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Love and

Relationships

Poetry Anthology

AQA GCSE English Literature



YORK NOTES

York Notes Rapid Revision

**Love and
Relationships
Poetry Anthology**

AQA GCSE English Literature

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WHEN WE TWO PARTED by Lord Byron

Lord Byron was once described as 'mad, bad, and dangerous to know', though he doesn't sound it in this **lyric**, which probably refers to a real past mistress. More importantly, it reflects the emotional intensity and melancholy **imagery** of love and death common to the **Romantic movement**.

Metre (here **dactylic**) is used to create a heavy and doom-laden **mood**, like a funeral procession

Use of pronoun 'we' to emphasise they are now 'parted' – 'two', not 'one'

'Half' is ambiguous. Were they both half-relieved (to end it)? Or was only one of them (him) 'broken-hearted'?

When we two parted

In silence and tears,

Half broken-hearted

To sever for years,

5 Pale grew thy cheek and cold,

Colder thy kiss;

Truly that hour foretold

Sorrow to this.

The dew of the morning

10 Sank chill on my brow –

It felt like the warning

Of what I feel now.

Thy vows are all broken,

And light is thy fame;

15 I hear thy name spoken,

And share in its shame.

'Sever' suggests violent and complete separation

Imagery of death (here and throughout) echoes feelings of loss and sorrow

Past and present: he feels the pain as sharply now as he did then

The weak (or 'feminine') **rhyme** of 'morning' and 'warning' could emphasise his mixed feelings towards her

Betrayal and false love: as reflected in the idea of 'broken vows'

Alliterative sibilance of 'sh' echoes the whispering gossip that he hears

Use of pronouns – 'they', 'thee', 'me' – suggests feelings of separation and isolation

Use of 'knell' (bell rung at death) emphasises the 'death' of the relationship

'Shudder' implies disgust or horror at thought of her

They name thee before me,

A **knell** in mine ear;

A **shudder** come o'er me –

20 **Why wert thou so dear?**

They know not I knew thee,

Who knew thee too well –

Long, long shall I rue thee,

Too deeply to tell.

25 In secret we met –

In silence I grieve,

That thy heart could forget,

Thy spirit deceive.

If I should meet thee

30 After long years,

How should I greet thee?

With **silence and tears.**

Rhetorical question implies that the speaker can't believe his earlier feelings of love

Changing tenses 'know'/'knew', like 'felt'/'feel' in ll.11–12, echoes changing emotions

Long vowel sound of 'rue' echoes length of regret

Strong feelings (of hate or love): these may be felt 'too deeply' to describe to others

Silent 'grief' suggests she is dead to him, and he has suffered by repressing his feelings

Question suggests feelings of discomfort and unease

Repetition of earlier phrase shows renewal of pain – and perhaps an inability to move on

Disrupted **rhythm** in final **stanza**, almost as if speaker is suppressing sobs



What is the poem's setting?

- The poem recalls a **past love affair** from '**years**' ago. Byron doesn't specify time or place – some readers believe he was protecting the identity of a real-life past lover.
- Hearing others talk about his ex-lover has revived **bitter memories** for the speaker.

What is the poem about?

- The speaker describes his **mixed feelings** on hearing rumours about a past love.
- The speaker compares his **sorrow** at how his lover's feelings for him '**grew ... cold**' when they **separated**, to the way he feels now when '**they name thee before me**'.
- Nobody else knew about their affair – suggesting it was **secret**, perhaps even **illicit** – and so he now has to listen to comments about her all around him.
- It's partly this that makes him '**shudder**' now, but also the fact **she has moved on**.
- He feels **betrayed** by her current behaviour, just as he did years ago; he's ashamed he loved someone so **deceitful**.



Five key things about the language

1. Byron's use of pronouns shifts between '**we**', '**thee**' and '**I**', reflecting present separation, but also the way their secret past separates them from everyone else.
2. The mostly regular **dactylic** metre could reflect ideas about the inevitable death of love, only slipping in the final **stanza** where some beats are dropped in lines 1, 5 and 6.
3. The speaker describes his ex-lover using typically Romantic vocabulary associated with death – '**pale**', '**cold**', '**knell**' – to represent their love.
4. Most of Byron's rhymes are strong, emphasising endings, but weak rhymes in the second stanza – '**morning**'/'**warning**', '**broken**'/'**spoken**' – could suggest the speaker's feelings are not as clear as he states.
5. Repetition of words and rhymes e.g. '**tears**'/'**years**', hints at the inescapability of the speaker's feelings: he is doomed to grieve past love, even though he tries to escape his memories.

Five key quotations

1. Pain of separation: **'To sever for years'**, l.4: 'severs' suggests that passion may end violently and suddenly.
2. Betrayal: **'Thy vows are all broken'**, l.13: implies that the lover was not true to her word.
3. Painful memories: **'A knell in mine ear'**, l.18: hearing a past love's name renews the agony of loss.
4. Power of emotion: **'Long, long shall I rue thee, Too deeply to tell'**, l.23: the sorrow of separation is both lasting and impossible to describe.
5. Uncertainty: **'How should I greet thee?'**, l.31: implies anxiety about how he will behave if they should meet again.

Note it!

Compare how Byron presents ideas about the end of relationships with Hardy's ideas in 'Neutral Tones'. Are their feelings equally 'dead'?

Exam focus

How can I write about how Byron uses imagery? AO2

You can explore how Byron uses imagery to present past love.

Byron's use of death imagery reflects the speaker's belief that the relationship is dead. His lover's 'cold' kiss mirrors his 'chill' brow, implying that their feelings have died, her name nothing but a 'knell' when he hears it. However, his ongoing 'tears' could suggest that he finds it hard to let go of his feelings, even though the relationship has been over for some years now.

Topic sentence makes clear point about the theme of endings

Precise references all support the point being made

Signals an alternative interpretation of developed idea

Link to wider context

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about betrayal. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Byron implies that the speaker's lover has betrayed him. He does this by

LOVE'S PHILOSOPHY by Percy Bysshe Shelley

The poem follows a tradition of European poetry making a playful argument in favour of giving in to love – and uses the nature **imagery** that was so popular in the **Romantic movement**.

Words like 'mingle' suggest gentleness at the beginning

Weak rhyme could suggest that two similar but not identical things, e.g. male and female, can mix

Nature imagery pervades the poem, while **enjambment** emphasises the sense of a natural 'flow' between different things

Confident statement advances persuasive **tone**

Love is natural: set by 'divine law'; this links to Romantic ideas about the authority of love

'Being' implies that the 'mingling' is not purely physical, but something more spiritual

Rhetorical question undermines objections to kissing!

Passionate verbs – 'clasp' and 'kiss' – make the argument more explicitly physical

Desire: using nature to comment on human desire, he implies his desire is pure whereas her reluctance is 'unnatural'

Strong rhyme ends the poem – and the argument – with certainty

Implies the addressee is acting cruelly

Repetition of 'kiss' and 'clasp' and other 'joining' verbs makes the idea seem more acceptable

The fountains **mingle** with the river
 And the rivers with the **ocean**,
 The winds of heaven mix for ever
 With a sweet **emotion**;
 5 **Nothing in the world is single**,
All things by a law divine
In one another's being mingle –
Why not I with thine?
 See the mountains **kiss** high heaven,
 10 **And the waves clasp one another**;
No sister-flower would be forgiven
If it disdain'd its brother;
 And the sunlight **clasps** the earth,
 And the moonbeams **kiss** the **sea** –
 15 What are all these **kissings** worth
 If thou kiss not **me**?

LOVE'S PHILOSOPHY

What is the poem's setting?

- The speaker uses **nature** to argue that it is natural for humans to kiss and 'mingle'.
- The poem **may** have a **real addressee**, but also follows an established poetic convention of male speakers persuading women to sleep with them (like Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress').

What is the poem about?

- The poem opens with images of '**fountains**', '**rivers**' and '**the ocean**', reminding us of the **natural flow** and **purity** of water.
- The speaker argues that **mixing** is a **natural state**, set by an unspecified '**law divine**'. By talking about 'beings' mingling rather than 'bodies', he draws the **argument** away from the purely physical, suggesting a meeting of minds.
- The second **stanza** introduces more physically **passionate** words such as '**clasp**' and '**kiss**', reminding us this is what the speaker really wants.
- The **tone** becomes more **demanding** as the speaker compares the addressee unfavourably to a '**sister-flower**', that grows alongside its '**brother**'.
- The final question introduces a more **plaintive note**, as the speaker feels that **everything** in the world is being kissed except him!

Five key things about the language

1. As we'd expect from a Romantic poet, Shelley uses a great deal of nature **imagery**, from the vast '**ocean**' to the tiny '**sister-flower**', from '**sunlight**' to '**moonbeams**'.
2. A mixture of strong and weak rhyme – or 'masculine' and 'feminine' rhyme, as they're sometimes called – echoes the thinly veiled theme of sex.
3. A **semantic field** of mixing is repeated throughout the poem to emphasise the point: '**mingle**', '**mix**', '**kiss**', '**clasp**'.
4. Both stanzas end with questions, which can be read as assertive and demanding, or as genuine puzzlement.
5. The speaker moves from the **universal**, e.g. '**all things**', to the **personal** at the end of each stanza, e.g. to '**I**' and '**thine**', reminding us of his goal.

Five key quotations

1. Emphasis on feeling: **'With a sweet emotion'**, l.4: the argument may be logical, but the feelings are what's important.
2. Naturalness of sex and love: **'Nothing in the world is single'**, l.5: men and women are meant to love.
3. Rightness of love: **'... by a law divine'**, l.6: humans are designed to be together by a higher power.
4. Kindness: **'No sister-flower would be forgiven / If it disdain'd its brother'**, ll.11–12: the object of love should take pity on the lover.
5. Unrequited love: **'What are all these kissings worth'**, l.15: unrequited love makes the world seem bleak and without value.

Note it!

Compare how Shelley presents physical desire with the way that Barrett Browning does in 'Sonnet 29'. How do their requests for their lover's presence differ?

Exam focus

How can I write about Shelley's use of rhyme in the poem?

AO2 AO3

You can show how Shelley's use of rhyme is linked to Romantic ideas.

By saying that 'Nothing in the world is single', Shelley echoes a Romantic idea that men and women should love freely. He uses 'masculine' and 'feminine' rhyme to support this argument, balancing 'single' and 'mingle' against 'divine' and 'thine' to show the rhymes almost literally clasping. By building ideas of 'male' and 'female' into the form of the poem, he emphasises how we should see love as a natural part of life.

Clear point linking idea to context

Examples support the point being made

Links form back to contextual ideas

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about unrequited love. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Shelley suggests that, without love, life is meaningless.

SPECIAL FOCUS 1: Sound and rhythm

What are sound and rhythm?

- Poets often choose **specific words** because of the **effect** of particular **letter sounds**, e.g. words beginning with **plosive** *p* or *b* can sound **harsh and aggressive**.
- The **rhythm** of a poem is created by the **positioning** of words to create **stresses** or **beats**.

How do I identify them in a poem like 'Love's Philosophy'?

- Read the poem **aloud**, looking for words which are given **emphasis** by the poem's rhythm, e.g. '**mix**' (l.3), '**why**', '**I**' and '**thine**' (l.8).
- Think about how the poet **disrupts the rhythm** of the poem, e.g. at the start of l.12 to accentuate the harsh word '**disdain**'d'.
- Look at the poet's use of **punctuation**, e.g. **enjambment** between ll.6 and 7 lengthens the long vowel in '**divine**'.
- Think about ways in which the **sound** of words adds to their impact, e.g. the **alliteration** of '**m**' in the first **stanza** could be interpreted as echoing moans of longing.

Exam focus

How can I write about sound and rhythm? AO2

You could use verbs and adjectives related to sound and rhythm: *regular, irregular, constant, disrupt, harsh, soft, rapid, slow, emphatic, dramatic*.

For most of the poem, Shelley uses **irregular beats to suggest hesitant thoughtfulness, e.g. between lines 3 and 4**. However, in the final four lines, the rhythm falls into a regular iambic metre: it's as if the speaker is becoming more emphatic in his demands, and **the steady beat suggests a pulsing desire to 'kiss' and 'clasp'**.

Focus on rhythm

How rhythm changes

Exploration of effect

Now you try!

Think about the other poems in the cluster. Do any use sound or rhythm to emphasise key ideas?

My progress

Needs more work

Getting there

Sorted!

PORPHYRIA'S LOVER by Robert Browning

Browning's **dramatic monologue** presents a speaker who is revealed as increasingly unstable, both emotionally and morally, as he reaches a point where murder becomes an expression of love. Some readers have even seen the figure of 'Porphyria' as a **personification** of the speaker's mental illness.

Personification of wind sets an eerie **tone**, and **pathetic fallacy** hints at the speaker's unstable emotions

Use of **end-stopping** and enjambment to mirror the speaker's mixed emotions beneath the regular rhyme and **metre**

Active verbs attached to Porphyria, not the speaker, contrasting her power to change the **mood** with his passivity and watchfulness

Regular **rhyme scheme** (ababb, etc.) and (mostly) **iambic tetrameter** could imply speaker's rigid thought patterns

Adjective 'soiled' implies dirt, and perhaps also sin

The speaker talks of himself here and in l.28 in the third person to distance himself

Sexual **imagery** linked to Porphyria suggests her 'soiled' state and the speaker's arousal; he later uses her hair, symbolising female sexuality, to strangle her

Gentle, soft verb – the speaker may want a clearer demonstration of love

Jealousy: the speaker presents Porphyria as kept from him by the world

The rain set early in to-night,
 The sullen wind was soon awake,
 It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
 And did its worst to vex the lake:
 I listened with heart fit to break.
 When glided in Porphyria; straight
 She shut the cold out and the storm,
 And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
 Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
 Which done, she rose, and from her form
 Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
 And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
 Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
 And, last, she sat down by my side
 And called me. When no voice replied,
 She put my arm about her waist,
 And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
 And all her yellow hair displaced,
 And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
 And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
 Murmuring how she loved me – she
 Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
 To set its struggling passion free
 From pride, and vainer ties dis sever,
 And give herself to me for ever.

But passion sometimes would prevail,
 Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
 A sudden thought of one so pale
 For love of her, and all in vain:
 30 So, she was come through wind and rain.
 Be sure I looked up at her eyes
 Happy and proud; at last I knew
 Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
 Made my heart swell, and still it grew
 35 While I debated what to do.
 That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
 Perfectly pure and good: I found
 A thing to do, and all her hair
 In one long yellow string I wound
 40 Three times her little throat around,
 And strangled her. No pain felt she;
 I am quite sure she felt no pain.
 As a shut bud that holds a bee,
 I warily oped her lids: again
 45 Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
 And I untightened next the tress
 About her neck; her cheek once more
 Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
 I propped her head up as before,
 50 Only, this time my shoulder bore
 Her head, which droops upon it still:
 The smiling rosy little head,
 So glad it has its utmost will,
 That all it scorned at once is fled,
 55 And I, its love, am gained instead!
 Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
 Her darling one wish would be heard.
 And thus we sit together now,
 And all night long we have not stirred,
 60 And yet God has not said a word!

Eyes used to symbolise life and truth to the speaker, here and in l.45

Narrative shift from Porphyria being active to the speaker being active signals a turning point

Obsession: repetition of 'mine' reveals the speaker's possessiveness

Euphemistic wording distances the murder

Contrast of **enjambment** to describe murder and short clause to justify; the pause could suggest uncertainty

Insecurity: the short sentence implies the need to convince himself

Simile suggests *his* fear and her power

Language suggests heated passion, as if in death, she comes alive for him

Echo of earlier action shows roles are reversed

First use of pronoun 'we' shows they are now truly 'together'

Ambiguity of final sentence leaves us uncertain of the speaker's mood

What is the poem's setting?

- The speaker sits alone in a cold cottage, **symbolising** isolation – the wind reflects his feelings of **resentment** and vexation.
- The '**spite**' of the wind could imply he views his absent lover as **selfish**, and also **foreshadows** his later **violence** in murdering her.

What is the poem about?

- The speaker's heart is '**fit to break**' – we can guess later that he's been **imagining** Porphyria with **other men**.
- When Porphyria arrives, she makes the room '**warm**', implying her **warm nature** and **desire**, but her actions leave the speaker **unmoved** and silent, so she tries harder to please him.
- The speaker finally sees 'worship' of him in her eyes and, aroused, decides how he can **keep** her for himself alone. He **strangles** her with her own hair.
- Describing the murder **calmly**, the speaker still seems **unsure** of his actions, until he checks her eyes which 'laugh' without '**a stain**', **absolving** him of the crime.
- The speaker now feels able to **act** upon his desire and hold Porphyria, telling himself she now has her '**darling one wish**'; and the poem ends with them sitting together, waiting.



Five key things about the language

1. This is a **narrative** poem, with a structure moving from separation to togetherness; Browning uses the **dramatic monologue** form to reveal the speaker's emotions.
2. Regular rhyme creates a sense that the speaker is unable to free himself from feelings of jealousy. The five-line structure is uneasy and feels irregular – like the speaker's moral beliefs.
3. **Enjambment** allows the words to flow naturally over the rhyme, but Browning also uses it to highlight emotion.
4. Pathetic fallacy emphasises the speaker's isolation from society and 'normal' human behaviour.
5. The use of physical and sexual **imagery** throughout reveals the speaker's sexual obsession, as well as his desire to keep Porphyria 'pure'.

Five key quotations

1. Pain of love: **'I listened with heart fit to break'**, l.5: longing brings an almost physical pain.
2. Sexual love: **'And all her yellow hair displaced'**, l.18: image of female sexuality unbound, literally and **figuratively**.
3. Barriers to love: **'... set its struggling passion free from pride'**, ll.23–4: love may be held back by social convention.
4. Power/Possessive love: **'And give herself to me for ever'**, l.25: the speaker wants to keep her for himself alone.
5. Obsessive love: **'... at last I knew / Porphyria worshipped me'**, ll.32–3: the speaker wants to be the sole focus of love; to feel godlike.

Note it!

Compare how Browning presents frustrated love with how Charlotte Mew does in 'The Farmer's Bride'. Do we feel the same sympathy for both speakers?

Exam focus

How can I write about desire in this poem? AO1 AO2

You can use Browning's description of Porphyria.

The speaker's language makes it clear his lover's actions are erotically charged for him: she bares 'her smooth white shoulder' to him and loosens her 'yellow hair'. References to her body reveal his focus, while the verbs suggest she is actively seducing him. However, there is also a sense that he fears and despises her for this, describing her gloves as 'soiled', implying she is 'dirty' or 'used'.

Topic sentence makes clear point linked to language

Carefully chosen quotations as evidence

Exploration of effect

Alternative reading adds depth

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about power. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Browning's language reveals that the speaker wishes to have power over Porphyria. He says that

SONNET 29 - 'I THINK OF THEE!'

by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Already a successful and popular poet herself, here Barrett Browning addresses her husband, the poet Robert Browning. It is one of forty-four **sonnets**, which he encouraged her to publish as *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, despite her initial fear that they were too personal.

Short, exclamatory sentence which begins the poem is arresting – is she in pain, or joyful?

Imagery of growth and flowering suggests she 'flourishes' with him

Extended metaphor (husband = tree, her thoughts = vines twined around it) suggests her thoughts are overwhelming

I think of thee! – my thoughts do **twine and bud**

About thee, **as wild vines, about a tree,**

Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see

Except the straggling green which hides the wood.

5 Yet, **O my palm-tree,** be it understood

I will not have my thoughts instead of thee

Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly

Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,

Rustle thy boughs and **set thy trunk all bare,**

10 And let **these bands of greenery which insphere thee**

Drop heavily down, – burst, shattered, everywhere!

Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee

And **breathe within thy shadow a new air,**

I do not think of thee – I am too near thee.

Comparison to biblical tree suggests he is king-like in her eyes, as well as tall, strong and fruitful

Regeneration: his return will revive and sustain their love

Look at the verbs: 'should' is almost reproachful, while 'rustle' could be imploring or demanding

'Bands' and 'insphere' imply that her thoughts choke and constrain reality

Words of life – 'breathe' and 'air' – also echo the biblical idea of 'a new heaven'

Barrett Browning breaks out of the traditional **octave-sestet** division of the sonnet form and extends the completing couplet to three lines

Delight: she proudly expresses preference for real, physical love over dreams

Circular form echoes the beginning of the poem, but the changed wording suggests resolution

Sexually loaded vocabulary is strikingly direct, implying sexual satisfaction

What is the poem's setting?

- It is very likely that Barrett Browning herself is the speaker in this poem which expresses **longing** for her husband's return from an unspecified **absence**: has he been gone a long time, or only a few hours?
- The **passionate** statement of **nourishing love** reflects the **inspirational** effect they had on each other's writing.

What is the poem about?

- Addressing her **absent husband**, the speaker describes her thoughts as so strong that they threaten to overpower the **memory** of him.
- She makes it clear that she would rather have him present than spend her time **thinking** about him.
- She urges him to return and clear away her thoughts, implying that – as a good husband – he should be with her. She longs to **lose herself** in his presence.
- The language implies she will '**drop**', '**burst**' and '**shatter**' at his return, hinting at **sexual desire**. It suggests her love is **all-consuming**, but also **renewing**. She feels reborn with him.
- She ends where she began, with a reference to her thoughts, but this time expresses her **joy** at leaving them behind to become one with him.

Five key things about the language

1. Nature imagery throughout emphasises their love is natural and fruitful, implying that sexual love is healthy.
2. Bending the poem's sonnet form by shifting the **volta** and extending the couplet shows that the poet understands 'the rules' but is willing to break free to follow her feelings.
3. **Run-on** lines echo the vocabulary of 'bursting' through boundaries.
4. The extended metaphor of the tree and vine runs through the poem like a trunk, with biblical allusions echoing the imagery of 'The Song of Songs' or the Garden of Eden.
5. Reversal of the opening lines at the end of the poem mirrors her feelings of completion with her husband.



Five key quotations

1. Longing: '**... the straggling green which hides the wood**', l.4: her imagination threatens to overwhelm her with loss when he is absent.
2. Female perspective: '**... as a strong tree should**', l.8: suggests she wishes her husband to take control.
3. Passion: '**... set thy trunk all bare**', l.9: she is not afraid to suggest that sexual desire is healthy.
4. Satisfaction in marriage: '**... this deep joy**', l.12: the feeling of true love is one of completion, almost religious in depth.
5. Self-sacrifice: '**... breathe within thy shadow a new air**', l.13: true love does not seek to dominate and stifle.

Note it!

Compare how Barrett Browning here and Hardy in 'Neutral Tones' use nature to present feelings. Does Hardy offer any sense of love as a source of life?

Exam focus

How can I write about a female perspective of love? AO2 AO3

You can use Barrett Browning's use of metaphor to explore this.

Barrett Browning's **image of her husband as a strong tree** sees her as a vine growing around him, which **implies her acceptance of nineteenth-century attitudes to male dominance**. **However**, the openness of her passionate imagery as she demands that he set his 'trunk all bare', and **the fact she eloped with him in the first place**, suggests that **she is not afraid to break convention** by expressing her desires.

Opening links language and social context clearly

Signals an alternative reading

Use of specific context used relevantly

Makes clear alternative interpretation

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about marriage. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Barrett Browning shows how much she values the idea of marriage. She describes

SPECIAL FOCUS 2: Form and structure

What are form and structure?

- The **form** of a poem is the **type** of poem it is, e.g. **sonnet** (a poetic form typically addressing a lover), **free verse**.
- The **structure** of a poem is the **physical organisation and order** the poem takes around the form, using rhyme, **line length**, etc.

How do I identify them in a poem like 'Sonnet 29'?

- Explore **how** and **why** a poet may have used a **particular form**. Does the poet stick to the 'rules', e.g. why doesn't Barrett Browning end with a couplet?
- Look at **line lengths**, especially in **free verse**. Do any lines stand out? Why?
- Think about the **overall 'shape'** of the poem. Look for **narrative development** or repetition, e.g. Barrett Browning's ending echoes her opening.
- Consider the **rhyme scheme**: is it obvious? Does the poet use **enjambment** or do **end-stopped** lines emphasise words (e.g. **'thee'** in 'Sonnet 29')?
- Look at the **metre**. What **pace** has the poet created? Slow or upbeat?

Exam focus

How can I write about form and structure? AO2

It is crucial to explore **how** form and structure are used rather than simply to identify types of form and structure.

Although Barrett Browning uses the **sonnet form**, she **breaks conventions** by changing the **traditional structure**. **Instead of a volta shifting the mood after the octave, it comes, halfway through line seven. Instead of a rhyming couplet, she ends with a triplet.** This suggests the strength of her emotions, like her use of **enjambment**: **both show her desire to shatter** restraint.

Form/structure words

Evidence from the poem

How form and structure work together

Now you try!

Think about the other poems in the cluster. Do any play with form or structure? Why?

My progress

Needs more work

Getting there

Sorted!

NEUTRAL TONES by Thomas Hardy

Hardy's poem – like Byron's – looks back to the end of a relationship, which some readers mistakenly link to his unhappy first marriage. The poem describes a sense of bleak and lonely emptiness that seems the very opposite of love.

Imagery picks up idea of 'neutral' and colourless feelings: nature is dead, like their love

Pronoun suggests unity, but we quickly discover there is no more 'we', emphasising feelings of bitterness

Making God seem mean and petty, creating a sense of lovelessness

We stood by a pond that winter day,
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;
– They had fallen from an ash, and were gray.

Impersonal, 'neutral' phrasing, as if she doesn't feel anything for him

5 Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove
Over tedious riddles of years ago;
And some words played between us to and fro
On which lost the more by our love.

Closed **rhyme scheme** – abba cddc – echoes sense of going nowhere

Bitterness: each focuses on the negatives of the relationship

The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing

10 Alive enough to have strength to die;
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby
Like an ominous bird a-wing...

Juxtaposition of the 'deadest' smile which is 'alive' is a paradox which shows things are not as they should be

Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me

Could suggest brushing away rubbish, as if she wants to be rid of him

15 Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,
And a pond edged with grayish leaves.

Simile emphasises sense of unease and bad luck to come, or perhaps a bird symbolising death, such as a raven

Irregular **metre** enhances the sense of unease, as if someone were stumbling

Poem ends where it started, suggesting a lack of hope or progress

Memory: unhappiness twists ('wringing') memories, perhaps making them less 'neutral' or honest

What is the poem's setting?

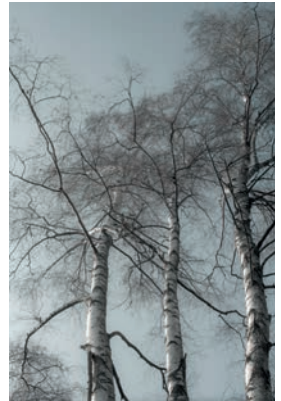
- The speaker remembers the **end of a relationship**, linking it to a pond in a dead, wintry landscape: nature offers no life or comfort to the scene.
- The rural setting and theme of **doomed love** are features that can be found in many of Hardy's novels.

What is the poem about?

- The poem opens with **'We stood'**, but the couple don't seem to be together among the fallen leaves. There is **nothing 'romantic'** about this landscape.
- The speaker describes how the woman's eyes passed over him as if she is already **bored** of him. **'Riddles'** and **'played'** suggest games, but they seem to be arguing.
- Neither shows any passion: even her smile seems **dead** in his memory.
- **'Since then'**, the speaker says, **experience** has shown him that love is false, distorting his **memories** of her face with **bitterness**.
- He still looks back at the **bleak** pond with a sense of being lost to God and to love. There is no more **'we'**.

Five key things about the language

1. Imagery of death pervades the poem: the **'white'** sun, the **'starving sod'**, the **'grey'** leaves from the **'ash'** tree.
2. The metre – **anapaestic** in places – is irregular and jolting, as if the speaker's emotions are not as flat as he states.
3. The rhyme scheme in each **stanza** is circular, suggesting imprisonment: the only half-rhyme is **'rove'/'love'**, perhaps suggesting their love was wrong.
4. **Pathetic fallacy** creates a sinister **mood** that hangs over the poem, suggesting love has been blighted, like the earth: the sun is cursed, a bird is **'ominous'**.
5. The poem has a circular structure, beginning and ending with the pond, but imperfectly so, as if the speaker is trapped in a memory, or in bitter emotions.



Five key quotations

1. Lack of feeling: **'Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove / Over tedious riddles ...'**, ll.5–6: she looks at him with restless indifference, not love.
2. Recrimination: **'... which lost the more by our love'**, l.8: they're almost competing to see who suffered most.
3. Death and decay: **'The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing'**, l.9: something once lovely has become horrid.
4. Bitter emotions: **'... keen lessons that love deceives ... have shaped to me your face'**, ll.13–15: memories have been twisted by sadness.
5. Lack of joy: **'... the God curst sun'**, l.15: even the sun has lost its brightness in their eyes.

Note it!

Compare how Hardy presents feelings of separation to the way that Sheers does in 'Winter Swans'. Does Hardy suggest any chance of a reconciliation?

Exam focus

How can I write about Hardy's use of structure in the poem? AO2

You can show how Hardy uses structural repetition to explore the end of the relationship.

The speaker describes a memory of a relationship ending, **beginning and concluding with the same scene by a pond, suggesting he is unable to move on from the past.** **More than this, by shifting the descriptions slightly** – the sun that has been **'chidden' by God to 'the God curst sun'** – Hardy **may imply** that memories are twisted by emotion to become even more bitter, with **the word 'curst' hinting at a complete loss of hope.**

Topic sentence makes clear point linking structure and meaning

Develops point

Precise quotations illustrate previous point

Exploration of effect

Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about language effects, using one of the quotations from the list.

Hardy uses negative vocabulary associated with death. He describes

SPECIAL FOCUS 3: Mood and tone

What is mood and tone?

- The **mood** or **tone** of a poem is the **atmosphere** or **feeling** evoked.

How do I identify them in a poem like 'Neutral Tones'?

- Explore the **connotations** of **particular words** or **phrases**: 'an ominous bird a-wing' suggests bad luck – even death.
- Think about how **particular vocabulary is linked**: all the words related to death – 'starving', 'ash', 'greyish', 'deadest', etc.
- Consider **voice** and **viewpoint** in the poem – the use of 'your' emphasises separation from the other.
- Think about the **sound**, **pace** and **rhythm**: is the poem fast-paced or slow? How does Hardy vary the rhythm throughout?
- Look for **change** or **development** in the mood or tone: how might we read the **lack** of change in scene in 'Neutral Tones'?

Exam focus

How can I write about mood and tone? AO2

You could use adjectives or adverbs related to the viewpoint or language: e.g. reflective, neutral, bitter, grim or sorrowful.

The speaker presents the death of passion and love as a **neutral** memory, preserved in **shades of white** and **grey** like a photograph, creating **distance**. However, the **death imagery and halting rhythm** could suggest a more **bitter or sorrowful** tone, and the speaker **becomes more reflective** as they describe how experience has 'shaped' their memories of past love.

Mood words

Evidence from the language

How tone/mood develops

Now you try!

Think about other poems in the cluster. Do any share Hardy's bitter tone?

My progress

Needs more work

Getting there

Sorted!