before them:
Tretower, Raglan, Bredwardine ...

And what he meant by this but never said, was
'Look, Look over this land and see how long
the line is before you – how in these generations

we're no more than scattered grains;
that from here in this view, 1, 19 or 90 years
are much the same;

that it isn't the number of steps
that will matter,
but the depth of their impression.'

And that's why he's come back again,
to tip these ashes onto the tongue of the wind
and watch them spindrift into the night.

Not just to make the circle complete,
to heal or mend,
but because he knows these walls,

sunk however low,
still hold him in as well as out:
protect as much as they defend.

Owen Sheers

Activity 40

- 1 Now read the following three contrasting poems, again listening to the poets reading them on www.poetryarchive.org, if possible.

Haunts

Don't be afraid, old son, it's only me,
 though not as I've appeared before,
 on the battlements of your signature,
 or margin of a book you can't throw out,
 5 or darkened shop front where your face
 first shocks itself into a mask of mine,
 but here, alive, one Christmas long ago
 when you were three, upstairs, asleep,
 and haunting *me* because I conjured you
 10 the way that child you were would cry out
 waking in the dark, and when you spoke
 in no child's voice but out of radio silence,
 the hall clock ticking like a radar blip,
 a bottle breaking faintly streets away,
 15 you said, as I say now, *Don't be afraid.*

Michael Donaghy

George Square

My seventy seven year old father
 Put his reading glasses on
 To help my mother do the buttons
 On the back of her dress.
 5 'What a pair the two of us are!'
 my mother said, 'Me with my sore wrist,
 you with your bad eyes, your soft thumbs!'
 And off they went, my two parents
 To march against the war in Iraq,
 10 Him with his plastic hips, her with her arthritis
 To congregate at George Square where the banners
 Waved at each other like old friends, flapping,
 Where'd they'd met for so many marches over their years,
 For peace on earth, for pity's sake, for peace, for peace.

Jackie Kay



Jean 'Binta' Breeze

earth cries

she doesn't cry for water
 she runs rivers deep
 she doesn't cry for food
 she has suckled trees
 5 she doesn't cry for clothing
 she weaves all that she wears
 she doesn't cry for shelter
 she grows thatch everywhere
 she doesn't cry for children
 10 she's got more than she can bear
 she doesn't cry for heaven
 she knows it's always there
 you don't know why she's crying
 when she's got everything
 15 how could you know she's crying
 for just one humane being

Jean 'Binta' Breeze

- 2 'Haunts' also features a father (perhaps two fathers).
- Write a sentence to describe the tone of the poem.
 - Write a short paragraph, comparing the tone of 'Haunts' with that of 'The Hill Fort (Y Gaer)'.
- 3 In 'George Square' Jackie Kay focuses on both a father and a mother.
- Write a sentence to describe the tone.
 - Write a short paragraph, explaining how you think the poem's narrator feels about her parents and the march they are going to participate in. Comment on how the tone helps you to arrive at your views.

- 4 'Earth Cries' is very different in subject matter and tone from the other three poems. Write a short paragraph to describe it. Make sure you explore the effectiveness of the poet's use of patterns and repetition in the poem as a whole.

If a poem includes speech, or a number of different voices, this can help with identification of tone. For example, Philip Larkin's 'Mr Bleaney' contains contrasting tones, which contribute to the overriding mood of the poem.

Activity 41

- 1 Read Philip Larkin's poem, upper right, and, if possible, listen to him reading it at www.poetryarchive.org.
- 2 Now read this possible response to the different tones (underlined), bottom right, that might be detected in the poem. Do you agree with these points of view or do you have a different interpretation?
- 3 Now look again at the words in the poem. On a copy and using different colours, highlight the parts that indicate contrasting tones.
 - a Why do you think Larkin has included the landlady's words?
 - b How do you think they contrast with the rest of the poem?
- 4 How else does Larkin appear to use language to show what the narrator thinks of the landlady and of his new situation?
- 5 What do you think the mood of the poem is? How does the language contribute to this?
- 6 Look at the sample response again. What essential elements are missing? Write your own commentary about the tone and mood of the poem, ensuring that you refer to evidence to support your ideas.
- 7 Share your commentary and discuss your ideas with a partner or the rest of your group.

Mr Bleaney

'This was Mr Bleaney's room. He stayed
The whole time he was at the Bodies, till
They moved him.' Flowered curtains, thin and frayed,
Fall to within five inches of the sill,

Whose window shows a strip of building land.
Tussocky, littered. 'Mr Bleaney took
My bit of garden properly in hand.'
Bed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb, no hook

Behind the door, no room for books or bags –
'I'll take it.' So it happens that I lie
Where Mr Bleaney lay, and stub my fags
On the same saucer-souvenir, and try

Stuffing my ears with cotton-wool, to drown
The jabbering set he egged her on to buy.
I know his habits – what time he came down,
His preference for sauce to gravy, why

He kept on plugging at the four aways –
Likewise their yearly frame: the Frinton folk
Who put him up for summer holidays,
And Christmas at his sister's house in Stoke.

But if he stood and watched the frigid wind
Tousling the clouds, lay on the fusty bed
Telling himself that this was home, and grinned,
And shivered, without shaking off the dread

That how we live measures our own nature,
And at his age having no more to show
Than one hired box should make him pretty sure
He warranted no better, I don't know.

Philip Larkin

You can hear the optimistic landlady, who is keen to rent out Mr Bleaney's old room and tell her visitor about how well he fitted into her establishment. However, the cynical narrator first casts his eye around his new lodgings, conveying his irritation for the ingratiating landlady. Then, there is a change in tone as he finds himself almost resigned to a solitary, grim life and questions if Mr Bleaney felt this way too.

Activity 42

For one final look at tone and mood in poetry, it is helpful to turn to the work of two other poets who both demonstrate real mastery of these elements: Thomas Hardy and Carol Ann Duffy.

- 1 Read the poems once and then reread them, preferably aloud to someone else.

Neutral Tones

We stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
– They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

5 Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles solved years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro –
On which lost the more by our love.

10 The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing
Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
Like an ominous bird a-wing ...

15 Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

Thomas Hardy

Mean Time

The clocks slid back an hour
and stole light from my life
as I walked through the wrong part of town,
mourning our love.

5 And, of course, unmendable rain
fell to the bleak streets
where I felt my heart gnaw
at all our mistakes.

10 If the darkening sky could lift
more than one hour from this day
there are words I would never have said
nor have heard you say.

15 But we will be dead, as we know,
beyond all light.

These are the shortened days
and the endless nights.

Carol Ann Duffy

- 2 Jot down your initial impressions of the tone and mood of each poem. How would you describe each poem?
- 3 Now imagine you have a card of paint colours in front of you and an mp3 player.
 - a Which broad colour group might you pick for each poem? Why?
 - b What broad type of music might you pick to reflect the mood of each poem? Why?
- 4 What do the poems have in common in terms of tone and mood? Write notes in answer to each of the questions below. You could also refer to the 'Looking and listening for tone' box on page 39 for further ideas.
 - a How do Hardy and Duffy use the settings in their poems (the pond in a winter landscape and the wet streets on the wrong side of town) to contribute to tone and mood?
 - b Both poems are written in stanzas. How do these structures, the rhythms and other patterns within each poem create a pervading atmosphere or mood? What impact do the poets' word choices have on us?
- 5 Now look again at your initial impressions. Listen to the poems again inside your head. Can you be more precise about the distinctive tones of each poem? What do the tones created by the poets contribute to the overall moods in each poem?
 - a What specific shade would you choose within the broad colour group? Are there subtle differences in tone or nuances you hadn't noticed before? Is, for example, one poem vermillion and the other scarlet? Is one azure and the other turquoise?
 - b What specific piece of music would you choose for each? How have you arrived at these choices?
- 6 What do the tones created by the poets contribute to the overall moods in each poem? Write a comparison of the tone and mood of the two poems. Remember to use evidence from the poems to support each of your points and follow this with further analysis or exploration.

Preparing for the exam

For your poems, think about how the following features help to create a particular tone:

- voice
- rhythm
- diction
- sound
- structure
- content.

How does the tone created contribute to the overall mood of the poem?

In conclusion

Throughout the 'Exploring poetry' section you have explored the different choices poets make when they write poetry and the effects these choices can have both on the poems they create and on the readers, performers or listeners who engage with them.

Return to the Poetry experiences grid you completed in Activity 3. Reflect on your progress with a partner or your teacher. Which aspects do you feel more confident about now? Which do you feel are your current areas of strength? Which areas do you think you need further work on?

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curated for the Curriculum**

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This is a genuine colour blindness test plate.

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In memory of

the late Meena Alexander

a Word Masala Award-winner

&

a beacon of the best of the diaspora poetry

Meena Alexander

*(Reprinted from the New Yorker in the aftermath of 9/11 and the Word Masala Award
Winners 2015 anthology)*

Kabir Sings in a City of Burning Towers

What a shame
they scared you so
you plucked your sari off,
crushed it into a ball

then spread it
on the toilet floor.
Sparks from the towers
fled through the weave of silk.

With your black hair
and sun dark skin
you're just a child of earth.
Kabir the weaver sings:

*O men and dogs
in times of grief
our rolling earth
grows small.*



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Foreword

ABOUT THIS FIRST ANTHOLOGY OF THE 'UNSEEN' POEMS

The Word Masala foundation programme has cultivated expertise regarding diasporic poetry. It puts the project in a better place to advise on selecting texts for any course related to the South-Asian diaspora. We are available to guide and help in this area.

This unique first volume of poems brings together the sentiments of immigrant poets from the British, American, German, and Canadian Asian diaspora. This selection will introduce new facets of experiences 'unseen' by the students of diasporic literature. Unless you are exposed to a vast output of diasporic poetry as we are in a focused manner, you will not find such a wealth of diversity we offer anywhere.

This is not the exhaustive selection: it cannot be. It justifies itself with themes and purpose covering migration, cultural invisibility, cultural duality, alienation, exile, and displacement. There are many poets we could have included to puzzle you with a choice! The poems have dictated a choice. They will enrich the curricular choice, bringing to notice the ignored poets and their work.

The selection also works around the vague definition of diaspora poetry. What is diaspora poetry? Let us know your definition. Does it mean all poems by the poets of colour? Do only the themes and issues make the diaspora poetry? In which case, why do not we include poets of other colour? What is the best way to introduce diversity poets in the curricula? Is it by following the diasporic contents or by their best writing? At Word Masala we are very keen to understand these views. Write to us. I remain encouraged by Katy Lewis and her team at Pearson Edexcel for initiating the debate on the matter. I hope the other examination bodies, teachers and universities will find something here for their active programme.

Please note the learning points or critical comments included - invited from the poets to create a point of view from their perspective - are not prescriptive. Work out your own viewpoints.

Quoting some examples randomly, if [Debjani Chatterjee's](#) child raises questions about how we deal with integration, [Sarah Wardle's](#) Amina demands an understanding of the migrants. If [Mr Patel](#) of my poem displays the resilient cultural trait, [Reshma Ruia's](#) Mrs Basu creates a narrative that raises a question about the aspects of deportations. If [Rishi Dastidar](#) experiments a title of the poem flowing into his poem, [Ravi Shankar's](#) sonnets precisely delve into homonymic rhyming. If [Sujata Bhatt](#) talks about one learning the language but denied owning it, [Cyril Dabydeen](#) makes us aware of the barbed language. The variety of themes and forms offered here should allow any teacher and student to find the richness they would have otherwise missed.

The poems here are not representative of each poet's body of work. To judge a poet by one poem is to judge a nation by one individual! The aim serves the purpose of enriching curricula by addressing gaps and alternatives. Please inform the Word Masala Foundation of any pick you use. It will help us learn for the future. Your feedback is also valuable to us, which you can send at editor@skylarkpublications.co.uk,

Finally, I like to add that curriculum is a tight space and as I learnt from selecting these poems, it must be always an agonising choice to make for the selectors. When we readily talk about a monocultural education, I also like to believe that it is not coming from any prejudices, but comes from instincts, familiarities and a missing knowledge about the diaspora poetry. Let us correct it together.

ABOUT THE COVER

This cover is not a gimmick; it is serious about the colour-blindness. If one young person is diagnosed for the colour-blindness through these Ishihara test plates specially created for this anthology and gets help,

it would have served the purpose through symbolism that is also at play here. If you cannot read the title, visit your optician.

Colour-blindness can hold us back, an eye condition or otherwise. It manifests itself as a metaphor for the 'unseen' material or cultural invisibility.

THE SYRIAN AND IRISH EXPERIENCES

Finally, yes, I have deliberately included two non-Asian poets: [Sarah Wardle](#) for her excellent poem examining the relationship of a migrant and English language, and [Steven O'Brien](#)'s poem to understand the oblique aspects of the Irish identity and the feeling of displacement or exile. I hope this collection takes you outside the mental fences we create that the education needs to dismantle.

[Yogesh Patel MBE](#)

If you have any funding available, please do consider paying fees for the work you use from this anthology.

Please contact the poets or their publishers directly.

*

We also welcome a donation to the non-profit Word Masala Project through

<https://www.skylarkpublications.co.uk/easyfunding.html>

Debjani Chatterjee

An Asian Child Enters a British Classroom

Before she stepped into the classroom:
she removed coat, mittens and *chunni*;
mentally undid her shoes for entry
to a temple of secular mystery.

She also shed her:
language, name, identity;
donned the mask of neat conformity,
prepared for lessons in cultural anonymity.

Note: A *chunni* is a long scarf worn with some South Asian clothes.

The poem is published in *Do You Hear the Storm Sing?* by Debjani Chatterjee (Core Publications, London, 2014).

Learning objectives

- Students should be encouraged to appreciate the part played by patterning in illuminating the poem's meaning. They will identify and understand the focus on words relevant to clothing, removal, and school.
- Students should be encouraged to learn layers of meanings, including the culture conflict experienced by an Asian child who lives in two separate cultures - in her home and in school.
- Students should be encouraged to learn questions such as should British education be multicultural.
- Students should be encouraged to understand how and why anonymity is established by the use of non-specific pronouns and generalisations, e.g. child, she, her.
- Students should be encouraged to learn about structure by

studying the two quatrains, their similarities, differences, and inter-dependence.

- Through a metaphor such as ‘temple’, students should be encouraged to learn about imagery in poetry.
- Students should be encouraged to use the poem to learn about the poem’s rhyming scheme, as well as its use of feminine rhyme and multisyllabic rhyme.

Editorial comment:

This is one of the all-time favourite poems that never tires me out! This line left me wide-jawed, ‘prepared for lessons in cultural anonymity.’ For your studies, what arguments and animated discussions can you resort to for this revealing aspect?

Know the poet



Debjani Chatterjee MBE, FRSL, and RLF Fellow, has been called ‘Britain’s best-known Asian poet’ (Elisabetta Marino). Delhi-born and Sheffield-based, she is also an award-winning writer, translator and creative arts psychotherapist. Her 8 poetry collections include *Namaskar: New & Selected Poems*, *Words Spit & Splinter*, and – for children – *Animal Antics*.

The contact details for permissions and engagement

Contact the poet at debjanichatterjee@outlook.com for readings, recordings, interviews, workshops, commissions, and other opportunities.

Further reading: Debjani Chatterjee

Sacred Dip

Raja Rammohan Roy
carried Ganges water
when he came to England.
The natives were bemused.

Dadu came to London,
knowing all rivers are
the Ganges, if we choose,
or equally the Thames.

At sunrise, he removed
his shoes and English hat;
Gayatri mantra on
his lips, he waded in.

Saluting a mist-veiled
Turner sun, his cupped hands
poured heart-felt Thames water
beneath Westminster Bridge.

A passing bobby spied
the strange shenanigans
and rushed to halt the daft
Lascar's mad 'suicide'!

Notes: Raja Rammohan Roy (1772–1833), is considered 'Father of the Indian Renaissance'. He visited England in 1829 as the Mughal emperor's representative, and died in Bristol.

Yogesh Patel

A Leap of Faith

Abandoned by the birthplace
Idi-Amin Adelie penguins
Putting the boot in
The Emperor penguin chick
Struggles, stops, wonders
Should I? Shouldn't I?
At the borders
At the edge of a cliff
At the frightening first plunge
Into heartless ocean
A new country!
The warmth of father's pouch is
The motherland lost
What can you do when barbarians ride in?
You summon a leap of faith
To convince you
No one owns your home but you
It is where you find it!
Jump, jump, you stupid
Someone always pushes you
It is a jump from the old home
There's a new beginning in every jump
Orcas always ready to pounce
Every Mara Crossing is a leap of faith

* Barbarians refer to C P Cavafy's poem 'Waiting for the Barbarians'.
(Inspired by Snow Chick - A Penguin's Tale, BBC
One documentary <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06t3sk9>)

**Taken from *Swimming with Whales* published by Skylark Publications UK
in 2017. Available from www.skylarkpublications.co.uk/bookshop.html**

Learning objectives

- This is a free verse
 - Students should learn how images and words; barbarians, the Mara Crossing, Orca and Idi Amin enrich the narrative with the added layers of meanings and contexts.
 - Students should be encouraged to find implied meanings, as in the line 'What can you do when barbarians ride in?'
 - Explore the BBC context to find out how Adelie penguins behave to the Emperor, and how it relates to the Ugandan expulsion of Asians.
 - What the Mara Crossing teaches us? How has the poet integrated the brutality of the migration in the poem?
 - Explore the dangers and fears of migration. Discuss how the narrative probes the meaning of home.
-

Editorial comment:

A Leap of Faith' presents a powerful visual analogy: the Asian Ugandan expelled by Idi Amin, stands at a new country's border like a penguin chick at a cliff edge, deliberating whether to jump. In spite of the grimness of a 'heartless' ocean, helplessness against 'barbarians', and a 'motherland lost', the poet asserts that there is no choice but to take the plunge, the exiled should see their Mara Crossing as a 'leap of faith' and courage, in the hope of 'a new beginning'. The poem invites the reader to reflect on the true nature of 'home': 'no one owns your home but you', and home 'is where you find it'.

Know the poet



Yogesh Patel received MBE for literature in the Queen's New Year Honours list 2020. He edits *Skylark* and runs *Skylark Publications UK* and a non-profit *Word Masala* project. He has also received the *Freedom of the City of London*. His writing has appeared in *PN Review*, *The London Magazine*, and on BBC TV, and the others. Author websites: patelyogesh.co.uk and skylarkpublications.co.uk

Contact the poet at editor@skylarkpublications.co.uk

Further reading: Yogesh Patel

Typical Mr Patel's Typical Promotion

Mr Patel, you're blah blah blah.

BUTT.

(May I ask you to spell it correctly? I'm only an Indian after all!)

Can you fill this form for equal opportunity?

It's to allow us to monitor you know what.

Thank you. We'll let you know in due course.

(Never)

Mr Patel,

Sorry,

You were one of the two selected;

BUTT.

(Hell, you smell of masala)

Try again next year. (And the year after,
and after, and after.)

Thank you for your interest in our company.

The calf butted the oak:

Mr Patel bought the company
and promoted himself.

(Taken from *Bottled Ganges* published by Skylark Publications)

Learning objectives

- This poem uses colloquial and conversational language and is a showcase of the corporate business culture. Discuss the phrase 'equal opportunity'. Talk about brusqueness as a culture.
- Which cultural perception of the Patels does it raise here?
- What contribution the references to 'The calf butted the oak:' and Solzhenitsyn is making to the poem's narrative?
- Explore humour in poetry through Wendy Cope's work.

Steven O'Brien

Lough Swilly

I squinted
As the light squandered itself
On three plummets,
Like votive spears,
Cast into the scowling water.

After this nothing bright
Just a vault of lour-
Torn mists on the mountains
And three widow crows
Quarrelling over a rack of fish bones.

Weed fanned the rocks,
A treachery of green tresses
Beckoning me out under trapped echoes.

The gravel tramped back in my footprints
Like a retreating army.
On the far shore a Calvary of wind turbines
Stirred the dawn.

I wondered what it must be like under those gibbet gyes-
Rain smudging the fields,
A creak of oil famished steel.

I have heard that all times are present.
My ancestors are thriving as I speak,
And dying.
Their now generates against my now,
Divided by no more than the swoop of blades,
Or tides we may not cross.

Whatever,
I know it should have been exactly this way
When the O'Neill sailed out from Rathmullan-

The dawn as dour as a block of whetstone,
Black birds and carrion,
Crooked crosses like milling stars,
Shorn wind moaning down to the waves.

(From Scrying Stones, Greenwich Exchange. Buy the book from
https://greenex.co.uk/ge_record_detail.asp?ID=123)

Learning objectives

- According to the poet, the separation and experience of exile lie in the background of this poem, rather than being the 'main event.' How has poet achieved it?
- Place is important in this poem. In 1607 Hugh O'Neill, the Earl of Tyrone sailed into exile from Lough Swilly, never to return. It was the end of the old Gaelic aristocracy of Ireland. After this the English consolidated their power over the whole country. How does history intrude into the poet's experience of place in the poem?
- This poem is included because it is an example of an exilic poem where the poems don't 'tell' the subject. This poem evokes the essence of loss and exile. Which details demonstrate this?
- As in many modern poems, this poem also thrives as an oblique reference to displacement. The poet hints at this through 'I have heard that all times are present.'
- The idea of a contested and mythically charged landscape is present in the use of words such as 'spears' and 'blades.'
- Work out how poet plays with notions of time and the interaction of the past and the present; particularly in expressions such as 'tides we may not cross.'
- Images of persecution and violence are threaded through the poem in lines such as 'I wondered what it must be like under

those gibbet gyres.' Discuss how it helps the feeling of alienation.

- What is the overall tone of the poem?
 - The poem is expressed in free verse. How do you think the poet made choices regarding line breaks and stanza shape?
-

Editorial comment:

Editorially, I have made a conscious decision to include Steven's poem because as said in my editorial a feeling of alienation and displacement should not be identified as unique only to the diaspora. A feeling of divided Ireland is anchored in the Irish identity and culture. How would you compare this alienation of displacement also felt by the other groups?

Know the poet



Steven O'Brien is an Irish writer with specialisms in mythography, poetry and prose. He is Editor of The London Magazine and course leader for the MA in Creative Writing at the University of Portsmouth. He sings in the traditional Sean Nós style.

For further rights, readings, workshop, interviews, and talks please contact steven.obrien@port.ac.uk

Rishi Dastidar

The Problem of becoming English

Wasn't as I was supposing,
Of whether the ethnicity
Would accept my race;
But rather one of posing
In a top hat for publicity.

The poem can be found in Ticker-tape, published by Nine Arches Press (2017):
More details: <https://ninearchespress.com/publications/poetry-collections/ticker-tape.html>

Further reading from the above collection of poems

Risk Patterns

1.

I'm hearing that foxes
are feeling put out
the chickens are gathering
in chicken-only meetings,
discussing how fox violence
makes them feel.

13.

Refuge is not just a place.
It's a state of mind.
A state of hope.

14.

I've already won the lottery.
I have a British passport.

Learning objectives

- Discuss how the title continues into the main body of the poem. How successful is it?
- Explore how the poet shifts the burden of meaning to the other words as in 'whether the ethnicity/Would accept my race;' and the use of the word 'publicity'.
- How does the poem create a sense of rhythm while being free verse?
- Explore how the perception of being British can be different to how it might be experienced in reality.
- Explore how the reality of being British is different for people in a minority community.
- In the further reading option, discuss what the parable about chickens and the fox implies.
- Apart from what the poet has written what facets to 'refuge' can you add?

Editorial comment:

You would have explored how Daljit Nagra plays with the language. Rishi Dastidar does this on his term. His collection Ticker-tape often deconstructs the language and forms and reconstructs them making the experience fresh. I implore you to explore it.

Know the poet



A poem from **Rishi Dastidar**'s Ticker-tape was included in The Forward Book of Poetry 2018. His second collection, Saffron Jack, is published by Nine Arches Press. He is also editor of The Craft: A Guide to Making Poetry Happen in the 21st Century (Nine Arches Press).

Contact poet and Nine Arches Press at mail@ninearchespress.com;; betarish@gmail.com

Sarah Wardle

Amina's Truth

mother sisters brother on fire burn
in my eye now, no english, i learn

third language, trying forget, make friend,
me syrian, here britain women

lots freedom but I wanting return
where husband war, mother die, i born,

she flames, sisters brother shout, bombs kill
most, town skeleton, father fights, will

not live say text, so i come uk
to questions, men, papers, is ok?

i wanting ask what mean? me need show?
see they things i saw? but i not know

words, how explain, so nodding, smiling
time all, my son in arms, and crying

(Taken from Spiritlands, Bloodaxe, 2018, available from
<https://www.bloodaxebooks.com/ecs/category/sarah-wardle>)

Learning objectives

- To understand the difference between standard and non-standard English and identify uses of the latter in the poem;
- The poet has deliberately fractured the language in terms of grammar, syntax and punctuation to show both subject's fractured experience as she recounts the horrors she has seen and the further challenge of using a new tongue to describe them.

- To understand phonetic spelling and why the poet uses it.
- To analyse the relationship described in the poem. After all she has been through, all she has seen and her journey to the UK, the woman asylum seeker has to go through mundane paperwork and questions, when she needs loving care for her and her son.
- To enable the students to appreciate the poem. The point of view is the woman's pained voice, not a news report, or Government statistic.
- To enable students to understand the thought and imagination contained in the poem: The horrors the subject has seen and losses she has had are imagined and yet she needs to carry on as a mother.
- To appreciate the rhyme & rhythm and style of the poem.
- The poem is a sonnet and has rhythm and end rhyme.
- To train the emotions, feelings and imagination of the students. I hope this poem builds empathy for the mother and the plight of all asylum seekers.

The editorial comment:

This poem is not only a celebration of the versatile English language presenting various possibilities, but how the language still can connect us when it is dysfunctional!

Know the poet



Sarah Wardle was born in London in 1969. She won the 1999 Geoffrey Dearmer Prize, *Poetry Review's* New Poet of the Year award, and her first collection was shortlisted for the Forward Best First Collection Prize.

She has published five collections with Bloodaxe Books: *Fields Away* (2003), *Score!* (2005), *A Knowable World* (2009), *Beyond* (2014) and *Spiritlands* (2018).

Contact Suzanne Fairless-Aitken at rights@bloodaxebooks.com for the rights and to contact the poet.

Usha Kishore

Men in Turbans

*Few people are aware 1.5 million Indians fought
alongside the British – that there were men in turbans
in the same trenches as the Tommies...*

Shrabani Basu

Forgotten
by the world,
we linger in no-man's land.
Forsaken by history,
trampled by time,
renounced by a homeland
that does not honour
its imperial troops.

Our dreams lie scattered
across the Western Front;
our blood spilt in vain,
our memories fragmented
by empire, colony and nation.
Our lives, a redundant sacrifice
for king and another country.

Wear your poppies with pride,
but tell us who we are:
Brown *sepoy*s of the Raj
or comrades, who fought
arm in arm, losing eye and
limb, when cannons roared
like thunder and bullets
hurtled like rain?

From Immigrant, Eyewear Publishing London, 2018. Buy from
<https://store.eyewearpublishing.com/products/immigrant>

Learning objectives

- Turban – cloth headwear; Sepoy – Indian soldier, serving under the British.
 - Relationship – Between the British and Indian soldiers during World War I
 - World War I poem – about the Indian soldiers fighting for the British Empire.
 - The poet writes from the perspective of the Indian soldiers, during WWI.
 - The stanzaic poem in free verse; use of repetition, rhetorical question and imagery.
 - To understand the Indian sacrifices made during WWI.
-

The editorial comment:

Joanna Lumley champions Ghurkha, their contributions and their abandonment by the British Raj! Not only Sikhs but there were others too, who contributed to the British victory over Germany in the WW1. This poem registers that forgotten and often ignored histories, raising questions about racism and political responsibilities. What are your views?

Know the poet



Usha Kishore is an Indian born British poet, who is the author of three poetry collections. Her poetry has been published and anthologised internationally. Usha's poetry is featured in the British Primary and Indian Middle School and Undergraduate syllabi. Her third poetry collection, *Immigrant*, was published by Eyewear Publishing (2018).

Contact Usha Kishore at vajra@manx.net. For Eyewear Publishing contact poet-publisher Todd Swift at toddswift@clara.co.uk.

Jessica Mookherjee

Tigress

Eyes set in stone-flesh
dimmed with Amitryptaline.
Her hands are calloused from forty-five years
of washing-up.

Shuffles down stairs to write
a list of the day's repairs.
From the kitchen she watches her husband
flicking his paper.

He sits in their conservatory,
glass, cracked as she is.
Anticipates his need for tea, she serves him,
over and over again.

Seething, behind the drugs,
under her rock-salt mask, is a tigress
that was harnessed
and lanced.

Caged deep inside her chest,
she sedates it every morning and every night
before bed. Around tea time,
her eyes flick open
as her heart-beat quickens.
Faded carpets come into focus. She listens
for the voices of her children
in a deserted garden.

She is fierce for an hour,
stalking nilgai and gaur,
scent marking the garden, sniffing out
water buffalo.

Behind her husbands' back,

she plans an attack.
Until it starts to get dark. Until its time
to take her pills.

(cont.)

From 'Tigress' published by Nine Arches Press, More details:

<https://ninearchespress.com/publications/poetry-collections/ticker-tape.html>

Learning objectives

- Understand how a poem is tackling colonialism and subjugation;
 - Understand why the poet uses gender, the word Tigress as opposed to Tiger;
 - Analyse how the poet tackles 'wildness' within the form of the poem.
 - Learn how a poem might speak about illness.
 - Understand the interrelationships and points of view in the poem.
 - Appreciate the use of rhyme, rhythm and style of the poem.
 - Highlight how poet uses the real and the imaginary in this poem.
-

Editorial comment:

This poem may help to challenge the perceptions of cultural stereotypes we cast in Asians. It also may help to see the marital tensions, expectations as woman's role, and allow to probe into women's inner conflicts. Talk about what is happening in: *Behind her husbands' back, /she plans an attack. /Until it starts to get dark. Until its time /to take her pills.*

Know the poet



Jessica Mookherjee is of Bengali origin and grew up in Wales and now lives in Kent. She has been widely published. Highly commended for best single poem in the Forward Prize 2017, first collection is 'Flood' (2018, Cultured Llama) and her second Tigress is published by Nine Arches Press.

Email contacts: mail@ninearchespress.com & Jessica751@me.com

Reshma Ruia

Mrs Basu Leaves Town

Mrs Basu crouches in her seat at the airport gate,
chewing rat-like at the ends of her sari. Bullet voices
ricochet around. She grins.
Confused like a fool. Cameras flash.
A policewoman scowls. Moves closer.
Bare white legs pimpled with cold.
Throw us a crumb of a smile, Mrs Basu thinks.
Her bladder aches. Eyes burn from lack of sleep.
Her village - she never wanted to leave it behind.
A nephew's daft idea to make quick money.
Life-savings gone, in feeding the middleman.
Curled like a foetus sleeping behind the kitchen door.
Minding a stranger's child when she could be home
in the courtyard, oiling her daughter's hair.

Illegal alien to be deported - Section 3(c)
the policewoman snarls.
'I have a name!' Mrs Basu shouts. 'I am Kamala Basu,
tenth class pass.'
Her mouth twists in anger.
She pats her heart. Whispers; 'forget the lost years.
Just be glad.'
Hustled to the back of the waiting plane where
passengers fidget, glower and swear.
Strapped in her seat, Mrs Basu lets out a sigh.
She is going home.

Mrs Basu Leaves Town is from 'A Dinner Party in the Home Counties'
published by Skylark Publications UK. Available from
www.skylarkpublications.co.uk/bookshop.html

Learning objectives

- The poem examines the relationship between a figure of authority (police officer) and a powerless woman about to be deported.
 - The poet uses a variety of techniques ranging from an omniscient narrator observing Mrs Basu waiting in the airport to an internal stream of consciousness as Mrs Basu tries to placate herself for ‘all the lost years.’
 - The poem’s themes encompass displacement, nostalgia and societal inequality.
 - Mrs Basu may be a figure of helplessness but there is also a tone of defiance and new beginnings as she tells herself that she is ‘going home.’
 - The poem is topical and universally relevant with its overarching narrative of displacement and fear of the ‘other.’
-

The editorial comment:

In this poem, the poet captures typical Asian behaviour which you would not perceive normally, but in an atypical way, it challenges the treatment ‘aliens’ (define) receive at the hands of the authority that has prejudged them as aliens but not as humans! Is home where one becomes human? What is the concept of home? Where is it? Discuss.

Know the poet



Reshma Ruia is an award winning novelist, short story writer and poet. Her poetry collection, ‘A Dinner Party in the Home Counties,’ won the 2019 Word Masala Award. Her work has appeared in international anthologies and magazines and commissioned for BBC Radio 4. Reshma’s writing explores the preoccupations of those who possess a multiple sense of belonging.

Contact through poet’s website: www.reshmaruia.com

Kavita A. Jindal

Act of Faith

Don't pry don't ask to whom I pray
 if it changes from day to day,
 if the entity is male or female
if I fast and for whom
don't ask, don't ask.

I know there are forms to fill; spaces where I must
 write neatly and in caps,
 the beliefs I've claimed
dog tags strung tight
around my neck

agnostic, atheist, multi-faith, irreligious, liberal,
 gregarious, star-gazer
 sun-worshipper
and to top it all
open-minded

yet searching for a word to describe my true religion,
 which began one solemn day
 when I thought
impermanence could be
invited at will

I wished to be a ribbon of mist trailing in the cold blast of
 the stratosphere but found
 I'd stayed within
reach of earth; why, I was
still grounded

Drawing breath is an act of faith, one I've embraced
 running, jumping, keeping
 time, sucking in air, choosing to,
each new day
is religion
Monday to Sunday, just living is an act of faith.

From *Patina*: Published by **the wind in the trees**. Buy at <http://www.thewindinthetrees.com/books/patina>

Learning objectives

- To introduce the students to experimentation in style and form and to encourage their creativity in writing new forms that suit their speaking styles.
 - To understand that daily slang or abbreviation can be used in poetry that is conversational, such as the use of 'caps' for 'capitals' (line 8).
 - To tune into the rhythm of a poem: in this poem, the first line of each verse is as long as breath and that sets the tone for how it is read, especially read aloud.
 - To demonstrate how a story can be told within a poem.
 - To understand that some poems work on the page and also as a performance piece, if crafted carefully.
 - To show how feelings and emotions can be described in original ways; such as: 'I wished to be a ribbon of mist' (line 21).
-

The editorial comment:

It is difficult to write about religion without offending anyone. How is this poem trying to dismantle the labels we attach to religious views? When we talk about migrants, we often attach a religious identity to them. Poet breaks away from this idea. How?

Know the poet



Kavita A Jindal's poems and stories have appeared in anthologies and literary journals worldwide and been broadcast on BBC Radio. She is the author of the novel *Manual For A Decent Life* which won the Brighthorse Prize. She has published two poetry collections to critical acclaim: *Patina* and *Raincheck Renewed*.

Poet's website: www.kavitajindal.com Contact email: contactkaj9@gmail.com.

Mona Dash

Belonging

Corporate men, pinstripe suits
in deep discussion, in accents
lilting French, baritone German, twangy American.
Among them an Indian, worse, a woman, Indian.
When I speak in tone, walk with the step
eyebrows raise, they lean forward to hear better,
talk louder when addressing me, as if I am deaf
telling me silently:
You shouldn't be here.

A crowded English pub, people
standing in spaces too small for them.
I order the drinks.
The bartender stares when I say
'A glass of red wine and three pints of lager'
looking confused, leaning forward closer
telling me silently:
You shouldn't be here.

Welcoming smiles, women in sarees,
grinding *masalas*, rolling *chapatis*,
television is the world, content
in the four walls, within set boundaries.
My hometown, my roots, so far from my branches.
Ill at ease I sit
listening to my own voice
telling me silently:
You shouldn't be here.

Masalas: spices

Chapatis: Indian bread

From *A Certain Way*, published by Skylark Publications UK. Available
from www.skylarkpublications.co.uk/bookshop.html

Learning objectives

- Discuss how non-standard English words are creating a cultural imprint.
 - Discuss how in modern-day Britain the British Asians, especially women, look placed incongruously. Can you think of other situations: specifically, for Indian women, as part of mainstream Britain?
 - This poem explores belonging as a multi-layered concept. Do we belong to a place because we are born there? Do we belong only to our birthplace? Can people accept us, despite our cultural differences?
 - Belonging is not a simple concept, and one may want to explore one's identity outside the boundaries society draws. One such myth is that Indian women do not work in the international corporate world or socialise in a pub. How is a sari accentuating this? Students will learn to appreciate being global, multi-cultural and cosmopolites.
-

Editorial comment:

A driving force in this poem is the line 'You shouldn't be here.' Displacement is not the only aspect emerging here, thrown in is also *being out-of-place*. There is awkwardness in the prejudice. Instead of jumping to a conclusion, this poem implores us to examine if this narrative illustrates hate, racial abuse, foolishness or ignorance.

Know the poet



Mona Dash is the author of four books, Dawn-drops (poetry), Untamed Heart (a novel), A Certain Way (poetry) and A Roll of the Dice (a memoir). Her short stories have been listed in and won several competitions. She lives in London.

Contact through www.monadash.net

Sujata Bhatt

What Can You Tell Us?

Now that you have learned our language,
what can you tell us?

*Winter is over.
I found my son asleep under a tree.
We danced through the night.
I know you won't believe me
unless you see it for yourself.*

Before you cross the next border,
you must answer the following questions:

Is anyone there to receive you?
Who loves you?
What do your friends say?
Where will you keep your books?

*I have seen horses slide through sunrise –
through moonrise – horses in spring, wild –
they look through your being
and find nothing to hold them back –
Someone waits for me, someone
I have never met before –
Does that make him a stranger?
Yes, we have exchanged letters.
My love is anonymous.
My friends are deaf and mute.
I look into their eyes –
their clear, truthful eyes.
I have lost all my books in the flood.*

If you decide to live among us
you must observe the following rules:

Speak clearly!

Be quiet!

Enjoy life!

Die at the right time!

Now that we have accepted you,
do you have any further wishes?

Long live the King!

I'd really like a glass of water!

God be with us!

If only He were here!

From Poppies in Translation, Carcanet, Buy from

<https://www.carcanet.co.uk/cgi-bin/indexer?product=9781847770202>

Learning objectives:

- Who are the speakers? What is their relationship?
 - Study the diction, emotional tone and syntax.
 - Is the dialogue believable? Is it realistic?
 - What is the tone and style of the dialogue?
 - Ask students to write their own dialogue poems.
-

Editorial Comment

Debjani Chatterjee's poem ends with a child's initiation with 'lessons in cultural anonymity'. Sarah Wardle's Amina communicates with broken language. In Sujata Bhatt we are finding out the aftermath of 'Now that you have learned our language,/what can you tell us?' Here the language serves the purpose of inquisition. Students should discuss what the absence of God means here. Discuss the juxtaposed exit of God and the entry of a migrant in a country. What is the poet's message?

Know the poet



Sujata Bhatt's latest books from Carcanet are *Collected Poems* and *Poppies in Translation*. She has received numerous awards including the Commonwealth Poetry Prize (Asia) and the Cholmondeley Award. In 2014 she was the first recipient of the Mexican International Poetry Prize, Premio Internacional de Poesía Nuevo Siglo de Oro 1914-2014.

The best address for Carcanet for rights is Rachel Bent:
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info@carcanet.co.uk

Cyril Dabydeen

THE MISBEHAVED

This man with half muttered slurs,
lips pursed, a drifter of sorts
from the Maritime Coast--
skin colour only he talks about.

Barbs of the tongue, as I meet him
eye to eye; and his psychologist
& social worker are in awe of him
because of past fears the more

he's determined about race;
his nerves frayed, and he heaves in
& what will he say next about
where he actually came from?

Nothing will deter him, you see--
but what he says from long ago,
as he insists upon, being true
to himself I must really know.

Further Reading

Cyril Dabydeen

THE BORDER

No human being is illegal.

--Elie Weisel

1

It's where we do not want to go,
wire fences only, and making
faces at the border guards with
a handshake, a disturbance
of the spirit really, I claim.

Now in unfamiliar territory
with you, imagining places:
palings, staves, tunnels--
pretending to be who
we are not, you say.

2

New skin, new clothes, looking
over my shoulders, sideways,
taking one last breath, with you,
no one else, I tell you again.

The horizon only, you see--
I contend with, and roadways,
maps of old places in the sun
I remember most of all.

3

Cochineal and palm trees leaning
I look forward to, and again
thinking about it, like paradise
in someone else's backyard,
not a parking lot.

Being everywhere with you,
the equator most of all--
as I grit my teeth, and
there's no air to breathe,
I let you know.

No memory now life-giving,
no other instinct to follow,
but to raise a flag, a signpost:
landmarks I must contend with,
once in a lifetime.

These two poems are specially submitted for this anthology, and are aimed for a future anthology. "The Border" originally appeared in "God's Spider", which is available from Peepal Tree Press at

<https://www.peepaltreepress.com/authors/cyril-dabydeen>

Learning objectives:

- "The Misbehaved" and "The Border" — are written in standard English.
- The two poems deal with the dynamics of INSIDER-OUTSIDER relationships.
- Emphasis should be on marginality, as this is relevant to race, identity and becoming.
- Related to the above the imagination focuses on the individual and the personal, which ultimately becomes universal.
- The two poems are written in free verse with some internal rhymes. Line-breaks (enjambment) give the poems their special cadence and inflection, and appeal as internal drama.

Editorial comment

Is to be emphatic about one's racial identity misbehaviour? Discuss how the poet has lyrically captured man's skin colour as a counterproductive identity. How is the heading playing up this What is the significance of 'The' used in the heading?

Know the poet



Cyril Dabydeen is a former Poet Laureate of Ottawa, Canada. He has appeared in numerous magazines, e.g. Poetry/Chicago, The Critical Quarterly (UK), Canadian Literature, and in the Oxford, Penguin and Heinemann Books of Caribbean Verse. His recent volumes are God's Spider (Peepal Tree Press, UK), and My Undiscovered Country (Mosaic Press, Canada).

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Usha Akella

SCUTTLEBUTT

(Acrostic Poem)

Sailors we are, across the Atlantic we go in vertigo trips,
careening, never cleaned of our baggage and past, the journey is
upbound, it seems most of the time with the
tattle of the waves murmuring our histories, what's the
tell tail in all of this? The direction of the wind? No matter, no
lateral systems really aid us.

Embayed, we belong to two lands and the flag of the water erodes the
bulkhead in our hearts, we begin to belong nowhere.

Unshipped, we are exiled from anything that spells home.

Three sheets to the wind, each of us a paralyzed hulk in the hands of a
timoneer, perhaps, sea sick himself of the voyages he charts.

Scuttlebutt: rumor/gossip/nautical term- a casket of water or fountain around which sailors gather.

Careen: tilting a ship on its side to clean it.

Upbound: A vessel traveling upstream.

Tell Tail/Tell Tale: A light piece of string, yarn, rope or plastic.

Lateral systems: A system of aids to navigation.

Embayed: Where a sailing ship is confined between two capes by a wind blowing on shore.

Bulkhead: An upright wall within the hull of a ship. Particularly a watertight, load-bearing wall.

Unship: To remove from a vessel.

Three sheets to the wind: The three sheets in the mast if loose will result in the ship meandering aimlessly downwind/ A sailor who has drunk strong spirits beyond his capacity.

Timoneer: From the French timonnier, is a name given, on particular occasions, to the steersman of a ship.

An **acrostic poem** is a **poem** where certain letters in each line spell out a word or phrase. Typically, the first letters of each line are used to spell the message, but they can appear anywhere.

Learning objectives

- The language used in the poem is standard English.
- The immigrant poet uses the metaphor of sailing to convey the act of immigration. Crossing the seas as a phrase is explored linguistically and symbolically in the poem.
- Readers should notice the use of diction to convey fluidity, displacement, and shifting identity.
- The poem employs a variety of nautical terms to convey passage and immigration. The poet imaginatively explores these terms and compares them to displacement and identity.
- The form used is acrostic allowing the form to become the medium for the subject. Each line adds to the thematic meaning of the title.
- Why is 'scuttlebutt' the title? How does it relate to the poem's content? How does the poet imaginatively achieve this effect?

Know the poet



Usha Akella earned an MSt in Creative Writing from the University of Cambridge in 2018. She is the founder of *Matwaala*, South Asian Poetry collective and festival (www.matwaala.com) She has read at numerous international poetry festivals.

For further rights, readings, workshop, interviews and talks please contact usha.akella67@gmail.com.

Further reading: Usha Akella

This is just to say
to William Carlos Williams

I have not eaten the plums
nor has my daughter.

The mangoes win, gluttonous yellow,
plump with scathing summers,
childhood's innocence,
moist memories
of dead grandmothers,
bellowing grandfathers,
the sweet homesickness,
a sticky dribble on the chin.

The plums are prudish,
slow to ripen, a bit stiff,
in the back of the fridge,
they are not delicious or sweet
though cold, I admit.

Your plums Carlos,
Where do they come from?

Refer <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/56159/this-is-just-to-say>

Editorial comment

Usha Akella has composed poems in many forms. This includes a staged song drama. Along with Ravi Shankar, students should study in Usha Akella, how diaspora poets frequently write about wider range of subjects in many forms testing the language, as in this poem, still only to be identified in the diasporic context.

Ralph Nazareth

Pure Indian

Pure is as pure does.
As for the rest, there is blending
in ports at the forks of rivers.
Confusion in the synapses.
Enzymes mix as saliva
is exchanged between races.
Sperm and egg conjoin colorblind
in the amniotic dream.

Pure is as death does
as it lies in state beyond division.
Even sworn enemies show up
to lay down a wreath
though some of the blooms may drip
the blood of your clan.

It's with some difficulty
I say these words:
I am Indian
and wish to be seen as one
composed and taken apart
at the meeting and parting of worlds.

Learning objectives

- "Pure Indian" is in standard English. While discussing the poem, it would be fruitful for teachers and students to examine the assumptions underlying notions of "pure" and "standard."
- Explore the relationship in the poem between the speaker's split identities.
- How does the poem convey the idea that "pure" is not merely an abstraction or a concept? Is the speaker of the poem ambivalent about being identified as an Indian? Why or why not?

- Written in free verse, the poem uses short lines and makes declarative statements. Yet a touch of hesitation marks some of the lines. Discuss the way the tone and imagery shape the complex attitudes reflected in the poem.
 - The poem should raise the important question of identity in a multi-cultural society. Does the poem suggest or offer a path to peaceful co-existence in a society that is becoming increasingly diverse?
-

Editorial comment

Instead of telling us a context directly, creating or showing one is where some poems excel. Notice how the poet prepares a canvas for the identity to stand out and make a statement. Discuss how it works here. As a striking feature, this poem creates two contrasting states of pure and diminishing boundaries. The experience in a photographic sense is without noise.

Know the poet



Ralph Nazareth is an Indian poet who has been published, heard, and read in many parts of the world. He has taught for four decades in universities and maximum-security prisons in the U.S. The Managing Editor of Yuganta Press, he currently also heads GraceWorks, Inc., a non-profit based in Stamford, CT.

For further permission contact: ralphnazareth@mac.com

Ravi Shankar

Immediate Family

-homonymic sonnet

1) Though it might not have been readily apparent, I saw my father, ever conscious of dollars & cents, filch toilet paper from a maid's cart. Not a parent-like thing to do, granted, nothing that makes sense given his comportment. I wonder if he could choose differently or if he was just acting in a waking daze, a kleptomaniac stupor. Watching the way he chews his food sometimes, I puzzle what pleasure his days on earth might consist of & how I might be his son when his default mode of looking is to glare. Pried open, what dreams might orbit his heart as the sun harnesses planets to spin? All I see his dark pride. This stranger, my father, a Tamilian of Brahmin caste, remains elusive no matter how many lines I cast.

2) Finding out she was betrothed, my mother bawled in the high branch of a banyan tree, uncertain whether to jump or to hide knowing she was to marry the bald man come to marry her sister but in the shifting weather of Vedic astrological charts, much better suited to hold her hand. She was 19, he 30 & they had yet to meet. That long first afternoon, she preferred to stay holed up until her father called to say the man ate no meat, was kind & came from a good family. God who knows best would want nothing more for her. So down the limb she shimmied, wiping away tears & her ringed nose on the sleeve of her salwar kameez. She was yet to limn the shape of her life to be in America, frying bread not from lentil batter. For that, she was not yet bred.

3) In Hindu myth, Yama, God of death, is no mere idol but incarnation of justice, dharma, who will plumb the deeds of a mortal life. Astride a buffalo, never idle, holding mace and noose, dark as a rotting green plum, he decides each next life in accordance with what's fair. As a teenager, I would sit in temple under an ornate frieze of gods, trying my hardest not to estimate the airfare it took to bring these sculptures to the winter freeze of Virginia from Southern India, my stomach in a knot while old Sanskrit slokas, rich with meanings I missed completely droned on. What's just? Shame? Why me, not you, stuck with smelly barefoot Indians? Then from mist, I saw a shape: myself looking back at me without lesson or reprieve in lucent outlines that have yet to lessen.

From "Immediate Family" published in *The Many Uses of Mint* (Recent Works Press, 2018) and *Durable Transit* (Poetrywala, 2018)

Learning Objectives

- This sonnet explores issues of identity through the deployment of a singular American English idiom that also uses references to specific Indian cultural forms and mythologies. Discuss these linguistic decisions in light of the poem's themes.
- Homophones are words that are pronounced the same but have different meanings or spellings. The poet here uses this form of phonetic alteration to embody the way first generations of immigrants try to assimilate into a new culture, yet end up signifying something different. Them sounding the same as a native speaker compares to homophones.
- This poem by origin is familial and generational, describing the arranged marriage of the speaker's parents, and his own bicultural identity that develops in response to ancient Eastern customs transposed into a modern Western world.

- Students can discuss about one's own family and fitting in.
- The sonnet form has a rich history, and the author's poem is in conversation with those past forms and poems. It breaks new ground by using a rhyme scheme as original as Edmund Spenser's variation in the 16th century and content that is reflective of a multicultural society.
 - Because of the constraint of 14 lines, sonnets often engage in a "volta", or a turn in the middle. Study how the speaker grapples with the sense of his family's strengths and flaws while navigating a world different from theirs.
 - In this unique poem, words rhyme with themselves to use homonymic rhymes. The rhythm is colloquial, conversational and reflective, while the style fits the form and function of a sonnet while using a looser, more syncopated American idiom.
-

Editor's Note

Where possible, please teach and discuss this set of three sonnets as a unit. How Ravi Shankar has tied in three cycles of life and made them the interplay in his mastery of homonymic rhymes themselves creating a message will make a fascinating study in any learning environment.

Know the poet



Ravi Shankar is an international research fellow at the University of Sydney and author/editor of 15 books of poetry/prose/translation, including W.W. Norton's "Language for a New Century" and the Muse India Award winning translation "The Autobiography of a Goddess." His memoir "Correctional" is forthcoming with University of Wisconsin Press.

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Kalpna Singh-Chitnis

Coming Home

Tangled up in a spider web
I hold back my tears,
Standing in rubble,
Still wanting to call it home.

I see eight, bright shiny eyes
Looking straight at me,
Hanging upside down,

And from the distance of a thousand miles,
My little boy shouts-
“Black widow,
Mama, watch out!”

But, I was destined to be bitten.
Not many people will ever know,
I am poisoned now.

This poem is a part of **Bare Soul** (Partridge, India), a poetry collection by Kalpna Singh-Chitnis. It is available on sale from all major online stores worldwide. Amazon link - <https://www.amazon.com/Bare-Soul-Kalpna-Singh-Chitnis/dp/1482850559/>

Learning objectives

- The language of this poem is conversational American English.
- Spellings are American standards.
- This poem is a non-verbal conversation between mother and child taking place in two continents, in two countries.
- This poem is about the loss of someone's home and country. It also reflects the bond a mother and child share, which allows

them to cope up with sadness and fear in each other's absence.

- The poem reveals the vulnerability of the mother resulting in fear of the child, who, on the contrary, possesses motherly instincts and wants to protect his mother. The sentiments are expressed in metaphors like Rubble, Black Widow and Poison.
 - This poem is a free verse.
 - Emotions like fear, vulnerability, and human instincts can be identified in this poem; anyone can relate to them.
-

Know the poet



Kalpna Singh-Chitnis is the author of four poetry collections and the Editor-in-Chief of Life and Legends. Her work has appeared in notable journals like World Literature Today, California Quarterly, Indian Literature, and others. She has received several awards for her literary work and her poetry has been translated into many languages. Website – www.kalpnasinghchitnis.com.

For further permissions, the poet can be reached at - siletriberbend@gmail.com

Editorial comment

The simplicity of this poem is quite deceiving. Home as a concept has so many layers of meaning that one ends up extending its territory. This poem makes a great case for study of one ending up stung by memories that become home and hitchhike with the migrants for life. Those who complain about the Indians shouting in support of the Indian team at the Oval cricket ground may find the answer they are not looking for in this poem! Explore how.

Pramila Venkateswaran

Lighter Than

My daughter begs me to explain why she is darker than me, wondering if she has another mother hiding somewhere in the universe, coffee skin, ivory teeth against garnet lips, a shade darker than her mud-brown crayons tucked under her bed.

She wonders about her dark gums today.
In answer, I stretch my lips to stare at my gums in the mirror for the first time, to observe their color: Pink, I state, which does not explain the question of connection vexing her young identity in a school flooded with white kids, where lilies and roses are the only similies.

Can you dye me, she asks, to a light shade?
Light shade of what, I wonder.
Lighter than this dancing spirit?
Lighter than air? Lighter than water?
Lighter than her ear-splitting questions about creation?

Published in Thirtha, Yuganta, 2002.

Learning Objectives

In "Lighter Than," the poet explores how mothers deal with their children who grow up in a white-dominated geographical area. The mother is situated in a suburb of New York where everyone is white. In the poem, she ponders how to teach racial difference to the child and at the same time maintain her child's identity as brown. The poem is a vignette of a particular moment, which highlights the question of the child and the mother's physical action (of looking in the mirror) and her internal monologue. The poet uses the both interrogative and affirmative sentences to show the overt and internal conversation.

Further reading:

The Nest

For the first time last summer
my father paints sunflowers,
a cluster of hibiscus, fingers
of bananas. My canvas is filled
with so much snow, the trees
are invisible, the sky absent.

He wants to let jasmine thrive on ice,
fit one hemisphere into another
like Indian steel nesting containers,
mix ochre with blue, rhyme
his word with mine,

unlike his father who draped
the empire around him so tight
he didn't notice the son hungry,
waiting, always wanting more
than the songs his mother fed him
out of her emptiness.

He decides that his sunflowers
will be teal. Grapes, coconuts,
the road leading to his house,
mango leaves are as water
and sky, elemental.

(Published in Antiphon magazine, 2014)

Learning objectives

The poet brings together different worlds in this poem: the physical separations of the family are a result of colonialism and migration; the father's childhood affected by colonial rule, the poet daughter migrating to the West, and their effort to bring their worlds together.

The poem operates using contrasting images seen in the father's act of painting. Words such as "invisible," "absent," and "emptiness" set the tone and mood of the poem. Although the act of the father painting is a happy act, the memories are not, and pulling worlds together is an effort. The water image in the end seems to indicate that the lives of the father and the daughter are as intangible as water and sky.

Editorial comment

In both these poems, the poet has deployed a play of the interaction taking place between different generations. Which common grounds the poet has used to thread the perceptions at odds? What are these perceptions? Discuss these perceptions covered. Discuss how the poet brings both poems to a closure.

Know the poet



Pramila Venkateswaran, poet laureate of Suffolk County, Long Island (2013-15), and author of *Thirtha* (Yuganta Press, 2002), *Behind Dark Waters* (Plain View Press, 2008), *Draw Me Inmost* (Stockport Flats, 2009), *Trace* (Finishing Line Press, 2011), and *Thirteen Days to Let Go* (Aldrich Press, 2015) is an award winning poet who teaches English and Women's Studies at Nassau Community College, New York. She won the Local Gems Chapbook contest for her volume, *Slow Ripening*. Author of numerous essays on poetics as well as creative non-fiction, she is also the 2011 Walt Whitman Birthplace Association Long Island Poet of the Year. For more information, visit www.pramilav.com.

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Word Masala Foundation

The foundation promotes South-Asian diaspora poets and writers by awarding them for their excellence in poetry.

Instead of a monetary prize, it helps them by working as a non-commercial agent, by organising reviews, highlighting their work in publications and magazines, organising readings and events, and placing articles and interviews where possible.

The foundation is a non-commercial thrust and believes very strongly in working with other likeminded stakeholders. It also awards them with a recognition plaque highlighting their efforts in diversity. Hence, our work is far from done. We can be consulted on improving the diversity in your programme. Do contact us if you are as passionate as we are about the equal opportunity for all.

Yogesh Patel, poet, publisher and the founder

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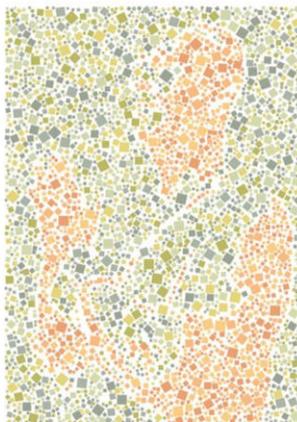
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Poems about migration, cultural invisibility, cultural duality, alienation, and displacement

Contributing British Poets

Debjani Chatterjee MBE
Yogesh Patel MBE
Steven O'Brien
Rishi Dastidar
Sarah Wardle
Usha Kishore
Jessica Mookherjee
Reshma Ruia
Kavita A. Jindal



Contributing American,
Canadian and German
Poets

Sujata Bhatt
Cyril Dabydeen
Ravi Shankar
Pramila Venkateswaran
Usha Akella
Ralph Nazareth
Kalpna Singh-Chitnis

Colour blind test plate Z: Namaste

This anthology offers an alternative to the poems selected by those from the monocultural stream. The editor and poets presented here have experienced intriguing facets of displacement which create a ground for a fascinating study. Poems from this selection can form a part of an examination and additional poems or unseen text.

*

The selection is also suitable for GCSE, A-Level, the International Baccalaureate and university courses as the unseen poems.

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1 Introduction

Something of a 'secondary school canon' of modern poetry has built up over the years; we hope that this collection will extend the pool of great poets studied in today's schools and colleges. We believe that the move to study post-2000 texts, that have been written in the lifetime of all those taking A level English Literature, will offer students an exciting opportunity – to see how today's poets treat issues and concerns that are sometimes universal and sometimes specific to our twenty-first century lives. It ensures that some of what you study really does look at the here and now, at poets who reflect on the world you inhabit.

The collection begins with four essays by specialists whose professional life is closely linked with English literature and poetry – an academic, a teacher, an editor and a poet. They offer you some 'ways in' to approaching unseen poems and some strategies for honing your skills.

Who better to teach you about contemporary poetry than the poets themselves? Most of this anthology is written by six of the best in contemporary poetry. We have tried to create the next best experience to live poetry readings; in this collection, the poets themselves introduce their work to you through one of their poems, and then choose a second poem they think will help your A Level study of contemporary literature. We hope you get a sense of their voice, interests and particular styles and are drawn to read some of the further reading suggestions they make, to widen your knowledge of the literature of your time and what underpins it. Their questions will help you learn about the choices writers make using both form and language to convey meaning. These can be used during class discussion time, so that you familiarise yourself with these poets and their methods. You can then apply the knowledge and skills you have learnt to the second half of this anthology where you are provided with a sample of Practice Unseens. These, together with our linked sample student essays and examiner comments, will support your work on improving your Unseen Poetry responses.

We hope in your preparation for the A level paper 3 exam that you will also spend time reading and understanding some poetry from the canon. For A level students this will occur, in part, in your Prescribed Poetry study for Component 3B. In this collection, some poets have directed you to read poems from that canon that offer a meaningful link to their own chosen poems. Making links between poems, selecting appropriate points of comparison and drawing connections across them will help prepare you for your examination tasks. The conductor Simone Young once said about music that 'tradition is the handing on of the flame, not the worshipping of the ashes'. The same can be said about literature and in many ways this is the intention of this collection. It is right that today's students study the literature that is being produced in their own time. The published anthology of contemporary poetry that you study for this component, and the unseen poems that you meet in the examination, will be written or published post 2000. But we cannot study contemporary poetry in isolation. We must also understand the strong and deep connections that today's writing has with the literature that has come before it. In some contemporary poems we see a continuation of forms and traditions from the literary giants that have preceded them. In others, we see deliberate rule-breaking and manipulation of such traditions.

Many of the poets featured in this anthology are performing live around the country right now. They can be seen up close and personal, reading in small bars, cafes and other venues around the UK. We hope that you will take the opportunity to hear some of them live and be inspired by them. For those of us at the exam board who have had our own A level Literature teaching groups, some of our best teaching moments have been seeing sixth formers transfixed by a performance from a contemporary poet. Some of you might be inspired to take part in the annual T. S. Eliot Poetry Prize Shadowing scheme which will enrich your reading of contemporary poetry.

T. S. Eliot said that there are different stages of becoming a good reader. You begin intuitively, enjoying some poems, discarding others. After a while you start organising your experience of reading. You find you're reading each poem in the light of others and understanding them all more precisely, even ones you've read already. You see more in them and enjoy more*. We hope that the signposts and journeys in this collection will be a milestone in your reading of poetry and that you find some new poets that inspire and lead you forward.

Pearson

Esther Menon



Katy Lewis

Consulting Poet

Esther Morgan

*'The Poem and the Journey', *60 poems for the Journey of Life*, R. Padel, Vintage, 2007

2 How to approach an Unseen Poem: four perspectives

Read the four perspectives on ways of approaching unseen poems. You may wish to annotate the essays and compile your own checklist of the valuable advice that you find here.

2A Approaching an unseen poem: a close (and distant) reading *Professor Peter Barry, Aberystwyth University*

A Soft-edged Reed of Light

That was the house where you asked me to remain
on the eve of my planned departure. Do you remember?
The house remembers it – the deal table
with the late September sun stretched on its back.
As long as you like, you said, and the chairs, the clock,
the diamond leaded lights in the pine-clad alcove
of that 1960s breakfast-room were our witnesses.
I had only meant to stay for a week
but you reached out a hand, the soft white cuff of your shirt
open at the wrist, and out in the yard,
the walls of the house considered themselves
in the murk of the lily-pond, and it was done.

Done. Whatever gods had bent to us then to whisper,
Here is your remedy – take it – here, your future,
either they lied or we misheard.
How changed we are now, how superior
after the end of it – the unborn children,
the mornings that came with a soft-edged reed of light
over and over, the empty rooms we woke to.
And yet if that same dark-haired boy
were to lean towards me now, with one shy hand
bathed in September sun, as if to say,
All things are possible – then why not this?
I'd take it still, praying it might be so.

by Julia Copus, from *The World's Two Smallest Humans* (2012)

Just looking

To make a close reading of a poem you need to read it several times. But don't rush. Start by just looking at it. This one is divided into two twelve-line stanzas, with a gap in between. So perhaps it presents a topic from two different viewpoints, or describes an event which has two distinct stages. We would expect some shift or development from one part to the next, and just looking alerts us to the need to describe the nature of this shift. We notice, too, that the two parts hinge on the word 'done', which ends the first and begins the second. 'Done' can refer to something which *has been* done, or something which two parties have agreed *to do*, in which case they may shake hands and say 'Done!' Both senses are relevant. But don't assume that every aspect of a poem's form is directly related to content. Constant straining to demonstrate a tight interlock between the two often results in far-fetched readings. So there is nothing significant here in the verses having twelve lines each. It's not a cryptic reference to the twelve days of Christmas (though Christmas features in the last line, as we'll see).

Slow reading

Having spent a few minutes 'just looking', you can now start reading the poem. My advice is as before – don't rush it. In fact, the opposite – try to become a slow reader. Also, don't read the lines, or the stanzas – read the sentences. To work out the sense of a poem, you must ignore the line endings and the stanza breaks and read the sentences, because lines of poetry are not intended as stand-alone units of sense. So when reading the opening ('That was the house where you asked me to remain'), don't stop at the end of the line – go on till you reach the full stop that ends the sentence in the next line – 'on the eve of my planned departure.' The opening line is 'run-on', meaning that its sense runs on across the line ending. When you get to the full stop you have the gist of the situation presented in the poem. If you lose the overall sense at any point, go back to the beginning of the sentence in which the loss of sense occurred (or, better still, the one before that) and read through again from there. One slow reading of this concentrated kind is worth five or six rapid skim reads.

But the situation of a poem isn't usually set out from its beginning, for poems often start as if suddenly, with a train of thought already well under way. Thus, the opening 'That was the house' indicates that the speaker has been thinking (or talking) about this house for some time. The poem goes straight to a pointed question addressed to the other person involved – 'Do *you* remember?' But is the question actually asked, or only formed mentally? It is difficult to be certain, but if a conversation is taking place, it seems to be of the intimate kind that would only happen if a couple were alone. Yet 'we' readers can hear it, even though we are not the 'you' who is the primary addressee – we are like 'over-hearers', or covert addressees. This is a frequent occurrence in lyric poetry (poetry which seems to convey the intimate, private feelings of a speaker) – John Stuart Mill, in his essay 'What is Poetry?' (1833), described poetry as 'overheard speech', noting that poets write *as if* unaware of our presence, as if self-communing, as a person might when writing a diary, or communicating only with a significant other.

Close and distant reading

So now we can put forward a 'distant reading' (that is, an overview) of the situation presented in the poem, which would go something like this: in the first stanza the speaker recalls the moment in a particular house which instigated a relationship that in the end led nowhere. In the second she says that if she could return to that moment, she would take the offered hand again, and make the same bargain, in spite of knowing that it never could be their 'remedy', or their 'future', while at the same time praying that – somehow – it might be.

So the 'distant reading' briefly summarises the situation depicted in the poem (though it doesn't paraphrase the poem, of course), and it is an essential part (or partner) of the 'close reading'. It is the necessary frame within which all the details commented on in the close reading cohere and make sense. For the close reading, try not to snip out from the poem isolated words, phrases or lines to use as evidence. Instead, quote a significant block of text which seems crucial, and then home in on it. I will do that with the last five lines, which crystallise the effect of the poem, with their touching (pun intended) profession of faith in what cannot actually be believed:

And yet if that same dark-haired boy
were to lean towards me now, with one shy hand
bathed in September sun, as if to say,
All things are possible – then why not this?
I'd take it still, praying it might be so.

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I give these lines as a 'displayed quotation', rather than as lines run on in my own text with line-endings indicated by an oblique stroke. I do so to foreground the poem *as* a poem, and to highlight my view that these lines are crucial. Notice that what is quoted is a complete sentence, making sense in itself even when isolated from the rest. Writing it out in full is another way of slowing down, making me notice things about these lines that I might otherwise have missed. For instance, the order of the phrases seems to have a delaying effect, postponing the eventual arrival of the decisive and quietly defiant statement 'I'd take it still'. Thus, between the 'one shy hand' and 'I'd take it still' there are two intervening lines, and the effect is to emphasise the significance of the handclasp by seeming to make the moment happen in slow motion. The order of the phrases manipulates emphasis onto the key declaration and puts it in the strongest position, right at the end of the poem.

I notice, too, that in both stanzas the line about the hand reaching out (the fifth-to-last line in both) is longer than the lines around it, as if reaching beyond the margin-line of the stanza into a void which is both unknowable and already known. It might be possible to identify other symmetries and effects of this kind in the poem. But don't overdo this kind of thing. Good poems don't always have formal elements of this 'mimetic' kind (that is, elements that seem to 'mime' or 'enact' their meaning).

Tone and tradition

The close reading should also comment on tone or diction (meaning word choice and style). 'A Soft-edged Reed of Light' is fairly formal in tone, rather than chatty or colloquial. For instance, it mentions 'the house where you asked me to *remain*' (rather than 'stay', as we would probably say in relaxed conversation) 'on *the eve of my planned departure*' (rather than 'the night before I was due to go'). So the tone seems related to that of the more formal poetic styles of an earlier century. There are other echoes: addressing a house directly reminds me of Tennyson's poem 'Dark house, by which once more I stand', about being outside the house of his dead friend Arthur Hallam as dawn breaks (Poem 28 of *In Memoriam*). Further, the ending of 'A Soft-edged Reed of Light' directly echoes Thomas Hardy's 'The Oxen', which is about the old country legend that animals in the fields kneel for Christ's birth at midnight on Christmas Eve. The last two of the four quatrains (that is, four-line stanzas) read:

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
'Come; see the oxen kneel,

'In the lonely **barton** by yonder **coomb**
Our childhood used to know,'
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

The delaying effect is seen here too, as two lines are inserted between 'Come; see the oxen kneel' and 'I should go with him', exactly as two lines in 'A Soft-edged Reed of Light' separate the 'shy hand' from 'I'd take it still'. It is worth noting, finally, that Copus changes Hardy's 'Hoping it might be so' to '*praying* it might be so'. Which is stronger, or better? I don't know, but sometimes the questions we ask are more important than their answers, and no close reading can explain everything about a really good poem. If a close reading, by some chance, ever managed to do that, we would have nothing to bring us back to the poem again.

Further reading

- *Reading Poetry*, Peter Barry, Manchester University Press, 2013: the first five chapters are on Meaning, Imagery, Diction, Metre and Form; Chapter 6 is on 'Close and Distant Reading'; Chapter 8 is on 'Text and Context'.
- *How to Study Modern Poetry*, Tony Curtis, Macmillan, 1990: Chapter 2 ('The Making of a Poem') is on his own 'The Death of Richard Beattie-Seaman', then four chapters on the 1940s/50s, 60s, 70s and 80s.
- *How Poets Work*, Tony Curtis (ed.), Seren, 1996: an edited collection of chapters by modern poets, each on the evolution of one of their own poems (including Dannie Abse on a cricket poem and Simon Armitage on one about football).
- *52 Ways of Looking at a Poem*, Ruth Padel, Chatto, 2002: 52 chapters, each printing a modern poem, followed by a 2- to 3-page reading of it.

2B Approaching an unseen poem – a teacher's perspective

Gary Snapper, English Teacher, Cheney School, Oxford / Editor, National Association for the Teaching of English

What makes a teacher happy when they read a response to an unseen poem? I've read hundreds of such essays over the last 25 years, and I've thought hard not only about what makes a good response, but also how to help my classes to produce them. I'll try here to distil my thoughts in this short space – just as you will have to do when you try to organise your thoughts about an unseen poem in your AS or A level exam.

First, and perhaps most important, when I read the unseen response essay I hope to get a sense that the writer is someone who understands how poetry *works* and what it is *for*. First and foremost that means someone who understands that *poems are not intended to be studied in classrooms or written about in exams*, but rather are written to be read *for pleasure*: the *aesthetic* pleasure a poem's *creativity* provides – *both* through the ideas and meanings it evokes *and*, equally importantly, in the way it is crafted by the poet – its shape, sound, form, structure, tone, style, imagery, and so on, and the way it plays with and makes patterns from words.

It may seem ironic for me to say, in an article about writing about poems in exams, that one of the things I'm looking for is a sense that *poems are not intended to be written about in exams* – but it's an important point. To really understand and analyse poetry, you have to be able to see poems as works of art, lovingly crafted by poets to tell stories, make arguments, reflect on experiences and evoke feelings, using language in a very particular, often playful, way. They are not like crossword puzzles or maths problems that need to be solved. Each poem is a carefully shaped whole employing a variety of poetic techniques to create an object of beauty – a work of art – and a thought-provoking experience. Your job, in an unseen commentary, is to explore this fragile object without losing a sense of its purpose and wholeness, its real life outside the classroom and the exam hall.

Why might anyone *want* you to write about poems in exams, when that's not what they are *for*? To understand *that*, you need to reconcile yourself to the difference between *reading* and *studying* poetry: they are not the same thing, although of course they are strongly connected. In 'the real world', people read poetry for pleasure in their leisure time, or turn to poems for solace or joy at times of difficulty or celebration, or use them to bold effect in performances and advertisements – and so on. When you *study* poetry in an A level literature course, you are setting out on the path to becoming an expert in a specialist academic field – learning about the history and methods of a powerful and influential form of communication, to analyse the subtleties of skilled thought and language, and to develop your own subtleties of response. In your response to the unseen poem, you have the opportunity to show that you can apply the knowledge you've gained in class about how to think and write about poetry.

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Reading a poem, in various ways, is of course *part* of studying it, and when you approach an unseen poem your *first* readings of it are crucial: it's the nearest you'll get to the experience of reading the poem for pleasure in 'the real world'. It's at this point that you need to let the *impact* of the poem speak to you. What *kind* of poem is it? What does it sound like? What does it feel like? What shape or form does it have? What feelings or thoughts does it evoke? What images or words immediately stand out? Imagine you are looking at a painting in an art gallery and listening to a piece of music at the same time. What sounds and images grab your attention? Then there's the question of what the poem is *about*. Again, this should strike you as part of your first impressions of the poem: a general impression of the theme of the poem, or its overall message (if there is one). And don't forget that the *title* of the poem is usually significant too!

You'll probably need to read the poem two or three times before you begin to be clear about these things – and this is before you even *start* to think in detail what it *means*. But don't lose these first impressions of the poem. A poem is more than just the meaning of its words: it's also about its aesthetic impact – and a good response will convey this.

Many of my students want to go straight to *what the poem means* and *what techniques are used in the poem*, skipping the question of what the poem is *like*, and what impact it has. Once they begin writing, some are too keen to launch in at this point, instead of establishing the impact of the poem and its overall narrative or meaning to anchor the rest of their analytical answer for their reader. So when I introduce poems to my classes, I try to read them aloud in a way that emphasises the sounds and structures of the poem as well as its meanings, or I ask them to prepare readings which do the same. I try to impress on them how important it is to *hear* the poem in your head when you read it. Many poems use sound effects – rhyme, assonance, consonance and alliteration – often, but not always, creating some kind of onomatopoeia – which contribute to the pleasure of the poem, and may also reflect the meanings in the poem. But such sound effects are only part of the way a poem sounds: the silences, breaks and pauses in a poem are part of its effect, as are the poem's overall pace, rhythm, tone, mood and atmosphere.

Once you've thought about the impact of the poem, you can start to reflect in more detail on the *content* of the poem, and the way it's structured: what the poem actually *means*, what the argument or narrative of the poem is, how the various parts of the poem connect, and how the poem develops from beginning to end. It's vital to remember here that meaning is constructed *by the reader* as a response to what the poet has written. In many poems, meanings are deliberately ambiguous: the poet wants the reader to engage *actively* in deciding what the poem might be about. Such ambiguity is again intended to be part of the *pleasure* and *interest* of much poetry. In these cases, a good response will tentatively *suggest* what a poet *might* mean, or offer more than one possible interpretation. So, for example, an answer that establishes 'the poet describes a relationship between two people, possibly one that is about to end, and explores both its sensual and destructive qualities', before going on to explore relevant sections of the text, is more carefully crafted than an answer which asserts 'the poet describes a failed relationship which has ended and has had a destructive effect on him'.

Finally, you can begin to think in detail about the *form and language* of the poem: the techniques which the poet has used to convey its images and ideas. There's no mystery here. I teach my students about the 'bag of tricks' that poets carry about – the various verse forms they can choose from; the way they use stanza, rhyme, metre, end-stopping and enjambement; the way they choose and combine words and sentences to create a particular tone, mood, atmosphere or style; the way they use literal and figurative imagery (description, metaphor, simile) and rhetorical devices.

After *identifying* these techniques, I know that the real work my students have to do is to learn how to write subtly and sensitively about the *effects* these techniques have in the context of the whole poem – how they contribute to the meaning of the poem and the experience of reading it. The candidate who writes ‘The poem is constructed in four stanzas of five lines each’, with no more about how that structure reflects on the poem’s content, might be well advised to remove this comment completely. A response which comments ‘the progress of the four stanzas charts the progress of the speaker’s movement from emotional pain to acceptance’, and goes on to analyse how the poem’s language reflects this, is building a stronger analytical essay.

Now that you’ve thought about all these things, you’re ready to start writing. The introduction to your essay is where you can show that you have thought carefully about the experience of the poem as a whole work of art – briefly indicating what it’s about, what kind of poem it is, what its impact is, what kind of language it uses, what kind of message or meaning it might have. By the end of your introduction, the examiner will be happy because you’ve already shown that you have a pretty good idea of how poetry *works* and what it is *for* – and there’s a good chance that they can sit back and enjoy whilst you talk them through your detailed analysis of the content, language and form of the poem.

Remember that the unseen commentary is only *one* way of writing about poetry. It’s a type of exercise known as ‘literary appreciation’ which is designed to cultivate your knowledge of poetry as a literary craft and your sensitivity to the ways writers use language and readers respond to it. It’s important to be aware that there are other critical ways of writing about poetry which are more concerned with evaluating the *cultural significance and value of poets’ work*, and of poetry in general. Once you’ve got the basics of poetry sorted, you’ll be ready for that next step!

Further reading

If you’re going to read lots of poetry, it makes sense to start by reading poems that have been identified as really good, interesting or worth reading by the people who put together poetry anthologies. Some of these anthologies are designed specifically to introduce readers to a range of really great poems of many different sorts by many different writers.

- *Poem for the Day*, Nicholas Albery and Peter Ratcliffe (eds.), Chatto and Windus, 1994: this is one of the best anthologies, which gives you one poem to read each day.
- *The Nation’s Favourite Poems*, Griff Rhys Jones (ed.), BBC Books, 1996: another good anthology, which focuses on some of the best-known and best-loved poems.
- *Penguin’s Poems for Life*, Laura Barber (ed.), Penguin Classics, 2007: you could also try this anthology, which organises poems around different stages of life, from birth to death.

Also try finding the poetry anthology shelf in your local bookshop. You’ll find a huge range of anthologies on offer – from collections of poems about love, war, Scotland, sport and so on, to collections of comic verse and ‘Poems That Make Grown Men Cry’.

2C Approaching an unseen poem – a poetry editor’s perspective *Maurice Riordan, Poet/Editor of The Poetry Review*

‘A poem should not mean/but be’, so says an old poem about poems.

A poem isn’t a series of statements or observations or arguments. It isn’t mere prose. It’s more alive than that. Indeed, Ted Hughes believed his poems about animals continued his habit as a child – the rather cruel habit – of capturing little creatures and keeping them in his pockets. Poems have the fascination, if not quite of living beings, then of language at its most alive. They come to us with a voice that’s still carrying the pulse and warmth of the body.

But those printed words are inert, a useless lump, until they are re-activated by a reader and brought to life again in the mind.

Look at the poem first. Some poems sit comfortably on the page. They are tidy and well behaved, as Shakespeare’s sonnets are. Others sprawl all over it, reluctant to be confined by its margins, like the great rebellious poems of Pablo Neruda and Allen Ginsberg. Others again seem barely to want to intrude on the white space. Such is William Carlos Williams’s ‘This is Just to Say’ or his infamous ‘The Red Wheelbarrow’. The breathless verses of Emily Dickinson look modest and shy on the page. But be wary of those! There’s nothing whatsoever timid about her electrifying poems.

A poem may come in any shape or size. And that is part of its style and its personality. So give it the once-over.

Then read the poem. No, don’t just read it. LISTEN to it. I don’t mean you have to read aloud – though a time may come when you can’t resist doing that. But read at speaking pace, perhaps mouthing the words as you go, but in any case hearing the lines in your head. Poems are for the ear as well as for the eye. Part of their *being*, as opposed to *meaning*, is the noise they make:

Chieftain Iffucan of Azcan in caftan
Of tan with henna hackles, halt!

That’s how Wallace Stevens’s ‘Bantams in Pinewoods’ starts, kicking up quite a racket. Some poems can send a chill through you from the off: ‘This is the light of the mind, cold and planetary’ (Sylvia Plath, ‘The Moon and the Yew Tree’). But poems can lull and seduce, too: ‘Lay your sleeping head, my love,/Human on my faithless arm’ (W. H. Auden, ‘Lullaby’). Again, beware!

Once you start hearing a poem like that, then you have re-connected it with the body, where it belongs. Now you can converse with it, start making some sense of it, question it where it intrigues or puzzles you, tease out its meaning – because yes, poems do mean as well, though it may not be the most vital thing about them. That meaning usually comes with hints and insinuations, with those shades of meaning we are actually very adept at picking up in conversation or on the phone. Ditto with poetry. Part of the meaning resides in the intonation of the sentences and the rhythm of the lines. The American poet Robert Frost has a nice phrase for this: ‘the sound of sense’.

One thing to bear in mind is the poem becomes yours as its reader. You don't need to ask, 'what did the poet mean?' It doesn't have some secret meaning that the author is privy to, or that can be accessed only by the Critic. I can tell you for a fact that readers have told me many things about my poems that were news to me, but they were true.

Poems do contain secrets, however – hidden connections, subtleties and surprises, things they disclose or half-disclose as a reward for attentive reading. One of my own long-time favourites is 'Filling Station' by Elizabeth Bishop. It begins 'Oh, but it is dirty!' And she repeats that word 'dirty' several times, and insists on the oiliness of the gas station, or petrol station to you and me. It's a foul, smelly, oily place. But it fascinates her. And she begins to notice things – a plant, a woman, a mother somewhere in the background, and a beautifully embroidered 'doily' covering a small table.

That changes things. Even the oilcans of ESSO are neatly stacked so that they sing 'SO, SO, SO' to the passing traffic. She sees the underlying hidden texture of family life. 'Somebody loves us all', the poem daringly concludes. And so everything is changed, the messy awful world we live in is 'redeemed', if we want to be fancy about it.

Looked at another way, the poem is about the process of writing or reading a poem. It's about what happens when the imagination comes awake and regards the strangeness and wonder of the world. The quality of our attention is repaid. I have just stopped, or been forced to stop, not at the petrol station – but at this poem, and because I give it my full attention, I am rewarded. The filling station turns out to be, if you'll forgive my terrible pun, a 'fulfilling' station.

The great thing about language is it contains trickery and treachery, all sorts of giveaways and hints, opportunities for jokes and slips-of-the-tongue. It's a playground for our brains. Good writing, and poems above all, make the most of this. Just as I was writing these sentences, and re-reading 'Filling Station' for, oh, perhaps the thousandth time in my life, I noticed a detail I'd never seen, something I should certainly have spotted before, since it occurs three times. It gave me quite a kick.

You've already spotted it? I looked at that word 'doily' again and saw the oil hidden in it.

Further reading

- 'This is Just to Say' <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/just-say>
- 'The Red Wheelbarrow' <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/red-wheelbarrow>
- 'Bantams in Pinewoods' <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/bantams-pine-woods>
- 'The Moon and the Yew Tree' <http://www.angelfire.com/tn/plath/yew.html>
- 'Lullaby' <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/lullaby-0>
- 'Filling Station' <http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/filling-station>

The Poetry Review has been published by the Poetry Society since 1912, and is a quarterly source of new poems, reviews, essays and interviews with contemporary poets. The Poetry Society is the UK's leading poetry organisation. They run programmes of live events, competitions and workshops, as well as providing resources, advice and support for young people and schools. For more information please visit www.poetrysociety.org.uk/education.

2D Approaching an unseen poem – a poet’s perspective

Patience Agbabi, Poet/Performer

In 2002 I was approached, with 37 other poets, to write a poem in response to Wordsworth’s sonnet, ‘Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802’. The aim was to celebrate the bicentenary of its composition and also to use the sonnet to link Westminster Bridge with Shakespeare’s Globe. I stood on the bridge one bright spring morning noting the black cabs, Routemaster buses, tourists and most significantly, the London Eye (aka The Millennium Wheel). I didn’t want to write a timeless poem; I wanted to capture the sights and sounds of 2002. The subsequent anthology of poems, *Earth has not anything to show more fair*, included several sonnets that looked nothing like Wordsworth’s tidy original, with references to strip-lit offices, crack heads, traffic jams, disposable cameras and mobile phones; one translated the entire sonnet into text language. Though composed in isolation, those poems were in *contemporary* dialogue with one another as much as they were inspired by Wordsworth’s original.

When I visit secondary schools I’m often asked where I get my ideas from. My primary inspiration is other poems. The best part of being a writer is being a *reader*. That might seem odd but many believe that every poem is a response to a poem that has already been written. Researching a new piece is inspiring, as I read a range of poems around a particular theme, form or tone. I read for visual impact first, then aloud in my head, as most poetry is written for the eye *and* the ear. Often I find one poem will kick-start my own. It may use a striking image, communicate with startling honesty, or have an unsettling last line. Writers use the term ‘reading as a writer’, meaning reading to identify the techniques used to create a work of art before attempting those techniques yourself. Such reading fires my creativity. But you don’t have to be a writer to do this. When you’re revising for comparing linked poems, *imagine* yourself as a writer rather than a student with a forthcoming exam. When you read an unseen poem, ask yourself what works and what doesn’t? Why did the poet make those creative decisions and how would you approach writing a new poem in response to it? Which elements would you replicate and which would you change?

The more poetry you read, the more individual poems will remind you of other poems you have studied. In the Unseen Poetry Preparation Anthology, several contemporary poets choose one of their poems to discuss and then compare and contrast to a second linked poem by another poet. Some contrast similar themes, for example, identical forms and spoken and written language. I was very struck by how, in each case, reading the second poem enhanced my reading of both. All the originals are strong poems, but in dialogue with a second, that power is intensified. For example, Jacob Sam-La Rose’s *Faith* explores mutism and political protest; Alexandra Teague’s *Adjectives of Order*, explores the complexities of learning a foreign language and surviving the Vietnam War. I was familiar with Jacob’s poem before I read the anthology but re-reading it alongside Alexandra’s made it all the more poignant and potent. The fact they are both written in the same form (unrhymed tercets) further heightens the poetic connections between them. Paired in the anthology, each poem becomes more than the sum of its parts.

Sometimes you find yourself reading two poems by the same poet. You gain greater insight not only into each poem but deeper access into their work as a whole. Some poets work in traditional forms and metres; some take liberties with those forms so always be alert to formal poems masquerading as free verse; and some poets write in free verse that at times employs formal elements like internal rhyme or metrical repetition. T S Eliot famously rejected the notion of ‘free verse’, declaring ‘...there is only good verse, bad verse, and chaos.’ Take note of this. Even in the purest of free verse, poets have made decisions about certain poetic features (e.g. where to put line-breaks and stanza breaks). Similarly, poets must make other creative choices, for example, whether to use dialect, unusual technical terms. Many have recurrent themes which may have arrived subconsciously. When you read two poems by the same poet, and assess their similarities and differences, you begin to have a sense of their poetic style. You

make valued judgements about which poem you prefer and why. You start to cultivate your unique poetic taste. And the more knowledge you have, the more enjoyable it becomes.

You have the exciting challenge of choosing a second poem that you have studied to go with one that is presented to you. I say *exciting* because you have the freedom to determine the course of your essay. Like the narrator of Robert Frost's poem, 'The Road Not Taken', you must take one of two paths. Which poem of the offered poems will you choose? This element of choice enables you to be more creative. Therefore, it is essential to choose the contrasting poem that enables you to have more insights in your essay. This may not necessarily be your favourite one, or the one that is more obviously accessible, but the one you can link most effectively with the unseen poem.

Make sure you read the question carefully. Are there any key areas it asks you to focus on? Go with your gut reaction, and then make a quick list of similarities and differences in form and content. Start with the *visual*: are they written in the same or a contrasting form? Look at stanza lengths and line lengths. Read both poems aloud in your head and move on to *sound*: metre, rhyme scheme, any other form of repetition. Do they adhere to the same structure (e.g. begin in the past and end in the present)? Then briefly move on to content: explore *theme*. Is there a similar subtext? Think about *voice*; point of view; accessibility versus complexity. Is the unseen poem written by one of the poets in the anthology? Make sure there's at least one clear similarity in order to write a substantial essay. If you can't quickly find a connection, move to the other poem. You will generally find that, for you, one yields more potential than the other. But if you find them equally thought-provoking, you might choose the more challenging option. Once you've made your choice, stick to it.

Just as each poet has their own inimitable style, it's important you write *your* essay. Remember, you've already made a choice, you've stated a preference. Having an angle at the beginning will help your essay remain unique and focused. Always begin with an introduction that mentions both poems. What makes poetry interesting to *you*? I'm obsessed with traditional poetic forms and how contemporary writers engage with them, so depending on the unseen poem, and the optional anthology poems, I might choose either a formal or free verse poem or make the relationship between sound and sense my primary focus. But you may be fired by strong visual imagery, use of the vernacular, philosophical or political ideas, or a multicultural or international perspective. You may have a strong reaction to one or both of the poems which you wish to communicate. Don't be afraid of having an opinion but always back up any assertion with evidence from the poems. And remember that you are writing about poems, works of art that make particular use of visuals and sound, words and white space.

There are no hard-and-fast rules for structuring the main body of the essay. However, it must have an introduction and conclusion, remain focused on the original question and give equal weight to both poems. It should reflect your unique response to the task. The conclusion should summarise the points you've made in your essay. You may find, as I often do, that the comparative process yields new insights into both poems. Emphasise them. On many levels, having to prepare for this exam is a gift: it enables you to read some compelling contemporary poetry, have time to study it in depth, and broaden your knowledge and aesthetic pleasure. Furthermore, it gives you inside knowledge of how poets work, how we obsessively compare and contrast other poems to inspire new poems, and how exhilarating it is to engage in that poetic dialogue.

3 Contemporary Poets' Voices: poems with discussion points and further reading

Section 3 provides a range of poems selected by some of the leading figures in twenty-first century poetry. Use these to learn more about contemporary poetry, guided by the voices of the contemporary poets who have selected them for you. The poets encourage you to consider one of their own poems, followed by a second and, in one instance, third poem either from post 2000 or the established literary canon. They also make suggestions of further reading that you can undertake. Your study of contemporary poetry will be enhanced by reading widely within both modern poetry and the literary canon that has come before it.

In your final exam you will be asked to respond to a poem written post 2000 in comparison with a poem from your studied contemporary anthology.

3A Jacob Sam-La Rose

Jacob Sam-La Rose's poetry has been characterised as vivid, masterly and carefully structured. His debut pamphlet, *Communion* (2006), was a Poetry Book Society Pamphlet Choice and his collection *Breaking Silence* (2011) has been shortlisted for a Forward Poetry Prize (the Felix Dennis Award). He is widely recognised as a facilitator, mentor and supporter of young and emerging poets, and as an advocate for the positive impact of new technology on literary and artistic practice and collaboration. He lives in London, England.



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Faith (2011)

'Faith' was written on commission for International PEN to launch a festival dedicated to celebrating freedom of expression. It's a large theme to engage with and, as so often happens with larger themes, much of the work of writing the poem came in the form of finding an angle, a slant to approach from. There were two contrasting images that presented themselves, that I couldn't let go of: there was a series of protests in response to the G-20 London summit that year, some of which turned violent; also, through the work I'd done in schools, I'd recently met a student who was an elective mute. The marriage of these two made the poem for me.

Faith

A girl in class opts out of speech. A teacher mouths
problems at home and who knows what too-large
or brutal vision stalled the engine of her voice.

In a photograph I pass round, a man reels from
a baton to the head and cameras bloom in every hand
to catch his perfect grimace. Today, we write about

the things that we believe. The class comes up with
God, by all the usual names, and faith in numbers,
that the *News at Ten's* more often bad than good,

that some things never change, no matter what
you say, although there's so much to be said.

A girl carves out a space for her voice to return to.

Praise her fierce and stubborn silence. Somewhere,
rain will fall on dry land for the first time in months.

I want to know what her first words will be.

Thinking points

- 1 With regard to the poem's title, what is the significance or value of faith as offered in the poem?
- 2 If I was writing in response to the theme of freedom of speech and expression, what's the value of silence as I have detailed it in the poem?
- 3 What are the different ways that silence is rendered or manifested in the poem?
- 4 The poem moves through unrhymed tercets. What effect does that have on the way you might read it?

Adjectives of Order by Alexandra Teague (2010)

I chose Alexandra Teague's 'Adjectives of Order' as a thematic partner for 'Faith' for both the contrasts and the parallels. Both poems are written in tercets. Each poem presents a student struggling with challenging experiences. The student in 'Faith' is moved to silence. The student in 'Adjectives of Order' is presumably older and struggling with the mechanics of a foreign language, learning the best or most appropriate way to describe what he has lived through.

Adjectives of Order

That summer, she had a student who was obsessed with the order of adjectives. A soldier in the South Vietnamese army, he had been taken prisoner when

Saigon fell. He wanted to know why the order could not be altered. The sweltering city streets shook with rockets and helicopters. The city sweltering

streets. On the dusty brown field of the chalkboard, she wrote: *The mother took warm homemade bread from the oven. City is essential to streets as homemade*

is essential to bread. He copied this down, but he wanted to know if his brothers were *lost* before *older*, if he worked security at a twenty-story modern

downtown bank or downtown twenty-story modern. When he first arrived, he did not know enough English to order a sandwich. He asked her to explain each part

of Lovely big rectangular old red English Catholic leather Bible. Evaluation before size. Age before color. Nationality before religion. Time before length. Adding

and, one could determine if two adjectives were equal.

After Saigon fell, he had survived nine long years of torture. Nine *and* long. He knew no other way to say this.

Thinking points

- 1 'Adjectives of Order' explores the relationship between language and the attempt to make sense of experience. What is the significance of the poem's closing sentence?
- 2 Would you argue that the poem makes comment on the power of language to articulate experience, or that the poem makes comment on the inadequacy of language?
- 3 What does the poem do to challenge our thinking on the value of proper syntax and grammatical construction?

Further reading

- *Breaking Silence*, Jacob Sam-La Rose, Bloodaxe Books, 2012
- *City State: New London Poetry*, Tom Chivers (ed.), Penned in the Margins, 2009

3B Jen Hadfield

Jen Hadfield was born in Cheshire in 1978 and has been living in Shetland, more than 200 miles off the coast of Scotland, for the past eight years. In 2008 she won the T. S. Eliot Prize for her second volume of poetry, *Nigh-No-Place*. She writes poetry because a poem is often a better way of remembering people, places and experiences than photographs. She writes about wildlife and the landscape around her, about the here-and-now, and about how we make ourselves a home.



Daed-traa (2008)

I'm a stop-start writer: there are long spells of time where I don't write poetry at all. When I start again, I often 'warm up' by writing something about poetry itself. I had just moved to Shetland when I wrote 'Daed-traa'. The sea here is unpolluted and the rockpools are full of outlandish marine creatures: butterflyfish and hermit crabs and a weird luminous green sponge that covers the rocks like porridge. I started by trying to describe a rockpool in a poem, but ended up deciding that the poem itself was like a rockpool.

Daed-traa

I go to the rockpool at the slack of the tide
to mind me what my poetry's for.

It has its ventricles, just like us –
pumping brine, like bull's blood, a syrupy flow.

It has its theatre –
hushed and plush.

It has its **Little Shop of Horrors**.
It has its crossed and dotted monsters.

It has its cross-eyed beetling Lear.
It has its billowing Monroe.

I go to the rockpool at the slack of the tide
to mind me what my poetry's for.

For monks, it has barnacles
to sweep broth as it flows, with fans,
grooming every cubic millimetre.

It has its ebb, the easy heft of wrack from rock,
like plastered, feverish locks of hair.

It has its *flodd*,
It has its welling god
with puddled, podgy face and jaw.

It has its holy hiccup.

Its minute's silence

daed-traa.

I go to the rockpool at the slack of the tide
to mind me what my poetry's for.

Thinking points

- 1 'The slack of the tide' is a still hour between the tide coming in and going out again: a rest in the constant motion of the water. How do I use rhythm and rhyme to suggest the movement of the water in this poem? Can you find the moment the water becomes 'slack'? How does it happen?
- 2 I'm not religious at all, but I've used the word 'holy' and the imagery of a god in this poem. How reverent do you think the imagery is? Why do you think I have used it?
- 3 What is the effect of the poem's repetitive refrain? What do the poem and rockpool have in common? Look for other poetic features which explore their relationship.
- 4 How do I use this poem to consider what nature means to me? What use is poetry to people: what else can a poem do for you?

Poetry by Tom Leonard (1969)

Tom Leonard taught me two very important lessons about poetry.

- 1 Whatever your accent, the way you speak – like your fingerprints – is unique and, so, a precious part of who you are.
- 2 Poetry says that your voice deserves to be heard.

His poems are often from the point of view of people who have been told that they don't speak 'proper English'. They're often spelt phonetically: that is, instead of being spelt as they would be in a dictionary, the words are spelt as they would be pronounced.

Poetry

the pee as in pulchritude,
oh pronounced ough
as in bough

the ee rather poised
(pronounced ih as in wit)
then a languid high tea ...

pause: then the coda –
ray pronounced rih
with the left eyebrow raised
– what a gracious bouquet!

Poetry.
Poughit.rih.

That was my education
– and nothing to do with me.

Please remember that in your exam you will need to respond to a poem written post 2000 in comparison with a poem from your studied contemporary anthology. This poem is pre 2000, but is provided here to offer further practice in applying your analytical skills.

Thinking points

- 1 How much can we know about a person from the way they speak? Look at the 'voice-portrait' from 'the pee of' to 'bouquet'. How does Leonard want us to imagine this person?
- 2 Say this poem out loud. Do you use language in a different way when you speak and write? In general, do you think poetry is more like speech or writing? How does that illuminate the poem's form and meaning?
- 3 What response do you think the poet is trying to elicit from the reader? What is it about the poem's shape, sound or spelling that has that effect? What is your personal response to this poem?

- 4 In his poem, '100 Differences Between Poetry and Prose', Leonard says 'Poetry is the heart and the brain divided by the lungs'. Would you say Leonard's argument in 'Poetry' is intellectual, emotional or both? Support your theory with examples from the poem.
- 5 If you're interested in all these ideas about poetry, voice and identity, you could write your own poem about what makes a poem a poem, or a poet a poet. Write it to represent your natural speech as closely as possible, creating your own spelling system if necessary. Is this different from the way you normally write?

Further reading

- *Intimate Voices*, Tom Leonard, etruscan books, 2003
- *Bevel*, William Letford, Carcanet Press, 2012: this has been one of my favourite new poetry books in the last few years. Letford, another Scottish poet, writes about everyday life as if he's in love with every moment. And he writes about it in everyday language.
- *Strong Words – Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, W. N. Herbert and Matthew Hollis, Bloodaxe Books, 2000: lots of examples of poets writing about poetry here, from the informal to the academic.

3C Patience Agbabi

Patience Agbabi is a popular poet, performer, mentor and Fellow in Creative Writing at Oxford Brookes University. She read English Language and Literature at Oxford and has an MA in Creative Writing from Sussex. She has lectured in Creative Writing at Greenwich, Cardiff and Kent. Since 1992, she has taught in a wide range of secondary schools, arts centres, libraries, youth clubs and prisons. She has worked repeatedly on Arvon's schools and open courses. Canterbury Laureate 2009 to 2010, she received a Grant for the Arts to write a contemporary version of *The Canterbury Tales*. *Telling Tales* (Canongate, 2014) is her fourth poetry collection.



Martina (2000)

'Martina' was inspired by Alice Fulton's poem 'You Can't Rhumboogie in a Ball and Chain', which is about the tragic life and death of 60s hippy icon, Janis Joplin. I couldn't tell if it was a **sestina** at first, but liked the way it wove images and repeated key words that got to the essence of Joplin. These end-words formation-danced on the page and also echoed the musicality of speech. I was given my six end-words: *time, girl, end, child, boy* and *dark*, by Nuyeric poet, Samantha Coerbell. They helped shape my narrative, set in the Second World War, when it was still taboo to become pregnant outside marriage or be openly gay.

Martina

I must have been sweet sixteen at the time,
boyish, straight up straight down. She was the girl
next door but one, living at the dark end
of the street, the fat ugly duckling child
who grew up gorgeous. A different boy
for each day of the week. She was a dark

horse, kept herself to herself, her sloe-dark
eyes revealing nothing. It was wartime
and rations chiselled our features but boy,
she kept her curves. I was a grown-up girl,
she was woman. Time had silenced the child
in her eyes. We prayed for the war to end

in our Sunday best. But we were weekend
disciples, evacuees scared of dark
nights pierced with blitzkrieg pyrotechnics, child-
like, clinging to mother's skirt. She found time
to party in new nylons, good-time girl
growing voluptuous from man and boy,

on chocolate and plum brandy. I was tomboy
running errands, climbing trees till the end.
But she was the midnight-rouge glamour girl
who French-kissed GI lovers in the dark
who drawled, "Anytime, lady, anytime."
She was wicked woman: I was wild child.

We all knew she was expecting a child.
In those days we all expected the boy
to marry her. But, it being wartime,
too soon his two-month leave came to an end.
Her father threw her out into pitch-dark
November's clutches with the words "No girl

of mine..." She gave birth to a baby girl,
Martina. They wanted to put the child
up for adoption. Tina had the dark
features of her father, the soldier boy
tortured by fate's keen bullet till the end,
bleeding dry on a battlefield. In time,

she got married for the child's sake, a boy-
next-door type; and in time I met a girl
with sloe-dark eyes and loved her till the end.

Thinking points

- 1 What does the narrator of the poem think of the 'girl/next door but one'?
- 2 Modern sestinas choose flexible end-words with multiple meanings. The end-word 'boy' changes from stanza to stanza. What effect does this have?
- 3 Now choose another end-word that you find interesting and show how it enhances the narrative of the poem.
- 4 Why do you think I chose 10-syllable lines not in iambic pentameter?
- 5 The poem ends with an **envoy**, a three-line stanza (using all six end-words) that sums up the themes of the poem: what are they?

IVF by Kona Macphee (2002)

I chose this poem because it's contemporary and openly reveals the emotional side of the inability to have children. In vitro fertilisation (IVF) is a scientific procedure offering hope to many childless couples. I wanted to give you a stark contrast to 'Martina' where a single woman has an unplanned child in the 1940s. I also wanted you to experience a modern but traditional sestina, where the form is integral to the content. I admire the technical ability of the poet to take us into the heart of this conflict.

IVF

I come home early, feel the pale house close
around me as the pressure of my blood
knocks at my temples, feel it clench me in
its cramping grasp, the fierceness of its quiet
sanctioning the small and listless hope
that I might find it mercifully empty.

Dazed, I turn the taps to fill the empty
tub, and draw the bathroom door to close
behind me. I lie unmoving, feel all hope
leaching from between my legs as blood
tinges the water, staining it the quiet
shade of a winter evening drifting in

on sunset. Again, no shoot of life sprouts in this
crumbling womb that wrings itself to empty out
the painfully-planted seeds. The quiet doctors,
tomorrow, will check their notes and close
the file, wait for the hormones in my blood to
augur further chances, more false hope.

My husband holds to patience, I to hope, and yet
our clockworks are unwinding. In the stillness
of the house, we hear our blood pumped by our
hearts that gall themselves, grow empty: once,
this silence, shared, could draw us close that
now forebodes us with a desperate quiet.

I hear him at the door, but I lay quiet, as if,
by saying nothing, I may hope that somehow
his unknowingness may close a door on all
the darkness we've let in: the nursery that's
seven years too empty; the old, unyielding
stains of menstrual blood.

Perhaps I wish the petitioning of my blood
for motherhood might falter and fall quiet,
perhaps I wish that we might choose to
empty our lives of disappointment, and of
hope, but wishes founder – we go on living in
the shadow of the cliffs now looming close:

the blood that's thick with traitorous clots of
hope; the quiet knack we've lost, of giving in;
the empty room whose door we cannot close.

Thinking points

- 1 Why do you think the poet has chosen an intimate, first-person narrator?
- 2 Read the first stanza quietly in your head. How does the metre affect the mood of the poem?
- 3 Comment on the use of enjambement in stanzas 1 to 3. How does this contrast with the envoy?
- 4 How do the end-words contribute to the imagery of the poem?
- 5 What is the narrator's attitude towards IVF and how does the sestina form accentuate this?

Further reading

- *Transformatrix*, Patience Agbabi, Canongate Books, 2000: read the sestina sequence 'Seven Sisters'.

3D Helen Dunmore

Helen Dunmore is a poet, novelist, short story and children's writer. Her novel *A Spell of Winter* won the inaugural Orange Prize for Fiction, and her work has also been awarded the McKitterick Prize, the Signal Award for Poetry and the Cardiff International Poetry Prize. Her poem 'The Malarkey' won the National Poetry Competition in 2010. Her best-known work for young people is the *Ingo* series of novels. Helen Dunmore's books are translated into more than 30 languages, and she is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. Her latest novel, *The Lie* (2014), is set during and immediately after the First World War.



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The Duration (2013)

There's a sentence in the diary of Cynthia Asquith which she wrote just before the Armistice in 1918. Two of her brothers, and many friends, had been killed during the First World War. She wrote that, with the coming of peace, it would be necessary to recognise that 'the dead are not only dead for the duration of the war'. The permanence of loss became, for many, more unbearable once normal life resumed and there was no shred of hope that somehow, the 'missing' might return. In this poem 'the duration' has a double meaning. It recalls the duration of war, but also suggests the unlimited period of loss that stretched out for the bereaved after the war was over. The middle-aged parents in the poem have lost their only son, but the mother still refers to her husband as 'Father', as she did while the boy was alive. 'Quality lasts', she says of the macintosh, but this is profoundly ironic: the square of mackintosh has survived, but not her son.

The Duration

Here they are on the beach where the boy played
for fifteen summers, before he grew too old
for French cricket, shrimping and rock pools.

Here is the place where he built his dam
year after year. See, the stream still comes down
just as it did, and spreads itself on the sand

into a dozen channels. How he enlisted them:
those splendid spades, those sunbonneted girls
furiously shoring up the ramparts.

Here they are on the beach, just as they were
those fifteen summers. She has a rough towel
ready for him. The boy was always last out of the water.

She would rub him down hard, chafe him like a foal
up on its legs for an hour and trembling, all angles.
She would dry carefully between his toes.

Here they are on the beach, the two of them
sitting on the same square of mackintosh,
the same tartan rug. Quality lasts.

There are children in the water, and mothers patrolling
the sea's edge, calling them back
from the danger zone beyond the breakers.

How her heart would stab when he went too far out.
Once she flustered into the water, shouting
until he swam back. He was ashamed of her then.

Wouldn't speak, wouldn't look at her even.
Her skirt was sopped. She had to wring out the hem.
She wonders if Father remembers.

Later, when they've had their sandwiches
she might speak of it. There are hours yet.
Thousands, by her reckoning.

Thinking points

- 1 I have used military vocabulary, e.g. 'enlisted' or 'patrolling', in the apparently idyllic context of a summer's day at the beach. What do you think is the effect?
- 2 The boy is embarrassed by his mother's attempts to bring him back from the 'danger zone beyond the breakers'. This incident was memorable to the mother, but she is not even sure that her husband will recall it. Why do you think this is?
- 3 There's an implied contrast in the poem between the eternal 'present tense' of the sea and the beach, and the past tense of the son's life. But sometimes, the past and the present become one. You might think about points in the poem where this happens.
- 4 This poem has only one narrator. Can you rely on her voice? What is she not telling us?

My Boy Jack by Rudyard Kipling (1916)

I have chosen this poem because it is a fascinating example of how a poem can contradict the poet's own intentions. Kipling wrote 'My Boy Jack' in 1916, to boost morale after the British Navy's losses during the Battle of Jutland. 'Jack' probably represents the 'Jack Tars', as British sailors were known: six thousand died at Jutland. But behind the poem lies the shadow of Kipling's own bereavement. His only son John died, aged eighteen, in 1915 in the Battle of Loos. Kipling felt lifelong anguish at having pulled strings to wangle a commission in the Irish Guards for his boy. John Kipling was extremely short-sighted, like his father, and had been rejected previously for military service because of this. The poem states that these terrible losses are worthwhile, and that a parent should 'hold your head up all the more', but Kipling's suffering and artistry make it much more complex than that.

My Boy Jack

"Have you news of my boy Jack?"

Not this tide.

"When d' you think that he'll come back?"

Not with this wind blowing and this tide.

"Has any one else had word of him?"

Not this tide.

For what is sunk will hardly swim,

Not with this wind blowing and this tide!

"Oh, dear, what comfort can I find?"

None this tide,

Nor any tide,

Except he didn't shame his kind

Not even with that wind blowing, and that tide.

Then hold your head up all the more,

This tide,

And every tide,

Because he was the son you bore,

And gave to that wind blowing and that tide!

Please remember that in your exam you will need to respond to a poem written post 2000 in comparison with a poem from your studied contemporary anthology. This poem is pre 2000, but is provided here to offer further practice in applying your analytical skills.

Thinking points

- 1 What do you think of the question and answer structure of the poem? What effect does it create?
- 2 The second voice in the poem gives very simple, repetitive answers to the first voice in the first two stanzas. In the third and fourth stanzas the tone changes. What is your view of this change of tone, and does it imply a change of speaker too?
- 3 The poem relies heavily on repetition and variations within repetition. What is your response to this technique?
- 4 The voice in the last stanza of the poem urges acceptance and pride. Does this convince? Which voice do you find persuasive within the poem?

Further reading

- *The Malarkey*, Helen Dunmore, Bloodaxe Books, 2010: if you have enjoyed 'The Duration', you might like to look at this collection of my poems.
- *1914, Poetry Remembers*, Carol Ann Duffy (ed.), Faber & Faber, 2013: 'The Duration' was included in this new anthology of contemporary poems published to mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War.

3E Esther Morgan

Esther Morgan's three collections are all published by Bloodaxe Books. Her first, *Beyond Calling Distance*, won the Aldeburgh Festival First Collection Prize and her third, *Grace*, was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize. She was born and spent her childhood in Worcestershire. She began writing poetry during her time as a volunteer at the Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere, Cumbria, where looking at Wordsworth's notebooks was the first step in understanding the importance of drafting in creating a finished poem. She has worked as a freelance editor and writer and was Historic Recordings Editor for the Poetry Archive, the world's leading online resource of poets reading their own work (www.poetryarchive.org). She currently lives and works in Norfolk, combining motherhood with communications work for Norfolk Museums Service and various writing projects.

**Sand (2001)**

'Sand' is the last poem in my first book, *Beyond Calling Distance*. In the collection as a whole I was interested in exploring voice and silence – in what kinds of pressures and repressions prevent people from speaking out. A lot of poems, as is the case with 'Sand', are first-person dramatic monologues, spoken by often isolated narrators. This particular poem had its starting point in an article I read about the expansion of the Sahara desert in Africa due to climate change and increased aridity. The idea of the sand itself advancing like a slow but inexorable army got the poem going. And then I started to wonder what would happen if someone refused to leave their home in the face of this threat. So these twin concerns – voice and the environment – came together.

Sand

That last spring I seemed to guess.
In one long dusk I harvested the garden,
hung clusters of flowers from the rafters.
I pressed violets between the leaves
of dictionaries and bibles, filled
whole seed trays with keep-sake petals.

The summer burned hotter, turning
the hydrangea heads coppery,
rosebuds into bunches of dried blood.
Their dusty pot pourri still lingers.
I fall asleep, my fingers tracing
the wallpaper's trellis of honeysuckle.

I am the last one left in this valley,
empty and brown as a beggar bowl.
All day I sweep the desert from my steps.
The slate floors crunch like emery boards.
Wood loses its lustre, dulls to the matt
of a cataract eye. My skin cracks like a lizard's.

I turn on taps out of habit.
The plumbing is racked by shuddering sobs.
I risk bad luck – umbrellas blooming indoors
like black silk poppies. I've spent hours
sifting the attic for grass-stained tennis balls,
shutting my eyes, inhaling the past.

No twilight. Night falls like a blade.
In my dry bed, I dream rain;
fat droplets on waxy laurel leaves,
clouds the colour of tear-run ink,
the subtleties of mist. I dive into a pool
and wake. The dunes curve their scimitars.

Silence – except for the tinnitus
inside my head, its constant shush and whisper.
The horizon shifts in the moonlight,
a drift surges, snapping a telegraph pole
like a pencil, a forest of pines
shrinking to Christmas trees.

I think of the pale green domes of cathedrals
buried out there like unhatched eggs.
Soon this house will go blind, its windows silted,
the sun eclipsed, an hour glass twist
in the fireplace. I already sense its silkiness,
the kiss that will stopper my mouth.

Thinking points

- 1 What kind of person do you think is speaking (or writing) the poem? What do you think their motivation might be for telling the story?
- 2 What is the effect of using a first-person voice rather than, say, a third-person voice? Why choose this technique instead of basing the poem more closely on the factual account that inspired it?
- 3 Where do you think the poem is set and why? What impact does this have on the reader?
- 4 How does the sound of the language in the poem create atmosphere and dramatise the narrative?
- 5 There is a lot of sensual imagery in the poem. Identify moments where the poem appeals to different senses and discuss their effect.

Ozymandias by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1818)

It wasn't a conscious influence but perhaps at the back of my mind when writing 'Sand' was Shelley's haunting sonnet 'Ozymandias', a poem I've known and loved since childhood. Shelley wrote the poem in 1817 after a conversation with a friend about recent archaeological discoveries in the Near East. Ozymandias has been identified as Rameses II – who may well have been the pharaoh of the Book of Exodus which tells the story of the Israelites' enslavement by the Egyptians and their long years in the wilderness. Shelley was a political radical, a republican hostile to the concept of empire and authoritarian power. In his poem the figure of Ozymandias becomes a powerful focus for these sentiments. Great poems retain their relevance – when images of Saddam Hussein's massive statue being toppled in Iraq were beamed around the world, 'Ozymandias' was immediately quoted and referenced by many. I love the fact that Shelley had no idea when he wrote his short poem that it would become such a touchstone of English poetry, a status which adds another dimension to this piercing analysis of power and time.

Ozymandias

I met a traveller from an antique land
 Who said—"Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
 Stand in the desert. . . . Near them, on the sand,
 Half sunk a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
 And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
 Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
 Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
 The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed;
 And on the pedestal, these words appear:
 My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings;
 Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!
 Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
 Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare
 The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Please remember that in your exam you will need to respond to a poem written post 2000 in comparison with a poem from your studied contemporary anthology. This poem is pre 2000, but is provided here to offer further practice in applying your analytical skills.

Thinking points

- 1 Consider the title of the poem. How does it connect to the ideas which the poem explores?
- 2 There are three different voices in the poem. Identify them and discuss their relationship to each other and how they enact some of the poem's central concerns.
- 3 Sound is a significant element in the poem – explore how Shelley uses contrasting sounds to create different moods.
- 4 The white spaces within and around a poem can be an important part of its impact. What role do you think the white space has at the end of this poem?

Further reading

- *Beyond Calling Distance*, Esther Morgan, Bloodaxe Books, 2001
- If you're interested in the connection between a poet's speaking voice and their writing voice, dip into the Poetry Archive, which has hundreds of contemporary and historic poets reading from their own work: www.poetryarchive.org
- *Staying Alive*, *Being Alive* and *Being Human* are three wonderful anthologies published by Bloodaxe Books with themed chapters, helpful introductions and a great range of poetry from around the world.
- *Writing Poems*, Peter Sansom, Bloodaxe Books, 1994: this book was written as a guide to help people discover their own voice in poems, and to avoid some of the commonest pitfalls of putting pen to paper. It contains great advice for reading poems as well as writing them, and lifts the lid on some of the many issues and technical decisions poets have to grapple with.

3F George Szirtes

George Szirtes, poet and translator, was born in Budapest in 1948. He came to England with his family as a refugee in 1956 following the Hungarian Uprising. They settled in London where he went to school; he went on to art school in Leeds and London. He has published some 40 books altogether and has won major literary prizes for both poetry and translation. He has worked with artists, musicians and composers. His *New and Collected Poems* appeared in 2008.



My father carries me across a field (2004)

The poem is one of 25 in five sections based on incomplete memories of childhood, all in the same *terza rima* form. The sequence begins with five poems on forgetting, the implication being that memory is partly constructed through the imagination. This poem recalls the night the family crossed the border into Austria, illegally, on foot. It sees the crossing through childhood characters from A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* and arises out of a sense of miracle and desolation beyond the child's comprehension but felt through the parents. *Terza rima* is a form derived from Dante and his exploration of Hell, Purgatory and Heaven: its rhyme scheme works like interlinked arms and drives the poem forward with a sense of inevitability, each verse joined to the next.

My father carries me across a field

My father carries me across a field.
It's night and there are trenches filled with snow.
Thick mud. We're careful to remain concealed

From something frightening I don't yet know.
And then I walk and there is space between
The four of us. We go where we have to go.

Did I dream it all, this ghostly scene,
The hundred-acre wood where the owl blinked
And the ass spoke? Where I am cosy and clean

In bed, but we are floating, our arms linked
Over the landscape? My father moves ahead
Of me, like some strange, almost extinct

Species, and I follow him in dread
Across the field towards my own extinction.
Spirits everywhere are drifting over blasted

Terrain. The winter cold makes no distinction
Between them and us. My father looks round
And smiles then turns away. We have no function

In this place but keep moving, without sound,
Lost figures who leave only a blank page
Behind them, and the dark and frozen ground

They pass across as they might cross a stage.

Thinking points

- 1 What is the connection between memory and imagination in the poem?
- 2 What is the relationship between the subject of the poem and the form of it?
- 3 Why the feeling of extinction?
- 4 What does the image of the 'stage' at the end add to the poem?
- 5 What is the effect of the characters from A. A. Milne?

Inferno IV by Dante, translated by Ciaran Carson (c1300)

This fourteenth-century Italian epic poem describes Dante's journey through hell, guided by the Roman poet Virgil. I have chosen it because it is the model for my own poem, not just formally, but in its associations. The *terza rima* is not as strictly rhymed as in the original but it keeps the echo rolling along with the narrative to carry the reader through Dante's adventure.

Inferno IV

Shattering the deep sleep in my head,
a peal of thunder rang, so I awoke
confused, like someone shaken out of bed;

and coming to, and getting up, I looked
about with rested eyes to ascertain
where I might be. O such an awful nook!

this was, in truth, the dread Abyss of Pain
whose brink I stood upon, from which there rolled
collective groanings, endlessly sustained.

Dark as a thundercloud was that enormous hole;
so deep, the eye could get no fix on where
it ended; nor could I see any foothold.

'Down into the blind world we must fare,'
began the poet, whiter than a sheet;
'I first, then you, we'll make a goodly pair.'

And I, who'd marked the pallor of his cheek,
said: 'Go? When you, who, when I was in doubt,
was wont to be my strength, appear as weak?'

And he: 'It's when I hear the awful shouts
of those below, that pity drains my face
of color; not cold feet, as you make out.

Onward! a long road lies ahead of us.'

Please remember that in your exam you will need to respond to a poem written post 2000 in comparison with a poem from your studied contemporary anthology. This poem is pre 2000, but is provided here to offer further practice in applying your analytical skills.

Thinking points

- 1 The poem is a translation. Are there particular problems associated with the translation of poetry?
- 2 How far do we have to believe in Hell as an idea to enjoy the poem and make it relevant to us?
- 3 What is the balance between old and new language in the translation?
- 4 What, for you, are the best lines, and why?
- 5 Would this passage be just as effective if the whole were prose? What would be lost? How would you argue for the value of the form of it?

Canadian Pacific by Derek Mahon (1966)

This short poem is by the contemporary Irish poet, Derek Mahon. I have chosen it because while it deals with a quite different emigration, like mine, it uses an analogy (my analogies are A. A. Milne and a stage), in his case migrating geese, and seeks to understand a similar event and a similar state of mind. Derek Mahon was born into a Protestant family in Belfast and his youth was spent in the Troubles from which he sought to escape and yet to describe by finding parallels elsewhere. And children appear in his poem, too.

Canadian Pacific

From famine, pestilence and persecution
 Those gaunt forefathers shipped abroad to find
 Rough stone of heaven beyond the western ocean,
 And staked their claim, and pinned their faith.
 Tonight their children whistle through the dark.
 Frost chokes the windows; they will not have heard
 The wild geese flying south over the lakes
 While the lakes harden beyond grief and anger —
 The eyes fanatical, rigid the soft necks,
 The great wings sighing with a nameless hunger.

Please remember that in your exam you will need to respond to a poem written post 2000 in comparison with a poem from your studied contemporary anthology. This poem is pre 2000, but is provided here to offer further practice in applying your analytical skills.

Thinking points

- 1 How close to ordinary speech is Mahon's poem?
- 2 How well does the sudden break from the gaunt forefathers to their whistling children work? Could Mahon have split the poem into two verses and to what effect?
- 3 The last three lines are vital to the poem. What happens there that re-orientates the reader?
- 4 Mahon is a perfectionist. What is the effect of the word 'chokes' in the sixth line?
- 5 Think about the poem as music. What is it about the poem that renders it musical when spoken aloud?

Further reading

- George Szirtes' *Reel* (2004) and *New and Collected Poems* (2008), both from Bloodaxe Books: the other poems in the sequence from which 'My father carries me across a field' is taken are parts of a whole; see 'Flesh: An Early Family History' in these two collections.
- *Omeros*, Derek Walcott, Faber & Faber, 2002: passages from this epic poem use an echo of *terza rima* at the very beginning; also see *The Star-Apple Kingdom*, Derek Walcott, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1980: the poem 'The Schooner *Flight*' in this collection also flirts with *terza rima*.
- *Here*, Wisława Szymborska, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010: try this if you'd like to read more poetry with an Eastern European background.
- And of course ... *Winnie-the-Pooh*, A. A. Milne, Egmont, 2013, for the Hundred Acre Wood, Owl, Eeyore and the rest.

4 Sample Unseen Poems

Sample Unseen Poems

Section 4 provides seven examples of poems, all written post 2000, which you can use for unseen practice. Although you will be comparing an unseen poem to one from your studied collection in the A level paper, you may like to use a selection of these poems for individual analysis, as a way to develop your analytical skills. You could also use these poems to make links to others in your studied collection, considering points of similarity and difference. Within each poem you may like to consider:

- the poet's development of themes
- the poet's use of language and imagery
- the use of other poetic techniques.

My Father's Language (2011)

When my father sits in the straight-backed leather chair
the room contains him as my head contains this thought
of him. As though, in the gathering darkness,
made safe by the position of a rug or lamp
5 he is not being lost to shadows and incoherence.

As though he is not being lost to the drift of age.
Alzheimer's – slow accumulation of losses.
First, memory: the near shore of my father's life,
licked by the small waves, starts to grow faint and vague.
10 Next it is swept clear by the escaping tide.

First memory, then language. What process of attrition
(‘tangles’, the text books answer, ‘fatty plaques’)
sees him revert to a spoken Anglo-Saxon?
His language rattles in its dearth of nouns.
15 Everything is a ‘thing’. ‘Where is the thing for the thing?’

‘Where is the thing? The thing, you know, the thing?’
(In this bone-dry wasteland where the nouns have died
‘daughter’ might sometimes be confused with ‘wife’.)
I say: *The thing's not lost. No. Take this thing.*
20 *Here is the thing. The thing – Daddy – take this thing.*

Leontia Flynn

Thinspiration Shots (2013)

i

Beneath the website's banner – *if you eat
you'll never dance again* – a close up
of a ballerina, veins like wires,
balancing on a single satin shoe.

5 Once, you dreamt of being small enough
to fit inside your grandma's jewellery box:
the dancer spinning on her gold left leg,
a mirror doubling her, the tinny music
playing

on and on until the lid was shut at last,
10 and you were locked in with the dark.

ii

One model has a waist just like a snake.
The other is all whippet ribs,
her legs a deer's. The way she
rests one hand against the fence

15 hummingbird-light, as if she's never still,
reminds you of those hours of press ups
when the lights were out,
the dizzy sit-ups before dawn,
the miles you ran away from home, near
fainting,

20 trying to give yourself the slip.

iii

Scroll down. A brunette in a mermaid
pose,
too slight to break the surface of the lake.
You would have drunk a lake-full if you
could,
those days they put you on the scales,

25 your bladder swollen, taut.
When they were sure there was
enough of you, you'd go upstairs
lock the bathroom door,

crouch above the cool
30 white bowl and piss it all away.

iv

The shape of her is surely made for air,
the blonde who stands on the hillside,
back bared to the camera.

You take her in, those shoulder blades
35 sharpened to wings. You wanted to be
light like her.
But now, your mirror's not a magnifying
glass.

She teeters on the edge of flight. Tonight,
you look away. You close the page.

Helen Mort

Resolution (2000)

The new year blurs the windowpane.
Soho surrenders to the rain
as clouds break over Chinatown.
See how the storm's resolve winds down?
5 Its steel pins thin and mist away.
Get up. Come here and see the day.

Through this droplet's contact lens,
the West End and the future tense
look dainty, vacant and convex.
10 We haven't seen such weather since
the morning they invented sex.
And yet, baptised, by rain and gin,
of last year's unoriginal sins
of inattention and cliché,
15 this looks like every other day
that we will never see again.

Courage. Coffee. Aspirins.
Our window on the world begins
to dry, the breakfast bulletins
20 appal, the civil voices lie,
our private garden cloud with doubt.
So let me make *this* crystal clear:
the rain has stopped. Your taxi's here.
The New Year bells will ring you out.

Michael Donaghy

Scent (2012)

Lately, going in and out of the house
we once shared, I sometimes think
that the dead have many disguises;
so I hesitate at the blue-painted gatepost
5 – there where the evening midges dance –
because of the propinquity of a twining shrub
you long ago planted – now in jubilating flower
and surrendering faintly
its button-holding scent – one so alluring,
10 so delinquent, it could have made Adam
fall on Eve, with delight, in Eden.

In this world the scent could have haunted
the sacred gardens of Athens
to distract a philosopher from his thoughts,
15 or wafted through an open window
of the Great Library in Alexandria
unbidden, prompting a scholar
to uplift his eyes from his scroll.

But what do I care about that.
20 For me, now, you are its sole tenant.
Compelled I linger, allowing myself
the charm and freedom of inebriating fancy
till the scent becomes only the scent itself
returning, and I, at the gate, like **Orpheus**,
25 sober, alone, and a little wretched.

Dannie Abse

The Wreck (2003)

But what lovers we were, what lovers,
even when it was all over –

the deadweight, bull-black wines we swung
towards each other rang and rang

5 like bells of blood, our own great hearts.
We slung the drunk boat out of port

and watched our unreal sober life
unmoor, a continent of grief;

the candlelight strange on our faces
10 like the tiny silent blazes

and **coruscations** of its wars.
We blew them out and took the stairs

into the night for the night's work,
stripped off in the timbered dark,

15 gently hooked each other on
like **aqualungs**, and thundered down

to mine our lovely secret wreck.
We surfaced later, breathless, back

to back, then made our way alone
20 up the mined beach of the dawn.

Don Paterson

Raymond, at 60 (2012)

The 185 from Catford Bridge, the 68 from Euston –
 those same buses climbing the hill long into the evening.
 This is what stays with him best now, this and watching,
 in the ward where Mother had finally died,
 5 the way the rain had fallen on the window –
 a soft rain sifting down like iron filings.
 The whole of that evening he'd kept his eyes fixed on the rain,
 out there in the O of the buses' steel-rimmed headlamps.
Now I am I, he thought, his two dark eyes ablaze – as if he'd found God
 10 the very moment she'd left him. He took off his hat,
 and he put his dry lips to her cheek and kissed her,
 unsettled by her warmth, the scent of her skin
 so unexpected he found himself suddenly
 back on Bondway, crushed to her breast, in a gesture
 15 that meant, he knew now, *You are loved*. There he was, with her
 pulling his bobble-hat over his ears in that finicky way she had.
 What was he? Eleven? Twelve? Too old, in any case, for her to be
 holding his hand the entire short walk from the house
 that first time she'd taken him down to watch the buses.

20 That first time she'd taken him down to watch the buses,
 holding his hand the entire short walk from the house,
 what was he? Eleven? Twelve? Too old, in any case, for her to be
 pulling his bobble-hat over his ears in that finicky way she had
 that meant (he knew now) *You are loved*. There he was with her
 25 back on Bondway, crushed to her breast, in a gesture
 so unexpected he found himself suddenly
 unsettled by her warmth, the scent of her skin,
 and he put his dry lips to her cheek and kissed her.
 The very moment she'd left him, he took off his hat.

30 *Now I am I*, he thought, his two dark eyes ablaze – as if he'd found God
 out there in the O of the buses' steel-rimmed headlamps.
 The whole of that evening he'd kept his eyes fixed on the rain,
 a soft rain sifting down like iron filings,
 the way the rain had fallen on the window
 35 in the ward where Mother had finally died.
 This is what stays with him best now, this and watching
 those same buses climbing the hill long into the evening:
 the 185 from Catford Bridge, the 68 from Euston...

Julia Copus

Birthday (2002)

Bed. Sheets without sleep, and the first birds.
Dawn at the pace of a yacht.

The first bus, empty, carries its cargo of light
from the depot, like a block of ice.

5 Dawn when the mind looks out of its nest,
dawn with gold in its teeth.

In the street, a milk-float moves
by throw of a dice,

the mast to the east raises itself
10 to its full height. Elsewhere
someone's husband touches someone's wife.
One day older the planet weeps.

This is the room
where I found you one night,

15 bent double, poring over
the *Universal Home Doctor*,
that bible of death, atlas of ill-health:
hand-drawn, colour-coded diagrams of pain,

chromosomal abnormalities explained,

20 *progesterone* secretion,

cervical incompetence...

Susan, for God's sake.

I had to edge towards it,
close the cover with my bare foot.

25 Dawn when the mind looks out of its nest.
Dawn with gold in its teeth.

From the window I watch
Anubis, upright in black gloves

making a sweep of the earth
30 under the nameless tree,
pushing through shrubs,
checking the bin for bones or meat
then leaving with a backward glance, in his own time,
crossing the lawn and closing the gate.

Simon Armitage

5 Unseen Responses: Reviewing your Answers

Section 5 offers supporting notes on the unseen poems in Section 4.

5A Notes on 'My Father's Language' by Leontia Flynn

Look again at your unseen response. Check that you have established your understanding of the overall focus or 'story' of the poem in your essay. Consider the following points in relation to the poem and your answer. Are there any changes you would make?

In this poem, Flynn describes her father's deterioration with Alzheimer's. She considers communication both in her poetic art and, more generally, in human relationships. Inevitably the precise choice of words of the poet's craft offer painful contrast with her father's lack of language as described in the poem. The movement of the poem reflects a shift in the poet's relationship with her father as he loses his ability to find words. Her appropriation of his language, 'the thing', in the second half of the poem, reflects her own emotional and linguistic movement towards her father as his own mind shifts and moves away from the solidity of the setting described in the first stanza.

- 1 Consider the effect of the first stanza of the poem which seems to offer a familiar setting in which her father is secure. Which words convey security? What do they suggest about the relationship and this man?
- 2 Consider the poet's use of repetition – 'the thing', 'as though'. What is its effect?
- 3 Think about how the poet explores stillness and movement in the poem and how these convey:
 - the father's illness
 - their relationship.
- 4 Is it valuable to comment on the poem's free verse and 5-line stanzas? How, if at all, do the poet's choices of form reflect on the poem's content?
- 5 Think carefully about the relationship between the poet's craft, with its reliance on words, and her father's lack of language:
 - What is the effect of the poet using 'words' to convey this situation?
 - What does the poem suggest about language and relationships?
- 6 Which points of comparison could be made between this poem and others from your studied collection?

Further reading

- Other poems by Flynn can be found on her website: <http://leontiaflynn.com/index.html>
- The Poetry Archive contains a number of poems read by Flynn herself: <http://poetryarchive.org/poet/leontia-flynn>
- An interview with Leontia Flynn in which she discusses the poem 'My Father's Language' may be found at: <http://www.literarybelfast.org/article/4343/leontia-flynn-s-profit-and-loss>

Biographical information

While you will not of course be expected to know the biographical information about an unseen poet presented in examination conditions, the following information is for your own interest and general knowledge.

Leontia Flynn was born in County Down in 1974. She won an Eric Gregory award in 2001 and her first book of poems *These Days* (Jonathan Cape, 2004) won the Forward Prize for Best First Collection, and was shortlisted for the Whitbread Poetry Prize. Her second poetry collection *Drives* (Jonathan Cape) was published in 2008. Her third collection, *Profit and Loss*, was published in September 2011 and was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize 2012. Leontia Flynn has been Research Fellow at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry, Queen's University, Belfast, since 2005.

5B Notes on 'Thinspiration Shots' by Helen Mort

Look again at your unseen response. Check that you have established your understanding of the poem's central concerns in your essay. Consider the following points in relation to the poem and your answer – are there any changes/ additions you would make to your response?

Helen Mort's short sequence 'Thinspiration Shots' tackles the subject of eating disorders, specifically the world of online sites which promote extreme weight loss. The sequence takes us on a journey through the experience of an unnamed female protagonist, from illness, through denial, delusion and the start of recovery. Her history is told using a succession of images of very thin women and girls, the so-called 'Thinspiration Shots' of the title. Mort employs startlingly physical imagery to explore the psychological aspects of compulsive dieting. Alongside powerful imagery, patterns of sound, including a strong rhythm, underpin the sequence and contribute to its overall impact.

- 1 The act of looking and being looked at is central to the poem. Why do you think this is, and how does the poet use this idea to indicate the emotional development of the main protagonist?
- 2 What is the effect of writing the poem in the second person, i.e. 'you', rather than, say, the first or third person?
- 3 Identify images of physical transformation in the poem and comment on why you think they're important.
- 4 How does the poet convey a sense of physical constraint in the poem? In thinking about this consider both the form of the sequence, and the poet's use of imagery.
- 5 Why do you think the form and imagery change so markedly in the final poem? Comment on the images connected to flight in this section.
- 6 Which points of comparison could be made between this poem and others from your studied collection?

Further reading

- *Division Street*, Helen Mort, Chatto & Windus, 2013
- Here's a recent interview with Helen Mort where she talks about some of her inspirations and her approach to writing: <http://www.oxonianreview.org/wp/in-conversation-helen-mort/>
- Helen Mort's website has biographical details, audio clips, links to reviews and other useful info: <http://www.helenmort.com/>

Biographical information

While you will not of course be expected to know the biographical information about an unseen poet presented in examination conditions, the following information is for your own interest and general knowledge.

Helen Mort was born in Sheffield in 1985. Her collection *Division Street* is published by Chatto & Windus and was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize and the Costa Prize. She has published two pamphlets with tall-lighthouse press, 'the shape of every box' and 'a pint for the ghost', a Poetry Book Society Choice for Spring 2010. Five-times winner of the Foyle Young Poets of the Year award, she received an Eric Gregory Award from The Society of Authors in 2007 and won the Manchester Young Writer Prize in 2008. In 2010, she became the youngest ever poet in residence at The Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere.

5C Notes on 'Resolution' by Michael Donaghy

Look again at your unseen response. Check that you have established your understanding of the poem's central concerns in your essay. Consider the following points in relation to the poem and your answer – are there any changes/ additions you would make to your response?

'Resolution' takes place on 'the morning after the night before'. It's a rainy New Year's Day and the narrator is in a reflective mood. Addressed to another person with whom, the poem implies, the narrator has just had a casual affair, the poem wittily exposes the difficulties and delusions bound up in the concept of the New Year's resolution, the 'fresh start'.

- 1 The poem begins with a six-line stanza of three couplets. What happens to the rhyme scheme after that? How does this relate to the narrative of the poem?
- 2 Look at the poet's use of words connected to vision. What's the significance of this strand of imagery in the poem?
- 3 The language in the poem is playful, making use of puns and other kinds of wordplay. Can you identify some examples and comment on how they affect the tone of the poem?
- 4 The poem reads like a short scene from a play. What devices does the poet use to achieve this effect and what purpose does it serve?
- 5 Identify three words or phrases to describe the speaker of the poem. Consider the reasons for your choice and the supporting evidence in the poem.
- 6 Which points of comparison could be made between this poem and others from your studied collection?

Further reading

- The Poetry Archive contains a number of poems read by Michael Donaghy himself: <http://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/michael-donaghy>
- *The Guardian's* obituary, written by fellow poet Sean O'Brien, provides a good overview of Donaghy's life and poetry: <http://www.theguardian.com/news/2004/sep/24/guardianobituaries.arts>

Biographical information

While you will not of course be expected to know the biographical information about an unseen poet presented in examination conditions, the following information is for your own interest and general knowledge.

Michael Donaghy was born in New York to Irish immigrant parents and grew up in the Bronx. After earning a BA from Fordham University and an MA from the University of Chicago, he moved to London in 1985. In England he won an Arts Council Writers Award and was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature; his work was recognised with the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize and the Whitbread Prize. In addition to writing and teaching, he played the flute and the bodhrán, specialising in traditional Irish music. Adept at using traditional forms, Donaghy often employed conceits, extended metaphors, puns, paradoxes and stories. Witty and erudite, the poems reference literature, science and the oddities and losses of contemporary life. Donaghy taught at City University and Birkbeck College, London. He died of a brain haemorrhage in 2004 at the age of 50.

5D Notes on 'Scent' by Dannie Abse

Look again at your unseen response. Check that you have established your understanding of the overall focus or 'story' of the poem in your essay. Consider the following points in relation to the poem and your answer. Are there any changes you would make?

In this poem, the speaker addresses a partner who is no longer present – we can assume dead. The first stanza of the poem locates the scene as very personal and domestic, in the house and, more strongly, the garden that the two people shared. As he stands at the gatepost, the speaker catches a brief scent of a shrub that his partner planted in the past. The scent fixes him in a poignant moment of transition between past and present, loneliness and union, and allows him some connection with the person he has lost. In fact, the moment allows him to address the partner, using first-person and second-person pronouns ('I', 'you') and speak to them as though they were there. While the location of the poem is the garden, Abse includes wider epic literary, fictional and religious references, for example the stories of Adam and Eve and of Orpheus and the Underworld. These broaden the scope of the poem from a very personal experience in a local setting to the universal questions of human life and existence, and perhaps also underline the huge impact of this loss and emotion on the speaker. The poem could be described as a kind of vignette, since it captures and expresses a moment in time.

- 1 Read the first stanza of the poem.
 - Notice the emphasis on the words 'in', 'out', 'dead', 'disguises' and 'hesitate'. What do they reveal about the speaker's mood?
 - Consider the more effusive and sensuous language emphasised in the second half of the stanza and how it reflects a change of mood. What is the effect of this contrast?
- 2 Consider the speaker and the verbs establishing his thoughts and actions in the poem. What do they reveal about him and what is their effect on the reader?
- 3 The poet has chosen a number of academic and biblical references. Locate these in the poem and consider what, if anything, they add to the central concerns of this poem.
- 4 What is the importance of the title to Abse's poem?
- 5 Consider the structure of the second stanza of the poem in relation to the others.
 - Notice the punctuation or lack of it. What is the effect of this?
 - Compare the structure of stanza one with that of the other stanzas and consider the effect of the contrast.
- 6 Dannie Abse's wife died in a car crash in 2005 and much of his subsequent writing has focused on this loss. In an unseen examination you could not be expected to know this biographical information, of course. How far does such biographical information enhance your own reading of the poem? Does it add anything that you would not have gleaned from a careful 'unseen' reading of 'Scent'?
- 7 Which points of comparison could be made between this poem and others from your studied collection?

Further reading

- Other poems and information about Dannie Abse can be found on his website:
<http://dannieabse.com/>
- You might find it interesting to read Edward Thomas's wonderful poem 'Old Man', about the elusive quality of scent, in relation to Abse's poem:
<http://www.ablemuse.com/erato/showthread.php?t=748>
- 'Scent' was selected from Abse's most recent poetry collection, *Speak, Old Parrot*, which was published by Hutchinson in 2013, the year of his 90th birthday.
- The Poetry Archive contains a number of poems read by Abse himself:
<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/dannie-abse>

Biographical information

While you will not of course be expected to know the biographical information about an unseen poet presented in examination conditions, the following information is for your own interest and general knowledge.

Dannie Abse is a poet, author, doctor and playwright. He has written and edited more than 16 books of poetry, as well as fiction and a range of other publications. He is president of the Welsh Academy of Letters and was recently awarded a CBE for services to poetry and literature.

5E Notes on 'The Wreck' by Don Paterson

Look again at your unseen response. Check that you have established your understanding of the overall focus or 'story' of the poem in your essay. Consider the following points in relation to the poem and your answer. Are there any changes you would make?

In this poem, Paterson addresses a lover, celebrating the carelessness, escape and physicality of a relationship that perhaps has come to an end. The tension between celebration and destructiveness is carefully balanced. There is beauty and heaviness in Paterson's choice of sounds, words and images, which he uses to explore the nature of this passionate relationship.

- 1 Look carefully at the couplets Paterson uses to structure his poem. How tightly do they link? Are they rhyming? Does his choice bear any relevance to the subject matter of his writing?
- 2 Read the poem aloud in your head or aloud, depending on where you are doing this work! Sound is important in this poem. Notice the vowel sounds in the first three couplets. Are they heavy or light? What is their effect on the pace and delivery of the poem? Can you identify any other dominant sounds, for example through Paterson's use of alliteration? What is the purpose of this in relation to the poem's topic?
- 3 How far do the images the poet chooses reflect the relationship he portrays? Consider 'bells of blood', 'drunk boat out of port', 'deadweight, bull-black wines', 'lovely secret wreck' and any others that appeal to you.
- 4 Paterson makes use of vocabulary relating to both the sea and war in this poem. Can you identify:
 - examples of this language?
 - how they link to ideas of being sober and drunk?
 - their purpose and effect?
- 5 Consider the last couplet of the poem. How, if at all, has the mood changed? What is Paterson suggesting about this relationship?
- 6 Which points of comparison could be made between this poem and others from your studied collection?

Further reading

- Other poems by Paterson can be found on his website:
<http://www.donpaterson.com/bio.htm>
- The Poetry Archive resource contains a number of poems read by Paterson himself:
<http://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/don-paterson>

Biographical information

While you will not of course be expected to know the biographical information about an unseen poet presented in examination conditions, the following information is for your own interest and general knowledge.

Don Paterson was born in Dundee, Scotland, in 1963. His publications since 2000 include *Landing Light*, *Orpheus* and *Rain*. He is known both for his work as a jazz musician and a prize-winning poet; amongst other awards he has won the T. S. Eliot Prize twice. Most recently he has published work about reading Shakespeare's sonnets and has written a number of poems in this form himself, due for publication in 2014.

5F Notes on 'Raymond, at 60' by Julia Copus

Look again at your unseen response. Check that you have established your understanding of the poem's central concerns in your essay. Consider the following points in relation to the poem and your answer – are there any changes/additions you would make to your response?

In this poem Copus uses the specular form (a form that she in fact invented and other poets have since used) to explore the relationship between a mother and son. This form, from 'speculum', the Latin for mirror, is a poem of two stanzas in which each line from the first stanza is repeated, or mirrored, in the second stanza but in reverse order. Key elements of the form are its circularity and its sense of inevitability – the fascination for the reader partly stems from seeing how the poet achieves such a difficult technical challenge.

In 'Raymond, at 60' Copus describes the complex emotions of a man in late middle age following the death of his elderly mother. Memory is at the heart of the poem – Raymond's memory of the night she died blurring into a boyhood memory when he'd felt smothered by her care. The poem flows from the present, to the recent past, to the distant past and back again. In doing so, the specular form dramatises the nature of the central relationship and its impact on Raymond's emotional development.

- 1 How does the title help to set the scene for the poem?
- 2 Consider movement in the poem – both in terms of images of movement and the form itself. What does the poet's use of both of these reveal about Raymond's relationship with his mother?
- 3 In addition to the above, consider the use Copus makes of physical gestures in the poem – how do these convey the complex relationship between mother and son?
- 4 What is the significance of the two statements in italics, and the fact these are both unspoken thoughts?
- 5 Can you comment on the mood of the poem? What details does the poet use to create this atmosphere?
- 6 Which points of comparison could be made between this poem and others from your studied collection?

Further reading

- You can read a good analysis of another Copus poem published on the *Times Literary Supplement's* website: <http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article1249590.ece>
- For a more in-depth look at Copus's qualities as a poet, the British Council's literature website has a good critical essay which also includes a discussion of the specular form: <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/julia-copus>
- The Poetry Archive contains a number of poems read by Copus herself: <http://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/julia-copus>

Biographical information

While you will not of course be expected to know the biographical information about an unseen poet presented in examination conditions, the following information is for your own interest and general knowledge.

Julia Copus was born in London, near to the Young Vic theatre, and now lives in Somerset. Her two previous collections, *The Shattered Eye* and *In Defence of Adultery*, were both Poetry Book Society Recommendations, while her third collection, *The World's Two Smallest Humans*, was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize. She has also won first prize in the National Poetry Competition and the Forward Prize for Best Single Poem (2010).

5G A critical response by Ruth Padel to Simon Armitage's poem 'Birthday'

In her book about poetry which offers perspectives on how to read poetry as well as excellent analyses of 60 modern poems, Ruth Padel includes an essay on 'Birthday'. Read the essay below. Consider the structure and style of Padel's analytical piece. Her close language analysis reveals how the poem's focus gradually reveals itself to the careful reader. She explores the structure and movement of the poem from dawn to dark, the sounds of the poem and how these reflect the pain portrayed, and of course the title of the poem which should never be ignored. For examination purposes we would not require biographical materials at the opening of your essay and would recommend a clearer initial paragraph to establish the overall focus of the poem. Padel's essay itself mirrors the gradual revelations in Armitage's poem, not disclosing its painful focus on miscarriage until the sixteenth paragraph.

Look again at your unseen response. Check that you have established your understanding of the overall focus or 'story' of the poem in your essay. Consider Padel's analysis of the poem in relation to your answer. Are there any changes you would make?

Armitage, born in 1963 in Huddersfield, grew up in Yorkshire, studied geography and psychology at Portsmouth and Manchester, and became a probation officer. Then poetry took charge. His first collection (1989) established him as a leading poet of his generation. He has published ten books of poems since, taught at the Universities of Leeds, Iowa and now Manchester Metropolitan. He has written two novels, a memoir, television films, stage plays. His many awards include an award for song lyrics in a BAFTA-winning Channel 4 film.

Section 5 Unseen Responses: Reviewing your Answers

His early probation work gave his poems not just a rich seam of unexplored material but a particular social perspective which struck a note with many audiences, especially young urban readers. He has a wonderful ear for spoken language and timing. That part of his voice which is seemingly casual and off-the-cuff (with rhythms that appear to come naturally from the speaking voice – whoever is supposed to be speaking) disguises deeply sophisticated craft. His poems, often on the National Curriculum, are a rare mix of the genuinely popular and seriously literary.

This title poem in a collection called *The Universal Home Doctor* is a quiet approach to a highly emotive subject, which discloses itself as you go. Through seventeen couplets it moves from a *bed* indoors to *closing the gate* outside, a last act watched *from the window*. The first six scene-setting couplets, with no people in them, look out from *bed* to the outside world. Six more present a central drama between *I* and *you* in the bedroom. The last five echo the first section, but now the speaker looks out to see an intruder: the Egyptian god of the dead *in black gloves* like an undertaker.

The first movement builds a picture of earliness and beginnings (*first, first, dawn, dawn, dawn*) that is somehow *without* (the poem's third word) promise. The words in these descriptions feel chilly, silent, negative. *Empty*. *A cargo of light* (which could sound lovely but actually, when you think about it, reinforces emptiness), *a block of ice*. *Dawn with gold in its teeth* could also be lovely but sounds menacing too.

The first couplet has no verbs. When verbs do begin, inanimate subjects act almost eerily on their own. A bus *carries*, milk-float *moves*, mast *raises itself*. And *to its full height*, like someone intending to assert or dominate. Which strengthens the slight sinisterness behind the other images, as if *full* realisation (of something causing pain or fear) is coming back to the *mind*. Whose, we do not yet know. But it *looks out of its nest* as the poem looks out from the *bed* to the wider world.

When we get a person, he is *elsewhere*. This act, *someone's husband* touching *someone's wife*, is a betrayal that is nothing to do with this room. It is the climax of the world starting up, unfolding into a new day; which at this point means *the planet* being *one day older*. Routine wrongness, how the world goes. So *the planet weeps*: climax of all these objects acting on their own. It puts on the table the despair behind this section's images.

Vowel sounds bind together these first six couplets. *Bed's* short E is echoed in *empty* and *nest*. The EE of *sheets* moves on through *sleep*, *teeth*, *street* and *east* to culminate in *weeps*. The IR of *first* echoes on through *birds* and *first*; its final ST is echoed in *mast* and *east*. The long I of *light* flickers through *like*, *mind*, *dice*, *height*, *wife*. The long O of *gold* picks up *depot* and is echoed in *older*.

After scene-setting, the drama. People: *you* and *I*. This is the same room, but the verbs now look back to how it was in the past (*found*; *I had to edge*; [*I had to*] *close*.) The central couplet describes a medical reference book in unusually emotive terms. *Bible of death* expands on *weeps*. We are talking about mourning. The poem is sad not only for the *planet*, but for loss inside *this room*.

Then another work of reference that every *home* needs, which brings in the geographical as well as the sacred world. Not the family *bible*, but a map of this weeping *planet*: an *atlas*, which maps *ill-health* in a nice new modern way (*colour-coded*). This reference work is about not the outside world or sacred history like a real bible or atlas, but the inside of the human body, this thing through which we hurt and which lets us down (as *incompetence*). Its title in the central couplet contains the word which ties the *planet* and all objects in it to what is happening in *this room* (now and in the past) and to every *mind* looking out of any *nest*. It is *universal*, whose sound effect is prepared for by *double* in the line before. And its language of explanation for *pain* is the climax of the autonomous impersonality with which the poem began. It is technical, but in a human context the phrase *cervical incompetence* sounds unbearably reproachful. So the poem brings in real spoken language (*Susan, for God's sake*) to shut it up, for the name *Universal Home Doctor* is ironic. This is a *home*. But no book (or not one like this) can *doctor* what has happened, cure the *pain*.

The drama is three slight actions. The speaker *found you*, edged *towards*, then closed this chapter of *pain* with a *bare foot*. Simple, personal *bare* words rise up and throw out the technical language which is supposed to map what happens inside you. They *close* down the impersonality.

These tiny acts move the poem forward to the final section. Some of the vowel sounds here pick up those of the first section. (*Night* echoes the long monosyllabic I; *bible* and *cervical* place the I in a new rhythmic context. *Bent* echoes *bed* and *empty*, and is followed up in *death*, *health* and *edge*. *Poring* echoes the OR of those two *dawns* and is repeated in *abnormalities*.)

But others create a new soundworld. The OO of *room* is echoed in *you*, *universal*, *Susan*, *towards* and *foot*. The U of *double* is echoed in *colour* and *cover*, its L in the frightening language around the central book: *universal* (the central line), *chromosomal*, *cervical*. The long O of *over* and *Home* (again in the central line, half-echoing *room*) reappears in *coded*, *chromosomal*, *progesterone* and *close*. The emotional AIN (*pain* and *explained*) mutates to *sake*.

With the drama past, the present tense returns. In the reprise of the third couplet, *teeth* seems even more sinister after *bent double*, *death* and *pain*. Action passes from the I who closed the book to what I sees. Not only inanimate objects now but a figure. We have had the *bible of death*, but this figure comes not from the Bible but an even more ancient sacred world. The poem describes the Egyptian guide to the topography of *death* in a string of present participles: *making*, *pushing*, *checking*, *leaving*, *crossing* and (bringing back the closing book) *closing*.

Meanwhile the OR of *dawn* returns twice, and again in the last line (*lawn*). The long I of *mind* now looks forward to I, *upright* and *time*; the EE of *teeth* to *sweep*, *tree*, *leaving* and *meat* (which widens into the last word *gate*); the long O of *gold* to *window*, *bones*, *own* and *closing*. *Shrubs* picks up *gloves*, *crossing* echoes the short O of *watch*.

Section 5 Unseen Responses: Reviewing your Answers

I have read the poem with many groups. When I ask what they think it is about, most people say 'death' at first but one always says 'miscarriage' and eventually convinces the others by pointing to clues. *Cervical incompetence* reveals what kind of *ill-health* and *pain* is involved and reflects back on early images of emptiness and lack; on *without sleep* and *bent double*. It gives a human, biological dimension to the closing images of book and *gate*; and also (with muted horror) to *bones* and *meat*. This is not only a fox or dog nosing rubbish. There are undertaker-like *black gloves*.

Retrospectively, the *throw of a dice* associated with a *milk-float* suggests the biological lottery of miscarriage and lost maternity. And the poem's sad title is *Birthday*.

Anubis, jackal-headed god of the dead, is a surprise in this urban-sounding garden with its *street*, *shrubs* and *bin*. He mythologises the private, domestic sadness. The *nameless tree* could be a private reference (a tree in their garden whose name the couple do not know) but also sounds ancient and mythical as if familiar from some journey of the dead. And, significant, as if something were buried under it.

In his own time may reflect the calculatedly unhurried movements of any urban fox, but does it in the pseudo-comforting language used when someone in authority asks you to do something difficult. (In hospital, perhaps.) It sums up the silently autonomous way all objects in this poem have acted. It also says in a different register what the medical book explained through its *diagrams*: what happens in the body (as well as out of it) happens in its *own time*. There is nothing you can do but close the book, as *Anubis* closes the *gate*. Book of the body, gate of the body. The gate between living and dead.

A book of technical language, whose ambiguous title can never be fulfilled, cannot *doctor* private suffering. But there are disciplines that do put suffering into bearable *universal* perspectives: myth, philosophy, religion; and poetry. *There was a time when only wise books were read*, says Milosz's poem 'Ars Poetica?', *helping us to bear our pain and misery. / This is not quite the same / as leafing through a thousand works fresh from psychiatric clinics*.

Anubis stands for myth and religion. If you lose a baby, it is *universal* to torment yourself trying to explain why. But also *universal* to try and comfort someone you love in pain, try and find 'closure' for her or both of you. To close the *cover*.

This is about *universal* grief. But it is the particulars, the specific details and sounds that give it universal power.

From *The Poem and the Journey*, Ruth Padel, Vintage, 2008

6 Student Essays

This section shows some student responses that compare two of the contemporary poems from section 4. The students have been asked to compare the ways in which the two poets present strong emotions. Consider the quality of responses to the poems and how well they have addressed the poems themes, language, imagery or other poetic techniques.

Remember that in the A level paper, you will compare an unseen contemporary poem with one of the poems from your studied anthology, *Poems of the Decade*.

AO1	Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression
AO2	Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts
AO4	Explore connections across literary texts

Example 1

Though both the poems 'Scent' by Dannie Abse and 'The Wreck' by Dan Paterson have a clear cut title, if the reader looks at the duality of the title, different interpretations begin to become more apparent. The word 'scent' on paper implies a sense of pleasantness and a natural smell that is somewhat distinctive to a person. This is much like the poem, as the reader learns that the persona becomes lost in an uncontrollable passion for a scent that remind them of a person who was once very close to them. However, hearing the word 'scent' could also be interpreted as 'sent', a conscious act that is carried out by someone. This also shows an aspect of the poem as it is implied by the persona that the dead never leave us, even though they have been sent away.

The duality in choice of title is similar to Paterson's 'The Wreck', which initially gives the impression that there is loss or ruins within the poem, or perhaps something that was there before that is not now. However, the word 'wreck' could also suggest a sign of drunkenness and uncontrollable actions that are carried out. Either interpretation means something that is in ruins, regardless as to whether it is still in its original form or if it is still remaining.

The structure of 'Scent' is unique. The opening of the poem is very vague, 'going in and out of the house,' but then goes on to describe the 'ruining shrub' the persona lost once planted long ago. By placing this at the opening of the poem it creates a sense of allusion and the explicit scent that the flower withholds. Abse structures the poem to end right back where it began- 'charm' and 'freedom' link back to the beginning of the poem, when the narrative voice talks about themselves being 'allured' and 'delinquent'. It suggests that the persona is reiterating the enjoyment of being out of control with their passion, and the sense of a freedom that comes with it. Yet the final sentence ends with such emotional honesty. 'Sober, alone and a little wretched' expresses subtlety of emotion and leaves the reader feeling empathetic to the poignant persona.

'The Wreck' is structured in a more complex way than 'Scent'. Paterson structures his poems in couplets, perhaps creating a sense of pairs or relationships. The opening of the poem gives the reader the initial impression

that it reflects signs of love or falling in love. However, by the end of the poem, the reader learns the tension of the ‘lovely secret wreck’ between the couple, and the symbol of love becomes less apparent. Paterson may have wanted the reader to think that the emotions in relationships are not always easy going and that first impressions do not always define a couple.

The form of the poem ‘Scent’ shares a distinct change from beginning to end. It allows the reader to be carried away into the universe by the biblical reference of Adam and Eve, perhaps sharing the essence of pure passion, relating to something more fundamental and well known. Yet it zooms into a small part of the persona’s personal experience of being out of control with their passionate emotions.

Unlike Paterson who creates the form of his poem much like a wreck- his use of a variety of punctuation and multiple uses of enjambment demand when the reader will choose to end the sentence. This gives an uneven rhythm, in combination with half rhyme couplets creates a disrupted and inharmonious poem, perhaps mirroring the emotions being explored in the couple’s relationship.

Abse creates his poem as a vignette to carry the explicit memories the narrative voice is experiencing. The scent of a ‘jubilating flower’ shows the intense passion and unbelievable sense of happiness that the narrative voice is experiencing, simply by the scent of a flower. Abse shows a clear classical interest when he mentions both ‘The Great Library in Alexandria’ and the ‘Gardens of Athens.’ Not only does this link the reader back to the fundamental feeling of something personal, but both places are the epitome of stillness and silence- mirroring how the persona feels when they are experiencing the scent. The ‘sole tenant’ of the scent could even ‘distract a philosopher from his thoughts.’ This particularly illuminates the narrative voice’s passion for absence. It shows how the power of this particular smell can arouse a connection between the living and dead.

‘The Wreck’ has aspects of purity and passion, however different in consistency to ‘Scent.’ Paterson refers to ‘tiny silent blazes’ and the ‘candlelight’. Yet throughout the poem, the writer also repeatedly expresses energy in his verb usage- ‘swing’, ‘rang’ and ‘swung’ all demonstrate a physicality to show the strong and intense relationship that this couple as ‘lovers’ were experiencing. This is further demonstrated when Paterson metaphorically uses bathos (‘our lovely secret wreck’) to show the heavy passion and intensity of the relationship by lapsing the mood.

Example 1

This is a level 2 answer, showing general understanding. After a slow introduction and rather laboured suggestions of what “Wreck” might mean, the answerer looks at structure, identifying half rhyme in the Paterson poem but concluding rather disappointingly with the view that the form is itself “much like a wreck”. There is some comment on the use of verbs, but at times expression is loose and says little. There is however a broad and general sense of understanding.

12 out of 30

Example 2

Both Dannie Abse through 'Scent' and Don Paterson in 'The Wreck' express emotions through the overarching theme of love. Abse through the memories of a lost lover stimulated by scent, and Paterson through reminiscing of a lover on their previous relationship. Both poets are able to effectively convey emotion in their work.

Dannie Abse is able to express emotion purely through his choice of title. The single word 'scent' plays upon the idea of soft, perfumated aromas that draw connotations of a sensuous nature. Similarly, the word also carries a duality in its meaning: whilst the word itself conveys ideas of perfume and aromas, when pronounced phonetically it is conveyed as a message 'sent' from a conscious decision. This is an idea that is interwoven throughout the poem to convey the emotions carried in the scent of the flowers that becomes a message from the poets' lost lover.

In contrast, whilst Dan Paterson also uses a short simple title choice to great effect, the title of 'The Wreck' creates very different impressions.

Traditional interpretations of the title draws upon ideas of a shipwreck, a literal interpretation of the metaphor of the poem, however it could alternatively be interpreted in a modern sense as the description of a drunken, wasted individual who is reckless in nature, both of which are explored by Paterson in the poem.

Whilst the key linking theme of both poem is undoubtedly love, both also explore ideas of desperation and desire. In 'Scent', Abse conveys the powerful emotions felt by the narrator in their desire to connect once more with the person they have lost. In the very first line, Abse recalls 'going in and out of the house we once shared' suggesting they are almost desperately searching for some connection they can make with the deceased. This is furthered through the way Abse states that the 'dead have many disguises.' This could be interpreted as the poet showing the raw desperation to remain in touch with the memories they hold, yet so often they find that the stimulants of these memories try to avoid them. Here, Abse is also able to evoke sympathy in the reader for the desperate nature of their attempt to make any connection with the dead.

Similarly, Paterson presents the theme of the emotion of desire and desperation through his description of the reckless nature of the relationship. Paterson is able to achieve this through the way he begins the poem as if the person is mid-sentence. This immediately creates a faint rhythmic pace to the poem, mirroring the passion of the relationship. The final line of the final stanza 'even when it was all over' suggests that some desire to engage with each other in passionate actions still exists between them, even though it would seem that the formal relationship is over.

Both Abse and Paterson are able to convey emotions of desperation through their lexical choices in the first lines of each respective poem. Abse draws upon ideas of the desperation to connect once more with a deceased lover, whilst

Paterson explores the desire and urge to engage in passion once more between two apparently separate figures.

Both poets are also able to express emotions through their use of imagery. Abse uses the image of a flower to represent the poets connection with the dead, specifically through its location by the gatepost, whilst Paterson draws upon the imagery of the sea and the sexual connotations it holds.

In 'Scent' the flower is presented as the stimulant to the poet's memories of the person they have lost. Just like the title the image conveys ideas of softness yet with a strong power to disrupt even the greatest [sic]. This is shown in the first stanza through the way Abse describes the flower as having a 'button- holding' scent- one so alluring,' revealing the softness of the scent through the way it is described as 'button-holding,' whilst also conveying the power and strength it holds, capable of 'alluring' anyone into a state of uncontrol. This is furthered in the second stanza in Abse's imagery of Athens and Alexandria. Abse is able to emphasise the soft power of the scent through the way it is distinguishable from all other scents in a 'sacred garden.' A place already saturated with aromas. In the same stanza, however, Abse is able to convey the power of the scent through the way it is able 'to distract a philosopher from his thoughts' as well as 'promptly a scholar to uplift his eyes,' highlighting the power of the scent and the strength of memories to draw the attention of even the great and good in its power.

Similarly, Paterson uses the imagery of the sea to present the emotions of the couple. In both the third and fourth stanzas of 'The Wreck' Paterson emphasises the influence of the sea in dictating where the lovers journey. In the third stanza, Paterson's lexical choice of 'slung the drunk boat out of port' reflects the wild yet reckless nature of the couple's relationship. The verb 'slung' contrasts greatly with the soft tenderness of the scent in Abse's poem yet it could be argued that both methods are equally effective in contrasting the depth and strength of love experiences in both poems. In 'The Wreck', Paterson's description of the boat as 'drunk' encapsulates the state of the lovers on board. In the fourth stanza, Paterson's description 'unmoor, a continent of grief' evokes images of lovers casting away the shackled of their lives and allowing themselves to be at the mercy of the roll of the sea. An image which is in itself sexual in nature through the idea of rhythmic, rolling movements.

Both poets structure their poems to convey the idea of love and the emotions experienced. The poem 'Scent', as a vignette, is written in free verse emphasising the way in which the first-person poet is immersed in their memories and is uncontrollably carried away by them. Abse's choice to make the first stanza longer than the other two, clearly lengthened, draws once more upon ideas of being lost and carried away in emotions. However, another interpretation of this could be that it is representing the idea of change, a change in the lives of the poet following the death of their lover.

In contrast, Paterson writes his poem in rhyming couplets with ten stanzas, each two lines in length. This could be seen as Paterson emphasising the idea of unity in a relationship. And, though it may now be over, a connection remains, both between each stanza through rhyming couplets and similarly between the two lovers in their passionate desire for one another. Both poets are able to convey the emotion and expressiveness of love through the structures of their poems. In conclusion, Both Dannie Abse in the poem ‘Scent’ and Dan Paterson in ‘The Wreck’ are able to present and convey emotions through a wide variety of methods. Though they may in some cases, use contrasting methods this is necessarily and arguably equally effective in conveying the contrasting approaches to love and the emotion is carries.

Example 2

This is a clear response with relevant connections and therefore falls into level 3. A neat start in the opening paragraph leads to a rather wordy response, at its best when it deals with the imagery of the poems. There is some attempt to compare the structure of the two poems, which is not entirely convincing however. In fact the word “structures” tends to be used inappropriately – we are told ‘the verb ‘slung’ contrasts greatly with the soft tender experiences of love through the structures of their poems.

15 out of 30

Example 3

Both the poems ‘My Father’s Language’ and ‘Scent’ are concerned with strong emotions towards someone. However, there are differences in meaning that indicate that the extent of strong emotions differ. Both poems present relationships with lovers or family in a largely similar manner, though the nature of the relationships differ. For instance, while Flynn’s poem offers an insight into a woman losing her father (albeit not physically) due to Alzheimer’s, Abse’s poem talks of the loss of a lover or family member (it is not clear which). Both speakers retain a connection, however. While Abse’s speaker does so through scent, Flynn’s speaker does so through language, the only ‘thing’ (quoting directly) that he can express himself through. Both Flynn’s poem and Abse’s maintain a nostalgic tone throughout, indicating their inability to progress on. This choice of topic for both poems may be a result of the fact that they are post-modern. They tackle issues of family and loss with particular insight into the process of remembrance and sorrow for past times. Furthermore, a key difference is that [sic] both poems are in the first person (Flynn’s poem making an immediate acknowledgement of the relationship: ‘My father sits’) but they both present differing tones. Abse’s poem, for example, has a rather impersonal tone as it mentions nothing of the lover or family member except that of an ‘alluring’ scent, making it an almost universal poem in its exploration of nostalgia. While Abse’s poem uses the metaphor of the scent of the flower to illustrate

the nature of their relationship, Flynn's poem utilises a metaphor of the sea to depict the extent by which the speaker has lost her connection with her father due to Alzheimer's. Memory has been 'licked by small waves', starting to 'grow faint'. What remains is language, though it has reduced him to a 'spoken Anglo-Saxon', his language consumed by 'nouns.' However, though his language has deteriorated, they manage to maintain a connection through simple conversations with nouns. In Abse's poem, on the other hand, the scent of the 'jubilating flower' is what helps the speaker connect to his/her lost partner. While both poets use metaphors in differing manners, both poets illustrate a [sic] connection that is returned, despite the loss of memory, or in Abse's case, the loss of a person. Both poems also use enjambment to illustrate the meandering nature of the speaker's thoughts. Flynn, for instance, uses enjambment to compliment the speaker's reference to the nature of Alzheimer's on her father's memory; 'the near shore of my father's life.' The whole poem can thus be seen as a representation of the father's Alzheimer's as the waves continuously sweep away his life. In Abse's poem, enjambment is used to depict a continuous connection through scent, though the last stanza provides us with evidence that the scent has left and the speaker is 'sober, alone.' Both speakers, it can be stated then, are at a war with forces they cannot win against. The speaker of Abse's poem, however, is still unable to accept the loss as is seen with the varied stanza length. The speaker of Flynn's poem has a continued relationship with her father, as demonstrated by the equal stanza length throughout the quatrains. Unlike Abse's speaker, Flynn uses dialogue to illustrate how her relationship with her father has deteriorated. Interestingly, the speaker has an almost optimistic tone at the end of the dialogue with nouns. Flynn writes 'I say: the thing's not lost. No. Take this thing.' This offers a personal insight into the nature of the speaker's strong emotions. Though the speaker is losing her father, the end of the poem commits her to readily 'speak her father's language.' In 'Scent', however, the speaker uses no dialogue. As the object of the strong emotions is no longer alive, the speaker sees the 'jubilating flower' as his or her 'disguise'. As such, just being in its presence ('I linger') the speaker is able to communicate without language. Unlike Flynn's poem, however, the end of the poem is not optimistic, as the speaker is left 'like Orpheus, sober, alone.' The strong emotions are thus different as the circumstances differ. This means that the tone of both poems, too, are largely different.

In conclusion, both poets use different language methods to express strong emotions. While they both tackle the problem of nostalgia, differences in structure and language mean that the nature of these strong emotions differ. For instance, while Flynn deals with loss due to Alzheimer's, Abse deals with loss due to death. This means that the tone of the poems largely differ.

Example 3

There is clarity and relevance in this answer, placing it in level 3. The answer starts by summarising the content quite efficiently and identifying the speaking voice of each poem. When it moves on to explore the tone, it is less impressive: differing tones are identified, but Abse's poem is described as being rather "impersonal" and later we are told that in the Flynn poem "they manage to maintain a connection through simple conversations with nouns", when in fact it is the nouns that are missing, and the poignancy of the situation is overlooked. Some structural features are noted - enjambment and stanza length – although the conclusions are less secure.

16 out of 30**Example 4**

In the poems 'Scent' by Dannie Abse and 'Thinspiration Shots' by Helen Mort, the contrast between naturalistic imagery and the domestic are used to represent the speaker's strong emotions [sic].

In both poems, enjambment is used frequently to portray the primal emotions of the speakers, in 'close up/of' and 'open window/if.' In both of these instances a description is followed by enjambment. This leads the reader to experience the initial description solely before moving on to the practical reality of the object.

This also has the effect of demonstrating the reader's transformation from feeling strong, painful emotions to being aware of the practical realities of their situation.

Sensual and naturalistic imagery are used in both poems- seen in 'one model has a waist just like a snake' and 'there where the evening midges dance.' In 'Thinspiration Shots', this has the effect of aligning the speaker's battles with eating disorders with nature, and thus mental illness. The use of the word 'snake' also employs usage of dramatic irony in order to inform the reader of the changes of being thin. This is similar to William Blake's poem, 'The Guardian of Love', in which 'black gowns' inform the reader of the sinister nature of love. The usage of 'and' to begin the line suggests it is part of the story [sic] related to the sensual, naturalistic imagery above it. This means the morbid pathetic fallacy has the effect of shocking the reader. In 'Scent', naturalistic imagery is separated from the domestic allusions- 'gatepost' and 'twining' are separated with hyphens. This has the effect of leading the reader to acknowledge the contrasts between domesticity and the speaker's sensual fantasies. Furthermore, it also suggests that the speaker's observance of the sensual [sic] is interrupting their train of thought, thus depicting the speaker as strongly passionate.

The pieces contrast in that 'Scent' uses classical references and allusions such as 'the Great Library in Alexandria' whilst 'Thinspiration Shots' uses extremely modern, topical references such as 'model' and 'camera' in order to depict strong emotions. 'Thinspiration Shots' includes the line 'These days they put you on the scales', referencing the modern practices of a rehabilitation clinic in order to relate the speaker's self loathing with the modern climate. In 'scroll down' and 'camera', the internet and the modelling industry are associated with the speaker's distress. This is similar to Andrew Murrell's poem 'To his Coy Mistress' in which topical references to 'empires' highlights the speaker's fear of mortality.

In contrast, 'Scent' uses classical references to imply that the speaker's sensual feelings have been felt throughout history. In '...Adam fell on Eve in delight', a biblical allusion suggests that the speaker's emotions are so strong they could allude [sic] to original sin and the damnation of humanity. Alternatively, historical references to the library of Alexandria are likely to have been used to imply the apparently enduring quality of the speaker's passion. The public and well-known destruction of the library may be associated with the destruction of the speaker's passion.

Both poems end with short punctuational [sic] sentences. These contrast with the earlier enjambment of the poem, suggesting the flowing and free nature of the speaker's strong emotions have been usurped by reality. The last line of Bishop's 'The Fish' ('...and I let the fish go') shows that the exhilaration of the process of catching a fish is contrasted with the speaker's moral disillusionment with the glamorisation of death. The usage of 'and' links the last sentence, thus implying the progression of the speaker from passionate to subdued. To contrast, in 'Scent', the line 'But what do I care about that' is positioned at the beginning of the stanza, implying that the speaker's apparent nonchalance is temporary. Similarly, the structure of 'you look away- you close the page' implies that the speaker has been able to remove themselves from their emotions, but their battle with anorexia is still constant.

To conclude, naturalistic imagery and disjointed structure emphasise the rise and fall of the speaker's strong emotions and imply the emotional journey of the speaker.

Example 4

This response is clear and logical, and achieves a mark in level 3. This response is very much focused on looking at methods, with the result that the overall sense of the two poems does get somewhat lost. Against the requirements of the task and the mark schemes, references to other works and poets are not really relevant. The response would be improved by considering the voice of the poem and the attitude to these anorexic models, for example.

17 out of 30

Example 5

In both the poems 'Scent' by Dannie Abse and 'The Wreck' by Don Paterson, emotions are expressed in many ways. The poem 'The Scent' depicts the narrative voice reminiscing on a clearly departed person and relating that memory to the scent of a flower. In 'The Wreck' the relationship of two lovers is explained after they have broken up. The emotions felt in both is a direct link to the love two people once shared even after separation or through death.

In both the poems 'Scent' and 'The Wreck' the poets use emotive language to help emphasise the emotion and love showed between the poems' personas. In

'Scent', Abse chooses to approach the theme of love through the narrative voice of the poem, focusing on 'the twining shrub.' Throughout the poem Abse uses emotive language such as 'alluring' and 'delinquent' in order to describe the scent the 'shrub' radiates. This expresses emotion as the persona is enticed by the scent, as it reminds them of a mad and passionate love they once shared with a departed loved one. The paradox of the scent being 'alluring' yet 'delinquent' helps to convey the enormity of the love the person once has which was lost through death.

In 'The Wreck', Paterson uses a similar method of emotive language in order to express emotion. Paterson uses language choices such as 'candlelight' and 'tiny silent blazes' in order to show the delicate nature of their love as they have now separated and only engage in a physical relationship. As a result of this the persona 'watched our unreal sober life' as they cast away all of the shackles they had in the past and instead decide to engage in an electrifying relationship away from any judgement. This helps to express the carefree feeling the two lovers have as they engage in a physical romance raging with excitement for the other. This is a similar emotion Abse expresses as his persona, like Paterson's, are so captivated with emotions they suggest all the boundaries that prevent their love.

Emotion is also created in both poems through the structure of each poem. In 'Scent', Abse expresses emotion through his choice to make the opening stanza four lines longer than the other two. In the first stanza the persona 'hesitates at the blue pained gatepost' as a result of the overpowering scent that remind them of a departed love one. The stanza ends with the persona believing the scent would have delighted Adam and Eve in Eden. This structured choice helps to express how the emotion the persona feels makes him get carried away with himself and forgets everything else and instead enters a different state. The impact is to make the persona appear rather happy to be remembering their loved one. However, alternatively the persona also appears rather melancholy as the idea of the dead wraps them in sorrow as they remember their dearly departed.

Paterson also uses structural choices to express emotion in 'The Wreck'. The poem on the surface is laid out in two line stanzas with half rhyming couplets throughout. Despite the obvious structure, however, the enjambment and punctuation used by Paterson demand that the rhythm of the poem does not flow and are instead disrupted. 'What lovers, even when it was all over- the deadweight' demands to be read as one full line. This helps to express emotion as it corresponds with the crazy and erratic love the two lovers shared. It complements the idea of young people breaking the rules and having a physical relationship with no emotion. Therefore the emotions expressed through the structural choice are very different in the two poems as Abse uses it to show the power and distinction of the personas past love, whereas Paterson shows the informality [sic] and recklessness.

A recurring idea throughout both of the poems is the idea that part things remain. In 'Scent' Abse addresses this immediately: 'I sometimes think that the dead have many disguises' as the persona believes their dead loved one remains in a more spiritualised way. The narrative voice remembers the dead through a scent, a scent so poignant and powerful it could influence Adam and Eve as well as overpower all the flowers in the 'sacred garden of Athens.' The idea of past things remaining helps to express emotion as the persona is unable to move on and forget and will always be enticed by the scent to remember love. The enormity of the idea that one smell could influence so much help convey the feeling the persona has for their dead loved one as it so important it can transport them to many places and still be in a world with just each other.

This same idea of past things remaining is used by Paterson in 'The Wreck': 'But what lovers we were, what lovers, even when it was all over.' Again like Abse, the idea of something continuing after the end is as absolute [sic] at the very beginning. Paterson approaches a continuing physical relationship even after the emotional one is over. Their emotion is expressed as they do continue a mad and passionate love despite separation, therefore having an emotional detachment from each other allowing the persona to enjoy the physical emotions [sic]. This is a direct contrast to Abse's persona, as they only felt the extreme measure of a cold heart of emotion minus any physical intimacy following death,

In both the poems 'Scent' and 'The Wreck', emotion is expressed right until the last lines of the poem. In 'Scent' Abse uses the last lines to convey the feelings of the persona, as they return from their dreamlike state back to real life 'sober, alone and a little wretched.' Through this the scent has evaporated and instead left the persona feeling lonely and melancholic about their dearly departed loved one. Emotion is expressed in these last lines through the wider confusion he felt in the power of the scent of the flower to the feeling it leaves him with. After the scent has gone away he is 'wretched' and in a sense of abandonment.

In 'The Wreck' Paterson uses the same idea of abandonment to express the live emotion the personas feel, 'then we made our way alone up the mined beach of dawn.' Here the mad and crazy intimacy they experience as lovers has faded and has instead been replaced by a tranquil scene. The idea of a 'mined beach' shows they have gained what they wanted from each other physically and any emotion or feeling they had for each other has gone. Both of the poets use the final lines to show true emotion different from the power and enormity previously shown. All personas are returned to who they are in the end.

In both poems, emotions are expressed throughout the poem. Both poems grip the reader and express emotions in the title, with 'scent' introducing the idea of a pleasant and dominating smell that is nice and pleasing for people to smell. 'The Wreck' however, encourages the idea of loss and whether things exist after destruction. Emotion is the pinnacle of both poems as the personas experiences of love is to then suffer the separation, or after someone dies.

Example 5

This answer has consistent analysis and clear understanding of the writer's craft and is therefore in level 3. After a clear opening the essay moves on to explore emotive language and make sustained comparisons. Fair points are made about structure, noting half rhyme and enjambment. There are useful links: common to both poems is the theme of past things remaining and passion overstepping boundaries. The statement that the mined beach is "tranquil" however is less convincing.

18 out of 30**Example 6**

Both Donaghy's 'Resolution' and Paterson's 'The Wreck' express strong emotions through the prism of love reaching its inexorable end, and the contrastingly liberating and debilitating impact that it has on the protagonist.

Both Donaghy and Paterson express strong emotions through their protagonist's wilful detachment from reality, with each author utilising the nuances of contrasting imagery to express strong emotions. Donaghy uses the mundane nature of the London backdrop, in which 'clouds break over Chinatown' and 'Soho surrenders to the rain' to act as an allegory for the disintegration of the protagonist's love, with the relentless 'convex' of 'rain' reflecting the dominance of the loss and inevitable change alluded to through the 'baptism' of 'droplets' over such a [sic] source of life and vitality as the swollen 'West End.'

Despite both texts belonging to the post modern era, Paterson conflicts with Donaghy's era of an urban, contemporary idyll through his use of hyperbole of the norm to represent the desperation with which his protagonists cling to each other, as the normality of 'candlelight' is subverted into 'strange', 'coruscations' of 'wars' with the unrelenting rhythm of the sustained half-rhyme- 'swung' and 'ring'- creating the impression of two lovers in opposition against a 'dark' and hostile world. This furthers the disparity between the two texts; the exaggerated violence of having 'blew them out' and 'took the stairs' implies that Paterson is portraying characters attempting to flee from the inevitable end of their relationship, with the sonorous repetition of 'ran and ran' reflecting the inescapable obsession with one another, whilst Donaghy's gradual progress from the co-dependence of the ABAB rhyme scheme- 'pane' and 'rain'- marks the gradual acceptance of their separation, with the nature of 'rain' implying that a new, brighter future of solitude awaits.

However, both Donaghy and Paterson address the detachment from reality that is inextricably linked to a failing love. Donaghy detaches the speaker from these pains through the use of the direct address to his lover as he embodies the realism of 'coffee' and 'aspirin' through his soothing reassurances to his lover, with the placating rhetorical question of 'see how the winds die down?' 'Come... see the day' illustrates his attempt to transcend the 'blur' and blindness of strong emotions in love, and accept their parting. This starkly contrasts the fierce

delusion of Paterson's poem, in which the protagonists 'unmoor' themselves away from a 'real, sober life' and thundering 'back to back' against the all-encompassing 'timbered dark.' The subversion of what is 'real' and 'unreal', what is 'drunk' and 'sober' marks the cold clarity that Donaghy displays, with the progression of time as 'the world begins' with 'breakfast bulletins' and 'coffee'. Donaghy allows the lover to let go of their strong emotions and Paterson allows them to wallow in their 'lovely secret wreck.' However, both poems enjoy a sharp shift in tone that anchors both the poem and their emotion in the pragmatism of reality. Though Paterson maintains the collective pronoun of 'we' and 'us', he echoes Donaghy's sharp acceptance- 'let me make this clear...the rain has stopped'- through his abrupt break from the sustaining half-rhymes, ending with the despondent finality of 'made our way alone, up the mined beach of the dawn.' Though Donaghy's poem may have continuously been centred on the resolution of time passing and washing away 'last years original sins', driven by strong emotion, Paterson eventually reaches this same equilibrium, with the gentle, uneven stanza structure reflecting the slow, inexorable movement of the ocean, as though irrespective of 'what great lovers we were', they were still being carried to a 'breathless' end, echoing Donaghy's depiction of the futility of attempting to prevent the ending of a 'day' 'we will never see again.'

This somewhat pessimistic outlook of the nature and contingency of love conflicts with Spenser's transcendental, immortal love depicted in 'Sonnet 75'. Some would assume that Spenser would adhere to the bloodless realism adopted by postmodern poetry, and to his own rejection of the mawkish sentimentality of the troubadour love displayed in the Sonnets. However, he appears to shun the limitations of Donaghy's pragmatic outlook, in which the 'world' is centred on 'coffee' and 'aspirin' and 'rain.' Instead, he is increasingly influenced by the metaphysical works of Donne, and is convinced that his love will stand the test of time, in which 'heavens shall write your glorious name'- while others 'die in the dust'- the love will make them 'live.' [sic]

Example 6

This answer shows evidence of the requirements of level 4 and is placed at the bottom of that band. It has a brave shot at interpreting the poems, though often in a rather ornate style. Connections between texts are analysed: "both poems enjoy a sharp shift in tone that anchors both the poems and their emotions in the pragmatism of reality..." At times the expression says less than it seems to. "Paterson eventually reaches this same equilibrium with the gently uneven stanza structure reflecting the slow inexorable movements of the ocean..." This is very impressionistic and could be further supported by more precise detail.

19 out of 30

Glossary

barton farmyard

coomb woods

Saigon capital city of South Vietnam during the 1955–75 Vietnam War

Little Shop of Horrors a hit musical comedy which depicts a shop worker who raises a flesh-eating plant

daed-traa 'the slack of the tide' in Shetland dialect

sestina a poem with six stanzas of six lines and a final triplet, known as the 'envoy', all stanzas having the same six words at the line ends in six different sequences

envoy short stanza at the end of a poem used either to address an imagined or actual person or to comment on the preceding body of the poem

augur foretell

Orpheus musician and poet from ancient Greek myth; in his sorrow at his wife's death, he travelled to the underworld to try to retrieve her

coruscations bright flashes

aqualungs equipment for breathing underwater

progesterone a hormone

cervical incompetence medical condition which can lead to miscarriage of a foetus

Anubis jackal-headed Egyptian god of the dead

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