

# POETRY NOTES: Grade 12

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# INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

Terms you must be familiar with:

- Theme
- Intention
- Style
- Diction
- Tone
- Mood
- Form
- Rhythm
- Rhyme
- Imagery
- Symbolism

## **Theme:**

It is the subject, central idea or underlying thought. It is sometimes also equated with the meaning or sense of piece of writing.

## **Intention:**

The reason or motive the poet had for writing his poem. The poet may want: \* to persuade  
\* to defend, \* to express hatred / scorn \* to protest, \* to praise, \* to argue,  
\* to express love, \* to flatter, \* to warn, \* to criticise, \* to evoke sympathy,  
\* to enrage, \* to mock, \* to incite, etc.

## **Style:**

It is the manner in which a poet or writer expresses himself, his distinctive traits or the individual manner in which he uses the language at his disposal. It includes many aspects but sometimes it helps to look at the period in which the poem or work was written to determine the poet's style. Sometimes it is useful to sum up a poet's style in a word or two: \* colloquial, \* conversational, \* emotive, \* factual, \* humorous, \* idiomatic, \* sensational, \* succinct, \* terse, \* technical, \* clichéd, etc.

## **Diction:**

This refers to the poet's vocabulary or choice of words. The choice of words and the order thereof, is intention to suit the poet's purpose. Remember that words do not always have a fixed meaning: their exact meaning depends of their context. The sound of words may be important as well. Every word used by poet must be seen as a way to enhance his intention.

## **Tone:**

It is the poet's attitude towards his subject and towards his readers. The tone can only be determined once one has examined the poem thoroughly. The tone may also vary within a poem.

Examples of tone: \* sincere, \* humorous, \* forceful, \*critical, \* sarcastic,  
\* ironical, \* loving, \* sentimental, \* joyful, \* melancholy, \* bitter,  
\* mocking, etc.

**Mood:**

Mood or feeling is a term used to refer to the atmosphere the poet creates within his particular work. It is related to the tone and in some ways mood may also be said to reflect the poet's attitude towards his subject matter.

<b>FORM:</b> or structure and it may be rigid and prescribed or loose and undefined.	
<p><b><u>BALLAD:</u></b> Most ballads started as songs passed on from one generation to the next. Characteristics: * fast moving story, * rhythm is pronounced * rhyme pattern (usually rhyming couplets or alternate rhymes) and * metre is usually iambic. Poems in short stanzas narrating popular story without rhyme pattern or unpronounced rhythm, is narrative poetry.</p>	Entertains the readers by telling a dramatic story.
<p><b><u>METRE:</u></b> Poetic rhythm determined by character and number of feet.</p> <p><b><u>IAMBIC:</u></b> unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.</p> <p><b><u>TROCHIAC:</u></b> stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable.</p>	
<p><b><u>ODE:</u></b> Poem often in the form of an address and in exalted style, in praise of something/one. It is exalted in both feelings and expression, written in rhymed stanzas.</p>	Expresses the speaker's admiration.
<p><b><u>ELEGY:</u></b> Song of lamentation or mourning that honours someone /thing that has died. Subject matter is treated in a suitable serious fashion. The tone is sad and mournful with a slow rhythm.</p>	Expresses the speaker's sorrow.
<p><b><u>LYRIC POETRY:</u></b> Originates also in songs. It is much more emotive that usually conveys feelings. It is typically a short poem that deals with a single theme or idea.</p>	Expresses the speaker's feelings.
<p><b><u>AN ALLEGORY</u></b> It is the representation of abstract ideas or principles by characters. Once again the allegory makes use of the story form, and it is long, but it either has a religious theme or it contains a moral warning, or offers advice to the reader, e.g. "Animal Farm"</p>	

**Rhythm:**

Rhythm is the follow of words or 'beat' in a poem. It is the repetition or recurrence of stress. Metre is the term used to describe the measurement of regular rhythm.

The function of rhythm is to emphasise or endorse the meaning of the words in a poem. It can also help create a particular mood or atmosphere, convey a particular theme or set a particular pace.

**Rhyme:**

It is the repetition of similar sounds.

- a) End rhyme: rhyme occurs at the end of lines of verse. (*time; crime*)
- b) Half rhyme: words do not fully rhyme but there is a similarity in sound. (*work; pitchfork*)
- c) Internal rhyme: a word in the middle of the verse line, rhymes with the word at the end of the verse line. (“In mist or *cloud*, on mast or *shroud*.)

**Imagery:**

It is the use of word pictures or images that usually appeal to our senses but they may also appeal to the heart or the mind.

**Figures of speech:**

Words, phrases or expressions used in a manner other than their literal meaning in order to produce a special effect. It is important to know how figures of speech work.

POETIC DEVICES & FIGURES OF SPEECH	FUNCTION / EFFECT (N.B.)
<b>Figures of speech based on associated ideas</b>	
<p><b><u>METONYMY:</u></b> Substitution of the name of something for that of the thing meant, e.g. “And ploughs down palaces, and thrones, and towers.”</p>	<p>It may serve to emphasize a certain aspect of the person or object concerned.</p>
<p><b><u>SYNECDOCHE:</u></b> A part is named but the whole is meant/ understood, OR the whole is named but only part is meant/understood, e.g. “ ... his back to the five thin healthy head grazing.”</p>	<p>It may serve to emphasize the aspect which is selected, but often it is just a case of common usage.</p>
<p><b><u>HYPERBOLE:</u></b> Exaggerated statement. Not meant to be taken literally,</p>	<p>It expresses intense emotion and emphasizes the fact stated.</p>
<p><b><u>LITOTES:</u></b> Ironical understatement, esp. expressing an affirmative by the negative of its contrary.</p>	<p>It emphasizes the statement.</p>
<p><b><u>EUPHEMISM:</u></b> Substitution of vague or mild expression for harsh or direct one, e.g. “He passed away” is a euphemism for “He died”.</p>	

<b>Other useful terminology</b>	
<p><b><u>RHETORICAL QUESTION:</u></b>            Asked not for information but to produce effect.</p>	<p>It emphasizes the fact stated. It draws attention to the statement and makes the reader stop and think.</p>
<p><b><u>APOSTROPHE:</u></b>            The poet addresses an inanimate object, or an absent person.</p>	<p>It creates a sense of immediacy; it makes the person or object addressed seem closer and more real.            When an inanimate object is addressed it is, of course, personified.</p>
<p><b><u>PATHOS:</u></b>            Quality in writing that excites pity or sadness.</p>	<p>Excites pity or sadness.</p>
<p><b><u>ENJAMBMENT:</u></b>            Continuation of sentence beyond end of line, e.g.            "His state              Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed            And post o'er land and ocean without rest:"</p>	<p>It suggests continuation, so strengthens the meaning of lines which state that something is going on without stopping; it creates a fluent movement or helps create a restful mood; Sometimes it emphasizes the last word of one line and the first word of the next line if the end of the first line occurs at an unusual position.</p>
<p><b><u>INVERSION:</u></b>            Reversal of normal, grammatical order of words, e.g.            "How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea            Whose action is no stronger than a flower,            ..."</p>	<p>It may create a jerky rhythm suggesting restlessness, intense emotion, etc; it often serves to lift out certain words by placing them at the beginning or end of a line, or sentence, in an unusual position.</p>
<p><b><u>SATIRE:</u></b>            Ridiculing prevalent vices or follies e.g.            "Tis with our judgments as our watches, none            Go just alike, yet each believes his own."</p>	<p>Causes amusement/makes fun of people/shows things or people up as fools/influences the reader's response.</p>
<p><b><u>DRAMATIC IRONY:</u></b>            The audience/reader is aware of a fact which the speaker is unaware of. This gives the speaker's words a double meaning.</p>	<p>It creates tension and links characters, events or themes.</p>
<p><b><u>UNDERSTATEMENT:</u></b>            Represents something as less than it really is: After the floods, when things were carried away by the water, we say "We've had some rain."</p>	
<p><b><u>CLIMAX:</u></b></p>	

Event or point of greatest intensity or interest.	
<u>ANTI-CLIMAX:</u> Ineffective end to anything that has a suggested climax.	Creates a let-down feeling, suggests a feeling of disappointment / dissatisfaction.
<u>ALLUSION:</u> Reference to a specific person, place, event or literary work in the course of a poem.	
<u>ELISION:</u> Letter(s) left out to intensify the rhythm.	
<u>EPIGRAM:</u> It is a short, concise statement but has a deeper meaning	Creates the atmosphere before a poem.
<b>Figures of speech based on comparison or resemblance.</b>	
<u>PERSONIFICATION:</u> Attribute human qualities to thing or quality.	It makes the scene more vivid or the action more forceful.
<u>SIMILE:</u> Comparison between two things, using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i> .	Makes the picture more vivid and helps to convey more accurately how the writer experienced a sensation.
<u>METAPHOR:</u> Calling something by a name to an object/person which is not literally applicable to it.	Makes the writer's experience clearer and more vivid and conveys a depth of meaning by calling up numerous associations in the mind of the reader. Makes the description more compact.
<b>Figures of speech based on contrast or differences</b>	
<u>PUN:</u> Uses the double meaning of a word or phrase for suggestive and humorous purposes.	
<u>PARADOX:</u> A statement which is self-contradictory but which contains some truth. "One has to be cruel to be kind." Punishing a child who plays with the electric socket may seem cruel, but is kind, because if you don't he/she may be electrocuted.	
<u>OXYMORON:</u> A paradox contained in two words: "rotten beauty". A beautiful girl with low morals is outwardly beautiful, but inside she is rotten.	

<p><b><u>ANTITHESIS:</u></b>  Opposites are contrasted or balanced in two clauses or phrases.  “The years to come seemed waste of breath  A waste of breath the years beyond.”  (N.B. Antithesis contains no contradiction or seeming contradiction, it is merely opposites/ contrasts)</p>	
<p><b><u>SARCASM:</u></b>  Bitter or wounding remark, ironically worded taunt.</p>	<p>Expresses feelings, serves to reveal the speaker’s attitudes or feelings towards the person meant/addressed.</p>
<p><b><u>IRONY:</u></b>  Expression of meaning by language of opposite or different tendency.</p>	<p>It expresses the speaker’s feelings and attitude towards the person/thing he is discussing. It is usually used to create humour.</p>
<p><b><u>INNUENDO:</u></b>  When something is hinted at without actually saying it.</p>	

**Sound devices:**

The following are not strictly figures of speech, although they are often classified as such. It is where the sound of words is just as significant as the meaning of the words.

<p><b><u>ALLITERATION:</u></b>  Repetition of beginning consonant sounds, at short intervals, of different words, e.g.  “ ... my <u>d</u>ongas  and my ever-whirling <u>d</u>ust,  My <u>d</u>eath ...”</p>	<p>Links important words and emphasizes them. Imitates sounds mentioned in the poem. Influences the rhythm, either slowing down the tempo, or increasing it, depending on whether the words are long or short and whether the sounds are clipped or drawn-out.</p>
<p><b><u>ASSONANCE:</u></b>  Repetition of vowel sounds in two or more words, without the repetition of the same consonant, e.g.  “And all is <u>se</u>ared with trade, <u>ble</u>ared,  <u>sm</u>eaded with toil. ...”</p>	<p>Creates vivid aural images by imitating the sounds of objects mentioned in the poem.</p>
<p><b><u>ONOMATOPOEIA:</u></b>  Forming words from sounds that resemble those associated with the object or suggestive of its qualities, e.g. “The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard .....</p>	<p>Imitates the sounds referred to. Helpsto create a vivid aural picture and make the scene more immediate and real to the reader.</p>

### **Symbolism:**

A symbol is any word or object which represents or suggests an idea.

### **Hints for analysing a poem:**

- Regard every poem as a masterpiece! Instead of finding fault, look for positive aspects.
- Keep an open mind and allow yourself to be influenced by the poet's voice.
- Read a poem at least three times before analysing it in depth.
- It is the WHOLE poem that counts. Begin with the poem as a whole, move to its individual parts, then return to the poem as a whole again.

### **Useful method of analysing a poem:** (there are other ways as well)

- ✓ Read the poem a number of times, aloud, if possible.
- ✓ Ask yourself what the poet is saying to the reader. Try to identify the subject and the theme.
- ✓ Consider what the poet's intention was when writing the particular poem.
- ✓ Analyse carefully the poet's diction. Ask yourself what type of language and style has been used. Look up any words you do not know/understand.
- ✓ Establish what feelings the poet evokes in the reader and then assess the mood of the poem.
- ✓ Look at the form of the poem as part of the poet's method of getting his message across.
- ✓ See what poetic devices (rhyme, rhythm, figures of speech, sound devices) the poet has used. Analyse them individually and assess what they contribute to the success of the poem.
- ✓ Identify any other outstanding or unusual features.
- ✓ Decide whether the poet has succeeded in his aim.

### **Poetry literary essay:**

This essay will be a shorter version. The structure of this literary essay is exactly the same as a prose literary essay.

#### REMEMBER:

- ❖ Write in the third (objective) person.
- ❖ Write in the present tense. (you are analysing the set work today)
- ❖ Every argument MUST be supported from the poem.
- ❖ Introduction and conclusion paragraph briefly rephrases question to show your point of view. (do you agree or not)
- ❖ Create a mind-map that contains the key aspects of the question. Under each aspect, identify examples from the poem to support aspect.
- ❖ Do not pass judgement (good/bad poem), only state whether the poet was successful as stated in question.
- ❖ Do not just retell what the poem is about or the historic background thereof, stick to the question.
- ❖ Incorporate your knowledge of poetic devices. (learn them and know them well!!!!)
- ❖ Write in paragraphs and logically.
- ❖ Stick to the word count, so avoid repetition and unnecessary examples.

## SONNET

A sonnet consists of 14 lines, usually iambic pentameters, with the exception of Gerard Manley Hopkins' curtail sonnets (e.g. *Pied Beauty*) which were cut (or curtailed) to 10 lines in stanzas of 6 and 4 lines. They do however display a noticeable variation in rhyme scheme, the majority falling into either of two basic categories:

- (i) Shakespearian, Elizabethan or English sonnet, rhyming *abab cdcd efef gg* (i.e. three quatrains with a gathering together or focalisation of the three aspects of the theme expressed in each of the quatrains in the concluding couplet)
- (ii) Italian or Petrarchan sonnet, rhyming *abbaabba* and, with variations, *cdecde* (i.e. an octave which presents the main thrust or thesis of the poem, followed by the *volta* or resolution of the thesis in the sestet).

In a sonnet the poet has to express a SINGLE theme: a single idea, thought, emotion, experience, etc. English sonnets (written by English poets) into FOUR groups.

### A) THE ITALIAN OR PETRARCHAN TYPE

It was named after the Italian, Petrarch who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century at the beginning of the Renaissance. He did not invent the verse form, but was the first to use it extensively to express his deep love for his beloved.

The Italian sonnet consists of TWO parts.

1. The first EIGHT lines (octave) in which the main theme is presented.

LINE			Rhyme scheme	
1	.....	soon,	a	} Only TWO rhymes used in the octave. (1) the 4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> lines rhyme the FIRST line  (2) the 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> rhyme with the SECOND line
2	.....	powers;	B	
3	.....	ours;	B	
4	.....	boon!	A	
5	.....	moon,	A	
6	.....	hours	B	
7	.....	flowers	B	
8	.....	tune;	A	

### THE BREAK

There is a definite break in the thought, arrangement, etc. between the octave and the second part: the sestet

2. The last SIX lines (sestet) in which the poet presents the conclusion he has drawn from the theme presented in the octave.

### B) THE ENGLISH OR SHAKESPEARIAN TYPE

During the Renaissance everything Italian was fashionable in England (and in most other European countries) and so, quite naturally, Petrarch's sonnet form was copied by many English poets.

Some of them, however, found the Italian sonnet form unsuitable and so they adapted it to suit their purpose.

This was done before Shakespeare's time, but because he used this new sonnet so magnificently it is sometimes called the Shakespearian sonnet.

In its typical form, the Shakespearian sonnet consists of:

- (1) Three quatrains (four lines) in which its theme (an emotion, a thought, an idea, etc.) is presented and developed;
- (2) and of a rhyming couplet (two lines) in which the poet states the conclusion he has drawn from the theme which is presented in the first twelve lines.

But there are many variations of this form, the most important being the sonnet where the first TWO quatrains are used as an octave; the last quatrain and the rhyming couplet are used as the sestet. In this variation there is NOT such a sharp break (marked division) between the octave and sestet, although it does have a PAUSE there.

The layout of the TYPICAL Shakespearian sonnet.

	LINE			Rhyme scheme	
FIRST QUATRAIN	1	....	sea	A	} There are SEVEN rhymes There are TWO rhymes in each quatrain: (1) the FIRST line rhymes with the THIRD line
	2	....	power,	B	
	3	....	plea,	A	
	4	....	flowers,	B	
SECOND QUATRAIN	5	....	cut	C	} (2) The SECOND line rhymes with the FOURTH line.
	6	....	days,	D	
	7	....	stout	C	
	8	....	decays?	D	
THIRD QUATRAIN	9	....	alack!	E	} (3) The FIRST and THIRD lines rhyme; so do the SECOND and FOURTH lines.
	10	....	hid?	F	
	11	....	back,	E	
	12	....	forbid?	F	
COUPLET	13	....	might,	G	} (4) The Shakespearian (5) sonnet is always concluded with RHYMED couplet
	14	....	bright.	G	

## TONE VOCABULARY

Tone: quality or timbre of the voice that conveys the emotional message of a text. In a written text, it is achieved through words.

Mood: atmosphere or emotion in written texts; shows the feeling or the frame of mind of the characters; it also refers to the atmosphere produced by visual, audio or multi-media texts.

Theme: the central idea or ideas in text; a text may contain several themes and these may not be explicit or obvious.

### *Positive Tone / Attitude Words*

Amiable	Consoling	Friendly	Playful
Amused	Content	Happy	Pleasant
Appreciative	Dreamy	Hopeful	Proud
Authoritative	Ecstatic	Impassioned	Relaxed
Benevolent	Elated	Jovial	Reverent
Brave	Elevated	Joyful	Romantic
Calm	Encouraging	Jubilant	Soothing
Cheerful	Energetic	Lighthearted	Surprised
Cheery	Enthusiastic	Loving	Sweet
Compassionate	Excited	Optimistic	Sympathetic
Complimentary	Exuberant	Passionate	Vibrant
Confident	Fanciful	Peaceful	Whimsical

### *Negative Tone / Attitude Words*

Accusing	Aggravated	Agitated	Angry
Apathetic	Arrogant	Artificial	Audacious
Belligerent	Bitter	Boring	Brash
Childish	Coarse	Cold	Condemnatory
Disappointed	Disgruntled	Disgusted	Disinterested
Choleric	Harsh	Haughty	Hateful
Condescending	Contradictory	Critical	Insulting
Hurtful	Indignant	Inflammatory	Outraged
Irritated	Superficial	Desperate	Passive
Facetious	Shameful	Smooth	Snooty
Furious	Surly	Testy	Threatening
Quarrelsome	Wrathful		

### *Humour-Irony-Sarcasm Tone / Attitude Words*

Amused	Bantering	Bitter	Caustic
Comical	Condescending	Contemptuous	Critical
Cynical	Disdainful	Droll	Giddy
Flippant	Mocking	Mock-serious	Irrelevant
Humorous	Insolent	Ironic	Quizzical
Joking	Malicious	Patronizing	Sarcastic
Pompous	Mock-heroic	Scornful	Whimsical
Ribald	Ridiculing	Teasing	Wry
Sardonic	Satiric	Silly	Taunting

### *Sorrow-Fear-Worry Tone / Attitude Words*

Aggravated	Despairing	Hopeless	Paranoid
Apprehensive	Disturbed	Horror	Pessimistic
Agitated	Embarrassed	Melancholy	Poignant
Anxious	Fearful	Miserable	Pitiful
Apologetic	Foreboding	Morose	Regretful
Concerned	Gloomy	Mournful	Remorseful
Confused	Grave	Nervous	Resigned
Dejected	Horrific	Numb	Sad
Depressed	Hollow	Ominous	Serious
Sober			

### *Neutral Tone / Attitude Words*

Admonitory	Allusive	Apathetic	Authoritative
Baffled	Callous	Candid	Ceremonial
Clinical	Consoling	Contemplative	Conventional
Detached	Didactic	Disbelieving	Factual
Dramatic	Earnest	Expectant	Frivolous
Fervent	Formal	Forthright	Incredulous
Haughty	Histrionic	Humble	Loud
Informative	Inquisitive	Instructive	Nostalgic
Intimate	Judgemental	Learned	Urgent
Lyrical	Matter-of-fact	Meditative	Vexed
Objective	Obsequious	Patriotic	Wistful
Pleading	Pretentious	Persuasive	Zealous
Questioning	Reflective	Reminiscent	
Restrained	Sincere	Resigned	
Shocking	Seductive	Serious	

## THE GARDEN OF LOVE

William Blake

I went to the Garden of Love  
And saw what I never had seen:  
A Chapel was built in the midst,  
Where I used to play on the green.

And the gates of this Chapel were shut, 5  
and Thou shalt not. writ over the door;  
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,  
That so many sweet flowers bore,

And I saw it was filled with graves,  
And tomb-stones where flowers should be: 10  
And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,  
And binding with briars my joys & desires.

The Garden of Love

William Blake

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### **Background notes of poet**

William Blake was born in London, in the United Kingdom, in 1757. He was a poet, artist and mystic, and his poetry is amongst the most lyrical and prophetic in the English tradition. Blake was a non-conformist and a radical who was concerned with many of the social injustices of the day, as well as being profoundly spiritual. Both aspects are reflected in his works. He died in poverty in 1827, and his genius was only truly recognised after his death.

The Romantic poem **The Garden of Love by William Blake**, published in 1794 as part of the Songs of Experience, consists of three quatrains, i.e. three stanzas having four lines each. ... One can, however, find a couple of internal rhymes in stanza two (shut - not) and three ("gowns" - "rounds"; "briars" - "desires").

### **Themes**

#### **The distortion of Christian belief about the future life**

Blake attacks the approach of some forms of contemporary Christianity which encouraged the denial of sexuality and other powers in the present, in the hope of future reward and bliss. He felt that this led to permanent failure to attain human fulfilment.

#### **The effects of 'fallenness' on repression of sexuality and other emotions**

Blake believed that inhibitions lie primarily within the mind, rather than in external factors. Society makes its fears, guilt and shame into rules and laws which are then enshrined in social institutions such as the authority of parents, the Church and the State or Monarchy.

The poem is the antithesis to The Echoing Green of Innocence, as it uses the same setting and rhythm to stress the ugly contrast. Blake firmly believed that love cannot be sanctified by religion. The negative commandments of the Old Testament, 'Thou Shall Not' could not

enshrine the most positive creative force on earth. For Blake, sexuality and instinct is holy, the world of institutionalized religion turns this instinct into imprisonment and engenders hypocrisy. Those rules, which forbid the celebration of the body, kill life itself.

### **During reading**

1. Why do you think the 'Garden of Love' (line 1) is written with capital letters?
2. Why can the speaker not enter the 'Chapel' (lines 3 and 5)?
3. How does the speaker feel about the presence of this chapel?
4. What has replaced the flowers in the 'Garden of Love' (lines 8-9)?
5. What do you understand by the expression 'walking their rounds' (line 11)?

### **Content**

- In this poem, the speaker describes revisiting a place he remembers from his childhood, only to find that it has been taken over by a chapel or church. He is prevented from entering so he attempts to explore the surrounding garden instead. Here he finds that the place which used to be full of 'sweet flowers' (line 8) has been filled with graves and tombstones instead. In addition, patrolling priests, in their dark robes, prevent him from experiencing or reliving his 'joys & desires' (line 12).
- This poem could be interpreted in different ways. On one level it is simply a mark of the passage of time, and that as a result of human expansion; an open area of his childhood no longer exists. While this is cause for dismay for the speaker, it is surely not particularly surprising.
- However, the fact that it is a religious building that has usurped this land could imply a broader comment on organised religion and its influence on 'innocent' pleasures and freedom.

### **Summary**

- The speaker visits a garden that he had frequented in his youth, only to find it overrun with briars, symbols of death in the form of tombstones, and close-minded clergy.
- "The Garden of Love" is a deceptively simple three-stanza poem made up of quatrains. The first two quatrains follow Blake's typical ABCB rhyme scheme, with the final stanza breaking the rhyme to ABCD. The lack of rhyme in the last stanza, which also contains the longest lines, serves to emphasize the death and decay that have overtaken a place that once used to hold such life and beauty for the speaker.
- Following the specific examples of flowers representing types of love, this poem paints a broader picture of flowers in a garden as the joys and desires of youth. When the speaker returns to the Garden of Love, he finds a chapel built there with the words, "Thou shalt not," written overhead. The implication is that organized religion is intentionally forbidding people from enjoying their natural desires and pleasures.
- The speaker also finds the garden given over to the graves of his pleasures while a black-clad priest binds his "joys and desires" in thorns. This not-so-subtle critique shows Blake's frustration at a religious system that would deny men the pleasures of nature and

their own instinctive desires. He sees religion as an arm of modern society in general, with its demand that human beings reject their created selves to conform to a more mechanistic and materialistic world.

### **Imagery and symbolism**

- The garden of love - The dominant image evokes two gardens in the Old Testament. Firstly, it evokes the Garden of Eden before the Fall of humankind. When Adam and Eve were in the garden, they were able to love without shame and self-consciousness. It was a place, therefore, of innocent, uninhibited sexual expression. The state of the garden discovered by the speaker is therefore akin to Eden after the Fall, when sexuality is surrounded by shame, repression and prohibitions.
- The second garden is found in the Old Testament poem, the Song of Songs. This is an unashamedly erotic poem in which garden imagery is used as a metaphor for sexual enjoyment. However, the contemporary Christian reading reinterpreted the original eroticism of the poem, to make it a symbol of a 'purer' spiritual love, implicitly demoting the worth of sexuality.
- **The green**  
The colour green is associated with growth, fertility and spring  
Village greens were places of play and freedom. They represented the importance of play, and therefore of imagination, in human life.  
Village greens were not owned by anyone, so represented freedom from the rule or demands of an authority figure.
- In the Songs of Innocence, the green is a place of play and freedom for children. It evokes a time of innocence in which 'play' could include innocent, unselfconscious sexuality. Here it has been taken over by repressiveness.
- **The Chapel**  
It is bounded by 'gates' which are 'shut'  
It is a place where people are not free to act ('Thou shalt not')  
It is associated with the loss of life ('graves')  
Its priests wear uniforms (they are all 'in black') and patrol the grounds like warders  
They confine any initiative toward freedom ('binding... desires'), in a potentially painful way (using 'briars').
- Here, in this poem, the poet rebels against the idea of original sin. Man was expelled for eating of the fruit of knowledge and, cast out of Eden, was shamed by sexuality. In the poem, the poet subverts orthodoxy and the patriarchal authority figures of the daddy and God and his Priests. The Dissenting tradition to which Blake's family belonged believed in "inner light" and "the kingdom within". Moral laws without any rationale are not to be obeyed. In 'The Garden Love', interfering priesthood and the powers of prohibition blight innocent affections. The Church of Experience like the King and State rely on such powers to ensure obedience. A contemporary reference linked with the poem is that of the Marriage Act of 1753, passed by Lord Hardwicke. These Acts stipulated that all marriages had to be solemnized according to the rules of the Church of England in the Parish Church of one of the parties in the presence of a clergyman and two witnesses.
- With the loss of rural society and extended families in villages this legislation was perhaps necessary, especially in urban centres. However, for Blake this was equal to curbing individual freedom. For him, each prohibition created repression, therefore in The Garden of Love, we see a bleak, unproductive landscape of unfulfilled yearning where sterile resentment, fear, guilt and joylessness replace the open freedom of innocence.

## The Garden of Love Analysis

*I went to the Garden of Love,  
And saw what I never had seen:  
A Chapel was built in the midst,  
Where I used to play on the green.*

- The twelve lines of the William Blake's poem The Garden of Love belong to the state of Experience that characterizes the present day world. Experience stands in total contrast to the state of Innocence.
- The poet revisited the Garden of Love, open green piece of land where he used to play with boys and girls together. He was dismayed to see there what he had never seen earlier. He found that in the green open place, a Chapel (church) had been erected in the middle of the place where boys and girls together used to play. Institutionalized religion thus destroyed the Garden of Love. In the world of Experience, the harmony between man and nature no longer existed. Earlier the Garden of Love seemed to be in state of idyllic beauty, but the present day scenario of the place is one of utter sadness and gloom.

*And the gates of this Chapel were shut,  
And Thou shalt not. writ over the door;  
So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,  
That so many sweet flowers bore.*

- In the second stanza, the poet gives further description of the place of his revisit. The gates of the Chapel were closed. And the closed door had got written on it 'Thou Shalt Not.' So, the visitor (the poet) turned his attention to the place of the Garden of Love where it used to bloom a number of flowers but found them missing. In fact, the very idea of chapel and the negative "Thou Shalt Not" suggests the concept of private property, which is the source of all inequality and helplessness in society. The gate is closed to the passerby and on it is inscribed the warning 'Thou Shalt Not'. The warning is emblematic of the classic dictum of the Old Testament God-Jehovah who is seen as a prohibitive and a vindictive tyrant.

*And I saw it was filled with graves,  
And tomb-stones where flowers should be:  
And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,  
And binding with briars, my joys & desires.*

- The lines of the third stanza depict the adverse changes that have enveloped the Garden of Love during the present time. The Garden portrays an aura of total unease and misery. At present, the garden seems to be filled with graves and tombstones which are images of death, and so horrendous and undesirable. Even the priests wrapped in black gowns forebode an ill-omen and an act of mourning and despair. The priests depict a total official manner devoid of any compassion or even forgiveness. This seems to be the basic factor that binds the narrator's desires and joy.
- It could be that earlier, the Garden presented the state of innocence where an environment of gaiety and mirth prevailed and everybody could enter the place without any discrimination whatsoever. But now it seems that the Garden has been lent or sold out to a private individual who exerts the sole authority and hence, the others are devoid

of any joyous moment. The present day scene looks quite dismal where even such a simple resort as the garden is unable to escape the evils of industrialization and subsequent phenomenon of private ownership.

### **Form and structure**

- ✓ This poem consists of three stanzas of four lines each. The stanzas are used to focus attention on different issues: The first stanza tells us of the speaker's discovery; the second reveals the speaker's feelings about the building but expresses hope for consolation to be found in the garden; the third stanza describes the speaker's disappointment that this, too, has undergone drastic change.
- ✓ The rhyme scheme makes use of end-rhymes in the first two stanzas, using the pattern of *a-b-c-b, d-e-f-e*. The poet uses internal rhyme with 'gowns' and 'rounds' in line 11, and 'briars' and 'desires' in line 12.

### **Poetic / language devices**

- ❖ Blake makes use of punctuation to add emphasis to his content: 'Garden of Love' (lines 1 and 7) is capitalised as the proper noun to name a special place, one that had a specific name. The word 'Chapel' (lines 3 and 5) is also capitalised, which given that 'chapel' means a 'small church', seems to underline the importance of its position to the speaker. This is echoed by the capital letter for 'Priests' (line 11), as if these members of the church loom large in this place. The capital letter and fullstop are used to highlight the sign 'Thou shalt not' (line 6), making the command forbidding and hostile.
- ❖ The poem's diction is simple and straightforward, capturing the natural expression of the speaker's experience. The use of innuendo is apparent as the speaker does not express his anger, disappointment or outrage explicitly, but implies it in the phrase 'where flowers should be' (line 10) and 'binding with briars' his 'joys & desires' (line 12).
- ❖ The reference to the 'Priests in black gowns' (line 11) who are 'walking their rounds' (line 11) is not a positive image. A perfectly acceptable situation where priest are perhaps saying prayers in the chapel grounds is given rather sinister overtones. The 'black gowns' seem somewhat threatening, while the action of the priests suggests they are like guards or sentinels to keep out 'undesirables'.
- ❖ The use of tense in 'never had seen' (line 2) and the garden that 'bore' (line 8) flowers in the past suggests the passage of time. In a figurative interpretation, it could be implying that this experience amounts to a sudden realisation of what has been in front of the speaker for some time, but he was unable to 'see' the reality clearly before.

### **Sound devices**

- The rhythm in the poem is mostly regular, due to the steady meter and rhyming. However, the change in rhyme, pace and rhyme structures of the final two lines draws the reader's attention.
- Perhaps the speaker suggests that his world is now out of balance with his realisation, and this new reality requires a different form of expression.

Vocabulary:

<b>the green</b>	- a common or public park
<b>shalt</b>	- shall, will
<b>binding</b>	- restricting
<b>briars</b>	- thorny branches

**Questions:**

1. How do we know that the speaker had positive memories of the place the poem describes?
2. What does the word 'midst' (line 30) mean in the context of the stanza?
3. The speaker seems to paint a negative picture of what the garden has become. Without changing the 'facts', discuss how a different impression could have been created.
4. Comment on the effectiveness of the description 'binding with briars' (line 12).
5. What view of organised religion could Blake be presenting in this poem? Find evidence in the poem to support your answer.

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**FELIX RANDAL**

Gerard Manley Hopkins

Felix Randal the farrier, O he is dead then? my duty all ended,  
Who have watched his mould of man, big-boned and  
hardy-handsome  
Pining, pining, till time when reason rambled in it and some  
Fatal four disorders, fleshed there, all contended?

Sickness broke him. Impatient he cursed at first, but mended  
Being anointed and all; though a heavenlier heart began some  
Months earlier, since I had our sweet reprieve and ransom  
Tendered to him. Ah well, God rest him all road ever he  
offended!

5

This seeing the sick endear them to us, us too it endears  
My tongue had taught my thee comfort, touch had quenched thy  
tears                      10  
My tears that touched my heart, child, Felix, poor Felix Randal;

How far from then forethought of, all thy more boisterous  
years,

When thou at the random grim forge, powerful amidst peers,  
Didst fettle for the great grey drayhorse his bright and battering  
sandal!

Felix Randall

Gerard Manley Hopkins

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### **Background notes of poet**

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born in Essex, near London, in 1844 and studied at Oxford, where he converted to Roman Catholicism. He was ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1877, and some of his poems reflect the conflict he felt between his religious vocation and the attraction of the sensory world. Hopkins experimented with poetic techniques, and he attempted to capture the natural world through his original use of rhythm, alliteration and internal rhyme. Hopkins died in 1889 of typhoid fever.

### **During reading**

1. What does a farrier do? Look up this occupation if it is unfamiliar to you.
2. Identify the tone of the first line. How is the speaker feeling?
3. (a) What does it mean to 'pine'?  
(b) What is the effect of the repetition 'pining, pining' (line 3)?
4. What do you think caused the death of Felix Randal? What ailments were common in England in 1885? Do some research to help you with this question.
5. Explain the reference to 'Being anointed' (line 6).
6. Pick out the words and phrases from lines 9-11 that show the speaker's emotional reaction to the death of Felix Randal.

### **Content**

- ❖ In this sonnet, Hopkins reflects on the long illness and death of Felix Randal, and comments on his own role (as priest) in caring for the dying man. Hopkins has, in ministering to Felix Randal's soul, developed a sense of compassion and connection with the dying man.
- ❖ Hopkins recalls the big fellow who was equal to the most physically demanding job of showing the largest horses, and describes his decline as he became sick: 'Sickness broke him' (line 5) as he began to lose his hold on 'reason' (line 3). Hopkins makes a distinction between the physical and spiritual health of Randal, and takes some comfort or 'sweet reprieve' (line 7) to prepare his soul for the afterlife.
- ❖ Though the title is "Felix Randal", the poem is just as much and perhaps even more about Hopkins' ministry. Note that Hopkins' reaction to the news that Felix is dead is neither sorrow nor joy but a comment that Hopkins' own duty toward Felix is "all-ended". He does not go on to speak of the good times in the man's life, but rather how his greatness diminished. He describes how he has watched the physical decline of this man, "...his mould of man, big-boned and hardy handsome/pining, pining, till time when reason rambled in it and some/Fatal four disorders, fleshed there, all contended". Felix Randal was a "farrier", a blacksmith. It is interesting that his decline suits his profession; he loses his shape like a piece of metal in the forge, becoming amorphous.
- ❖ The second stanza concentrates on Felix as the object of Hopkins' ministries. Hopkins gives Felix Extreme Unction, "Sickness broke him. Impatient he cursed at first, but mended/Being anointed and all;...". Extreme Unction is the final sacrament in the Catholic Church, meant to prepare one's soul to enter heaven. However, Felix's attempt to skirt Hell began before the Anointing of the Sick near his deathbed, "though a heavenlier heart began some/Months earlier, since I had our sweet reprieve and ransom/Tendered to him". Notice that the emphasis is on the sacraments the man has

received even more than the attitude change that has occurred. This is not a tale of a deathbed conversion. The focus is not on the dying man, but on Hopkins' work with the man.

- ❖ The next stanza is explicitly about Hopkins' specific ministry to Felix. Hopkins describes the connection between the two of them, "This seeing the sick endears them to us, us too it endears./My tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears,/Thy tears that touched my heart, child, Felix, poor Felix Randal". It is interesting that Hopkins portrays the relationship as reciprocal. Hopkins and Felix are both endeared to each other. Felix's tears which he wipes away touch his heart. That a whole stanza is given to the mutual aspect of the relationship rather than just Hopkins' one-sided ministry to the man is significant. Perhaps Hopkins was trying to console himself to the idea of ministry, that it was not a constant giving with nothing in return. He needed to know that his personal sufferings had a purpose. Not only that, he wanted his spiritual exercises, his writings, to be missionary. He longed for recognition and was "...preoccupied with his lack of an audience" .
- ❖ The final stanza highlights the difference between the Felix Randal of life versus on his deathbed. In life, Felix Randal was a productive citizen, lively and "boisterous". His work as a blacksmith garnered him respect, as he was "powerful amidst peers". However, as he approached death, he seemed the exact opposite: weak, cursing, and unlikeable. Hopkins notes the distinct difference, "How far from then forethought of, all thy more boisterous years". It is possible that this illustration of a distinct difference in personality and form between youth and old age had its roots in Hopkins' own disenchantment with his vocation. His later years found him frustrated with a sense of "poetic infertility". In addition, his ministries were tiring, as he later noted, "It made even life a burden to me"

### **Form and structure**

- ✓ This sonnet consist of two *a-b-b-a* rhymed quatrains (the octave) followed by two rhymed *c-c-d* stanzas making up the sestet.
- ✓ Each section has a particular function, allowing Hopkins to develop his theme. The octave states the situation and establishes the background leading up to Randal's death. The sestet allows the speaker's emotional state to find voice as he addresses the dead man directly, and expresses his regard for him. His own sense of loss and sorrow is made explicit in this sestet of the poem.

### **Poetic / language devices**

- ❖ A notable feature of this sonnet is the shift in tone. The opening line comes across as matter-of-fact, whereas the sestet provides a stark contrast as the raw feelings of the speaker become clear. The tone changes to one of loss and grief.
- ❖ Hopkins uses his structure to establish some distinct contrast. He shows us the strapping healthy Randal who once was 'powerful amidst peers' (line 13) and we can then draw the contrast with eh 'pining, pining' (line 3) man who was broken by 'some/ Fatal four disorders' (line 3-4).
- ❖ A contrast is also provided by describing the spiritual state of Randal who acquires a 'heavenlier heart' (line 6) after time spent with the speaker. This time spent together also causes the development of their relationship from perhaps one of mutual tolerance to a close one where each genuinely cared for the other.
- ❖ Hopkins' use of compound adjectives like 'hardy-handsome' (line 2) gives his poem a liveliness and freshness. The diction of the last stanza lends power to the content, as the reader can visualise Felix Randal 'at the random grim forge' (line 13) performing impressive physical feats.

## Sound devices

- This poem demands to be read aloud. The rhythm of pauses and flow is made clear by the punctuation and word order.
- In the first line, three points are made, separated by the commas and the question mark. The use of alliteration in 'hardy-handsome' (line 2), 'reason rambled' (line 3) and 'Fatal four' (line 4) not only increases the impact of the words due to their sound, but also due to the linking of these words.
- The final two lines of the poem create a strong rhythm as the short phrases 'random grim forge', 'powerful amidst peers' (line 13), 'great grey drayhorse' and 'bright and battering sandal' (line 14) balance each other and cumulatively build the image of strength.

### Vocabulary:

<b>farrier</b>	- blacksmith who specialises in shoeing horses
<b>mould</b>	- shape; type
<b>rambled</b>	- talked aimlessly
<b>anointed</b>	- blessed by a priest
<b>reprieve</b>	- a temporary improvement
<b>ransom</b>	- deliverance; being saved
<b>endears them to us</b>	- makes us like them
<b>quenched</b>	- stopped
<b>forethought of</b>	- predicted
<b>boisterous</b>	- lively
<b>fettle</b>	- trim the horse shoe
<b>drayhorse</b>	- a large working horse

## Questions:

1. Quote the phrase from the poem that tells us of the speaker's belief that Felix Randal's soul had been saved.
2. Relate the physical decline of Felix Randal.
3. Discuss the connotations of the word 'mould' (line 2) and its application in this context.
4. Comment on the poet's use of tone in the poem. Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.
5. Ministering to the sick and dying forms an integral aspect of the function of a priest. Given the clues provided in this poem, do you think Hopkins was effective in this function? Motivate your answer.

**somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond**

ee cummings

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond  
any experience,your eyes have their silence:  
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,  
or which i cannot touch because they are too near

your slightest look easily will unclose me 5  
though i have closed myself as fingers,  
you open always petal by petal myself as spring opens  
(touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose

or if your wish be to close me,i and 10  
my life will shut very beautifully,suddenly,  
as when the heart of this flower imagines  
the snow carefully everywhere descending;

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals  
the power of your intense fragility:whose texture  
compels me what the colour of its countries, 15  
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes  
and opens;only something in me understands  
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)  
nobody,not even the rain,has such small hands 20

somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond

ee cummings

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**Background notes of poet**

E E Cummings was born in 1894, in Massachusetts, in the United States of America. He served as an ambulance driver in World War I, and was detained in France for several months. After the war he lived in France, studying art, and finally settled in New York. Cummings was one of the most experimental poets of the twentieth century, and the style of his poetry is unusual: he uses distorted syntax, unusual punctuation, new words and slang words. These elements make his poems look complicated, but the ideas contain in them are generally quiet simple.

**During reading**

1. Note the many 'errors' or deviations present in the poem.
  - (a) List all the 'errors' you can find in the poem. (Note: 'errors' are instances in the poem in which conventional poetry and language rules are broken.)
  - (b) What is your initial reaction to this rule breaking?
  - (c) Why do you think the poet deliberately makes these 'errors'?
2.
  - (a) Think of synonyms for the word 'frail' (line 3).
  - (b) Find other words and expressions in the poem that have similar meanings.
3.
  - (a) What would be a more usual word to use in place of 'unclose' (line 5)?

- (b) What is the effect of the poet's invented word?
- (c) Identify the irony contained in the phrase 'the power of our intense fragility' (line 14).
- (d) Consider the theme of travel in the poem. Do you think the speaker is referring to a physical journey to a foreign country? If not, what sort of travelling is he talking about?

### **Title**

Like many poets, Cummings never gave his poems titles, so editors just use the first line as the title of each poem. That said, "somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond" seems like a fitting title, because the poem takes on such a surreal, yet strangely happy voyage into the weird world of the speaker and his lover.

### **Theme**

The piece is similar to many traditional love poems in that the speaker spends a lot of time talking about his lover's eyes, and in that the poem uses the well-worn symbol of a rose.

The speaker of "somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond" is a total slave to his lover. He goes on and on about how she has total control over his emotions and there's nothing he can do about it. Rather than this being a bad thing, though, the speaker really seems to love her more the more power she has. She manages all this with subtlety and a mysterious grace.

This love poem takes it to a whole other level. The speaker of "somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond" isn't just kind of infatuated, or even in the throes of violent passion. His love is transcendent. He's so in love with this girl that it's like he's going through a religious conversion of some kind. His feelings for her connect him to something bigger than both of them, something that's infinite and ultimately unknowable.

The poem is full of images of the natural world. We've got flowers, rain, references to the seasons and all that good stuff.

"somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond" shows man and nature in a kind of harmony. The speaker actually describes himself as a flower, opening and closing with the seasons. So you could say that this isn't a poem about man and nature; it's a poem about man as nature.

### **Content**

- ❖ Cummings uses unusual words, punctuation and sentence structure. Once the reader adjusts to the strange language use and relaxes, the emotional associations are not difficult to understand.
- ❖ This is a love poem, although it is quite an unconventional one. The speaker seems to be attempting to understand his beloved's power over him, but he admits that her appeal is intangible and difficult to pinpoint. He cannot work out why she has this ability to move him but he welcomes it nonetheless.
- ❖ The poet makes use of images of nature and the concept of travel to develop his ideas.

### **Form and structure**

- ✓ Given all the unusual features of Cummings' writing, it might be surprising to see a definite form being used. The poem is composed of regular four line stanzas and each stanza deals with a new, separate point.

### **Poetic / language devices**

- ❖ The idea of closing and opening recurs in this poem. The first stanza hints at this with the use of the word 'enclose' (line 3), which becomes more significant in the light of the later

reference to 'unclose' (line 5), 'closed' (line 6), 'open' (line 7), 'close' (line 9), 'shut' (line 10) and 'closes/ and opens (lines 17-18)

- ❖ The poem often uses run-on lines, or enjambment. In one instance, the line could even be said to 'jump over' words to complete the thought, as in line 7 where 'Spring' skips over the content in brackets to find its object, 'her first rose' (line 8).
- ❖ The poet skilfully makes use of imagery, and expresses the images through the use of similes and vivid personification. This can be seen in the capitalisation of 'Spring' (line 7), and the rain's 'hands' in the final line.

### Sound devices

- Notice the alliteration of the hard 'c' sound repeated in line 15 which gives extra power to the words and draws the reader's attention.
- The sound of the word 'enclose' (line 3) is echoed by its opposite 'unclose' (line 5). Perhaps Cummings is saying that in the context of his love's power over him, both actions are equally wondrous.
- The fact that there is little rhyme used in the first four stanzas makes the use of rhyme in the final stanza all the more noticeable.
- This trek deep into the mysteries of the universe—and the human heart—is helped by Cummings's constant use of the long O sound. It reminds us a whole lot of the "omm" sound people make when they're meditating. We also talk about the use of this sound in "Form and Meter," but throughout the poem, Cummings rhymes words like "enclose", "unclose", and "rose". He also connects it all with assonance by using "open" and "opens". So, all the way through our journey, we hear the meditative "ohh" sound, which is also a subtle sonic reminder of the sense of awe in our speaker, too.

### Symbol Analysis

#### Touch

There is a lot of touch imagery in this poem. You'll find mentions of fingers, hands, mysterious touches, and textures. This motif is knitted tightly with some others, like flowers and nature, with Cummings blending the images so well that it's hard to pull them apart. The motif also fits neatly with the poem's overall use of paradoxical images. Translation: you get a bunch of references to the speaker being touched by things that are untouchable. At first, it might not make sense, but then if you think of a time you were truly, madly in love, it totally does.

**Lines 3-4:** We spot touch imagery early on when the speaker describes his lover's "most frail gesture." Maybe she delicately tucks a lock of hair behind her ear? Whatever this tiny flick of the hand is, the speaker is totally awestruck by it. The speaker is so enraptured by all the things in his love's "frail gesture" that he isn't sure if it they "enclose him," or if there are things in them that he "cannot touch because they are too near."

First of all, how can a tiny gesture totally enclose somebody? And secondly, why can't he touch something that's so close to him? These are **deliberate paradoxes**. This touch imagery conjures contradictions that place us in the love-dazzled mind of the speaker.

**Lines 5-6:** The speaker says, "your slightest look easily will uncloset me/ though i have closed myself as fingers." The digits on our hands are probably the parts of our body we most often associate with our sense of touch. Here, the speaker uses a **simile** to compare the feeling of being closed off emotionally to the image of the closed fingers. He can't manage to stay closed off around his love. All she has to do is give him the "slightest look," and he opens up again. Notice that she doesn't even have to touch him to make this happen.

**Lines 7-8:** The touch imagery continues when the speaker describes his love as "touching skilfully, mysteriously." For one, we definitely get a sensual feeling from this line. Skillful and mysterious. Notice, though, that the lines equate this mysterious touching the way "Spring

opens/ [...] her first rose." - It's with sunlight and rain. Again an image of him being opened without any literal hands being put on him.

**Lines 13-14:** Once again we hear about the speaker's love's "fragility," and once again it's related to touch. This time, the speaker says its "texture/ compels [him] with the colour of its countries."

Many paradoxes are found here. First, how can fragility have a texture? It's a quality of a person, not something that's tangible. Also, how can a texture have colours? A texture is something you can feel, not something you see, right? Not in the world of Cummings, where senses mingle in a phenomenon called **synesthesia**. Here again, we see the speaker being touched by things you wouldn't be able to feel in a literal sense.

**Line 17:** Personification is found in the last line of the poem, saying "nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands." It's personification because he's giving human characteristics to something that isn't human. Once again, the speaker describes himself as being opened by some intangible thing about his love. He compares himself to a flower being opened again, but notice that it isn't the rain that opens him. It's some mysterious, subtle thing with even smaller hands than the rain.

### Eyes

**Lines 1-2:** Cummings opens up the poem with the lines, "somewhere i have never travelled, gladly beyond/ any experience, your eyes have their silence." This could be interpreted to mean that the unexplored place the speaker is heading into is the depths of his lover's eyes. The fact that her "eyes have their silence" makes them seem even more mysterious and unknowable.

BUT, aren't all eyes silent? They can't talk at all. In a way they can. You've probably heard somebody say that "the eyes are windows to the soul." You can look into a person's eyes and see what they're feeling and thinking, which could be described as a way of talking without words. Well, if the speaker's eyes are silent at times, we're guessing that means she can be really hard to read, which only makes her more exciting to the speaker.

**Line 5:** At the top of the next stanza, the speaker says that his lady's "slightest look will unclothe [him]." Notice that we've gone from inscrutable, silent eyes that don't seem to be paying much attention to him to ones that are at least sparing him a glance. Smitten, he goes crazy for this and opens right up to his illusive lady. The speaker gives his lover's eyes power by giving them power over the physical world. Metaphorically at least, she can open his tightly closed fingers with the smallest of glances.

**Line 19:** We have to hand it to Cummings. Lines like "the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses" make our heads hurt in a wonderful way. First of all, it's cool how this line brings us back to the silent eyes from line 2. Here, the eyes have a "voice," but it's not any typical voice. It's "deeper than all roses."

Roses wordplay conjures the image of a lady whose eyes are deep and mysterious. When the speaker looks into them, he can't quite read what's there, but he is mesmerized.

### Roses

Cummings manages to pluck these flowers from the garden of clichés and replants them in fertile new ground.

**Lines 7-8:** The flower of love gets its first mention in the second stanza, where the speaker uses a simile to compare the way his lover opens him emotionally to the way spring opens roses. The already obvious love symbolism is taken to an erotic place with all this talk of spring "touching skilfully, mysteriously." Cummings also describes the speaker, who we assume is male, as the flower. It's probably sexist, but the popular perception generally relates women to

flowers.

**Lines 9-12:** The third stanza carries the image of the rose through, but this time uses another simile to compare the way the speaker's lover can close him down emotionally to the way a rose shuts in winter. All the connotations from the previous line apply here, too. What's interesting is that this doesn't come off as a sad image at all. Instead, it's described as being beautiful. The act of it closing itself against the cold is celebrated.

**Lines 17-20:** The speaker ties up this extended metaphor of his lover being able to open and close him like a rose in the final stanza by saying that he has no idea how she has this mysterious power. He goes on to say that whatever this power is, it's "deeper than all roses." If we think about it like there's some deep natural force that make roses grow and if you stare into the folds of a rose's petals, it really can seem like you're staring into another dimension. You can get lost in the patterns of its design. The speaker says, "the voice of [his lover's] eyes is deeper than all roses [our emphasis]." So she's even more powerful and more mysterious than a rose.

Vocabulary:

<b>frail</b>	- physically weak
<b>gesture</b>	- movement made to communicate
<b>descending</b>	- act of moving downwards
<b>rendering</b>	- causing; making

**Questions:**

1. (a) List the elements of nature that are referred to in the poem.  
(b) Quote the word that tells us that the snow is not wilfully destructive.
2. Identify the figure of speech in 'though i have closed myself as fingers' (line 6).
3. (a) Explain how 'fragility' can have 'power' (line 14).  
(b) Describe the extent and ability of this power.
4. (a) Describe the atmosphere or mood of this poem.  
(b) How does the poet create this mood?
5. Explore the metaphor of travel as it is used in the poem, and evaluate its effectiveness.
6. Comment critically on Cummings' unusual use of punctuation and sentence structure.

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**A HARD FROST**

Cecil Day Lewis

A frost came in the night and stole my world  
And left this changeling for it – a precocious  
Image of spring, too brilliant to be true;  
White lilac on the windowpane, each grass-blade  
Furred like a catkin, maydrift loading the hedge  
The elms behind the house are elms no longer  
But blossomers in crystal, stems of the mist

5

That hangs yet in the valley below, amorphous  
As the blind tissue whence creation formed.

The sun looks out, and the fields blaze with diamonds. 10

Mockery spring, to lend this bridal gear

For a few hours to a raw country maid,

Then leave her all disconsolate with old fairings

Of aconite and snowdrop! No, not here

Amid this flounce and filigree of death 15

Is the real transformation scene in progress

But deep below where frost

Worrying the stiff clods unclenches their

Grip on the seed and lets our future breath.

A Hard Frost

Cecil Day Lewis

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### **Background notes of poet**

Cecil Day Lewis was born in Ballintubber, in Ireland, in 1904 and died in 1972. He was educated at Wadham College, in Oxford, and later became a lecturer at the University of Cambridge. He also taught poetry at Oxford and Harvard universities. Lewis was named Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom in 1968. His poetry is characterised by the introduction of modern diction and often addresses relevant social issues of the time, as well as the nature of relationships.

### **During reading**

1. What does the use of 'brilliant' (line 3) mean in this context?
2. How has the windowpane (line 4) been transformed?
3. Describe the altered appearance of the elm tree in your own words.
4. In what way is this seen a 'mockery' (line 11)?
5. Form the context, deduce what the word 'fairings' (line 13) probably means.

### **Content**

- This poem describes the appearance of a hard frost that formed overnight. Think of the patterns that frost forms on glass, and how it sparkles in the early morning sunlight.
- The speaker comments on how the world's appearance has been radically altered by the layer of frost, and in such a way that suddenly the surroundings seem almost spring-like (although the absolute opposite is the case). The glittering and sparkling of the reflected frost creates a bright image but, as the speaker admits, this is 'too brilliant to be true' (line 3). The speaker notes that as opposed to this fake appearance of spring, the 'real' spring is beginning to make itself felt unnoticeably underground.
- This poem was a poem describing the beautiful scene the poet saw one day he woke up in winter morning. Besides portraying the stunning scenery, the poet also wanted to relate the transformation in nature to human life cycle.
- The most prominent imagery used was snow, for example, 'brilliant', 'white', 'diamonds', 'bridal gear'....
- Things used to describe the hard frost were beautiful, shiny and bright. These were used to portray a beautiful scene of white snow spreading all over the forest. Usually the forest in Winter gave people a sense of cruelty, harshness and lifeless, but after having a white frost coating on the dead trees, mountains, everything seemed to become glamorous and attractive. Also, personification was used, like 'the dry' and

'dead' forest coating with shiny, white 'frost' was personified as a raw country maid wearing a borrowed bridal gear for a few hours. As a raw country maid wasn't that beautiful, but, after she wore the white bridal gear, she shined brightly.

- The poet wanted to show the contrast between the forest before and after coating with the frost by personifying it, to make the shape contrast stand out from the poem to get readers' attention. At the same time, he conveyed that this beautiful scene didn't last long.
- After using the imagery to show how beautiful the scene was, the poet also indicated that this scene had only lasted for a short period of time, because after the sun rose, the frost melted. Though the poet was a bit disappointed that the frost melted so quickly, but he found out that after the frost melted, it was also the time for new seeds to grow, it was shown by 'grip on the seed' and 'lets our future breathe'.

### **Form and structure**

- ✓ The poet arranges his content into two stanzas, of similar length. He does not use traditional rhyme scheme, and the line and stanza arrangement is set up to support the content. The first stanza describes the scene, while the second stanza comments on it and exposes the 'truth' of the first.

### **Poetic / language devices**

- ❖ Lewis uses an extended metaphor to compare the image of frost on a window to different features of spring. This is an intriguing choice of comparison, as he describes how the effects of frost can remind the viewer of its opposite, spring.
- ❖ The imagery suggests spring flowers and the freshness of new growth, such as 'maydrift loading the hedge' (line 5) or 'blossomers in crystal' (line 7). Despite the glittering beauty, from the outset the speaker points out that this appearance is deceiving. He accuses the frost of theft as it has stolen away the expected scene and replaced it with a fake. The frost is given almost magical, mystical powers in its ability to accomplish this transformation.
- ❖ The metaphor comparing the white frost blanket to a wedding dress (line 11-13) contains quite a disapproving tone. The wedding dress is being lent to a country maid for a few hours, but she will be left terribly sad when she has to return it and resume her usual, boring appearance.
- ❖ The personification of the last two lines creates an image of a contest of strength taking place beneath the ground where the earth is surrendering its frozen hold to the power of spring. This allows the seeds the chance to sprout, grow and break out of the soil to promise future life and growth.

### **Sound devices**

- The poem focuses on the tension between appearance and reality. Unsurprisingly, there is no overt reference to sound. The heavy coating of frost would blanket the world in sharp silence, and the brittle crispness of this is implied in the mention of 'crystal' (line 7) and 'diamonds' (line 10).
- The alliteration of 'flounce and filigree' (line 15) suggests the disapproving tone of the speaker.

Vocabulary:

<b>changeling</b>	- something that has been secretly exchanged for something else
<b>precocious</b>	- developed earlier than usual
<b>catkin</b>	- spiky flower
<b>amorphous</b>	- without a specific form
<b>mockery</b>	- absurd imitation
<b>disconsolate</b>	- without comfort; unhappy
<b>aconite</b>	- flower similar to a buttercup
<b>snowdrop</b>	- drooping white flower
<b>flounce</b>	- impatient movement
<b>filigree</b>	- ornamental and delicate
<b>clods</b>	- lumps of earth
<b>unclenches</b>	- loosens

**Questions:**

1. Explain the comparison of frost to a thief, used in the first line of the poem.
2. Name the plants mentioned in the first stanza that are used to describe this 'spring' scene.
3. Comment on the effect of the figure of speech used in lines 11-14.
4. Explore how the poet uses punctuation to convey emotion in the poem.
5. Critically evaluate the poetic technique of the extended metaphor, and how it is used in this poem. How effective is it? What might be the potential risks of using this technique? Use evidence from the poem to formulate your response.

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**FUNERAL BLUES - W H Auden**

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead  
Put crêpe bows round the white necks of the public doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song:  
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now; put out every one;  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;  
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

5

10

15

**Background notes of poet**

Wystan Hugh Auden was born in York, in the United Kingdom. At Oxford, he became associated with a number of radical poets and authors, including Stephen Spender. Many of his poems focus on social ills, as well as concern with the workings of the mind. He lived and worked for many years in the United States of America and returned to the United Kingdom in 1972, where he died a year later.

**Before reading**

If one has not experienced it, it is extremely difficult to try to explain the depth of pain and sorrow of a broken heart. We use this term quite loosely in romantic contexts, but when it refers to the response of real grief, the concept of a broken heart is difficult to comprehend.

Think of an experience when you lost someone you loved. If you have not had such an experience, you can imagine how terrible it must be. Compose a short poem for that person that explains your grief at losing them.

**During reading**

1. Notice the plea for certain actions to take place in the first stanza.
  - (a) Why would someone want to 'Stop all the clocks' (line 1)?
  - (b) Identify all the references to sound.
  - (c) Why would the speaker want these sounds to stop?
2. Why do you think capital letters have been used in 'He is Dead' (line 6)?
3. Consider the implications of the description 'He was my North, my South, my East and West' (line 9).
4. Link the verbs in the final stanza to their objects: 'put out' (line 13), 'pack up', 'dismantle' (line 14), 'Pour away' and 'sweep' (line 15). In what way are these verbs appropriate?

**Content**

- This poem is an expression of grief and heartache. The speaker describes his pain and links his overwhelming emotion of despair to the world around him. The reference to 'clocks', 'telephone' (line 1), 'dog' (line 2) and 'pianos' (line 3) examines the mourner's reaction to his immediate, domestic surroundings through the lens of loss. The poem then expands the surroundings to the public arena with 'aeroplanes' (line 5), 'doves' (line 7) and 'traffic policemen' (line 8), and finally ends in the universal sphere of 'stars' (line 13), 'moon', 'sun' (line 14), 'ocean' and 'wood' (line 15). The third stanza describes their special relationship, and gives a personal account of what the dead man meant to the speaker.
- It is clear from the outset what the subject of the poem will be with the title 'Funeral Blues'. The choice of the word 'Blues' is an effective one as this could refer to a depressed mood, and also describes a slow, sad musical piece. The reader immediately understands the call for everything to cease – time, noise, music – as soon as the reference is made to the 'coffin' and 'mourners' (line 4). The stark message 'He Is Dead', to be written on the sky for all to see, implies the speaker's need for the world around him to register the passing of his beloved.

**Line-by-line analysis****Lines 1-2**

*Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,*

- The poem begins with a series of harsh commands: stop the clocks! Cut off the telephones!
- The speaker sounds forceful, even angry.
- Whoever the speaker is, he sounds angry, and issues harsh commands. In the first line, he wants to stop the clocks and the telephone. These seem like physical representations of time and communication to us. He wants everything to just stop.
- In the next line, he asks for silence. He wants dogs to stop barking, too.

### Lines 3-4

*Silence the pianos and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.*

- This is not a time for pianos. It's a time for muffled drums. Now that he's asked the dog and the phone to hush, he has no problem extending that request to musical instruments.
- Except he's not opposed to the drum. Which fits the title. If this is a funeral we're dealing with, drums are much more solemn and fitting for the occasion.
- In the next line, he wants the coffin to be brought out and for mourners to come see it. Maybe the "muffled drum," then, is the sound of mourners walking, or of pallbearers carrying a coffin. Or maybe it is a slow and stately drumming that the speaker wants, the kind of drumming that happens at military funerals.
- The interesting thing about these two lines, and the first two as well, is that they are all commands, also known as imperatives. The speaker is making a big pronouncement to the world: someone has died, and we must acknowledge it in dramatic ways.
- These lines might even seem a little exaggerated. Should we really stop the clocks just because someone has died? Probably not. But the speaker's using hyperbole or exaggeration to convey just how important all this mourning business is.
- Line 3 has eleven syllables, and line 4 has ten. It is safe to call this one iambic pentameter.
- And by the end of stanza 1, we've also got a clear rhyme scheme at work. "Telephone" rhymes with "bone," and "drum" rhymes with "come."
- Whenever you see a four-line stanza, or quatrain that has an aabb rhyme scheme in a poem about a funeral, you're reading an elegiac stanza.

### Lines 5-6

*Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling on the sky the message He is Dead,*

- As if stopping the clocks weren't enough, the speaker would like an airplane to write "He is Dead" in skywriting to commemorate his grief. If a funeral is a public acknowledgment of death, then this is a super public acknowledgement of death.
- While earlier he asked for quiet, and for people to cut off their telephones (which are private communication devices), he wants the whole world to know that "He Is Dead."
- It's interesting that the speaker doesn't provide a name. He could have written, for example, "John Is Dead." Or "Tommy Is Dead." But he leaves the dead man's name anonymous. Maybe he wants more privacy after all. Or maybe he assumes that everyone already knows "his" name. Either way, there's an interesting mixture between private and public acknowledgments of death.

### Lines 7-8

*Put crêpe bows round the white necks of the public doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.*

- More public demands, as the speaker wants even the "public doves" - we have a strong feeling that these are pigeons - to honour the dead man. He wants the traffic police to acknowledge him, too.
- Does the speaker really want us to put bows on pigeons? It seems our man is getting hyperbolic again.

### Lines 9-10

*He was my North, my South, my East and West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,*

- This speaker is so broken up about stuff (and wants everyone else to be broke up about it, too) because he really loved the dead man. It doesn't seem like the dead man was important world- wide. The dead man is someone the speaker knew and loved in daily life.
- These lines are incredibly personal, especially when compared to the earlier lines that are mostly about public mourning. The dead man meant everything to the speaker, so it's no wonder he'd like all the world around him to reflect the fact that the man is dead.
- Metaphor alert. Was the dead man really a calendar of days for the speaker? All the directions on a compass? But in a metaphor, we describe one thing by way of another thing. So here, the speaker describes the dead man by saying that he was like a compass for him, and also like every day of the week for him. He provided direction, and filled his time.

### Lines 11-12

*My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;  
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.*

- More metaphors. These lines seem to imply that the dead man filled every hour of the speaker's day. He brought conversation and joy into the speaker's life.
- While the previous lines were lovely and metaphorical, this one is harsh. Your loved ones will die. No love lasts forever.

### Lines 13-14

*The stars are not wanted now: put out every one,  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,*

- The speaker grows even more depressed in these lines. He demands that someone, whomever he's talking to, put out the stars, pack up the moon, and take apart the sun. Now his grief is so extreme, it's affecting the way he sees the cosmos.
- His extreme, hyperbolic commands are his expressions of his extreme grief.
- Even though no one could ever "dismantle the sun," the speaker's grief is so intense that he wishes that we could. All of these romantic and natural images—the stars, the moon, the sun- are too painful for him. It's almost as if he wants to blot out everything in the world except his own mourning.

### Lines 15-16

*Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.*

- In these final lines, the speaker continues his hyperbolic thinking and asks us to get rid of the ocean and the wood (by "wood," he probably means the forests). He doesn't want to see any sign of the wonders of nature.
- In the last line of the poem he is totally hopeless, the speaker says that nothing will ever be good again.
- In a lot of elegies (poems like this one that commemorate a person's death), the speaker will offer some hope for the future, or will talk about how the dead person will live on in memories and poetry. There's usually a small moment of optimism buried somewhere in them. But not in Auden's "Funeral Blues." This is just a really sad poem about death. There is no light at the end of the tunnel for anyone in "Funeral Blues."

### **Silence - Symbol Analysis**

The speaker spends the first stanza of "Funeral Blues" complaining about how much he wants everyone and everything to be silent. Maybe he wants some peace and quiet to deal with his thoughts. Maybe he wants to make sure that everyone can hear his lament. Maybe he wants silence out of respect for the dead man.

- Line 1: The speaker wants to cut off personal communication with the world: he wants to stop the telephone lines from running. He's looking for isolation. He's probably being hyperbolic here, which means that he's exaggerating his feelings and desires to show just how sad and hopeless he is.
- Line 2: He also wants to stop dogs from barking. Poor dogs. It's not their fault.
- Line 3: Now he'd like people to quit playing the piano, thank you very much. Seems fair enough. This is a funeral after all.
- Lines 3-4: He wants to hear the "muffled drum" of the funeral march. The speaker wants to hear this and this only. It's like all other noise is a distraction from what really matters, which is his pain.

### **The Public - Symbol Analysis**

The speaker is not just concerned with his own reaction to the man's death. He wants the acknowledgment of the public, too. Even though we don't really have much of a reason to think that the dead beloved is famous or anything, the speaker really desires that this death be noticed. Perhaps his grief is so consuming, that he wants it to be reflected in all the world around him.

- Lines 1-4: The speaker wants quiet so that the drum of the funeral march can be heard by the mourners of the dead man. Once again, he's being hyperbolic. No one can really expect every dog in the world to stop barking just because a funeral is happening somewhere in the world.
- Lines 5-6: The speaker asks airplanes to proclaim the man's death though skywriting. It's like he wants the whole world to know what he's going through.
- Lines 7-8: He even wants policemen and pigeons to acknowledge the man's death. Once again, hyperbole.
- Lines 9-12: Compared to the previous lines that deal with the public, these lines seem quiet and intimate, and we realize what the dead man meant to the speaker. He wants a public acknowledgment of the man with whom he's spent his private life.

### **Nature - Symbol Analysis**

Sun, moon, stars...sounds lovely, right? Well, not to our speaker. He wants all these lovely things - and everything else in nature, it seems - to leave him alone. The grief he feels seems to have interfered with his ability to appreciate nature.

- Line 11: Here, the speaker says that the dead man was everything to him. Even times of the day. Even midnight itself. These metaphors are hyperbolic, but hey, let's cut the guy some slack. He's been through a lot.
- Lines 13-16: The speaker calls for us to "put out" the stars, "pack up the moon and dismantle the sun." He wants every beautiful thing that nature provides to go away. No more ocean, no more forests. This guy is so sad that he doesn't even want the stars around to remind him of his dead beloved. He's being hyperbolic, of course; he probably doesn't actually think that someone could "dismantle" the sun. But he yearns for this isolation from the natural world anyway.

### **Analysis: Form and Meter - Elegy**

Elegies can take lots of different shapes and forms, since there are no rhyming or metrical rules for an elegy. "Funeral Blues" is that is written in elegiac stanzas.

An elegiac stanza is a quatrain written in iambic pentameter, usually with the rhyme scheme abab. Here's where the "more or less" comes in. "Funeral Blues" is written in quatrains, and it does make use of iambic pentameter, but it's highly irregular in its meter, with extra syllables here and shaky feet there. And the rhyme scheme is tweaked a bit, too: aabb instead of abab. Auden is using heroic couplets instead of alternating rhymes.

### **Analysis: Speaker**

Let's list what we know about the speaker.

1. We don't actually know if the speaker is male or female.
2. He likes issuing commands and telling people what to do.
3. He's sad.

The speaker is so sad that he can't imagine any good or happiness in the future. He's so overwhelmed by grief that he's driven to speak in crazy hyperboles. It's as if his sadness has completely changed the way he sees the world around him, and he wants that sadness to be reflected back to him by everything he sees. The problem is, he exaggerates so consistently that we may even have trouble taking him seriously sometimes.

### **Analysis: Setting**

This poem's set at a funeral. This isn't about a small chapel, filled with loved ones in black. The setting, in many ways, is the whole wide world. The speaker wants that sadness to be reflected in everything - from the pigeons in the street to the stars in the sky. The true setting of "Funeral Blues" includes all of those things.

### **Analysis: Title**

The poem is called "Funeral Blues,". It's a sad song (blues) about a dead man (funeral).

### **Poetic / language devices**

- ❖ Auden effectively captures the speaker's sense of devastation and grief with his images in the first stanza. The speaker's world has ended, and he feels that life has changed forever. It seems wrong for the world to continue on with the telephone ringing or dogs barking in the face of his loss.
- ❖ The personification of the aeroplanes 'moaning' (line 5) shows the speaker's projection of his grief to his broader surroundings, as is the powerful image of the words scribbled on the sky for all to see (line 6).
- ❖ Describing the loved one as the points of a compass suggests that he, the departed, provided a sense of direction and grounding for the speaker, as well as being his entire world. The impact of the loss is further emphasised with the explanation that 'he' was

there for the daily grind of work as well as the moments of 'Sunday rest' (line 10). We see the depth of the relationship as it gave meaning to the various times of the day – with their implications, and through 'my talk, my song' (line 11) was one that thrived through both ordinary conversation and companionship, as well as moments of joy.

- ❖ Line 12 achieves its emotive impact through its simplicity, coupled with the use of the colon to state its devastating realisation.
- ❖ The final stanza plays on images often associated with romantic love: the starlit night sky, the shining moon, romantic walks along a beach or picnics in the wood. These conventions are destroyed as the speaker calls for all these symbols to be stripped of their meaning as 'nothing now can ever come to any good' (line 16).
- ❖ Auden achieves a remarkable balance of tone. The speaker's grief is starkly evident and his sorrow, confusion and even anger or bitterness at his loss is readily apparent. But Auden never allows the tone to become overly sentimental. As a result, the grief seems real and moving as we share and understand the speaker's bereavement.

### Sound devices

- The rhythm of the poem is regular, and the rhyme scheme contributes to this. This is fitting for a 'Blues' musical piece of the title. Notice how the regularity of the rhythm breaks down in the last line: This echoes the meaning as the speaker expresses his utter despair at his beloved's death.
- Auden allows the aeroplanes to 'moan': The onomatopoeia here encourages us to hear the low hum of a light aircraft in the sky overhead. References to sound are effectively used in the opening stanza with the contrast created between ordinary household noises and the call for silence, only to be broken by the solemn, 'muffled drum' (line 3) of the funeral procession.

#### Vocabulary:

<b>muffled</b>	- wrapped to deaden the sound
<b>crêpe</b>	- light crinkled fabric
<b>dismantle</b>	- take apart

### Questions:

1. State the possible meanings for the word 'Blues' in the title, and relate this to the poem itself.
2. Identify the colour contrast found in the second stanza, and show how this reflects the speaker's mood.
3. Discuss the nature of the relationship described in the third stanza, and comment on how this information is conveyed.
4. Critically evaluate the impact of this poem as an expression of loss and grief. Support your response with evidence from the poem
5. Identify the symbols of death that can be found in this verse.
6. What is the purpose of stopping the clocks?
7. Why must the dog be offered a "juicy bone" and not just a bone?
8. Why does the poet use the upper case?

## AN AFRICAN THUNDERSTORM

David Rubadiri

From the west  
Clouds come hurrying with the wind  
Turning sharply  
Here and there 5  
Like a plague of locusts  
Whirling  
Tossing up things on its tail  
Like a madman chasing nothing.

Pregnant clouds 10  
Ride stately on its back,  
Gathering to perch on hills  
Like sinister dark wings;  
The wind whistles by  
And trees bend to let it pass. 15

In the village  
Screams of delighted children,  
Toss and turn  
In the din of the whirling wind,  
Women - 20  
Babies clinging on their backs -  
Dart about  
In and out  
Madly  
The wind whistles by  
Whilst trees bend to let it pass. 25  
Clothes wave like tattered flags  
Flying off  
To expose dangling breasts  
As jagged blinding flashes  
Rumble, tremble and crack 30  
Amidst the smell of fired smoke  
And the pelting march of the storm.

An African Thunderstorm

David Rubadiri

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### **Background notes of poet**

David Rubadiri was born in 1930, in Malawi. He studied in Uganda and Cambridge. In 1964,

when Malawi gained independence, Rubadiri was appointed Malawi's first ambassador to the United States of America and the United Nations. He left the government in 1965 when he and President Hastings Banda had a disagreement, but he later returned to the Washington embassy after Banda's removal from power.

### During reading

1. How does the word 'African' in the title affect your expectations of the content of the poem?
2. (a) Count the number of participles (words ending in '-ing') used in lines 1-9.  
(b) what effect does this have on the description of the scene?
3. What image does the line 'Like a madman chasing nothing' (line 9) produce?
4. Consider the connotations of the words 'pregnant' and 'stately' in the lines 'Pregnant clouds/Ride stately on its back' (lines 10-11).
5. Has the full ferocity of the storm arrived by the end of the poem? Explain your answer.

### MAJOR

### THEME

The wind is a major theme in the poem. It is mentioned four times while it is explicitly examined and built upon like a main act in a plot through the interwoven five stanzas in the poem

### Content

- The Poet addresses the subject of thunderstorm in Africa. He closely examines the onset, features, manifestation and local setting.
- The effects of the storm on its environment-animate and inanimate, people, as well as flora and fauna, are closely outlined in free flowing subjective prose.
- The unmistakable signature of the tell-tales of the storm is repetitively spluttered in lingering fashion.
- Rubadiri's poem captures the looming arrival of a fierce storm. The anticipation of its arrival is both exciting and frightening. The wind is described as a mighty force, unpredictable in its direction, and carrying with it ominous clouds. The strength of the wind seems to suggest that worse is to follow once the storm hits.
- The poem describes nature's forces conspiring to bring this powerful storm, and then narrows the focus to its effect on people in its path. The inhabitants of a village are seen reacting to its approach, with the contrasting responses of children and mothers.
- The village is clearly vulnerable to the force of the storm. The poem ends with the storm almost breaking overhead as the flashes of lightning and crack of thunder arrive.

#### 1st

#### Stanza

Its origination is identified as proceeding from the west in hurry with the accompaniment of the clouds.  
Its form is also brought into the scenario with the adjectival connotations like 'Turning sharply, Here and there', as well as the fixated description attributed to it from the design of locusts.

#### 2nd

#### Stanza

We see here the opportunistic strut the clouds takes as it rides on the wind to make a getaway to the hills. The wind unmistakably is readily on the fore as its presence readily makes room for the transition of the clouds depicted in this fore as a passenger on the wings of the wind.

#### 3rd

#### Stanza

An evil archetype is attributed to the wind here when personified here as sinister. The

attribution is however not exemplified here rather what follows is a seeming swashbuckling with the flora and fauna making way for an unfettered flight for the wind as it empties its furlongs on its unpredictable path.

**4th** **Stanza**

Here even mortal man exemplified by the feminine extraction is seen to be harried by the onrush of the wind

**5th** **Stanza**

Its tell-tales are seen in the last stanza with its work on the upper trunk of the feminine anatomy which inadvertently brings about an exposure of the prized possession of the woman.

**FIGURES** **OF** **SPEECH**

**Simile**

The use of this figure of speech is seen in line 6 'like a plague of locusts'. The use of simile serves to pinpoint the unrelenting force of the wind which comes noisily and often in a discernible pattern. Again we see it in lines 11 and 25 'like dark, sinister wings'. 'Clothes wave like littered flags.'

**Metaphor**

"As an effect, a metaphor functions primarily to increase stylistic colorfulness and variety. Metaphor is a great contributor to poetry when the reader understands a likeness between two essentially different things". 'Trees bend to let it pass' ..line 13 ..and also in line 2 'clouds came hurrying with the wind'. The trees ordinarily do not possess a volition as to exhibit an element of will in making a passage way for the wind. However in the flare of the author, a nascent display of trees in the heat of the storm is rightly captured in the expressions above.

**Personification**

We see the use of this literary term in line 8 'Pregnant clouds...line 6' Tossing up things on its tail' as well as 'Pelting march of the storm' ..in the last line of the poem. The attribution of animate features to the cloud and wind captures the uncanny weaving of the Poet's intuitive perception.

**Alliteration**

The usage of words producing similar sounds or letters is manifest in this poem...see 'here and there' ..in line 5 as well as 'In the din of whirling wind' in line 17

**Cacophony**

This is shown in line 29,, 'Rumble ,tremble...' The interplay of words here produces a harsh sound

**Poetic** **Technique**

The poet adopts the use of figurative language that varies from the norms of literal language, in which words mean exactly what they say rather "figurative language does not mean exactly what it says but, instead, forces the reader to make an imaginative leap in order to comprehend an author's point. It usually involves a comparison between two things that may not, at first, seem to relate to one another. Figurative language facilitates understanding because it relates something unfamiliar to something familiar."

For example we see a rampant use of Juxtaposition, when the poet places two themes, characters, phrases, words, or situations together for the purpose of comparison or contrast

E.g. 'like a plague of locusts',.... 'like a mad man chasing nothing'... '...Here and there'.

### Form and structure

- ✓ The poem is divided into two parts which divide the content into the general and the specific. The first part, made up of stanzas one and two, describes the storm as it gathers momentum, and the third stanza describes its impact on human existence.
- ✓ The irregular number of words on a line, with many single-word lines, captures the unpredictable progress of the wind and the accompanying clouds. This technique is also evident in the second part of the poem, where the frantic movement of the village women as they 'Dart about/in and out/ Madly' (lines 22 – 24) is physically demonstrated by the line divisions.
- ✓ The description of 'The Wind whistles by/And trees bend to let it pass' in the second stanza in lines 25-26, although 'And' has been replaced with 'Whilst' (line 26). The path of the storm has not been diminished by the trees. In fact, the trees give way to allow it to progress unhindered.

### Poetic / language devices

- ❖ Rubadiri makes use of vivid imagery and figures of speech to convey the various elements of the storm. Line 6 introduces the simile of the approaching 'plague of locusts', underlining the appearance and potentially destructive nature of the storm. It also locates the setting in Africa. The further simile comparing the wind to a monster thrashing its tail about 'Like a madman chasing nothing' (line 9) emphasises the unpredictable nature of the storm, which adds to its danger. The description of the clouds 'Gathering to perch on hills/Like dark sinister wings' (lines 12-13) makes the clouds reminiscent of some bird of prey waiting for the opportune moment to strike.
- ❖ The third stanza continues in its depiction of noise and movement as villagers anticipate the storm's arrival. We notice how the children react with 'Screams' (line 17) of delight, possibly because of the thrill of potential danger. The women hurriedly attempt to prepare for the storm, although it seems that their efforts may be pointless as the 'Clothes wave like tattered flags' (line 27), completely at the mercy of the wind.
- ❖ The poem ends with the storm breaking, but stops before it actually hits. The progress of the 'pelting march of the storm' (line 33) tells the reader that this storm cannot be stopped and will be a mighty one.

### Sound devices

- This poem utilises sound effectively. Much use is made of onomatopoeia as the wind is 'whirling' (lines 7 and 19) and it 'whistles' (lines 14 and 25). The noise in the village has the screams of children competing with 'the din of whirling wind' (line 19). As the storm gets closer, its imminent arrival is heralded by the onomatopoeia of the 'Rumble, tremble, and crack' (line 31) of the thunder, and the impact of lightning striking the earth.

#### Vocabulary:

<b>sinister</b>	- evil; menacing
<b>din</b>	- loud noise
<b>jagged</b>	- pointy
<b>pelting</b>	- rain falling fast and hard

## **Questions:**

1. Compare the different reactions of the children and the adults in the village to the approaching storm.
  2. Quote an image from the poem that suggests the danger and destructive qualities of the coming storm.
  3. Contrast the different ways in which the wind and the clouds in the storm builds up.
    - (a) Does the speaker portray these elements as equally powerful?
    - (b) Do their roles change as the storm approaches? Discuss fully, supporting your answer with evidence from the poem.
  4. Comment on how the form of this poem enhances its content. Note the structure of the stanzas and lines, particularly.
  5. Do you think the poem ends effectively? Should the speaker not have described the impact of the storm on the people and the village, or the storm's aftermath? Evaluate the poet's intentions in this poem, and say whether you believe they were effectively realised or not.
  6. In short, summarise what happens in each section of the poem.
  7. Name and explain the figure of speech in line 5.
  8. Explain the effectiveness of
    - (a) "and trees bend to let is pass."
    - (b) "and the pelting march of the storm."
  9. Give a reason for the different reactions of the people in the poem. (Lines 15- 25)
- 

## **VULTURES**

Chinua Achebe

In the greyness  
and drizzle of one despondent  
dawn unstirred by harbingers  
of sunbreak a vulture  
perching high on broken 5  
bone of a dead tree  
nestled close to his  
mate his smooth  
bashed-in head, a pebble  
on a stem rooted in 10  
a dump of gross  
feathers, inclined affectionately  
to hers. Yesterday they picked  
the eyes of a swollen  
corpse in a water-logged 15  
trench and ate the  
things in its bowel. Full  
gorged they chose their roost  
keeping the hollowed remnant  
in easy range of cold 20  
telescopic eyes ...  
Strange  
indeed how love in other  
ways so particular  
will pick a corner 25  
in that charnel-house

tidy it and coil up there, perhaps even fall asleep – her face turned to the wall!	
... Thus the Commandant at Belsen Camp going home for the day with fumes of human roast clinging rebelliously to his hairy nostrils will stop	30      35
at the wayside sweet-shop and pick up some chocolate for his tender offspring waiting at home for Daddy's return ...	40
Praise bounteous providence if you will that grants even an ogre a tiny glow-worm tenderness encapsulated in icy caverns of a cruel heart or else despair for in the very germ of that kindred love is lodged the perpetuity of evil.	45          50

Vultures

Chinua Achebe

### **Background notes of poet**

Chinua Achebe was born in Nigeria, in 1930. He studied at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, and taught at various universities in Nigeria and the United States of America. Achebe wrote novels and essays, as well as poetry. His novels trace Africa's transition from traditional to modern ways. Achebe believed that a good work of art should have a purpose, an idea that originates in the oral tradition of storytelling in Africa. He died in 2013. His work looks at the relationship between African mysticism and modern Western culture.

### **During reading**

1. (a) What is your emotive response when you think of a vulture?  
(b) Why do you think you respond this way?
2. Look at the painting below. How has the artist depicted the vultures?
3. (a) What mood is established in the opening lines of the poem?  
(b) How is this achieved?
4. Consider lines 1 -21.  
(a) Identify words and expressions in these lines that have a negative impact on the reader.  
(b) Are there any words with positive connotations? List them.
5. How does the setting of the commentary in lines 22 -29 link to the vulture scene?
6. What is the effect of the ellipsis in line 30?
7. What does 'Belsen' (line 30) refer to?
8. The poet allows for two options in the final section of the poem (lines 41 -51). What are they?

## **Content**

- ❖ The poem begins with a description of the vultures that makes them seem repulsive and gory. However, they are also portrayed as showing affection, which only makes their behaviour more revolting.
- ❖ The second section of the poem describes the Commandant of Belsen, which was a Nazi concentration camp where thousands of Jewish people were murdered and their bodies burned during World War II. As with the vultures, the Commandant's love for his family makes his evil deeds in being responsible for thousands of deaths seem even worse.
- ❖ The description of the vultures is in the past tense, while the Belsen Commandant is described in the present tense. This seems to suggest that evil is always present. The use of 'perpetuity' (line 50) reinforces this idea.
- ❖ Of course there is a huge difference between the behaviour of the vultures and that of the Nazis. The vultures perform a vital ecological service, and act on instinct. The humans, who have the ability to make moral decisions, are where the real evil resides.
- ❖ The poem appears to offer us two different conclusions. This leaves the reader with a sense of both hope and despair.

### **First Stanza**

This first stanza begins with a relentlessly long sentence filled with dark, sullen descriptions. He uses alliteration in the second and third line "drizzle of one despondent dawn" but this is an enjambment line and so doesn't give the ebb and flow usually associated with alliteration. This helps to emphasize the bleak tone Achebe is trying to achieve.

He uses the description of the vultures seating position "perching high on broken bones of a dead tree" It is unclear whether he is describing the tree as being bone-like or if the vultures are actually perched upon a mound of bones.

Achebe then continues to describe the birds themselves and paints a grim image of them, having already described them as harbingers, a word closely associated with the brining of death he describes them as having "bashed in heads" and "gross feathers" and later in the final line he describes them as having "cold telescopic eyes" giving the birds an almost mechanical feel, suggesting they shouldn't even really be classed as animal.

He then continues to describe their actions, again this is very grim as they peck at the eye of a corpse. He further describes the vultures eating the corpse's bowel.

### **Second Stanza**

In this stanza Achebe skilfully contrasts the "light" of love with the "dark" of death by mentioning that in this darkest of environments, the "charnel-house", a storage place for corpses, there is the presence of love. He personifies love itself.

He uses an exclamation point on the phrase "her face turned to the wall" because love can't stand to look at the atrocities contained within. It may also be a reference to people being lined up against walls before being gunned down by firing squads.

### **Third stanza**

This Stanza cleverly constructs the character of the Commandant. His description is not particularly flattering. His only physical description describes his "hairy nostrils" but his actions are kind and very human. He brings chocolate home for his child. A kind gesture and not actions you would probably associate with a war criminal. Achebe makes us see that even this horrible man has a soft side and that is represented by the description of his interactions with his child. It is almost as if his child represents his "good side" and the vultures represent his "bad side" Achebe also produces the harrowing image of the smell produced by Belsen, the smell that lingers on the Commandant himself being described as "human roast" considering the man smelling this way and then hugging his "tender offspring" this is a very powerful piece of imagery.

## Fourth Stanza

In this final stanza Achebe brings the poem to a close by describing how even the “ogre” that is the commandant has a soft side, which was shown in the preceding stanza.

He emphasises the solace that should be taken in this small mercy “praise bounteous providence” his language here is particularly emphatic and evokes fantastic contrasts, describing the Commandant’s humanity as a “tiny glow worm” which is encapsulated in a “cruel, icy cavern” even the word encapsulated isn’t accidental, suggesting that his warmth is trapped. It gives a picture of an evil man that would be rid of that warmth if possible.

This is further emphasised by the line “the very germ of that kindred love” this is not the voice of the narrator but rather a peak into the psyche of the Commandant and showing the narrator’s omniscience.

This is a chilling thought, the idea that the Commandant views his softer side as a curse, or a “germ” Achebe closes by using the phrase “perpetuity of evil” suggesting that evilness is enduring, everlasting. This leaves the poem on a very bleak note.

## Form and structure

The poem is written in four stanzas, in free verse with no rhyming pattern. It contains lots of enjambment lines giving the poem a fast pace, but with a jarring rhythm that mirrors the dark tone of the poem. The first stanza is considerably larger than the other three taking up twenty three lines that are all very short. The other three stanzas are eight, eleven and eleven lines respectively.

- ✓ Each section of the poem is marked by a line indentation rather than a new stanza. This could possibly indicate how one idea flows to the next as the poem develops.
- ✓ The arrangement of lines appears to be almost like a list, a building up of evidence. The short lines running on to the next could suggest a continuous flow of content that supports the poet’s theme.

## Poetic / language devices

- ❖ The poet establishes a depressing mood in the poem through the ‘greyness’ (line 1) and ‘drizzle’ (line 2) of the pre-dawn setting where even the dawn is ‘despondent’ (line 2).
- ❖ The opening scene continues with evocative imagery, prompting an emotional response from the reader. Consider the description of the vultures’ appearance perched on ‘broken/bone’ (line 5-6) and the ‘bashed-in head’ (line 9) that is grotesquely prominent above the ‘gross’ (line 11) feathers. The strong imagery of their picking at the ‘swollen/corpse’ (line 14-15) to devour the ‘things in its bowel’ (line 17) effectively disgusts the reader.
- ❖ Yet we are also told that the scavengers ‘nestled’ (line 7) ‘affectionately’ (line 12), which would normally generate a positive response. However, in this instance, the contrast established between the birds’ warmth towards each other and their revolting practises, makes their ‘cold/telescopic eyes’ (lines 20-21) all the more disturbing.
- ❖ The shift to focus on human behaviour in the second section of the poem is even more disturbing. The jarring images of the Commandant, with ‘fumes of/human roast clinging/ rebelliously to his hair/nostrils’ (line 32-35) who then buys a chocolate for his ‘tender offspring’ (line 38) is alarming and makes the reader feel uncomfortable.
- ❖ Achebe expresses his theme powerfully due to his choice of diction, the disturbing imagery created, and the use of contrast.

## Sound devices

- Notice the use of alliteration in the final section where the providence ‘grants’ an ‘ogre’ a ‘glow-worm/tenderness’ (lines 43-45), while the harsh ‘c’ use in ‘caverns’ and ‘cruel’ (line 46) refer back to the ‘cold’ (line 20) eyes of the vultures.

Vocabulary:

<b>drizzle</b>	- steady, light rain
<b>despondent</b>	- miserable
<b>harbingers</b>	- messengers
<b>gross</b>	- unpleasant
<b>gorged</b>	- overate
<b>remnant</b>	- remains
<b>telescopic</b>	- able to see far
<b>charnel-house</b>	- place where bodies are placed
<b>coil</b>	- curl
<b>offspring</b>	- children
<b>bounteous</b>	- plentiful
<b>providence</b>	- fate or God
<b>grants</b>	- gives
<b>ogre</b>	- monster
<b>kindred</b>	- family
<b>perpetuity</b>	- everlasting

**Questions:**

1. What does the word 'nestled' (line 7) mean?
2. Is the 'bashed-in' head (Line 9) of the vulture meant to be understood literally or figuratively? Explain your answer.
3. The word 'harbingers' (line 5) is often used in the expression 'harbingers of doom'. How does this inversion of this expression link to the message of the poem?
4. The poet seems to be drawing a parallel between the vulture and the Commandant at Belsen. Do you think that this is an appropriate comparison? Discuss.
5. Critically discuss the concept of evil as explored by Achebe in this poem. Can an animal be considered evil? Do you agree with Achebe's comment of human nature?

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**AN AFRICAN ELEGY**

Ben Okri

We are the miracles that God made  
To taste the bitter fruit of Time.  
We are precious.  
And one day our suffering  
Will turn into the wonders of the earth. 5

There are things that burn me now  
Which turn golden when I am happy.  
Do you see the mystery of our pain?  
That we bear poverty  
And are able to sing and dream sweet things 10

And that we never curse the air when it is warm  
Or the fruit when it tastes so good

Or the lights that bounce gently on the waters? We bless things even in our pain. We bless them in silence.	15
That is why our music is so sweet. It makes the air remember. There are secret miracles at work That only Time will bring forth. I too have heard the dead singing. And they tell me that This life is good They tell me to live it gently With fire, and always with hope. There is wonder here.	20          25
And here is surprise In everything the unseen moves. The ocean is full of songs. The sky is not an enemy. Destiny is our friend.	     30

An African Elegy

Ben Okri

**Background notes of poet**

Ben Okri was born in a small town in Nigeria, in 1959. He studied in Nigeria and the United Kingdom, and has worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation as well as being a poetry editor and a poet. His short story collection, *Incidents at the Shrine*, was awarded the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Africa, and his third novel, *The Famished Road*, won the Booker Prize for Africa, the United Kingdom's top award for fiction. Much of his work looks at the relationship between African mysticism and modern Western culture.

**During reading**

1. What are your expectations of the poem after reading the title?
2. (a) Pick out words that are positive in the first stanza, and then identify negative ones.  
(b) What is the overall effect, positive or negative?
3. What is the 'mystery' (line 8) referred to in the second stanza?
4. Why do you think 'Time' (lines 2 and 19) is written with a capital letter?
5. How can the 'ocean' be 'full of songs' (line 28)?

**Theme:**

Hope, miracles, poverty, pain, destiny, time, suffering.

**One who forgets their suffering no longer suffers.**

**Content**

- ❖ Traditionally, an elegy is a mournful poem usually written in response to death.
- ❖ It has no rhyme scheme.
- ❖ It is written in three stages

- grief
- sorrow
- praise

- ❖ Okri's elegy, however, is not mournful; rather it is reflective and thoughtful.
- ❖ The poet is speaking about his African culture – 'we' and 'our' – the people of Africa.
- ❖ The speaker asks the unique African spirit for answers to life's paradoxes. He explores the miracle of what being African means to him: the endurance for suffering, the ability to find joy and beauty in the midst of pain, a spiritual union with nature's bounty, and an irrepressible sense of optimism despite all indicators pointing in the opposite direction.
- ❖ The speaker seems to believe that the tendency to hope and the sensitivity to recognise wonder is a shared trait of Africa's people.

❖ **Stanza 1:**

God created humans so that we could face good and bad times  
 We are innocent people whose suffering will one day change for something good.  
 'precious': if they are precious, why are they suffering.  
 The tone in this stanza is bitter but optimistic.

❖ **Stanza 2:**

'things that burn me now' : suffering/ pain/ leaves scars  
 'Which turn golden' : rare/ memorable/ precious  
 'sing and dream sweet things': there is still hope through all the pain and suffering.

❖ **Stanza 3:**

They don't take things for granted. They cherish all the things they have.  
 'never curse the air when it is warm' → sensory imagery: they picture and feel the positive things they have in life.  
 'We bless things even in our pain' → Contrast (Bless/ pain): believing even though it is difficult.

❖ **Stanza 4:**

'It makes the air remember' / 'I too have heard the dead singing' → Personification  
 'Time' → capitalised → metaphor

❖ **Stanza 5:**

Live life happily despite the situations you encounter. Then there will always be something to look forward to in the future.  
 'fire' → live life with passion, warmth and hope, even during the bad times.

**Tone:**satisfying / friendly / hopeful / optimistic

**Form and structure**

- ✓ Okri has made use of a structure where each stanza is of equal five line length, giving the form of regularity and a distinct pattern.
- ✓ There are a variety of line lengths within each stanza; the short lines are somewhat isolated from the enclosing lines, and for this reason they tend to 'stand out' for being short.
- ✓ The line breaks add an additional dimension to the interpretation of the poem as this promotes multiple interpretations.

## Poetic / language devices

- ❖ The poet's diction reflects his interest in African mysticism. He uses words that have religious undertones, such as 'miracles' (lines 1 and 18), 'mystery' (line 8) and 'bless' (lines 14 and 15). He implies that all Africans are able to bear poverty and hardship because they 'are the miracles that God made' (line 1).
- ❖ 'taste the bitter fruit of time' → **metaphor**: this includes sensory imagery and symbolism that points to the trials and hardships of life.

## Sound devices

- This is a poem that demands to be read aloud. The pauses, bound by the punctuation and line breaks, create a rhythm that contributes significantly to the reader's appreciation and understanding of the poem.

### Vocabulary:

<b>elegy</b>	- mournful poem
<b>miracles</b>	- acts of God
<b>destiny</b>	- inescapable fate

## Questions:

1. Make a list of all the positive things that Okri says about Africa and being African.
2. What do you think the speaker means by the line 'We are precious' (line 3)?
3. Does the speaker respect the dead? What makes you say this?
4. How does the poet connect each negative aspect in the poem with something positive?
5. Explain how one can live life 'gently/ With fire' (lines 23-24).
6. Do you think Okri is being overly idealistic, or do you agree with what he is saying about Africa and Africans? Motivate your answer.

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## **THE ZULU GIRL**

Roy Campbell

When in the sun the hot red acres smoulder,  
Down where the sweating gang its labours plies,  
A girl flings down her how, and from her shoulder  
Unslings her child tormented by the flies.

She takes him to a ring of shadow pooled  
By thorn-trees: purples with the blood of ticks,  
While her sharp nails, in slow caress ruled,  
Prowl through his hair with sharp electric clicks. 5

His sleep mouth plugged by the heavy nipple,  
Tugs like a puppy, grunting as he feeds: 10  
Through his frail nerves her won deep languors ripple  
Like a broad river sighing through its reeds.

Yet in that drowsy stream his flesh imbibes  
An old unquenched unsmotherable heat –  
The curbed ferocity of beaten tribes, 15  
The sullen dignity of their defeat.

Her body looms above him like a hill  
Within whose shade a village lies at rest.  
Or the first cloud so terrible and still  
That bears the coming harvest in its breast.

20

The Zulu Girl

Roy Campbell

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### **Background notes of poet**

Roy Campbell was born in Durban in South Africa, in 1901. He was educated in Durban and then spent a year at Oxford before returning home, where he established a satirical literary magazine, entitled *Voorslag*. Campbell used irony and humour to expose and criticise people, often targeting Afrikaners. He lived in France and Spain and served in the English army in World War II. Campbell eventually settled in Portugal, where he died in a vehicle accident in 1957.

### **During reading+**

- Carefully read the first stanza.
  - What is the setting of the poem?
  - What is the job that the girl is doing?
  - What does the word 'flings' (line 3) suggest about her attitude?
- What are the connotations of 'prowl' (line 8)?
  - What is being compared to what?
  - Are these comparisons effective?
- Identify the comparisons used in the third stanza.
- Which word in the fourth stanza alerts the reader to a change in mood?
- Examine the artwork, *Virgin and Child (Madonna Colonna)* by Raphael. The artwork represents the traditional view of the Madonna. In which way can the Zulu woman in the poem be considered a version of the Madonna figure?

### **Theme**

The poem Zulu Girl is a powerful yet pathetic recreation of the hardship and endurance of the South African people. Roy Campbell makes the masculinist equation i.e. male is equal to culture and female is equals to nature. It poses an immediate problem of how miserably the poor South African people are forced to work on the farm. The poem is powerful both in sound and in effect.

### **Content**

- ❖ On the surface, this poem is simply an observation of a Zulu woman feeding her child. Upon closer consideration, however, it becomes clear that the poem is about oppression, specifically of women.
- ❖ The poem has a four line stanza. The speaker provides us a detail of the plight of the Zulu girl. The observation made by the speaker is minute and influential.
- ❖ The **first stanza** gives a description of a hot landscape where the labourers work.
- ❖ It is during the daytime that the sun sheds its hot rays on the ground -"the hot red acres". The farm seems to be under the powerful heat of the sun. It is so parching that the hot red acres –African landscape-seem to be ready to burst into flames.
- ❖ In the field is the "gang". The word "gang" as of course frequently used in this connection, suggests that its members have no individuality and identity, are treated rather like prisoners, or are being made to undertake forced labour: certainly they have no personal pride or pleasure in the work they are doing, and are actually under some kind of the compulsion

- ❖ Now the observation is focused on the girl who flings down her hoe which can be seen as an act of defiance of authority, which exacts her subjection, a turning from mass production to the responsibilities of reproduction. Then she unslings her child from her shoulder. The child besides being “tormented by flies” is also in need of nourishment, for the girl takes him to a patch of thin shade nearby to feed him at her breast. While the child feeds, the girl passes her hand caressingly through his hair. It is significant perhaps that the mother is referred to as a ‘girl’: this may suggest that she is not a wife and belongs to the vast number of black South Africans who have lost their traditional ways of life and have been caught up in the chaos of the modern world.
- ❖ The **second stanza** illustrates the care that the mother shows for her child: she is looking for ticks and lice on him, which emphasises the poor conditions in which they are forced to live.
- ❖ In **stanza three, four and five** the poet goes on to give his impression of the relationship and feeling between mother and the child in more than a merely physical sense. The child is ‘grunting’ as he feeds, that is he is feeding greedily and expressing his simple but deep satisfaction. Not only does he take in physical nourishment, however, for during this process of feeding, her own deep feelings ‘ripple’ and are conveyed little by little into his frail, infantile nerves.
- ❖ The poem admirably suggests the strong intimate mother-and- child relationship developed by breast-feeding (often, of course, lost or destroyed in more ‘advanced’ cultures). The word ‘languours’ is important. It tells us that the girl appears rather weary, unenthusiastic, and hopeless, as though expressing a deep despair and resentment against the whole situation in which she finds herself.
- ❖ Nevertheless, even in her mood of hopelessness, her motherhood and the latent satisfaction she has in feeding her child, seem to arouse in her a kind of pride, ‘the old unquenched, unsmotherable heat’: a feeling perhaps that her life has some value, that she is taking part in an important life process; that she is not alone and abandoned; she belongs to an old enduring tradition of human struggle and survival; her ‘tribes’ though ‘curbed’ and ‘beaten’ for the time being, ‘have a dignity’ in their ‘defeat’; and still retain their self-respect, and are ready to ‘rise again’.
- ❖ As the poem develops, we seem to move gradually closer to the mother, until in the final stanza we are looking up at her, almost as though through the eyes of the child himself; and she appears as an impressive, statuesque figure, shielding and protecting her helpless infant. In the two last lines of all, after being compared to a ‘hill’, she is likened to a great storm cloud which “bears the coming harvest in its breast”.
- ❖ In the **third stanza**, the woman breastfeeds her child. He is hungry and tugs at her nipple like a ‘puppy’ (line 10). This image again points out the way in which the people in the poem are viewed: if a child is viewed as a puppy, his mother is viewed as a dog. The mother, however, does not see her child in this way, and feels an overwhelming tenderness for her child.
- ❖ In the **fourth stanza**, the underlying message becomes clear. The young child is a symbol of the might of the Zulu nation: in him, there is an ‘old unquenched, unsmotherable heat’ (line 14) that refers back to the fierce warriors of the Zulu tribe. The strength of the Zulu still exists in the Zulu people in spite of the oppression that they experience.
- ❖ In the **final stanza** of the poem, the mother metaphorically becomes a hill that overshadows a whole village. She is no longer just the mother of one child; she represents all the mother of all the children of oppressed people.
- ❖ She is also compared to the first cloud that brings the rain that will lead to a harvest. This is a metaphor that suggests the children of the oppressed people will one day reap the harvest of their suffering; in other words, they will overcome their oppression with help from mothers like the ‘Zulu Girl’ in the poem.

- ❖ Without appealing to our emotions are directly or blatantly (as a propagandist might have done) the writer arouses our sympathy for the Zulu Girl in the hardships of the existence; this leads on to an admiration for the endurance and for the strength of life that is seen in her.
- ❖ This in its turn, through the concluding simile, leads to a kind of prophetic hint that the scene we have witnessed is not final, and that a different and better state of affairs is bound to come in the future.
- ❖ We notice that this hope is not conveyed by plain, prose statement, as a matter of fact: it is glimpsed imaginatively by the poet's intuition and conveyed in the form of this indirect suggestion.

### Form and structure

- ✓ Campbell makes use of a regulated form to structure his message. The five stanzas of four lines each follow the same rhyme pattern. The first stanza uses *a-b-a-b*, the second *c-d-c-d*, and so on. The different stanzas are thus related to each other because of this noticeable pattern.

### Poetic / language devices

- ❖ As mentioned in 'Content' the poet uses imagery, symbol, metaphor and diction to add meaning to the poem throughout.
- ❖ The simile in stanza three, which compares the child to a 'puppy' (line 10), implies an innocent, harmless and natural activity. However, the 'broad river' (line 12) contains more than nutritional substance. The reader is informed that this child is absorbing much more and the dash used at the end of line 14 tells us what this is.
- ❖ The poem begins with a fairly simple observed situation, and as the poet develops and reflects upon it, its references broader out until it is of world-wide significance. The first strong impression we are given in the poem is of the heat which scorches the landscape where the girl is working: the acres, we are told, are red, which we know is the predominant colour of the African earth, but 'hot red', and obvious pair of adjectives suggest in our mind something similar- 'red hot' the **epithet** usually applied to heated iron. This together with the **metaphor of 'smoulder'** gives the impression that the land is almost too hot to bear and could almost burst into flames.
- ❖ We are given other details that emphasize the unpleasant nature of the 'gang's' work: they are 'sweating'; the child is 'tormented by the flies'. At last she flings down her hoe. She does not just 'drop it' or throw it down: the word '**flings**' suggests **impatience and exasperation**. An interesting point to notice in the first stanza is the way in which the **rhythmic and rhyming pattern emphasizes the physical effort made by the girl** when she takes the child from her back. "When in the sun the hot red acres smoulder / A girl flings down her hoe, and from her shoulder / Unslings her child, (tormented by the flies)."
- ❖ In stanza two, we read how the mother, in the meagre shade of the thorn trees, is searching the hair of her child for ticks – again a **detail which suggests the poverty and unsanitary conditions under which these labourers live**.
- ❖ We notice that her sharp nails are 'purpled with the blood' of the parasites. In fact, the phrase 'purpled with the blood of ticks' is grammatically out of place; it is intended presumably to relate to its head - word 'nails', but the nails are introduced by the conjunction 'while' and cannot strictly be governed by a loose phrase which lies outside the clause together. Our attention is held by the **metaphor 'prowled'**, which **suggests that her fingers are like a fierce animal searching through the forest for its prey**. The **sharp electric clicks** are produced when she finds a tick and cracks it between her fingernails: this produces a sound like that given by an electric spark. Not only does the **metaphor** give this impression but the sounds of the word sequence 'ticks', electric, clicks intensify it.

- ❖ In stanza three, we turn on different matters, but the choice of words is apt again. We see, and hear that the baby's mouth is 'plugged'; he tugs at the nipple: grunting as he feeds. The **sequence of ugly vowel sounds suggest the greediness** (and hunger) of the baby as he feeds, and this is intensified in the animal **simile 'like a puppy'**, in which the same vowel sound appears.
- ❖ Then the poet goes on to describe the deep strong feelings which pass in a steady, inevitable flow from the mother to the child and here the **simile of the broad river** is very suitable.
- ❖ Stanza four arouses out increased attention with an unexpected switch of thought, **almost a paradox**. In the physical sense it is obviously the child which is drinking from its mother; in another sense we are now told that her flesh is, in a deeper sense, imbibing something from the drowsy stream.
- ❖ To make the sudden change of thought from the reflective to the aggressive, there is a **sudden change in the rhythmic and sound qualities of this stanza**, and we come to a vigorous climax on the energetic multi-syllabic word 'unsmotherable'. "Yet in that drowsy steam her flesh imbibes/ An old unquenched unsmotherable heat..."
- ❖ The word 'unsmotherable' takes on special force in its context with 'unquenched', which seem to prepare the way, and the monosyllable 'heat' which gives the line its decisive conclusion. The line as a whole is an emphatic statement of the unquenchable vigour and spirit of the African people: nothing can blot out or obliterate their primal energy (heat – one of the basic essentials of life).
- ❖ The feeling of conviction is repeated in a slightly different rhythmic pattern in two following and closely parallel lines: "The curbed ferocity of beaten tribes/ The sullen dignity of tier defeat" when an element **of alliteration 'b' and 'd' also adds to the forceful pattern of speech**.
- ❖ The poem now moves to its prophetic climax and the Zulu Girl, as we have seen, takes on the significance of a symbol. She is no longer just a single, stray, exploited, hardworking individual in some remote part of the veldt: she represents to us the potentiality of her race for suffering, survival, and triumph. Her body is grand and imposing: it 'looms' over her child, and its protective power is beautifully shown in the **picturesque simile** of "... a hill/ Within whose shade a village leis at rest."
- ❖ We notice that the shade, unlike that of the thorn trees (a mere 'pool') is unbroken and extensive, and in it the village lies in peace and tranquillity, 'at rest. The ' looming hill' leads our thoughts to the second simile of the great thunder cloud, 'so terrible and still', which suggest violent storms to come in the near future, but with the prospect of a welcome harvest in the fullness of time.
- ❖ "Zulu Girl" is thus an effective and meaningful short poem, in which many resources of the poet's art have been combined to treat one of the urgent problems of the modern world.

### Sound devices

- The rhyme of the stanzas provides the poem with regular rhythm.
- Sound is also employed to add riches to the image of the 'grunting' (line 10) child, the sound of the mother's nails rustling through the child's hair with onomatopoeic 'clicks' (line 8), and the personified 'sighing' (line 12) of the river as the mother's milk passes to her child.

Vocabulary:

<b>smoulder</b>	- burn slowly without a flame
<b>languors</b>	- tenderness
<b>imbibes</b>	- absorbs or soaks up
<b>unquenched</b>	- unsatisfied
<b>unsmotherable</b>	- inextinguishable; cannot be put out
<b>ferocity</b>	- fierceness
<b>sullen</b>	- gloomy silence
<b>looms</b>	- rises before

**Questions:**

1. What does the inclusion of the colour 'red' in line 1 tell us about the scene?
2. List all the words in the poem that suggest heat, and provide short definitions for each of them.
3. What is your understanding of 'curbed ferocity', and who are the 'beaten tribes' (line 15)?
4. Explain what the child 'imbibes' (line 13) on both a literal and figurative level?
5. Explore how the poet uses tone in the poem. Note how and where it changes over the course of the poem, and quote from the poem to give substance to your response.

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**MOTHO KE MOTHO KA BATHO BABANG**  
Jeremy Cronin

**(A Person is a Person Because of Other People)**

By holding my mirror out of the window I see  
Clear to the end of the passage.  
There's a person down there.  
A prisoner polishing a doorhandle. 5  
My face in the mirror,  
I see the fingertips of his free hand  
Bunch together, as if to make  
An object the size of a badge  
Which travels up to his forehead 10  
The place of an imaginary cap.  
(This means: *A warder*)  
Two fingers are extended in a vee  
And wiggle like two antennae.  
(He's being watched.) 15  
A finger of his free hand makes a watch-hand's arc  
On the wrist of his polishing arm without  
Disrupting the slow-slow rhythm of his work.  
(*Later. Maybe later we can speak.*)  
*Hey! Wat maak jy daar?* 20  
- a voice from around the corner.  
*No. Just polishing baas.*  
He turns back to me, now watch

His free hand, the talkative on,  
Slips quietly behind

25

In my mirror,

- *Strength brother, it says,*

A black fist

Motho Ke Motho Ka Batho Babang

Jeremy Cronin

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### **Background notes of poet**

Jeremy Cronin was born in Cape Town, in South Africa, in 1949. He became active in the South African Communist Party, and was arrested and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for being active in the struggle against apartheid. After he was released, and South Africa became a democracy, he became a member of parliament.

### **During reading**

1. How many languages are used in this poem? Name them.
2. What is the term given to the African philosophy of the title?
3. Notice Cronin's use of brackets, italics and line arrangement to describe the incident. How does this help the reader to understand the poem?

### **Content**

- ❖ This poem captures the scene of one prisoner communicating discreetly with another, under the watchful eye of a warder. The cleverness of the participants is shown as they find ways to maintain human contact, communicating with sign language in defiance of the deprivation of imprisonment.
- ❖ As readers, we are invited to imagine how the human connection described in the scene would have provided the speaker with considerable comfort, strength and encouragement. This scene demonstrates *ubuntu* in action.

### **Form and structure**

- ✓ A noticeable feature of this poem is its visual layout. The narrative is provided on the left, while a 'translation' is provided in brackets on the right.
- ✓ The format of this translation or explanation is varied as the poem progresses. The first insertion in line 12 announces itself as an explanation, the second (line 15) and third (line 19) give the explanation directly, while the last insertions lose the brackets, as if the reader has now learned the poem's language and no longer needs them.

### **Poetic / language devices**

- ❖ This poem uses punctuation and typography (the way in which it is printed or set out) to convey the poet's message.
- ❖ Notice the poet's use of italics for different purposes, as well as the use of dashes. The use of italics in lines 20 and 22 seems to indicate direct speech. It is most effective that 'Strength brother' (line 26) is also written this way, as the two prisoners are communicating so effectively they may as well be using direct speech.
- ❖ The use of the present tense makes the content feel immediate, and in the last stages of the poem, as we are instructed to watch, we feel as though we are sharing the cell and watching the signals with the speaker.

### **Sound devices**

- It could be considered ironic that although this is a poem without formal 'sound devices', it is centred on sound and the lack of it. Cronin refers to a 'talkative' (line 24) hand which, of course, is completely silent.
- The poem is commenting on sound by emphasising its absence.

Vocabulary:

Baas: boss

Wat maak jy daar?: What are you doing there?

**Questions:**

1. Provide an explanation for the prisoner's use of the mirror.
2. Find evidence in the poem that prisoners are kept occupied with time-wasting chores.
3. Explain the link between an 'imaginary cap' (line 11) and a guard.
4. Discuss Cronin's use of different languages in the poem.
5. The poem is written in an informal style. How does the style contribute to the meaning of the poem?
6. This poem illustrates truths about the human condition. Explore how the poem shows the cruelty of isolation as a form of punishment, and why it was a favoured treatment of political prisoners.
7. Assess whether the poem is an appropriate demonstration of the concept of *ubuntu*.
8. How does the prison setting contribute to the message of this poem?
9. What kind of prisoners do we assume these are? Why?
10. Appearance and reality differ in this poem; explain how.
11. Why is his work 'slow-slow'?

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**FIRST DAY AFTER THE WAR**

Mazisi Kunene

We heard the songs of a wedding party  
We saw a soft light  
Coiling round the young blades of grass  
At first we hesitated, then we saw her footprints,  
Her face emerged, then her eyes of freedom! 5  
She woke us up with a smile saying,  
'What day is this that comes suddenly?'  
We said, 'It is the first day after the war'.  
Then without waiting we ran to the open space  
Ululating to the mountains and the pathways 10  
Calling people from all the circles of the earth.  
We shook up the old man demanding a festival  
We asked for all the first fruits of the season.  
We held hands with a stranger  
We shouted across the waterfalls 15  
People came from all lands  
It was the first day of peace.  
We saw our Ancestors travelling tall on the horizon.

### **Background notes of poet**

Mazisi Kunene was born in South Africa, in 1938. He studied in South Africa and in the United Kingdom, and worked as an academic in the United States of America before returning to South Africa. His best known work is the poem, 'Emperor Shaka the Great', which was originally written in isiZulu and translated into English. He died in 2006.

### **Before reading**

Think back to South Africa's hosting of the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup. (If you cannot recall anything about that time, imagine it.) Now put yourself in the shoes of a radio journalist who is attending the opening game between South Africa and Mexico. It is 11 June 2010. The weather is chilly, but the heat generated by the hundreds of South African fans makes the temperature rise. Details from the actual match:

*Siphiwe Tshabalala scored off a pass through Mexico's defence by Teko Modise to score the first goal of the tournament. Mexico later equalised. In the dying moments of the game, a shot by Katlego Mphela hit the post, denying South Africa a win.*

- As the radio journalist, make some notes on the game to be able to give an on-air report of about 3 minutes. Be sure to describe the atmosphere and mood of the crowd.
- Deliver your on-air report to the class. Follow the prompt: 'We now cross live to ... who will give us an update.'

### **During reading**

1. Which sense does Kunene use in this poem?
2. Think about the connotations of the word 'coiling' (line 3). Do you think it is intended to be understood as a positive image in this context?
3. Consider the pronoun 'her' in line 4. How could this be interpreted in an abstract way?
4. How does Kunene convey the joy of the time?

### **Content**

- ❖ Mazisi Kunene wrote much of his poetry in South Africa, in the time of apartheid, a period in which black people were discriminated against and oppressed. His poem describes the joy that people felt at the ending of this system of government.
- ❖ The poem lists a number of ways in which the people celebrate the news. Notice the variety of the actions and the jubilation this shows. The news is so wonderful that we see how people of all types celebrate together and 'held hands with a stranger' (line 14)

### **Form and structure**

- ✓ This poem uses free verse which seems appropriate for its theme. Notice the repetitive form of the line structure of lines 12 to 15, perhaps implying that the overwhelming joy prompted an unrestrained physical response, and that the people ran around responding impulsively to the situation.

### **Poetic / language devices**

- ❖ Kunene uses simple but effective diction to capture the scene. This seems to add to the spontaneous nature of the excitement displayed – the actions speak for themselves.
- ❖ The 'soft light' (line 2) creates an image of contained optimism and hope, as if the viewers are not sure whether to believe what the light might be indicating. This uncertainty is clear in the hesitation in line 4 until the truth 'emerged' (line 5), and the realisation set in.
- ❖ Notice the contrast that follows as 'without waiting' (line 9) the celebration begins that unifies humanity 'from all lands' (line 16).

## Sound devices

- The poem begins with a reference to the 'songs' of a party and the association of sound and joy is carried through the poem from the onomatopoeia of 'ululating' (line 10) to the shouts of enthusiasm that compete with nature's music as the people 'shouted across the waterfalls' (line 15).
- The alliteration of 'first fruits' (line 13) alerts the reader to the significance of the moment, while the use of this device in the final line lends the 'Ancestors' renewed stature as they are 'travelling tall' (line 18) in response to the event.

### Vocabulary:

**ululating** - wailing or howling

## Questions:

1. What clues suggest the rural setting of the poem? Quote from the poem to support your answer.
2. Why do you think the people 'ran to the open space' (line 9)?
3. Discuss the possible literal and figurative meanings of the 'footprints' (line 4) and the 'young blades' (line 3).
4. (a) What does the expression 'shook up' (line 12) mean?  
(b) How do you interpret it in this context?  
(c) Who might the 'old man' (line 12) be?
5. Critically comment on the effectiveness of the final line of Kunene's poem.

## **REMEMBER**

Christina Rossetti

Remember me when I am gone'  
Gone far away into the silent land;  
When you can no more hold me by the hand,  
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.  
Remember me when no more day by day  
You tell me of our future that you planned:  
Only remember me; understand  
It will be late to counsel then or pray.  
Yet if you should forget me for a while  
And afterwards remember, do not grieve: 10  
For if the darkness and corruption leave  
A vestige of the thought that once I had,  
Better by far you should forget and smile  
Than you should remember and be sad.

**Background notes of poet**

Christina Rossetti was born in London in 1830. Her work covers a wide range of styles and forms, and she wrote ballads, sonnets, love lyrics, nonsense rhymes and children's books. She died in 1894.

Being remembered after death - it's just what makes the speaker of "Remember" tick. She keeps telling her beloved to remember her, because, well, she's obsessed with death. She's clearly somebody who is really thinking a lot about death.

This poem was written in the middle of the nineteenth century. People died much more suddenly, and much more frequently, than they do nowadays. Another reason may be because this speaker has a few hang ups. She's definitely thinking about death a lot, but this isn't necessarily a bad thing. The speaker is at least realistic.

She's definitely a very caring person. The whole "remember me remember me remember me" business might seem a tad selfish, but by the end of the poem the speaker shows us how selfless she actually is. In the poem's final lines, she essentially says "On second thought, it's actually better if you forget about me, because remembering me will only cause you sadness." - the ultimate gesture of selflessness. She would rather the man she loves be happy than remember her. She just can't bear the thought of him being unhappy.

- Write down the definitions for the terms "elegy", "epitaph", "eulogy" and "obituary". What theme is common to all four of these words?

**During reading**

1. (a) Think of a euphemism that is commonly used in modern life to substitute for Rossetti's "silent land" (line 2).  
(b) Explore the connotations of the expression "the silent land" (line 2).
2. Line 4 seems to suggest that the speaker is unable to make up her mind. What underlying emotion might cause her to behave in this way?
3. Consider the poet's choice of word "corruption" (line 11). What meaning do you think is intended in this context?

**TITLE**

"Remember" - one word that summarizes the poem's major theme: remembrance. This is a poem spoken by a woman who is thinking about her death and wants to make sure that her beloved never forgets her. She's obsessed with making sure her beloved doesn't forget her. It's almost like she's worried that he might do exactly that.

This brings us to another important idea about this poem's title. It is a command, an order. The title might as well be "Listen you, remember me or else!" It's not quite that commanding, but the speaker definitely orders this guy to remember her at least four times, if you include the title. The fact that an imperative introduces the poem, and that keeps popping up, confirms what we've already noted: the speaker is worried that her beloved will forget her, and is overcompensating.

By the end of the poem the speaker basically changes her mind, and says, essentially, "On second thought, it's better that you forget me because remembering me might cause too much pain, and I just can't have that," but for most of the poem, she's more concerned with making sure he doesn't forget her – this makes the title a bit deceptive.

## Theme

“Remember” is an elegiac **poem**, focusing on the **themes** of death, remembrance, relinquishment, and forgiveness. The speaker is **Rossetti** pondering her impending death and releasing her lover from the responsibility of enshrining her in his memory because she fears it will cause him pain.

## Content

- ❖ The poem could be interpreted as the speaker addressing a loved one directly, seen in the use of “you” (line 3) and “our” (line 6), in the form of a letter to be read after her death.
- ❖ The speaker focuses on memories of moments of their time spent together, revealing her concern that she wants to be remembered. This is highlighted by the repetition of the word “remember” throughout the poem.
- ❖ The couple anticipated that they would share a future together, but this was not to be. The speaker succumbed to some disease or “corruption” (line 11) that eventually led to her death. Neither prayers nor “counsel” (line 8) could change the outcome.
- ❖ The tone and focus shift over the course of the poem, signified by the word “yet” (line 9). Where the first part of the poem looks back and clings to memories, the second part seeks to find a way to move forward.
- ❖ The speaker seems to be giving her partner permission to let go of the memories and his sorrow in order to “smile” (line 13) and live positively after her passing. She demonstrates the selfless depth of her love, as she is able to suppress the human need to be remembered so that her beloved has a chance at a happy life after her death, unburdened by guilt.

## Form and structure

- ✓ Rossetti uses the form of a Petrarchan or Italian sonnet to convey her message. The first two quatrains of this sonnet start with the word “remember” (lines 1 and 5), and the tone is mournful.
- ✓ The *c-d-d-e-c-e* rhyme scheme used in the sestet of lines 9-14 establishes a break from the octave. This break is also seen in the tone and content of the poem.
- ✓ Rossetti uses the octave to address memories and remembering, while the sestet focuses on the process of forgetting and moving forward.

## Poetic / language devices

- ❖ Rossetti uses euphemism to discuss difficult subject matter: Death becomes “gone away” (line 1), while the afterlife is expressed as “the silent land” (line 2).
- ❖ The simple imagery of the physical linking of hands in line 3, as well as the speaker’s reluctance to be separated, underlines the strong connection between the speaker and her beloved.
- ❖ Notice that despite the hue of words with negative connotations in the sestet, for example “grieve” (line 10), “darkness” and “corruption” (line 11), Rossetti establishes a lingering mood of positive acceptance. What might have been a depressing poem with sad content becomes a poem that ultimately celebrates life.

## Sound devices

- The long syllables used in the opening lines force a slow, mournful reading of the sonnet. This is contrasted by the pace of lines 9 and 13, for example, which is more “upbeat” and positive.
- If we had to describe the sound of “Remember” in two words, those two words would be “commanding” and “consoling.”

## Symbol Analysis

It's only natural that a poem about death would have something to say about going away forever. Sure enough, everywhere you turn in this poem, the speaker seems to be saying something about going away, leaving, or not being around anymore.

Clearly, going away is the poem's **metaphor** for death. Lines 1-2: In the first two lines the speaker says "gone away" and "gone far away." Clearly this is a metaphor for death. Now, the speaker never really says she will be gone forever, so the metaphor makes death seem less permanent.

- Line 3: Holding hands **symbolizes** physical presence and life—the very things that death eliminates.
- Line 4: The speaker notes how she used to half turn to go, but also half stay. While just a narration of a past event, this little snippet is practically a metaphor for the speaker's feelings about death as well.
- Lines 5-6: Again, the speaker talks about death without talking about death. When she talks about not being around to hear her beloved tell her about his plans for the future, we know this isn't because they've broken up.
- Lines 11-12: "Darkness and corruption" stand in for death. The word "vestige" is key, as it refers to something leftover after the speaker has gone away. Here, it is more or less a symbol of life, or of anything that defies death.

"Remember" something to do with memory. The speaker of this poem tells her beloved no less than three times to remember her. In a poem where death is pretty much a total separation, remembrance becomes a way of keeping somebody metaphorically alive.

- Lines 1-2: "Remember me" is **juxtaposed** with "gone away," which suggests that remembrance may be a **metaphor** for life.
- Lines 5-6: The speaker repeats the same command as line 1 ("remember me"), and memory again appears to be a metaphor for life. It comes across as an antidote or compensation for the fact that she and her beloved can no longer hold hands and discuss a future together.
- Lines 7-8: The speaker says "remember me" (metaphor). A small ambiguity is worth noting. The "only" in "only remember" me could mean either "I only ask that you remember me" or "the only thing you should do is remember me."

BUT forgetting is a big part of "Remember." The speaker is obsessed with being remembered, except towards the end, where she changes her mind. At first she's all "Well, I guess it's okay if you forget me, as long as you remember me later," but then she essentially says, "Actually it's better that you forget me."

Why? Remembrance is associated with sadness and pain, and the speaker doesn't want this for her lover. So, she decides that she will deal with being forgotten, as long as her lover will remain happy.

- Lines 9-10: The speaker starts to change her mind a little bit here in line 9, a crucial point in any sonnet that is sometimes called the turn. Forgetfulness here is a **metaphor** for death, in some ways. If the beloved doesn't remember the speaker, she will be totally and completely dead.
- Lines 13-14: Now she says it's better for her beloved to forget her because remembering her will cause him too much pain. This change of heart **symbolizes** the speaker's love, as she would rather sacrifice her memory, or rather metaphorically kill herself, than ask her lover to endure any pain.

Vocabulary:

**vestige** - remnant

**Questions:**

1. Provide a different euphemism that Rossetti could have used in place of “gone away” (line 1).
2. Which line of the poem shows that the couple expected to share many years of life together?
3. What does “to counsel” (line 8) mean in the context of the poem?
4. What can you infer about the character of the speaker’s beloved? Support your answer with evidence from the poem.
5. Suggest how the form of the poem contributes to its content?
6. Which of the following descriptions best fit the speaker: *egocentric*; *self-sacrificing*; *thoughtful*? Use evidence from the poem to motivate your choice.
7. Rossetti was a deeply religious person. Can you tell just by looking at this poem? What parts of the poem support your answer?
8. The speaker seems worried. Critically discuss this statement.
9. The speaker has commands in this poem (“remember,” “remember,” “remember,” “do not grieve”). Critically discuss the tone of these commands.