



# Roshnee Islamic School

## POETRY

### GRADE 11 2020

Name and Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

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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. (*tone words from page 11*)

## **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></p> <p>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></p> <p>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></p> <p>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></p> <p>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></p> <p>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></p> <p>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>	

## SONNET

A sonnet consists of 14 lines, usually iambic pentameters, with the exception of Gerhard 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	
THE OCTAVE	1	.....	soon,	A	} Only TWO rhymes used in the octave.
	2	.....	powers;	B	
	3	.....	ours;	B	
	4	.....	boon!	A	
	5	.....	moon,	A	} (1) the 4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> and 8 <sup>th</sup> lines rhyme the FIRST line
	6	.....	hours	B	
	7	.....	flowers	B	} (2) the 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 6 <sup>th</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup> rhyme with the SECOND line
	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 sonnet is always concluded with RHYMED couplet
		14	.... bright.	G	

### 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*.)
- d)

## **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.

<b>POETIC DEVICES &amp; FIGURES OF SPEECH</b>	<b>FUNCTION / EFFECT (N.B.)</b>
<b>Figures of speech based on associated ideas</b>	
<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."	It may serve to emphasize a certain aspect of the person or object concerned.
<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."	It may serve to emphasize the aspect which is selected, but often it is just a case of common usage.
<b><u>HYPERBOLE:</u></b> Exaggerated statement. Not meant to be taken literally,	It expresses intense emotion and emphasizes the fact stated.
<b><u>LITOTES:</u></b> Ironical understatement, esp. expressing an affirmative by the negative of its contrary.	It emphasizes the statement.
<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".	

## Other useful terminology

<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><u>DRAMATIC IRONY:</u></p> <p>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><u>UNDERSTATEMENT:</u></p> <p>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><u>CLIMAX:</u></p> <p>Event or point of greatest intensity or interest.</p>	
<p><u>ANTI-CLIMAX:</u></p> <p>Ineffective end to anything that has a suggested climax.</p>	<p>Creates a let-down feeling, suggests a feeling of disappointment / dissatisfaction.</p>
<p><u>ALLUSION:</u></p> <p>Reference to a specific person, place, event or literary work in the course of a poem.</p>	
<p><u>ELISION:</u></p> <p>Letter(s) left out to intensify the rhythm.</p>	
<p><u>EPIGRAM:</u></p> <p>It is a short, concise statement but has a deeper meaning</p>	<p>Creates the atmosphere before a poem.</p>
<p><b>Figures of speech based on comparison or resemblance.</b></p>	
<p><u>PERSONIFICATION:</u></p> <p>Attribute human qualities to thing or quality.</p>	<p>It makes the scene more vivid or the action more forceful.</p>



<p><b><u>SIMILE:</u></b> Comparison between two things, using <i>like</i> or <i>as</i>.</p>	<p>Makes the picture more vivid and helps to convey more accurately how the writer experienced a sensation.</p>
<p><b><u>METAPHOR:</u></b> Calling something by a name to an object/person which is not literally applicable to it.</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Makes the description more compact.</p>
<p><b>Figures of speech based on contrast or differences</b></p>	
<p><b><u>PUN:</u></b> Uses the double meaning of a word or phrase for suggestive and humorous purposes.</p>	
<p><b><u>PARADOX:</u></b> 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.</p>	
<p><b><u>OXYMORON:</u></b> A paradox contained in two words: "rotten beauty". A beautiful girl with low morals is outwardly beautiful, but inside she is rotten.</p>	
<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.</p> <p>“ ... 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.</p> <p>“And all is <u>ea</u>red with trade, <u>ea</u>red, <u>ea</u>red 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.</p>	<p>Imitates the sounds referred to. Helps to create a vivid aural picture and make the scene more immediate and real to the reader.</p>

"The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard ....."	
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### **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. (so learn them and know them well!!!!)
- ❖ Write in paragraphs and logically.
- ❖ Stick to the word count, so avoid repetition and unnecessary examples.

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## **TONE VOCABULARY**

**Tone:** 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	<b>Snooty</b>
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 Word*

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

## ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH – Wilfred Owen

### Biography

Wilfred Owen was born in 1893 and killed in 1918 in the First World War. He was short, weak and often ill, but he was sent to join the army in 1916. He fought in the trenches and was trapped by enemy fire with 18 other soldiers in a tiny, flooded, collapsing trench for four days. He was sent home suffering from shell-shock (PTSD), but the next year he was sent to the frontline again. He was killed by German gunfire and his parents received a telegram informing them of his death on the day the war ended. His poetry is concerned with expressing the sordid wastefulness and futility of war.



What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.                     5  
No mockeries now for them, no prayers nor bells;  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, –  
The shrill demented choirs of wailing shells;  
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes                     10  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.  
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

### Vocabulary

**Passing-bells:** A custom in England dating back many centuries was to ring a bell when a person was dying. Those who heard it were to pray that the person's soul would pass on to the light of heaven when he or she died – hence, the term *passing bell*. Today, churches traditionally toll bells at funerals.

**Cattle:** The comparison of the soldiers to slaughtered cattle underscores the inhumanity of war; it treats men as mere animals.

**Orisons** (OR ih zuns): Prayers.

**Wailing shells:** It is ironic that the killers, the shells, are also personified mourners.

**Candles:** Held by altar boys, the candles represent to Owen ritualistic, artificial funeral trappings. More appropriate to him is the sad glimmer in the eyes of these boys.

**Pall:** The cloth covering the coffin at a funeral. To Owen, it is, like the candles, an artificial funereal trapping. More appropriate as a pall is the pallor (paleness) on the faces of girls.

**Drawing-down of blinds:** This simple phrase allows the reader to picture the behind-the-scenes suffering of the loved ones after the burial of a soldier.

### Summary

“Anthem for Doomed Youth” was written by a soldier, Wilfred Owen, who died in the last week of the Great War. His poem clearly communicates the sorrow and horror he experienced during that war. In the poem, the noise of battle gives way to silent grief. Young men who should have lived died in the chaos of battle. Those who lost loved ones were not present at the deaths or burials of

their young men. In place of the usual funeral rites, sounds of battle, distant grief and nature's close of day were what they had to mark their deaths. Throughout the poem, Owen employed imagery to bring to life the sorrow and horror of war by describing the sounds and sights, by comparing a fitting funeral to the reality of death in war and by questioning the sufficiency of religion to provide solace in the face of such brutality.

**Questions**

- 1.1. What is an anthem? (2)
- 1.2. Why is it ironic then that the poem is called an anthem? (2)
- 2. Why are the youth “doomed”? (2)
- 3. Identify and discuss the figure of speech in “for these who die as cattle” (line 1). (3)
- 4. Why is the anger of the guns “monstrous” (line 2)? (2)
- 5. Explain why the rifles “stutter” (line 3). Discuss the figure of speech used. (3)
- 6. Describe line 7 in your own words. (3)
- 7. What do the candles (line 9) represent and where are they speeding the soldiers to? (2)
- 8. In Owen’s experiences in peace time, he knew that when someone died there was a church funeral with bells, choirs, prayers, candles, flowers and a pall. At the person’s home the blinds would be drawn to show that there had been a death. Discuss the extended metaphor and the following elements compared. Redraw and complete the table of the comparisons he uses. (8)

PEACE TIME	WAR TIME
Bells	
Prayers	
Choirs	
Candles	
Flowers	
Pall	
Blinds drawn	

- 9.1. Identify three alliterating words in the last line of the poem. (1)
- 9.2. Describe how these words affect the rhythm of the poem. (3)
- 10. After reading the poem, why do you think Owen’s poetry is described as “anti-war”? (2)
- 11. Write a short paragraph (3-5 sentences) about the tone and mood of the poem. Make reference to the use of diction and imagery to justify your answer. (4)
- 12. Comment on the relevance of the title of the poem. (3)

**[40 marks]**

## Type of Work

“Anthem for Doomed Youth” is a lyric poem in the format of a sonnet. Wilfred Owen wrote it in 1917 while under treatment for psychological trauma and trench fever (as explained in the paragraph above) at a war hospital in Craiglockhart, Scotland, then a suburb of Edinburgh and now part of the city.

## The Sonnet

The Italian poet Petrarch (1304-1374), a Roman Catholic priest, popularized the Italian sonnet format. A Petrarchan sonnet consists of an eight-line stanza (octave) and a six-line stanza (sestet). Generally, the first stanza presents a theme, and the second stanza develops it. The rhyme scheme is as follows: first stanza (octave): ABBA, ABBA; second stanza (sestet): CDE, CDE. The sonnet form was introduced in England by Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542) and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey (1517-1547). They translated Italian sonnets into English and wrote sonnets of their own. Wyatt and Surrey sometimes replaced Petrarch's scheme of an eight-line stanza and a six-line stanza with three four-line stanzas and a two-line conclusion known as a couplet. William Shakespeare (1564-1616) adopted the latter scheme in his sonnets. His rhyme scheme was ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG. The meter of his lines was iambic pentameter. After his sonnets were published in a 1609 collection, the English sonnet became popularly known as the Shakespearean sonnet.

## Owen's Poem

“Anthem for Doomed Youth” is a hybrid sonnet – that is, it combines the structure of the Petrarchan sonnet with the rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet except for lines 11 and 12. (The rhyme scheme of Shakespeare's sonnets is ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG; the rhyme scheme of Owen's poem is ABAB, CDCD, EFFE, GG.

## STANZA 1

Line 1

***What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?***

People are dying and our speaker asks us, what sound is there to mark their deaths?

Those “passing-bells” are church bells, which are rung to mark someone's death (when they have *passed away*).

This phrase introduces *religious imagery* to the poem, but it's contrasted with the horrific experience on the front lines of war, where men die like cattle; we can't imagine any church bells ringing there.

Did you notice that our speaker says “these” instead of “those”? “Those” gives a sense of distance to the poem. You might use that word to talk about people who are far away, or from whom you feel separated. If you use “these”, it's as though you're talking about someone who's right there in the room with you.

So with this very slight matter of **word choice**, our speaker has deliberately brought the soldiers much closer to us. It's as if we're on the battlefield, seeing the soldiers falling right and left.

What are these soldiers compared to? Cattle. It's not exactly the nicest **simile** we've ever heard. The phrase “die as cattle” suggests slaughter. He's saying that something about these deaths is especially terrible – it's inhumane; the soldiers are being treated like animals. Because cattle come in herds, we can assume that a lot of these men are dying all at once.

Line 2

***Only the monstrous anger of the guns.***

The only thing that marks the death of these soldiers is the angry sound of guns. Gunfire is just about the opposite of pleasant church bells. Anger suggests violence. So “monstrous anger” speaks of the atrocious hatred and horror of the battle, and the helplessness of the victims of such a monster. The guns are deadly. The first and second line of the poem indicate war. Where else would men die like cattle to the sound of monstrously angry guns?



Lines 3-4

***Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.***

The speaker says that rifle fire is the only kind of prayer for the dying soldiers. ("Orison" is from Latin and means 'prayer'.)

Notice the use of **anaphora**: the repetition of "Only". Owen does this to build momentum and pacing. The word "hasty" makes us aware of the suddenness of death on the war front, and also underscores the haphazard and senseless nature of the killing that's going on there. These are not thoughtful deaths—they're quick, loud, and messy.

The word "stuttering" helps bridge the gap between the rifles and the people back home who are saying prayers for these boys. By **personifying** the rifles, it gives us a weird opposite of what happened when the soldiers were first compared to cattle.

The image of stuttering rifles creates the staccato, harsh rhythm and sound of repeated rifle fire. This violent rhythm is complemented by the harsh screaming of the shells, which is suggested in the words 'mourning', 'wailing' and 'bugles', resulting in a very vivid impression of the confusion, turmoil and madness of the scene ('demented').

The soldiers become like animals, while the guns become like people. That does not sound like a good combination. The strange connections are between guns and prayer, and between people and animals.

**Rhyming:** rattle rhymes with cattle and orisons rhymes with guns.

Line 5

***No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;***

There are no prayers and no bells on the front to mock the dying men.

The speaker uses the word "mockeries", which he identifies as prayers and bells.

This line strips the holy, solemn mask off those rituals and casts them as an outright sham. The prayers and bells seem to be a joke. The speaker may feel this way because he thinks that those rituals totally miss the point. They ignore what's really happening. They glorify the deaths by pretending that the fighting is purposeful and noble, when really it's akin to slaughtering cattle.

N.B. Governments send young boys to foreign countries to fight for their country. They use words like patriotism; young boys are made to feel that risking their lives for the sake of their country is worthy, purposeful and noble. They are slaughtered on the battlefield and then made heroes for dying for their country. Their lives are in effect wasted.

Lines 6-7

***Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, –  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;***

There's no mourning whatsoever on the battlefield, except for the wailing of shells, which our speaker compares to the sound of choirs.

A traditionally religious image (choirs) is used as a **metaphor** for the ugly reality of war (in this case, the sound of shelling).

This choir is "shrill" and "demented". This is not a choir you want singing at your funeral, or even your average Sunday mass.

The use of these uncharacteristic adjectives could be another way for our speaker to point out the huge difference between what life and death are really like on the front, and the holy and noble way that those 'back home' present it.

All the holy and patriotic civilians are absent at the front. There's no voice of mourning there for the young men – just the sound of shells.

Our speaker is either lamenting this fact, wondering where all these mournful patriots are in actual battle, or he's saying that if there isn't any fancy memorial on the battlefield, then we shouldn't pretend by having them at home. It just seems phony (at least, so says the speaker).

Line 8

***And bugles calling for them from sad shires.***

Our speaker now draws our attention to another sound of mourning for the soldier – the sound of bugles playing in sad towns.

A "shire" is an English term for a county. The bugle is an instrument with military associations. In particular, it's the instrument used to play 'The Last Call' at soldiers' funerals.

This presumably is meant to call to mind all the towns left with half or more of their young men dead.

There is a lot of sad music in this short poem, although the music of these bugles is a bit more literal than the choir. There's no metaphor here. The bugle music is real.

## STANZA 2

Line 9

***What candles may be held to speed them all?***

The speaker wants to know what candles all these mourners can hold in honour of the fallen soldiers. What rituals can people possibly perform to help these soldiers pass on peacefully to the spiritual world? Rituals like lighting candles in churches.

These candles may be a **metaphor** for the larger ceremonies we hold when attempting to honour those killed in action.

Lines 10-11

***Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.***

The answer to the question "What candles?" is exactly that there are no candles. The speaker brushes off the idea of lighting candles. What's the point of that? He instead turns our attention to tears, which are also a sort of ritual that marks the soldier's death (less fancy, but more sincere).

This reference to what's "in their eyes" could refer both to the tears of the soldiers' sons, and to the tears of the soldiers themselves. The words "shine" and "glimmer" remind us of the candles from line 9, even as we know we're now talking about tears. Those two words make a sort of link, so that we know that the tears are standing in for the candles.

Note that these lines employ words that we associate with holy things, rather than human things. For example, instead of tears we have "holy glimmers," and instead of deaths we have "goodbyes." "Holy glimmers and goodbyes" certainly sound more lofty and noble than tears and death; we're still talking about human pain and suffering.

Owen is emphasizing the emotional aspect of grief – the private mourning that goes on. Holding a public vigil is nowhere near as poignant as actual tears.

Line 12

***The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;***

The pale, drained faces of girls will stand in for the cover on the dead soldiers' coffins. A pall is the cloth typically draped over a coffin, so in this case, the girls' pale faces will be **metaphorically** draped over the soldiers' coffins, sending them off with respect.

The drained (sad, shocked) faces of girls probably refers to the significant others and/or daughters of the soldiers – the women who are left behind by war.

This line, like the lines before it, brings our attention to the suffering caused by the death of the soldiers; not only to the soldiers themselves, but also to their towns and families. It's mixing that suffering in with the language of funeral rituals. So what matters here is not the pall, but the pallor; the girls' grief is what really counts. In this way, the speaker is not letting the funeral ritual get away with seeming sombre and noble; he's forcing it to take on the weight of the real suffering that surrounds it.

Line 13

***Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,***

“The tenderness of patient minds” will be like the flowers put on the soldiers’ graves. This is one of the more mysterious lines in the poem.

It could be that the speaker is holding up tender, patient minds in contrast to those who are all eager and excited about war.

In that way, this line could be telling us that the only positive tribute to the dead soldiers comes from the tender thoughts and concerns of those who have more patient, sensitive minds. Those who are really concerned about their safety and the danger they’re in, and mourn the loss of these innocent young lives.

On the other hand, it could be that this line is getting at something more critical of those patient minds: perhaps they shouldn’t be so patient with all the jingoism (extreme patriotism) and the eagerness to send boys off to die.

Maybe these minds should be a little less patient, and a little more eager to bring the boys home.

Line 14

***And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.***

The speaker ends with an image of blinds being drawn shortly before dark. The word “slow” reflects the way the poem has been slowing down throughout the second stanza, with the last line being the slowest and quietest of them all.

The ‘drawing of blinds’ is an image of death. The families that have lost young men are the ones closing the blinds, as a sort of matching image to the closing and ending of a life.

It also works as an image of civilians at home, with the drawing down of blinds acting as a **symbol** for the way they’re keeping out the realities of the war. They don’t want to be troubled by it. These folks will wave their flag by day, and close their blinds at night, so they don’t have to see the darkness, the terrible realities of the war. They are unwilling to take responsibility for what’s going on. Who is doing the action? Who is drawing down the blinds? It seems like nobody! It’s a passive sentence, which makes it seem like the blinds are drawing themselves down. Nobody’s in charge here. No one’s responsible.

This passive reading lends itself to a more negative reading of Line 13. Tender, patient minds might be more likely to draw down blinds and block out the real horrors the fighting men are facing. Or, then again, we might read this line as a simple, tender, private moment of grief. What else is there to do when you’ve lost a man in combat but to shun the rituals and shut out the world and mourn in your own personal way?

## **LITERARY DEVICES**

- **Simile** (line 1)  
Comparison of the battlefield deaths of soldiers to the slaughter of cattle.
- **Rhetorical question** (line 1)  
“What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?”  
The “passing-bells” are a traditional (and religious) way to mark someone’s death. When thousands die at once on the battlefield, no bell rings for the individuals. There are no bells ringing out the deaths of these soldiers.
- **Personification** (line 2)  
Comparison of anger, a human emotion, to the guns, machines.  
The soldiers are dehumanized and the guns (the instruments of war) are becoming more human.

- **Anaphora** (line 3)  
At the beginning of this line (starts with “Only the”, just like the line before) helps to build momentum. When something is repeated it is deemed important. The repetition of “only” adds to the tension and horror of the battlefield, where there are nothing but shells and dying men.
- **Alliteration** (line 3)  
At the end of the line “rifles’ rapid rattle” the alliteration builds intensity. The momentum and intensity emphasizes the battlefield/war zone; it emphasizes the sheer terror of the soldiers.
- **Consonance** (lines 3-4)  
The double-t words: “stuttering”, “rattle”, and “patter” and the “p” sound in “rapid”, mimic the sound of the rifles firing. There are a lot of “r” and “t” sounds to represent gunfire. E.g. “ratatat tat”. These sounds give a sensory experience of the battlefield.
- **Metaphor** (line 6)  
Funerals often have hymns (songs) to send off the dead. There are no funerals on the battlefield, and that means that artillery shells will have to **metaphorically** stand in for the choirs of a church.
- **Implied metaphor** (line 7)  
The shells are demented choirs continues the trend of **personifying** the weapons of war. The metaphor, by comparing choir members/churches) and inanimate weapons blurs the lines between a choir singing for the glory of God and country, and the shelling that just might be a result of that same nationalistic and patriotic fervor.
- **Rhetorical question** (line 9)  
“What candles may be held to speed them all?”  
This is another mourning ritual (the lighting of candles). There are no candles for the fallen soldiers.
- **Imagery** (line 12)  
The ritual of putting a pall on a coffin is replaced by the more sincere **image** of a grieving face.
- **Metaphor** (line 13)  
The ritual of putting flowers on a grave is compared with the patience and tenderness of those waiting at home. It might be suggesting that the compassion of others is as useless to the dying soldier as flowers on his grave. Or it might be contrasting the two, with the compassion being a much more fitting and suitable way of mourning than the act of bringing flowers to a gravestone.
- **Imagery** (line 14)  
This last line is not only an **image**, but also a **symbol** that works in a number of ways. First, the setting of dusk reminds us of death. The drawing down of blinds might also be read as signifying the refusal to see darkness and death. The speaker *wants* us to see the darkness and suffering, and to acknowledge the terrible cruelties of war. It could also depict the sincere, ritual-less private grief that the mourners experience, when all the pomp and circumstance of a ceremonial funeral is over, and they’re left alone.

## EATING POETRY – Mark Strand

### Biography

Mark Strand (April 11, 1934 – November 29, 2014) was a Canadian-born American editor, translator and prose writer. The hallmarks of his style are precise language, surreal imagery and the recurring theme of absence. He was appointed Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress in 1990 and received the Wallace Stevens Award in 2004. Many poems in his first book show a focus on how an individual struggles to find his/her place in the world. He also writes a lot about the “fight” between light and dark and what each symbolizes.



Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.  
There is no happiness like mine.  
I have been eating poetry.

The librarian does not believe what she sees.  
Her eyes are sad  
and she walks with her hands in her dress.

5

The poems are gone.  
The light is dim.  
The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.

Their eyeballs roll,  
their blond legs burn like brush.  
The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.

10

She does not understand.  
When I get on my knees and lick her hand.  
She screams.

15

I am a new man.  
I snarl at her and bark.  
I romp with joy in the bookish dark.

### Summary

The poem opens with the speaker eating poetry while ink runs from the corners of his mouth. A librarian spots him and doesn't understand what she's seeing. After all the poems are eaten, a bunch of dogs start coming up the stairs while their eyeballs roll and their legs “burn like brush”. The librarian starts to stamp her feet and weep because she doesn't understand. The speaker licks her hand and she screams. He snarls and barks at her. Then he romps with joy in the “bookish dark”.

### Questions

1. Discuss the image created in the first stanza. (2)
2. How would you describe the speaker's tone and mood in the first stanza? (2)
3. How does he sound when he confesses that he's been "eating poetry"? (1)

4. Explain in your own words how the librarian is described in stanza 2. (2)
5. Comment on what the librarian symbolises. (HINT: refer to stereotyping.) (3)
6. Why is she an important part of the poem's central themes? (2)
7. Why are all the poems "gone" (line 7)? (2)
8. Discuss the connotative and denotative meanings of line 8. (2)
9. Comment on the mood created in line 9. (2)
10. Explain in your own words how the dogs are described in stanza 4. (2)
11. How does the librarian act when she sees the dogs? What does this imply? (2)
- 12.1. What does speaker do in stanza 5 that causes the librarian to scream? (1)
- 12.2. Why, do you think, has the speaker transformed into a dog? (2)
- 12.3. Explain the irony in line 16. (2)
13. Provide a suitable in-context synonym for "romp" (line 18). (1)
14. Discuss why there are so many full stops and how the pace is affected. (3)
15. Normally we say that we read poetry. What is emphasised by saying that the speaker is eating poetry? How is reading poetry the same as eating? (2)
16. How is it the same or different from what you think of when you think of reading poetry? (2)

[35 MARKS]

### Analysis

Lines 1-2

***Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.***

***There is no happiness like mine.***

The speaker has just eaten something with ink in it. Whatever it is, he's happy about it. In fact, he's as happy as can be since he says in line 2, "there is no happiness like mine".

The poem is written in first-person. This means it is personal with lots of references to "I", "me", and "my". We see things from the speaker's own perspective that allows us to feel and see things like he does.

The speaker also has an active voice, which means we're present in the moment as this is all happening, adding a sense of immediacy to the experience.

Both lines end with a full stop. This means we should stop and take a moment to consider each line by itself before putting the pieces together. In a way, each line is a unique thought and deserves its space.

Line 3

***I have been eating poetry.***

Line 3 tells us where the ink is coming from: poetry. Line 3 has a slightly confessional element: the speaker is letting us in on this embarrassing, yet totally delightful activity of “eating poetry”. It is as if the readers have caught him in the act and he knows it.

The dryly humorous tone (meaning that it’s understated and quiet) is presented to us in such a matter-of-fact way. The speaker isn’t trying to suggest that he’s using figurative language here. On the contrary, this is the real deal. He is literally “eating poetry”.

Line 4

***The librarian does not believe what she sees.***

At this point, we know for sure that there isn’t any figurative language. The librarian’s disbelief proves that this is *really* happening – at least in terms of the poetry’s logic.

Instead, there seems to be a kind of **allegory** in which the “eating” of poetry is symbolic of the personal enjoyment of anything, be it poetry or popcorn.

So, the librarian is representative of people who witness such ecstatic enjoyment and just can’t understand it. They can’t understand it because they’re not the ones experiencing it.

Lines 5-6

***Her eyes are sad  
and she walks with her hands in her dress.***

The librarian is not experiencing joy. Maybe after seeing the joyous speaker with ink dripping from his mouth, she’s wishing she could feel the same about something.

Her “eyes are sad”, which tells us she can’t hide those disappointed or unfulfilled feelings that she has. She also “walks with her hands in her dress”, which gives the impression that she’s withdrawn and not looking to talk about it with anyone.

The enjambment is different from all the full stops in the first stanza. Maybe we are meant to see the librarian’s sad eyes and pocketed hands as part of her character. There’s no need to separate the two because together they fully capture how the librarian is feeling.

Lines 7-8

***The poems are gone.  
The light is dim.***

The speaker has gone and eaten all the poems. There is nothing left for the librarian now. The dim lights are symbolic. The “light” in line 8 might literally refer to the lights in the library, but symbolically they might refer to inspiration and that joyous moment the speaker just had while eating poetry. After all, as much as we’d like to, we can’t make those joyous moments last forever and, once they’re over, the lights go “dim” again.

Just as we saw in the first stanza, each line here is separated by a full stop to make us stop and think.

We get the sense that the speaker is feeling a bit disappointed at this moment after eating all the poems. So the lines purposely sound a bit deflated and boring with those repetitive clauses in order to reflect how he’s feeling.

Line 9

***The dogs are on the basement stairs and coming up.***

If we think about what the speaker was just doing and how he felt, we can assume that these dogs are symbolic of what happens after all the joyous inspiration is gone. Since they’re in the “basement”, we have even more reason to suspect that this line is getting at some of the speaker’s darker thoughts and feelings.

We get the sense that these aren't your typical fluffy best friends, since they're in the basement. Dogs trapped in basements aren't all that happy, as a general rule. There is something ominous about the mood in this line, as if those dogs are about to bring some bad energy up with them. Strand likes to write a lot about individuals struggling in metaphorical "darkness", in their attempt to understand themselves.

Since this line is different from its preceding lines, in terms of its subject, we can also assume that we have a shift in the speaker's thought process. We're not in that joyous moment anymore.

Lines 10-11

***Their eyeballs roll,  
their blond legs burn like brush.***

The dogs don't look too friendly with their rolling eyeballs and burning legs. They sound evil. Just as we saw in the previous lines about the librarian, Strand is keeping this image together without any full stops. We see these evil dogs in one relatively fluid moment with only a comma to make us pause for a second. Why are these dogs so ominous? The speaker was as happy as can be.

As we saw before, joyous moments can't last forever, and sometimes we might go from feeling really happy to really sad or even frightened. Our emotions can feel like a rollercoaster sometimes. So the same thing seems to be happening here. While the speaker was eating poetry, he was happy. Now that he's eaten all the poems, there's nothing left, so the dogs are on their way up ready to wreak havoc on the speaker's mind.

We don't know how these dogs will influence the speaker, but we do know that there's some darkness there nonetheless. The ambiguity allows us to fill in the blanks based on our own associations with evil dogs.

There is alliteration with "blond", "burn", and "brush". "Brush" is not the thing you comb your hair with. It's the stuff you see out in the woods that burn easily, like weeds and small sticks. The dogs seem to be literally on fire, which adds to their rather evil appearance and powerful influence.

Line 12

***The poor librarian begins to stamp her feet and weep.***

There is no information about why the librarian is weeping. She sees the same burning dogs that the speaker does. We know she was sad to begin with, so now it looks as if she's feeling even worse. More importantly, this line really accents the shift in mood that has occurred. Things have escalated in a way that's gone from joyous to surrealistically dark and chaotic.

We get the sense that neither joy nor darkness can exist by themselves in this poem. They're mingling with one another and transitioning from one to the other right before our eyes. Meanwhile, the librarian doesn't get any of it, so she stamps her feet and weeps. The speaker seems to have a better understanding of what's going on even if we don't. In a way, we're also like the librarian seeing all the strange things happening and trying to figure it out.

The assonance in "feet" and "weep", blend into one another like the other characteristics used to describe the librarian in the second stanza.

Line 13

***She does not understand.***

The librarian doesn't understand what is going on. Maybe besides being an outsider, the librarian is also a symbol of the types of bookish people who study things, but who don't really understand the lived experience of the real world that's around them. Likewise, they don't understand strange people that live in the real world.

With reference to any person's personal experience of joy, darkness, or anything else, we can understand that people will never fully grasp that individual's experience. The only thing left to say is "she does not understand".



Lines 14-15

***When I get on my knees and lick her hand,  
she screams.***

A transformation has occurred in conjunction with the shifting mood. The speaker is licking the librarian's hand like a dog and, of course, the librarian doesn't understand it. She screams, which is natural behaviour. You too would scream if someone licked your hand. The librarian is also frightened of the poetry eating and now our dog-man speaker.

The joy and darkness are being portrayed here in a constant state of flux with one transitioning into the other. Those who aren't part of the immediate experience, like the librarian, are unable to understand it; they are frightened by what they see from an outsider's perspective.

When we think about the experience of reading poetry, we understand that readers will have different experiences and reactions to particular poems. There's no static way of reading anything. For our purposes, the poetry eating dog-man speaker may represent the transformations that can occur for a person who is reading poetry. Only here the effect is magnified.

Lines 16-17

***I am a new man.***

***I snarl at her and bark.***

By line 16, we get that a transformation has indeed occurred: "I am a new man".

We are also given some assurance that the speaker is still a "man" even if he's barking, licking, and snarling at the librarian. It doesn't look as if the speaker is too bothered by this sudden transformation, either. In fact, he seems right at home with his snarling and barking, as if all the doggy behaviour is now part of his nature.

When we think about personal experiences in a more general sense, we understand that for the person experiencing these things, the changes inevitably become part of who he is. For those outside of the experience, the changes often don't make sense and can be a bit frightening even. Still, since the speaker seems to feel right at home with these changes, he doesn't want anyone spoiling it for him, so he "snarl[s]" and "bark[s]".

Line 18

***I romp with joy in the bookish dark.***

After all is said and done, the poem has a happy ending with the speaker romping with joy in the "bookish dark". Notice the couplet here. Strand ends his poem with the end rhyme of "bark" and "dark". That perfect rhyme really annunciates the joy the speaker is feeling, despite all the barking and "dark". By the very end, we see even more this mingling of "joy" with the "dark" in a way that suggests that the two get along just fine.

In fact, all the burning dogs and darkness that we saw earlier seem to be less scary by line 18. The dog-man now "romp[s]" around like a puppy at a park. Here, too, the dark is "bookish", which gives it an intellectual flair, rather than the evil one we saw earlier with the basement and burning dogs.

By the end of the poem, all of the transitions between joy, darkness, and burning dogs seem to suggest that it is part of the speaker's delightful activity of "eating poetry". Although outsiders like the librarian just don't get it, our speaker is "a new man" because of his steady diet of poetry – deliciously transformative.

## **LITERARY DEVICES**

- **Imagery**

- Ink runs from the corner of the speaker's mouth – like blood; savage. Links with dogs, later in poem. It is almost as if he reads (eats) the poems greedily, anxiously.
- Romp[s] with joy in the bookish dark – primal excitement; the dark represents his hunger for knowledge/understanding the poems.

- **Metaphor**  
Eating poetry is compared to reading/experiencing poetry. The experience of reading the poems changes the speaker.
- **Symbolism**
  - The librarian functions as a representative of an outsider's perspective.
  - The dog symbolizes uncontrolled human nature.
- **Alliteration**  
Line 11: "Blond", "burn", and "brush"
- **Contrast**  
*"The light is dim"*  
Literally: the dim lighting in the library as it gets late;  
Figuratively: the inspiration and that joyous moment the speaker just had while eating poetry fades.

## MID-TERM BREAK – Seamus Heaney

### Biography

Seamus Heaney was born in Northern Ireland in 13 April 1939. When he was 12 years old, he won a scholarship to St. Columb's College in the city of Derry. He was always grateful to have experienced "the earth" by working on his family's farm, but he considered education to be "heaven." He currently lives in Dublin, Ireland and periodically teaches here in the United States at Harvard University. He was the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995.



Many of his works concern his own family and focus on characters in his own family: they can be read as elegies (funeral speech or song) for those family members. The poem is about the death of Heaney's infant brother (Christopher) and how people (including himself) reacted to this. The poem is written from the point of view of a young Heaney, summoned from school after his brother died.

I sat all morning in the college sick bay  
Counting bells knelling classes to a close.  
At two o'clock our neighbours drove me home.

In the porch I met my father crying –  
He had always taken funerals in his stride – 5  
And Big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.

The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram  
When I came in, and I was embarrassed  
By old men standing up to shake my hand

And tell me they were 'sorry for my trouble'. 10  
Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,  
Away at school, as my mother held my hand

In hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs.  
At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived  
With the corpse, stanced and bandaged by the nurses. 15

Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops  
And candles soothed the bedside; I saw him  
For the first time in six weeks. Paler now,

Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple,  
He lay in the four-foot box as in his cot. 20  
No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

A four-foot box, a foot for every year.

### Vocabulary

**knelling:** (of a bell) ring solemnly, especially for a death or funeral.

**porch:** an exterior extension to a building; verandah

**take in stride:** to cope with something unfortunate without much effort; to accept or manage difficulties well.

**hard blow:** a sudden, hard knock (literal) with a hand, fist, or weapon, e.g. a blow to the head; a sudden emotional shock (figurative).

**stanching:** to stop or restrict (a flow of blood) from a wound.

**gaudy:** very bright

### Summary

The poem presents an elder brother having to deal with a terrible trauma. Heaney is very muted and understated with respect to his own emotional response. He chooses to focus more upon the reaction of his parents in order to convey the shocking impact of the death of their little boy.

### Questions

1. What is unusual about the title of this poem? (2)
2. How do you think the poet was feeling in stanza one? Quote to support your answer. (3)
3. Why does the poet choose the word “knelling” when writing about the school bells? (2)
4. What type of school did the poet attend? Give reasons for your answer. (2)
5. What did the poet find strange about his father’s behaviour? (2)
6. Why is what “big Jim Evans” says (line 6) an unfortunate pun? (HINT: Explain both meanings.) (3)
7. Why was the baby the lucky one that day? (1)
8. Why was the poet embarrassed by the old men shaking his hand? (2)
9. What was surprising about his mother’s behaviour? (2)
- 10.1. Contrast the reactions of both parents. (2)
- 10.2. With whom, do you think, is the mother angry? (2)
11. What is unusual about the poet’s use of the phrase “the corpse”? Answer fully. (3)
12. How does the use of “corpse” contrast with the language describing when he is alone with his brother’s body? (3)
13. Account for the atmosphere change in stanza six. (HINT: Remember before/after). (3)
14. Explain line 19 in your own words. (2)
15. Comment on the use of the simile in line 20. (3)
16. What do you think of the image used in the last line of the poem? (3)

**[40 MARKS]**

## Analysis

### STANZA 1

In the opening stanza Heaney, as a child, is waiting in the sick bay at school to be taken home. There is a sense of boredom as he counts the bells waiting for classes to end. It is as if he doesn't really understand what is going on and would rather be in class.

The beginning of the poem may refer to any child, but the second line introduces a darkly foreboding atmosphere: "I sat all morning in the college sick bay / Counting bells knelling classes to a close."

The word "knell" is appropriate in the context of a poem about death because it is the sound of a funeral bell. We do not normally associate school bells with death, but this day was to prove horrifically different for the poet.

The rhythm and alliteration also reinforce the mournful tone. The 'c' and 'l' sounds, as well as the internal rhyme of "bells" and "knelling" help to suggest both the idea of finality and of time seeming to slow down.

The poet is driven home by his neighbours and not his parents, another unusual event preparing the reader for the idea that something is terribly wrong. The fact that Heaney remembers the precise time, "two o'clock" is convincing as we all tend to remember precise timings when recalling traumatic, life-changing events.

### STANZA 2

Stanza two concentrates on the poet's father's emotional response who is "crying". Heaney tells us that his father "had always taken funerals in his stride" but this death is unnatural as well as personal. The bereft of a little child is unbearable for the normally rock solid father who would, we assume, be the sort of man to offer words of comfort to others just as "Big Jim Evans" offers his to Heaney's family in "saying it was a hard blow" (line 6). There is a terrible double meaning in the phrase "hard blow" because Jim Evans, by referring to the emotional impact of Christopher's death, also unwittingly uses language that recalls the impact of the car that killed him.

### STANZA 3

'The baby cooed and laughed'; it seems it is the adults who are most upset and the baby, innocent of all knowledge, reacts normally; life goes on. Heaney, too, is embarrassed by the way 'old men' come to shake his hand.

### STANZA 4

The men say they are 'sorry' for his 'trouble'. There is a sense of quiet throughout, with 'whispers' 'tearless sighs' as a reverence for the dead. At this point it is still unclear who has died. His mother holds his hand, almost possessively.

### STANZA 5

Heaney concentrates upon his mother's reaction to her little boys' death who says nothing, but holds his hand in her own as she "coughed out angry tearless sighs" (line 13). The implication here is that she has cried so much that there is nothing more to cry, but incensed by the driver's failure to avoid her son.

The corpse arrives in an ambulance. It all seems quite clinical and emotionless; the corpse is 'stanced and bandaged by nurses'.

## STANZA 6

He goes up to the room full of flowers and candles. The 'snowdrops' are white flowers representing purity (appropriate if we consider the child's age) and the candles symbolize hope.

We are finally given a sense of identity here with 'him' mentioned. Heaney describes him as 'paler now' than when he last saw him, six weeks previously.

The snowdrops and candles are symbolic of life but they are also ritualistically funeral. The word "soothed" may be applicable to both the idea that the flowers and candles are placed as a comfort to the dead boy but they are also for the solace of the grieving family. Unable to articulate the reality of his brother's death, the poet chooses to present his earlier self, noticing that he was "Paler" (line 18).

The epithet: transferred emotions; the visitors are soothed.

## STANZA 7

The penultimate stanza describes him in more detail with a 'poppy bruise on his left temple'. A poppy is a flower associated with the dead and the red colour accurately reflecting the colour of blood and a bruise. His bed is described using a simile 'as in is cot' to describe the bed like a child's cot as it is so small and he is so young. Just as there are "No gaudy scars" visible on the poor child's body, so, too, there is no lurid concentration upon injury or any self-indulgent displays of grief.

## THE FINAL LINE

The final line emphasises how tragic the event is as the coffin is so small, showing the youth of the victim. The stanza is only one line and nine words long to place a clear emphasis on how tragic and shocking the event is. It is dramatic emphasis: the small stature of the child and the brevity of his young life.

## LITERARY DEVICES

- **Assonance**  
Repetition of similar rhyming sounds  
"bells knelling"
- **Onomatopoeia**  
"knelling" – the sound of bells ringing  
"cooed" – the sound a baby makes
- **Pun**  
"hard blow" – two meanings  
- Literal: a physical knock  
- Figurative: an emotional shock
- **Pathos**  
The writer evokes feelings of sadness/pity/sympathy.  
"...angry, tearless sighs..."  
"...I met my father crying..."
- **Euphemism**  
"sorry for my trouble" – sad about the death of his brother  
box - coffin

- **Transferred epithet**  
“soothed the bedside” – a bedside can’t be soothed; those sitting at the bedside can be soothed.
- **Symbols**  
Snowdrops – purity/innocence  
Candles – hope  
Poppy – remembrance
- **Contrast**  
The room is a place of peace and contrasts greatly with the busy scene at home that the young Heaney walked into.
- **Metaphor**  
“wearing a poppy bruise”  
The word ‘wearing’ suggests that the bruise could be removed.
- **Alliteration**  
“bells knelling classes to a close”  
“four foot box”
- **Simile**  
“in the four foot box as in his cot”  
The child is lying in the coffin as he would when sleeping in his cot.





The speaker says that Milton could give England “manners, virtue, freedom, power,” for his soul was like a star, his voice had a sound as pure as the sea, and he moved through the world with “cheerful godliness,” laying upon himself the “lowest duties.”

The poem is a Petrarchan sonnet:

## **OCTAVE**

The poem begins with a plaintive call to John Milton, a much-loved and respected English poet, and one of Wordsworth’s great influences.

The speaker laments the fact that Milton isn’t around anymore, since, as he sees it, England needs a guiding voice.

The speaker flat-out condemns the state of the nation, saying that it’s a stagnant swamp and that the English people have forgotten all the things that used to make them so glorious, including religion, military might, and literature.

The speaker worries that the Englishmen of his day are too selfish and debased, and wishes Milton could return and give the nation a good old-fashioned pep talk. The poet is certain that Milton could inspire England to greatness once again, and mould its inhabitants into more noble creatures.

## **SESTET**

The speaker dwells on Milton’s high points; the speaker becomes emotional about Milton’s writing, and uses celestial imagery to show us just how divine it is. Not only is Milton’s writing admirable, apparently, so was his character. The man could do no wrong.

The speaker becomes excited over the all-around loveliness that was Milton, and ends the poem by praising the deceased poet’s humility.

*In general*

“London, 1802” is an obvious call for help; the poet, William Wordsworth, laments the state of England, and expresses his fears about the health of the national character.

The poem is an elegy for John Milton, a great English poet of the 17th century.

The poem is also a Petrarchan sonnet. In just fourteen lines, Wordsworth manages to invoke his poetic forefather, and describe his view of England’s character and inhabitants.

The sonnet is a bold condemnation of the poet’s nation and fellow countrymen.

“London, 1802” wasn’t published until 1807, despite its misleading title.

By that time, Wordsworth was an established poet.

Wordsworth knew he was living in a flawed country, and he perceived England as a nation that had lost sight of its past glories. In this poem, he longs to remind his countrymen of what England used to represent.

## **Questions**

1. Who was Milton? (2)
2. Identify the figure of speech the poet uses when addressing Milton. (2)
3. Identify and discuss the figure of speech used to describe England in “[England] is a fen / Of stagnant waters” (lines 2-3). (3)
4. Describe in your own words what is wrong with England according to the poet. (2)
- 5.1. Explain the symbolism used in lines 3-4. (5)
- 5.2. Provide another figure of speech that these symbols could be. (2)

- 5.3. Identify the over-arching image the poet has painted of England through the use of these symbols. (2)
6. Comment on why the poet wants Milton to “return”. (3)
- 7.1. Identify and explain the figures of speech the poet uses to describe Milton in lines 9-11. (3)
- 7.2. Discuss how these comparisons characterise Milton. (3)
8. Account for how the poet’s use of structure helps to convey the theme of the poem. (3)

**[30 MARKS]**

### **Analysis**

Line 1

***Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour;***

The poet calls out to Milton, and wishes that he was still alive in the present day.

Lines 2-3

***England hath need of thee: she is a fen***

***Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,***

The speaker believes that Milton could help England; he sees the country as a “fen” (line 2) – a kind of swamp – full of gross standing water, almost like a marshy pond that’s covered in algae and slime and warty toads.

Lines 3-6

***Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,***

***Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,***

***Have forfeited their ancient English dower***

***Of inward happiness.***

Symbolic: The speaker is distressed by the fact that certain elements of traditional English life have lost their magic.

He’s worried about religion (“altar”), war/military concerns (“sword”), literature (“pen”), the home (“fireside”), and the economy (“the heroic wealth of hall and bower”).

He’s concerned with his perception that these things are no longer tied to the “inner happiness” of the English people; in former days, they were fundamentally linked to the rightful success of the nation – this is the “dower” (a kind of gift) that the speaker refers to – but now these institutions have lost their meaning.

Lines 6-7

***We are selfish men;***

***Oh! raise us up, return to us again;***

These lines are pretty clear; the speaker declares that “we” (the English people of his time) are selfish and debased, and he begs Milton to help them get out of their slump.

Line 8

***And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.***

The speaker thinks that Milton could inspire the English to be better – nicer, more virtuous, and more powerful.

Line 9

***Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;***

Milton was a very special person (according to the speaker, at least). The poet compares the older writer to a star, something removed from the mass of humanity, and superior to the rest of us.

Line 10-11

***Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:***

***Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,***

Here, the speaker's not actually talking about Milton's speaking voice – instead, he's referring to his poetic voice. Basically, he claims that Milton's poetry was as powerful and amazing as the forces of the natural world, like the sea and the sky.

Line 12-13

***So didst thou travel on life's common way,***

***In cheerful godliness;***

Instead of continuing to rave about Milton's hyperbolic virtues as a poet, the speaker takes the last few lines to let us know that Milton was a good person. Instead of allowing status, money and power get to him, he followed "life's common way" (line 12) just like the rest of us, and lived his life happily and virtuously.

Line 13-14

***and yet thy heart***

***The lowliest duties on herself did lay.***

Milton, according to the speaker, didn't just rest upon his laurels and get all arrogant about how awesome he was; the closing lines of the poem emphasize his humble nature.

Instead of taking it easy, Milton took on "the lowliest duties" (line 14) – that is, he didn't avoid unglamorous tasks.

Perhaps the speaker is referring to Milton's intense and unflinching observations of human nature.

## **LITERARY DEVICES**

- **Apostrophe** (Line 1)

The speaker directly addresses someone or something that isn't present in the poem. The speaker could be addressing an abstract concept like love, a person (dead or alive), a place, or even a thing, like the sun or the sea.

Line 1: "*Milton*"! The poet directly addresses Milton.

Line 7: Wordsworth apostrophizes Milton, begging him to return from the dead and help England find itself again.

Line 9: "*Thy soul was like a Star*". Wordsworth uses a simile in the apostrophe to compare Milton's soul to a star, presumably far better than the rest of the people.

Line 10: Wordsworth uses two similes to tell Milton that his poetic voice "was like the sea" and was "pure as the naked heavens".

Lines 12-13: Wordsworth apostrophizes Milton one last time, claiming that the older poet lived just like everyone else.

- **Metonymy** (Line 3)

A metonymy is a word or phrase that is used to stand in for another word. The "pen" refers to the whole English literary tradition of the past; "sword" represents the whole of British military.

- **Synecdoche** (Lines 3-4)

The "altar" represents the English church; "fireside" represents for the security of home.

- **Metaphor** (Lines 2-3/5)  
 Lines 2-3: The first appearance of nature occurs in Wordsworth's striking metaphor for the country, which calls England "a fen/ Of stagnant waters". This grotesque image of sickly standing water shows us that there is something rotten in the state of England.  
 Line 5: Wordsworth uses metaphor to describe "inward happiness" as a "dower" (dowry), a kind of gift rightfully owed to the English people. A dowry is traditionally a certain amount of money or goods given by the bride's family to the groom as part of a marriage agreement.
- **Simile** (Lines 9-11)  
 Milton's "soul was like a Star" and was elevated/separate from all the people.  
 Milton's poetry is "Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free". Imagine the vast and impressive nature of a clear night sky.
- **Personification** (Line 14)  
 Wordsworth personifies Milton's humble heart, saying that it took all of the "lowliest duties" upon itself.

## A FAR CRY FROM AFRICA – Derek Walcott

### Biography

Derek Walcott was born on the island of Saint Lucia, a former British colony in the West Indies. He published his first poem in the local newspaper at the age of 14. Moving to Trinidad in the early 50s, where he was employed as a teacher, he became active in the theatre, and published, in 1962, his verse collection *In a Green Night*, which gained him international attention. He has continued to publish both poetry and plays, and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992. Born of mixed European and African heritage, he uses literature to explore themes of ethnicity, cultural and political inequality. Moreover, he examines these subjects in a manner that leads to psychological and moral insights pertinent not only to the clash of Western and Caribbean culture, but to the universal human condition



A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt  
Of Africa, Kikuyu, quick as flies,  
Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt.  
Corpses are scattered through a paradise.  
Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries: 5  
'Waste no compassion on these separate dead!'  
Statistics justify and scholars seize  
The salients of colonial policy.  
What is that to the white child hacked in bed?  
To savages, expendable as Jews? 10

Threshed out by beaters, the long rushes break  
In a white dust of ibises whose cries  
Have wheeled since civilizations dawn  
From the parched river or beast-teeming plain.  
The violence of beast on beast is read 15  
As natural law, but upright man  
Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain.  
Delirious as these worried beasts, his wars  
Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum,  
While he calls courage still that native dread 20  
Of the white peace contracted by the dead.

Again brutish necessity wipes its hands  
Upon the napkin of a dirty cause, again  
A waste of our compassion, as with Spain,  
The gorilla wrestles with the superman. 25

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,  
 Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?  
 I who have cursed  
 The drunken officer of British rule, how choose  
 Between this Africa and the English tongue I love? 30  
 Betray them both, or give back what they give?  
 How can I face such slaughter and be cool?  
 How can I turn from Africa and live?

### Vocabulary

**Tawny:** yellowish-brown colour

**Pelt:** skin/fur of an animal

**Kikuyu:** group of people living in southeast Africa

**Batten:** to secure onto something

**Carrion:** flesh, meat

**Salients:** outward bulge in the line of a military attack or defence

**Hacked:** cut with rough or heavy blows

**Threshed:** thrash, move violently

**Ibis:** large bird that wades in water

**Parched:** dry, arid, scorched

**Divinity:** holiness, spirituality

**Inflicting:** causing



Ibis

### Summary

The poem is divided into two. The first two stanzas focus on the Kenyan conflict and the next two stanzas refer to the poet's own roles. The insider/outsider role has affected his feelings. The colonial policy says that killing children is prohibited, but the black people have buried that rule below their feet.

“What is to the white child hacked in bed”? Dead bodies of the white are scattered throughout the place like ibis eggs thrashed out by beaters. Ibis eggs are metaphors for white children. The beaters are the Africans. Then Derek leaps into the topic where he says he can't choose who's right and wrong.

“The gorilla wrestles with the superman”. This is a metaphorical sentence where the gorilla means the revolutionary bands (terrorists) and superman the white. He claims to be poisoned by the blood of both and he has no option to select. He questions how to choose between two by betraying one. Should I do what they do? He questions. He loves the African culture and country but adores the English language. He has no options but bear what happens because he's a hybrid.

### Questions

1. Give three (3) possible meanings the title of the poem could have. (3)
2. Identify and discuss the figure of speech in:  
 “A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt / Of Africa” (lines 1-2). (3)
- 3.1. Who or what are the Kiyuku (line 2)? (2)
- 3.2. Discuss the effectiveness of the simile used to describe the Kiyuku. (2)
4. Comment on how the image of Africa changes in lines 1-4. (3)
5. Discuss the significance of the worm in line 5. (3)
6. Explain lines 7-8 in your own words. (2)

7. Identify the true cause of what has happened and why in lines 9-10. (2)
8. Describe what point the speaker is making about nature in lines 11-14. (3)
9. Account for how the speaker differentiates between actions of animals and man. (4)
10. Explain what the speaker means in “the tightened carcass of a drum” (line19). (2)
11. With reference to lines 20-21, what scares natives more the white man’s violence? (1)
12. Comment, in great detail, critically on the imagery used in line 25. (5)
- 13.1. Explain lines 26-27 in your own words. (2)
- 13.2. How does the poet situate himself, personally, with relation to the two sides in the conflict? What are the terms of his connections with each? (3)
14. Comment on the tone and mood of the poem in terms of the diction and imagery used. (5)

**[45 MARKS]**

**Title**

- The contrast between the beautiful setting of the African veldt (plain) and the bloody violence that occurred there. The fight between the Mau Mau and the British changed the landscape and beauty of Kenya so much that it is no longer recognizable. Africa is “a far cry” from what it was because it no longer resembles the Africa before civilization came and settled there.
- A far cry means an impossible thing. Here the state of the speaker’s mind is in conflict. Being a hybrid of both black and white, the speaker is impartial on the savage massacre. He cannot choose a side (black vs white).
- The speaker suffers cultural instability. He was raised in America. He is writing about Africa from a distance. The title implies a type of alienation from Africa. He is in search of legitimate identity.

**Theme**

A Far Cry from Africa by Derek Walcott deals with the theme of split identity and anxiety caused by it in the face of the struggle in which the poet could side with neither party. It is, in short, about the poet’s ambivalent feelings towards the Kenyan terrorists and the counter-terrorist white colonial government, both of which were “inhumane”, during the independence struggle of the country in the 1950s. The persona, probably the poet himself, can take favour of none of them since both bloods circulate along his veins.

**Idiom: a far cry**

The title of the poem involves an idiom: “a far cry” means an impossible thing. But the poet seems to use the words in other senses also; the title suggests in one sense that the poet is writing about an African subject from a distance. Writing from the island of St. Lucia, he feels that he is at a vast distance – both literally and metaphorically from Africa. “A Far Cry” may also have another meaning that the real state of the African ‘paradise’ is a far cry from the Africa that we have read about in descriptions of gorgeous fauna and flora and interesting village customs. And a third level of meaning to the title is the idea of Walcott hearing the poem as a far cry coming all the way across thousands of miles of ocean. He hears the cry coming to him on the wind.

The animal imagery is another important feature of the poem. Walcott regards as acceptable violence the nature or “natural law” of animals killing each other to eat and survive; but human beings have been turned even the unseemly animal behaviour into worse and meaningless violence.

### **Violence and cruelty/Pathos**

It is the violence of Mau Mau that most disturbs Walcott, apparently because it makes Africans look even worse than their British oppressors. There were many stories of Mau Mau violence directed at Derek Walcott's "A Far Cry from Africa," published in 1962, is a painful and jarring depiction of ethnic conflict and divided loyalties. The opening images of the poem are drawn from accounts of the Mau Mau Uprising.

Europeans took control of farmland and the government, relegating the Kikuyu to a subservient position. One faction of the Kikuyu people formed Mau Mau, a terrorist organization intent on purging all European influence from the country, but less strident Kikuyus attempted either to remain neutral or to help the British defeat Mau Mau.

### **Analysis**

Lines 1-3

***A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt  
Of Africa, Kikuyu, quick as flies,  
Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt.***

The first three lines depict the poem's setting on the African plain, or veldt. The nation itself is compared to an animal (perhaps a lion) with a “tawny pelt.” Tawny is a color described as light brown to brownish orange that is common colour in the African landscape.

The word “Kikuyu” serves as the name of a native tribe in Kenya.

What seems an idyllic portrayal of the African plain quickly shifts; the Kikuyu are compared to flies (buzzing around the “animal” of Africa) who are feeding on blood, which is present in large enough amounts to create streams.

Lines 4-6

***Corpses are scattered through a paradise.  
Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries:  
'Waste no compassion on these separate dead!'***

Walcott shatters the image of a paradise that many associate with Africa by describing a landscape littered with corpses. He adds a sickening detail by referring to a worm, or maggot, that reigns in this setting of decaying human flesh. The worm's admonishment to “Waste no compassion on these separate dead!” is puzzling in that it implies that the victims somehow got what they deserved.

Lines 7-10

***Statistics justify and scholars seize  
The salients of colonial policy.  
What is that to the white child hacked in bed?  
To savages, expendable as Jews?***

The mention of the words “justify” and “colonial policy,” when taken in context with the preceding six lines, finally clarifies the exact event that Walcott is describing—the Mau Mau Uprising against British colonists in Kenya during the 1950s.

Where earlier the speaker seemed to blame the victims, he now blames those who forced the colonial system onto Kenya and polarized the population. They cannot justify their actions, because their reasons will never matter to the “white child” who has been murdered – merely because of his colour – in retaliation by Mau Mau fighters or to the “savages,” who – in as racist an attitude as was taken by Nazis against Jews – are deemed worthless, or expendable.



("Savages" is a controversial term that derives from the French word *sauvage* meaning wild, and is now wholly derogatory in English. Walcott's use of "savage" functions to present a British colonialist's racist point of view.)

Lines 11-14

***Threshed out by beaters, the long rushes break  
In a white dust of ibises whose cries  
Have wheeled since civilizations dawn  
From the parched river or beast-teeming plain.***

Walcott shifts gears in these lines and returns to images of Africa's wildlife, in a reminder that the ibises (long-billed wading birds) and other beasts ruled this land long before African or European civilization existed.

The poet also describes a centuries-old hunting custom of natives walking in a line through the long grass and beating it to flush out prey. Such killing for sustenance is set against the senseless and random death that native Africans and European settlers perpetrate upon each other.

Lines 15-21

***The violence of beast on beast is read  
As natural law, but upright man  
Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain.  
Delirious as these worried beasts, his wars  
Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum,  
While he calls courage still that native dread  
Of the white peace contracted by the dead.***

These lines are simultaneously pro-nature and anti-culture. Animals kill merely for food and survival, but humans, having perfected the skill of hunting for food, extend that violent act to other areas, using force to exert control – and prove superiority over – other people; they seek divinity by deciding who lives and who dies. Ironically, wars between people are described as following the beat of a drum – an instrument made of an animal hide stretched over a cylinder.

Lines 22-25

***Again brutish necessity wipes its hands  
Upon the napkin of a dirty cause, again  
A waste of our compassion, as with Spain,  
The gorilla wrestles with the superman.***

These lines are difficult to interpret, but they appear to be aimed at those judging the Mau Mau uprising from a distance – observers who could somehow accept brutality as necessary and who are aware of a dire situation but wipe their hands, or refuse to become involved, in it. The poet appears to condemn such an attitude by comparing the Mau Mau Uprising to the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). Leaders of France and Great Britain wanted to avoid another war that would engulf all of Europe, so they introduced a nonintervention pact that was signed by twenty-seven nations. Nonetheless, the Insurgents, or Nationalists, (under the leadership of General Francisco Franco) were aided by and received military aid from Germany and Italy. The Loyalists, or Republicans, had no such backing; they fought valiantly but were outmanned, lost territory, and were eventually defeated in March of 1939. Line 25 presents a cynical view of the Mau Mau Uprising as just another colonial conflict where gorillas – negatively animalized Africans – fight with superman – a negative characterization of Europe.

Lines 26-33

***I who am poisoned with the blood of both,  
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?  
I who have cursed***

***The drunken officer of British rule, how choose  
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?  
Betray them both, or give back what they give?  
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?  
How can I turn from Africa and live?***

This stanza is a change of scene from primarily that of Africa, to that of the poet. Walcott, being a product of both African and English heritage, is torn, because he does not know how to feel about the Mau Mau struggle. He certainly is not satisfied with the stock response of those from the outside. Walcott is sickened by the behaviour of Mau Mau just as he has been disgusted by the British. By the end, the poet's dilemma is not reconciled, but one gets the sense that Walcott will abandon neither Africa nor Britain.

## **LITERARY DEVICES**

- **Simile**

- "Kikuyu, quick as flies"

The poet compares the action of Kikuyu with flies. It reflects the revolt of the people of Africa.

- "expendable as Jews"

The massacre in Africa is compared to the massacre of Jews. It reflects that the significance of an individual's life is reduced to nothing.

- "delirious as beasts"

Violence is compared with natural law, as the poet views colonization no better than the law of jungle. The hysteric of people in Africa is compared with that of beasts.

- **Metaphors**

- "worm" is a metaphor for British colonizer.

- "Paradise" is a metaphor for Africa's landscape. The poet compares the land of Africa to a "Paradise" and laments what colonialists have done to it by "scattering of the corpses in the paradise."

- The Europeans are "superman" and the revolutionary bands are called "gorillas"

- **Personification**

- The poet personifies war in the sentence, "his wars dance". It reflects that the people rejoice by exercising authority. It also reflects that orders are followed without giving a second thought to them. The thinking ability of individuals is maimed in the name of patriotism.

- Another usage of personification can be seen in the phrase, "brutish necessity wipes its hands".

- **Repetition**

Walcott uses repetition towards the end of the poem.

"How can I face...?"

"How can I turn...?"

- **Allusion**

- The poet uses allusions, for instance the mention of Jews refer back to the killings during the Holocaust.

- The "napkin" of a dirty cause reflects British mannerism and sophistication. It refers to their assumed responsibility to civilize the Black people, i.e. white man burden theory.

- "As with Spain" calls attention to the Spanish Civil war of 1930.

- **Irony**

- Irony reflects the bitter realities of the colonial era. "Corpses are scattered through a paradise". African landscape that is compared to paradise is referred to be filled with corpses.
- "A waste of our compassion" is also used ironically. Compassion is not wasted, but the usage here reflects that nothing can be done of the compassion when the situation does not change. A practical change is demanded by the people.

- **Play on words**

- "Colonel of carrion" refers to the colonial leader, who is compared with a worm that feeds by decomposing wastes.
- "Brutish necessity" is British necessity.

- **Animal imagery**

The poet uses complex words, for instance; tawny pelt, veldt, carrion, expendable, delirious, etc.

The images relate to nature and animals, as the poet compares colonialism with the law of jungle.

For example: pelt, flies, worm, ibises, beast, carcass, gorilla, etc.

The words give an animalistic quality to the description of colonization in Africa. The colonizers cause the subsequent revolt of the natives. He considers colonization a sham, 'a brutish necessity'.

- **Alliteration**

Batten upon the bloodstreams

Colonel of carrion cries

Kikuyu, quick as flies

Scholars seize

Calls courage

Blood of both

Betray them both

- **Consonance**

The repetition of the D sound can be seen in the following stanza;

Delirious as these worried beasts, his wars  
Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum,  
While he calls courage still that native  dread  
Of the white peace contracted by the dead.

- **Rhymes**

Pelt, veldt      Flies, cries

Bed, dead      Plain, pain

Again, Spain    Give, live

- **Cacophony** (harsh sounds)

"Colonel of carrion cries"

The harsh sound that foreshadows the unpleasant order, i.e. "Waste no compassion on these separate dead"

## THOSE WINTER SUNDAYS – Robert Hayden

### Biography

Born Asa Bundy Sheffey on August 4, 1913, Robert Hayden was raised in the poor neighbourhood in Detroit called Paradise Valley. He had an emotionally tumultuous childhood and was shuttled between the home of his parents and that of a foster family, who lived next door. Because of impaired vision, he was unable to participate in sports, but was able to spend his time reading. In 1932, he graduated from high school and, with the help of a scholarship, attended Detroit City College. In 1975, Hayden received the Academy of American Poets Fellowship, and in 1976, he became the first black American to be appointed as consultant in poetry to the Library of Congress (later called the poet laureate). He died in Ann Arbor, Michigan, on February 25, 1980.



Sundays too my father got up early  
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,  
then with cracked hands that ached  
from labour in the weekday weather made  
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

5

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.  
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,  
and slowly I would rise and dress,  
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,  
who had driven out the cold  
and polished my good shoes as well.  
What did I know, what did I know  
of love's austere and lonely offices?

10

### Vocabulary

**chronic:** constant, happening all the time

**indifferently:** not caring, having no feeling for someone

**austere:** serious, harsh, sombre

### Summary

The father, who works hard all week, gets up on his one day to rest and lights the fire to warm the house before waking the family. The speaker indicated that the father is a hard or demanding man to live with ("chronic angers of that house"). It seems there is no warmth in the house other than that provided by the fire. The speaker never thanks the father, in fact, never even thinks about the discomfort his father experiences getting up to a cold house so that the family can get up in a warm one. The poem implies that the speaker now, as an adult looking back, realizes the sacrifice made

by the father—perhaps the speaker is now a father too. Now the speaker realized that there actually was warmth in the house other than the fire—it was spoken by deeds not words.

### **Questions**

1. Discuss the significance of the title of the poem. (2)
2. Explain what “too” suggests in line 1. (2)
3. Comment on the effect created by the description of the cold as “blueblack”. (line 2). (3)
4. Discuss the state of the father’s hands in line 3. (2)
5. What does line 4 suggest about the father’s work? (2)
6. Discuss the significance of the last five words in line 5. (2)
7. Explain the metaphor used in line 6. (3)
8. Identify and explain the figure of speech used in line 9. (3)
9. Describe in your own words how the speaker feels in line 10. (2)
10. How is this contrasted in lines 11-12? (3)
- 11.1. Identify the figure of speech used in lines 13-14. (1)
- 11.2. Explain how this figure of speech emphasises the speaker’s tone and mood. (3)
12. Account for the speaker’s feelings toward his father, how they changed and why. (3)
13. Comment on the theme of the poem and how the structure supports it. (4)

**[35 MARKS]**

### **Analysis**

The poem is about a father-child relationship and all the mixed feelings that come with it: love, admiration, fear, misunderstanding, regret, bitterness.

#### **STANZA 1**

We meet the speaker and his father. According to the speaker, his father gets up very early every morning, even on Sundays. He dresses in the dark, cold room and then lights the fire in the house so that the house is warm by the time the children wake up. His father works hard. He says that his father had painful cracked hands because of working hard during the week. He reflects on how no-one ever thanked him for what he did for his family.

#### **STANZA 2**

The speaker remembers hearing the wood burn in the fireplace every morning when he woke up. His father usually called them when the house was warm. The speaker would get out of bed and





## Questions

1. Name two things to which the speaker compares his mistress. (2)
2. Outline five features of a Shakespearean sonnet that you can identify. (5)
3. How does the metaphor of music in stanza 3 impact on your understanding of the poem? (2)
4. Explain what the speaker means when saying his mistress "treads on the ground"? (2)
5. Discuss whether you think the speaker's love is sincere. (3)
6. What use of diction is made, and how does it affect the rest of Sonnet 130? (2)
7. What is an explanation is an explanation for both the literal and figurative meaning of Sonnet 130? (2)
8. What does the line mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun" literally mean? (2)
9. Essay  
In an essay of approximately 250-300 words, critically discuss the poet's comments on the sincerity of love. Your answer should refer to the conventions of a sonnet. (10)

**[30 MARKS]**

## Analysis

Line 1

### ***My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;***

- Here we are introduced for the first time to the main character in this poem, the speaker's "mistress".
- Today, when we use the word "mistress", it's usually to refer to a woman who is dating a married man. In Shakespeare's time, though, it was more general, like "my love" or "my darling".
- The speaker jumps right into his anti-love poem, letting us know that this lady's eyes aren't like the sun.
- As we read the next few lines though, we see that the comparison is a standard way of praising a beautiful woman in a poem without exaggerating about what her eyes look like.
- Our speaker is refusing to fall back on clichés though, instead telling us that this simile doesn't apply at all.

Line 2

### ***Coral is far more red than her lips' red;***

- If you imagined a stereotypically beautiful woman, like a model in a magazine, she'd probably have red lips.
- Certain kinds of very red coral are polished and used to make jewellery so if you compared lips to coral, you'd be thinking of the most beautiful, shiny red thing you could imagine.
- The speaker says that his woman's lips are not like that at all.

Line 3



***If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;***

- Her breasts are treated the same as her lips; there is no exaggeration.
- If the reddest red is like coral, then the whitest white is the colour of snow. A poet could praise a woman for having skin as white as snow.
- Not here, though. This woman's skin isn't white, or even cream coloured. Instead, the speaker calls it "dun," a sort of grayish-brown colour.
- Notice the little changes here. In the first two lines, we hear only that the woman isn't like the sun or coral; in this line she is "dun" It is an actual description, an adjective "dun" that applies to her. Unfortunately, it makes her sound ugly. "Dun" is a word often used to describe the colour of a horse, and definitely not the kind of thing a woman would be thrilled to hear about.

Line 4

***If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.***

- If a poet wanted to be sentimental and sweet, he might compare his lover's hair to something soft, smooth, and shiny, like silk. Here though, the mistress's hair is compared to black wires sticking out of the top of her head.
- Keep in mind that the whole point of this poem is to push back against standard ways of talking about women in poems. So it's not necessarily bad that she has frizzy black hair.

Lines 5-6

***I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;***

- Damasked means a pattern of mixed colours woven into expensive fabric.
- So imagine a rose with a white and red pattern on it, or maybe a bouquet of red and white roses. Our speaker has seen beautiful roses like that, but his mistress's cheeks don't remind him of them at all.
- Maybe some perfectly beautiful woman has cheeks that are white with just a little blush of red, but that's not the woman he's talking about.

Lines 7-8

***And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.***

- The speaker tells us that some perfumes smell better (give more "delight") than this woman's breath.
- Apparently it stinks.
- So far the speaker said that his mistress's eyes aren't that great, her lips aren't that red, that her skin is yellowish, that her hair is like wires, that her cheeks are nothing like roses, and that her breath reeks. She is not a goddess. She is human.

Lines 9-10

***I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound;***

- Now, after all of that criticism, the speaker starts to get a little bit nicer.
- He admits that he really does "love to hear her speak".
- The word "yet" in the middle of line 9 gets us ready for a negative comparison. It's like saying, "You're really great, but..."
- Then, in line 10, we get the negative half of that thought: he thinks that music is "more pleasing" than the sound of her voice.

Line 11-12

***I grant I never saw a goddess go;  
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.***

- Here's another thought that is split over two lines. In line 11, the speaker essentially tells us that he's willing to admit that he's never seen a goddess move.
- Now, when the speaker finishes his thought on line 12, he's not actually being mean at all, just stating the facts. His mistress isn't a goddess. She doesn't fly or soar or float along. She just walks (treads) like a normal person, on the ground.

Lines 13-14

***And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare  
As any she belied with false compare.***

- The speaker thinks that his lover is as wonderful ("rare") woman when compared to others ("any she"), especially those who are made to look beautiful with make-up ("belied") and exaggerated comparison ("false compare").
- These last two lines are the payoff for the whole poem. They drive home the speaker's main point, that unlike other people who write sonnets, he doesn't need flowery terms or fancy comparisons. He can just tell his mistress, plainly and simply, that he loves her for who she is.

### **Form and Meter**

1. The Shakespearean sonnet, like other sonnets, has 14 lines.
2. It has 3 quatrains and a rhyming couplet.
3. Rhyme scheme:  

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;	A
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;	B
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;	A
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.	B

For the whole poem, the rhyme scheme would be ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.
4. The last two lines is the couplet; a Shakespearean sonnet always ends with two rhyming lines, one right after the other.
5. Shakespearian sonnets are written in iambic pentameter:
  - Rhythm: dee DUM, dee DUM, dee DUM, dee DUM, dee DUM.
  - It consists of a line of five iambic feet, ten syllables, with 5 unstressed and 5 stressed syllables.
  - It is the first and the last sound we ever hear; it is the human heartbeat.
  - Iambic Pentameter? ( Iambic penta meter)
  - An "iamb" is "dee DUM" – it sounds like a heartbeat.
  - Penta is the Greek word for five.
  - Meter is really the pattern.
  - So there are five iambs per line!

Example: The stressed syllables in capital letters, would read, "my MISTress" EYES are NOthing LIKE the SUN."

6. Finally, sonnets often have a surprising twist to them towards the end; in this poem, the twist comes when the reader sees that, despite his criticisms, the author does actually love his mistress.

## Symbolism

- **The Mistress**

Every line refers to her, whether it's describing her appearance, her smell or the way she walks. We learn a few things about her, like the colour of her hair and her skin. In general, though, she's a little more like an idea than a real person. She is mostly here to give the poet a chance to poke fun at exaggerated love poetry. We hear a lot about her, but for the most part, the information is rather vague and negative.

- **Her Eyes**

Eyes are something we focus on in other people, so it's no surprise that they are always cropping up in love poetry. You know the old saying, "The eyes are the windows of the soul"? Well, that's just the kind of frequently used phrase that our speaker doesn't have much time for.

Line 1: We start out with the speaker refusing to compare his lover's eyes to the sun. He picks a really out-there, exaggerated simile so that we can see just how silly this kind of comparison can be. So really, this is a negative simile.

- **Her Lips**

Lips seem to be among the standard list of things you're supposed to notice in a beautiful woman. Think about a gorgeous movie star, for example. When she has a close-up in a particular scene, the camera tends to focus on her skin, her hair, her eyes, her breasts – all the things that Shakespeare includes here. The idea of breaking a woman into parts in order to praise her beauty has a really long history.

Line 2: Comparing lips to red coral gives us another slightly ridiculous over-the-top simile. Lips that red would have to be painted, and that's the kind of fake beauty that this poem is emphasizing.

- **Her Breasts**

For obvious reasons, breasts are a classic symbol of female beauty. We'll keep this G-rated, but you can see why talking about this woman's breasts forces us to think about how the world/media defines an ideal woman, and what seems beautiful about her.

Line 3: The speaker avoids a direct simile. He gives us the strong image of sparkling white snow, and lays it next to the equally strong image of dun (grayish-brown) breasts. He's playing with our associations with these colours. White is a long-standing symbol of purity, cleanliness, innocence, and next to that clean image, are the mistress's breasts, which seem dirty and polluted.

- **Her Hair**

Another major cliché about women's beauty is that their hair should be silky smooth and shiny.

Line 4: We think this image of hair as black wires sprouting out of her head is meant to sound ugly; yet, it is what it is. Imperfect people with imperfect hair, skin, eyes, breasts, and attitudes about love.

- **Her Cheeks**

If the ideal woman in Shakespeare's time was supposed to have skin as white as snow and smooth and blond hair, then her cheeks are probably going to have to be pink and rosy too. You've probably picked up the pattern by now. The more clichés the speaker piles on, the more we see what a silly way this is to compliment someone.

Aestheticism: an intellectual and art movement supporting the emphasis of aesthetic (beautiful) values.

Line 6: The speaker takes the standard image of rosy cheeks a step further here, pretending to be surprised that there aren't actually red and white roses in this woman's cheeks.

-

- **Her Breath**

Faults such as your hair not being just right, or your eyes being the wrong colour, might be easy to overlook; but bad breath is something else altogether. Shakespeare seems to be having fun here, exaggerating on human weakness to continue mocking the folly of “perfection”. The cliché “Love is blind” may sound correct with this poem, but the other senses, like the sense of smell, still work.

Line 8: The word “reeks” brings up a really strong image of just how far from perfect this woman is. By hitting us over the head with her very human flaws, the speaker forces us to take a look at our definitions of female beauty. Just like the “black wires” (line 4), this line pushes our boundaries a little, turning the love poem into a criticism.

- **Her Voice**

The perfect woman should of course have a beautiful voice, but this woman doesn't.

Lines 9-10: As always, the speaker rejects the obvious simile (“her voice is like music”), but this time he's being a little nicer. He doesn't say, “She sounds awful”. In fact, he goes out of his way to say that he loves the sound of her voice. He just thinks that comparing her voice to music is going too far.

- **The Way She Moves**

Of course this perfect woman that the speaker is taking apart would have to be as graceful as an angel too. Throughout the poem he's been setting up two portraits, side by side. One is of an ideal fantasy woman that he can't begin to believe in, and the other is of the real, imperfect woman he loves. In these last lines the speaker chooses the real woman over the goddess that he has never even seen.

Line 11: We want to take a second look at the alliteration in this line. Check out the way those three “g” words: “grant...goddess...go” make the line float along as gracefully as a goddess. Comparing a normal woman to a goddess is a complete exaggeration (or hyperbole).

## LITERARY DEVICES

### Allusion/Metaphor

Line 5: “roses damasked, red and white” – this is possibly an allusion to the rose known as the York and Lancaster variety, which the House of Tudor adopted as its symbol after the War of the Roses. The York and Lancaster rose is red and white streaked, symbolic of the union of the Red Rose of Lancaster and the White Rose of York.

### Parody

Line 8: “than the breath...reeks” – as the whole sonnet is a parody of the conventional love sonnets written by Shakespeare's contemporaries, one should think of the most common meaning of *reeks*, i.e. *stinks*. Shakespeare uses ‘reeks’ often in his serious work, which illustrates the modern meaning of the word was common.

### Satire

Shakespeare is known for crafting some of the most intricately beautiful poems in the English language. Sonnet 130, while similar to other Shakespearean sonnets in the use of poetic devices and techniques, stands apart from most of his other sonnets for its mocking voice and use of satire. In writing this poem, he was gently poking fun at the conventional romantic poems that were being written by other poets. In pointing out that his mistress' eyes are not more beautiful than the sun, that her hair is not made of gold threads, that her cheeks are not as red as roses and that her breath is not finer than perfume, he was able to make the argument that he loves her just the same for who she is and not for an unrealistic idealized notion of beauty.

### Imagery

In writing Sonnet 130, Shakespeare relied very heavily on strong sensory images to get his satirical message across. Imagery is a poetic device that employs the five senses to create an image in the mind of the reader. In this sonnet, Shakespeare draws on sight, sound and smell when he compares his mistress' eyes to the sun, her lips to red coral, her breasts to white snow, her hair to black wires, her cheeks to red and white roses, her breath to perfume and her voice to music.

### **Hyperbole**

Hyperbole is a form of speech that exaggerates the facts in order to make a point. To the same extent that many romantic poets exaggerate the beauty of their mistresses, insisting that their eyes are more beautiful than the sun, their hair fairer than gold or their cheeks redder than roses, Shakespeare decides to exaggerate how unattractive his mistress is. Sonnet 130 suggests that his mistress' hair is made of black wire, her breath reeks, her breasts are greyish brown and her voice is grating.

## A VALEDICTION: FORBIDDING MOURNING - John Donne

### Biography

John Donne became a Member of Parliament in 1601. That same year, he married 16-year-old Anne More, the niece of Sir Egerton. Both Lord Egerton and Anne's father, George More, strongly disapproved of the marriage, and, as punishment, More did not provide a dowry. Lord Egerton fired Donne and had him imprisoned for a short time. The eight years following Donne's release would be a struggle for the married couple until Anne's father finally paid her dowry. In 1617, John Donne's wife died shortly after giving birth to their 12th child. The time for writing love poems was over, and Donne devoted his energies to more religious subjects. As John Donne's health continued to fail him, he became obsessed with death. Shortly before he died, he delivered a pre-funeral sermon, "Death's Duel." His writing was charismatic and inventive.



### Vocabulary

**virtuous:** having or showing high moral standards; righteous

**tempests:** violent, windy storm

**profanation:** an act of great disrespect to God; blasphemy

**laity:** ordinary people; not professionals or experts

**trepidation:** a feeling of fear or anxiety about something that may happen

**sublunary:** beneath the moon; belonging to this world as contrasted with a better or more spiritual one

**elemented:** composed

**refined:** with impurities or unwanted elements having been removed by processing

**inter-assured:** to declare earnestly to; inform or tell positively; state with confidence to

**breach:** an act of breaking or failing to observe a law, agreement, or code of conduct

**hearkens:** listens

**obliquely:** not in a direct way; indirectly

### Summary

The poet begins by comparing the love between his beloved and himself with the passing away of virtuous men. Such men expire so peacefully that their friends cannot determine when they are truly dead. Likewise, his beloved should let the two of them depart in peace, not revealing their love to "the laity."

Earthquakes bring harm and fear about the meaning of the rupture, but such fears should not affect his beloved because of the firm nature of their love. Other lovers become fearful when distance separates them – a much greater distance than the cracks in the earth after a quake – since for them, love is based on the physical presence or attractiveness of each other. Yet for the poet and his beloved, such a split is "innocent," like the movements of the heavenly spheres, because their love transcends mere physicality.

Indeed, the separation merely adds to the distance covered by their love, like a sheet of gold, hammered so thin that it covers a huge area and gilds so much more than a love concentrated in one place ever could.

He finishes the poem with a longer comparison of himself and his wife to the two legs of a compass. They are joined at the top, and she is perfectly grounded at the centre point. As he travels farther from the centre, she leans toward him, and as he travels in his circles, she remains firm in the centre, making his circles perfect.

As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,  
Whilst some of their sad friends do say  
The breath goes now, and some say, No:

So let us melt, and make no noise, 5  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;  
'Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears, 10  
Men reckon what it did, and meant;  
But trepidation of the spheres,  
Though greater far, is innocent.

Dull sublunary lovers' love  
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit  
Absence, because it doth remove 15  
Those things which elemented it.

But we by a love so much refined,  
That ourselves know not what it is,  
Inter-assured of the mind,  
Care less, eyes, lips, and hands to miss. 20

Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, endure not yet  
A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

If they be two, they are two so 25  
As stiff twin compasses are two;  
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if the other do.

And though it in the center sit,  
Yet when the other far doth roam, 30  
It leans and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
Thy firmness makes my circle just, 35  
And makes me end where I begun.

## **Form**

The poem is written in iambic tetrameter, meaning there are eight syllables per line and they alternate between unstressed and stressed syllables.

## **Title**

The poem is a valediction. It is like a valedictory speech delivered on graduation day. A valediction literally means “to say farewell”.

The second half of the title tells the reader about the speaker’s deliberate efforts to go against the traditional goodbye.

## **Questions**

1. Explain the meaning of the title of the poem in full. (4)
2. Identify and discuss the figure of speech used in lines 1-2 . (3)
3. Where do the souls go (line 2)? (1)
4. Identify and discuss the figure of speech used in “So let us melt” (line 5). (3)
5. Discuss, in your own words, the meaning of stanza 2. (3)
6. Explain the juxtaposition the speaker uses in stanza 3. (4)
7. What does the speaker suggest about the love he shares with his wife in stanza 5?(2)
8. Identify and discuss the figure of speech used in line 24. (3)
9. Comment on the comparison the speaker makes to his relationship with his wife and the “twin compasses” (line 26) from stanzas 7-9. (5)
10. In one sentence, indicate what you understand the theme of this poem to be. (2)

**[30 MARKS]**

## **Analysis**

### **STANZAS 1-2**

The first two of the nine *abab* stanzas make up a single sentence, developing the simile of the passing of a virtuous man as compared to the love between the poet and his beloved. It is thought that Donne was in fact leaving for a long journey, and wished to console and encourage his beloved wife by identifying the true strength of their bond. The point is that they are spiritually bound together regardless of the earthly distance between them.

He begins by stating that the virtuous man leaves life behind so delicately that even his friends cannot clearly tell the difference. Likewise, Donne forbids his wife from openly mourning the separation. For one thing, it is no real separation, like the difference between a breath and the absence of a breath. For another thing, mourning openly would be a profanation of their love, as the spiritual mystery of a sacrament can be diminished by revealing the details to “the laity” (line 8). Their love is sacred, so the depth of meaning in his wife’s tears would not be understood by those outside their marriage bond, who do not love so deeply. When Donne departs, observers should



see no sign from Donne's wife to suggest whether Donne is near or far because she will be so steadfast in her love for him and will go about her business all the same.

Lines 1-2

***As virtuous men pass mildly away,  
And whisper to their souls to go,***

People are dying. In this case, the speaker is talking about the death of "virtuous" men, who "pass mildly away" because they have no regrets or shame. Death, for these men, is peaceful. More than that, they are in control. They can simply "whisper" their souls away off to heaven.

Metaphorically, Donne compares his separation from his wife to the separation of a man's soul from his body when he dies. The body represents physical love; the soul represents spiritual or intellectual love.

Lines 3-4

***Whilst some of their sad friends do say,  
The breath goes now, and some say, No:***

When these virtuous men die peacefully, all their friends gather around the deathbed. They're sad, waiting on death. They spend their time debating – one of them looks at the man in the bed and says, "He stopped breathing!" Then everyone else leans in and shake their heads, "No".

Virtuous men die peacefully. They die so peacefully that even their friends can't tell when they've stopped breathing.

Lines 5-6

***So let us melt, and make no noise,  
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move;***

The "so" in line five is the turn in the analogy, e.g. finger is to hand as branch is to tree; in the poem, the analogy is virtuous men are to peaceful death as love is to peaceful parting. Just as even their friends can't tell when the old men die, so unnoticeable should be the parting between these lovers. Donne begins with a nature metaphor: "let us melt." We picture winter snows or icicles on a rooftop – a slow natural process. The metaphors in line 6, though, keep us in nature, but move us to natural disasters: "tear-floods" and "sigh-tempests". These are hyperboles, or exaggerations, like "cry me a river". This hyphenated description is also commonly referred to as an epithet or a kenning. In the space of two lines, we've travelled from an old man's deathbed to the middle of a great storm.

The speaker tells her that they mustn't cry or sigh when he leaves on his journey. He believes their love is strong enough to endure the distance and loneliness.

These are hyperboles, or exaggerations, like "cry me a river". This hyphenated description is also commonly referred to as an epithet or a kenning. In the space of two lines, we've travelled from an old man's deathbed to the middle of a great storm.

The idea of "melt" line 5 is linked to lines 1-2, while Donne and his wife are apart, they cannot express physical love; thus, they are like the body of the dead man. However, Donne says, they remain united spiritually and intellectually because their souls are one.

Lines 7-8

***'Twere profanation of our joys  
To tell the laity our love.***

Donne argues that they shouldn't be over-emotional when they part because it would be a "profanation of our joys". In other words, it would make their love seem common and undignified. The "laity" simply means common people. Donne does not want to publicize the pain they are feeling at parting because it cheapens it.

"Twere" – "it were": a technique to preserve the meter (rhythm) of the poem.

### STANZA 3

The separation is like the innocent movement of the heavenly spheres, many of which revolve around the centre. These huge movements, as the planets come nearer to and go farther from one another, are innocent and do not portend evil. How much less, then, would Donne's absence portend. All of this is unlike the worldly fear that people have after an earthquake, trying to determine what the motions and cleavages mean.

Lines 9-10

***Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,  
Men reckon what it did, and meant;***

"Moving of th' earth" is another way of saying earthquakes. Earthquakes were (and still are) unexplained phenomena. Donne refers to them, though, to emphasize their violence – earthquakes bring "harms and fears". They shake everyone up and make them wonder "What just happened?" Line nine begins with a reversed iambic foot, called a trochee. Instead of the expected iambic rhythm (da-DUM), we get "Moving" (DA-dum). This is common at the beginning of a line, but the fact that this is the *first* reversed beginning, it could be that Donne wants to put extra emphasis on the violence of the earthquake. By opening the line with a stressed syllable, it packs a little more energy. Notice that line 10 moves us from the earthquake to peoples' reactions. Donne reminds us that all this talk about natural disasters is just a long-winded explanation of why it would be wrong to make a big show over his departure. Here, he is saying that earthquakes cause mass confusion and panic.

Lines 11-12

***But trepidation of the spheres,  
Though greater far, is innocent.***

Everything above the earth moved in spheres: the moon, planets, the stars and sun. The spheres moved in their own patterns, but different motions, vibrations, and alignments created what was referred to as "celestial music" and that divine symphony controlled everything in the universe – from the creation of planets and stars to what we are going to eat for breakfast.

The word "trepidation" usually means to be afraid or anxious, but in this poem it actually means to make a literal trembling motion. So Donne is referring to the trembling motions and vibrations of the heavenly bodies.

Metaphor: (i) the motion of the spheres is "greater far". Earthquakes make a big scene down here on earth, but the universe compared is "greater far". An earthquake might shake things for a little while, but the motions of the spheres control all eternity. (ii) These motions (unlike the earthquake) are "innocent". Not innocent like guilty/innocent, but innocent as in unseen or unnoticed. We are innocent of these all-powerful forces. Earthquakes are all show, but the motions of the stars are subtle and quiet.

### STANZAS 4-5

In the fourth and fifth stanzas, Donne also compares their love to that of "sublunary" (earth-bound) lovers and finds the latter wanting. The love of others originates from physical closeness, where they can see each other's attractiveness. When distance intervenes, their love wanes, but this is not so for Donne and his beloved, whose spiritual love, assured in each one's "mind", cannot be reduced by physical distance like the love of those who focus on "lips, and hands." The use of "refined" in the fifth stanza gives Donne a chance to use a metaphor involving gold, a precious metal that is refined through fire.

Lines 13-14

***Dull sublunary lovers' love  
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit***

Stanza 4 moves us away from the natural disasters and is going to connect it back with his argument. Line 13 has a lot of playful L sounds twisting through it. The playfulness of his argument is also emphasized by the repetitive phrase, “lovers’ love”.

We also skip right into this line by losing the first syllable. We ought to start with an unstressed syllable here, but we hop right in with the thudding sound of “Dull”. After that, things go right back to the iambic pattern we expect to see.

“Sublunary” means “beneath the moon”. More specifically, the speaker is connecting shallow lovers’ love to earthbound earthquakes, as opposed to the motions of heavenly bodies.

“Whose soul is sense” is a parenthetical note that explains why this type of love is so wrong. With the alliteration of “Whose soul is sense”, Donne explains that earthly lovers are only connected by earthly things, namely the five senses.

Line 14 is the first enjambment of the poem, meaning a line break that also breaks up a continuing thought. The next line explains what these lovers can’t admit!

The enjambment also allows for the more common definition of “admit”, confess, to assert itself.

Lines 15-16

***Absence, because it doth remove  
Those things which elemented it.***

The first word of line 15 is like a punchline. First, we were waiting for the resolution to the previous line. *What can’t they admit?* They can’t admit “absence”. This is another trochee, meaning a reversed iambic foot that puts the stressed syllable before the unstressed one.

The rest of these two lines explain the reason that these lovers can’t stand to be apart from one another. Their entire relationship is based on their physical presence. They can’t unglue themselves from one another for two seconds. Because their physical desires started (“elemented”) their love, absence extinguishes it.

## STANZA 6

The separation is portrayed as actually a bonus because it extends the territory of their love, like gold being hammered into “aery thinness” without breaking (line 24). It thus can gild that much more territory.

Lines 17-18

***But we, by a love so much refined  
That ourselves know not what it is,***

Donne returns to himself and his wife, the actual subjects of the poem. He reintroduces them (“we”). In line 16, he used the word “elemented” to mean “began”. Of course, it also reminds us of the physical elements. With the word “refined” here, he very subtly prepares his audience for his next metaphor.

Line 18 parallels the original metaphor – the earthquake and the motions of the spheres. The motions of the planets and stars, remember, are “innocent”, undetected and unknown by anyone. So is their love. It is so refined, so far above this world, that not even the poet himself knows what it is. Line 18 refers all the way back to line twelve to help the whole extended metaphor hold together.

Lines 19-20

***Inter-assurèd of the mind,  
Care less eyes, lips and hands to miss.***

In line 19, there is the contrast between lovers who are only connected by their physical bodies and those who share a spiritual bond. Donne emphasizes that he and his beloved are connected by their minds.

The other central contrast that is introduced here is hidden in that not-so-poetic phrase “inter-assured.” Donne claims that he and his wife share their mind and spirit with one another.

He is stating that, when that physical attraction is the only thing a relationship is based on, it's never enough. He loves his wife, and he will miss her dearly. They just "care less" about missing each other physically than their spiritual connection.

Notice in line 20 that Donne divides up the person into parts ("eyes, lips and hands"). This synecdoche (representing a whole with just a part), reminds us that when our love is only physical, it cheapens the other person and turns them into a commodity.

## STANZAS 7-9

The final three stanzas use an extended metaphor in which Donne compares the two individuals in the marriage to the two legs of a compass: though they each have their own purpose, they are inextricably linked at the joint or pivot at the top – that is, in their spiritual unity in God. Down on the paper – the earthly realm – one leg stays firm, just as Donne's wife will remain steadfast in her love at home. Meanwhile, the other leg describes a perfect circle around this unmoving centre, so long as the centre leg stays firmly grounded and does not stray. She will always lean in his direction, just like the centre leg of the compass. So long as she does not stray, "Thy firmness makes my circle just, / And makes me end where I begun," back at home (lines 35-36). They are a team, and so long as she is true to him, he will be able to return to exactly the point where they left off before his journey.



Lines 21-22

***Our two souls therefore, which are one,  
Though I must go, endure not yet***

It is as if he is quoting from the Bible, which establishes marriage as making two individuals into one unit.

The paradox is that he deliberately uses the words *two* and *one* in the same line to emphasize the confusing, mysterious force of wedded love.

Line 22 gives us our second big enjambment, or harsh line break. We get the verb, telling us that the two souls will endure something, but we don't know what yet.

Lines 23-24

***A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to airy thinness beat.***

Now we figure out what we aren't enduring: "a breach". "Breach" is a harsh word, with its B that explodes out of our mouth and its screeching long E sound. It fits perfectly. More than that, the enjambment itself made us feel a break in the grammar, which mirrors the meaning as well. How can a breach also be an expansion? This is yet another paradox that will have to be explained: they won't break – they will expand... somehow.

The alliteration with rapid B sounds at the beginning of the line also contrasts with the long sound of the word "expansion."

Line 24 is one of Donne's easier analogies, both in form and content. It's a simple simile. If you are at all familiar with metal-working, it's also a clear and straightforward image. Gold is a soft metal, easy to hammer and work with. It can be hammered ("beat") into super-fine gold foil, and a little bit can go a *long* way. Where other metals or materials would break when you stretched or beat them, gold retains its "one-ness", even across a great distance.

Lines 25-26

***If they be two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses are two;***

Even if they are “one”, they are still literally two people who are going to be separated by hundreds of miles. So, the beginning of this line concedes a little bit: “Fine. We’re two. But if we *are* two...” The metaphor: romance is compared to a compass, a mathematical equipment. Donne begins to draw comparisons between he and his wife, and the two legs of a compass. The metaphor works with Donne’s idea that even though the legs of the compass are separate parts, they have been joined together permanently; each is useless apart from the partner. The repetition of the word *two* in these two lines is to slowly begin to redefine the term. He admits that he and his wife are two, but then redefines two to mean what he wants.

Lines 27-28

***Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show  
To move, but doth, if th' other do.***

We are reminded here that this is a poem written from Donne to his wife. Donne’s wife is “the fix’d foot” of the compass, meaning the one that stays planted in the centre of the circle. Donne begins to establish the quality he finds so vital in his wife – her constancy. She is not only the fixed foot, but she “makes no show to move” until he (the other foot) does. She is completely faithful to him and supports him in whatever he does.

Lines 29-32

***And though it in the center sit,  
Yet, when the other far doth roam,  
It leans, and hearkens after it,  
And grows erect, as that comes home.***

The whole stanza is dedicated to the “fix’d foot”, to her. He focuses on the importance of that fixed foot.

Even though the fixed foot is stuck there in the centre, it follows after the roaming foot by leaning. The leaning is personified with the word “hearkens.” This calls to mind the title of the poem, which forbids mourning at his departure. We imagine Donne's wife (or her heart) longing outward toward her husband across the channel. That personification is mirrored in line thirty-two – the other foot, like Donne, will come “home” again.

The word “erect” shows that his wife will, like the compass foot, stand tall and firm again when her husband is on his way safely home.

Lines 33-36

***Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;  
Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
And makes me end where I begun.***

Here is more praise for his wife. Line thirty-three connects the fixed foot firmly with his wife.

Once again in line 35, Donne praises his wife for her faithfulness, for sticking with him even as he runs all over the place. We can connect the word “firmness” with “fix’d”. Her faithfulness brings him home.

We've really come full circle. Donne’s final promise, his final reason why they shouldn’t mourn at his parting: if they are both firm and strong, he will be back soon enough – right where he belongs.

## LITERARY DEVICES

### Euphemism

Line 1: “pass ... away” – a softer way of saying “die”.

### Metaphor

Lines 1-2: "As virtuous men pass mildly away" – the separation of Donne from his wife is compared to the separation of a man's soul from his body when he dies.

Lines 5-6: "Let us melt ... tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move" – they are saddened by their parting; their tears and sighs are compared to ice melting and windy storms.

Line 12: (i) when compared to an earthquake, the motion of the spheres is seen as "greater far". An earthquake might shake things for a little while, but the motions of the spheres control all eternity. (ii) These motions (unlike the earthquake) are "innocent". They are unseen or unnoticed. Earthquakes are all show, but the motions of the stars are subtle and quiet.

Lines 25-26: "If they be two, they are two so  
As stiff twin compasses are two"

The couple is compared to a compass.

### **Onomatopoeia**

Line 2: "Whisper" – the "wh" makes a soft, whispering sound.

### **Alliteration**

Line 3: "some of their sad friends do say"

Line 4: "some say"

Line 5-6: "melt, and make no noise/No...nor"

Line 14: "Whose soul is sense"

Lines 23-24: "A breach, but an expansion,  
Like gold to airy thinness beat"

### **Hyperbole**

Line 6: Exaggeration – "tear-floods", i.e. crying so much it will create a flood; "sigh-tempests", i.e. sighing so hard that it will create a windy storm.

### **Epithet**

Line 6: "tear-floods" and "sigh-tempests"

An epithet is the application of a word or phrase to someone that describes that person's attributes or qualities; in this case, the speaker doesn't want them to be over-emotional when he leaves.

### **Juxtaposition**

Two things are placed together with contrasting effects.

Lines 11-12: earthquakes are motion on earth, but the movement of spheres in space are "greater far". An earthquake might shake things for a little while, but the motions of the spheres control all eternity. (Earthquakes are seen/noticed, but the movement of the stars are subtle/quiet (chaos vs calm).

### **Synecdoche**

Line 20: The person is divided up into parts ("eyes, lips and hands").

This synecdoche (representing a whole with just a part), reminds us that when our 'love' is only physical, it cheapens the other person and turns them into a commodity.

### **Paradox**

Line 21: He states that marriage makes two individuals into one unit.

The paradox is that he deliberately uses the words *two* and *one* in the same line to emphasize the confusing, mysterious force of wedded love.

Line 23: The contrast is the breach that is an expansion. They won't break; they will expand.

### **Simile**

Line 24: *A breach ... Like gold ...*

It doesn't matter how far they are from each other, they can beat the "breach" like soft gold.

**Personification**

Line 31: The leaning foot is personified with the word "hearkens"; the leaning listens.

Line 32: The other foot is personified – it will return home.

**Biography**

Keorapetse Kgositsile (1938 – ) left South Africa for exile in his early twenties, travelling to Tanzania and then to the United States of America, where he studied, lived and taught for a while before returning to Africa in 1990. He has published several books of poetry, receiving awards for his poetry in the United States of America and in South Africa. In 2006, he became South Africa's first poet laureate and in 2008 he received the Order of Ikhamanga (Silver) for his achievement in literature. The South African poet laureate and anti-apartheid activist passed away at the age of 79. Also known as "Bra Willie," Kgositsile was the father of American hip hop artist Earl Sweatshirt.

Beware, my son, words  
carry the loudnesses  
of blind desire also carry  
the slime of illusion

dripping like pus from the slave's battered back 5  
e.g. they speak of black power whose eyes  
will not threaten the quick whitening of their own intent  
what days will you inherit?  
what shadows inhabit your silences?

I have aspired to expression, all these years, 10  
elegant past the most eloquent word. But here now  
our tongue dries into maggots as we continue our slimy  
death and grin. Except today it is fashionable to scream  
of pride and beauty as though it were not known that  
'slaves and dead people have no beauty' 15

Confusion  
in me and around me  
confusion. This pain was  
not from the past. This pain was  
not because we had failed 20  
to understand:  
this land is mine  
confusions and borrowed fears  
it was. We stood like shrubs  
shrivelled on this piece of earth 25  
the ground parched and cracked through the cracks my cry:

And what shapes  
in assent and ascent  
must people the eye of newborn  
determined desire know 30  
no frightened tear ever rolls on  
to the elegance of fire. I have  
fallen with all the names I am  
but the newborn eye, old as  
childbirth, must touch the day 35  
that, speaking my language, will



say, today we move, we move...

### Vocabulary

**random:** without definite aim, conscious decision or direction; haphazard

**illusion:** false or unreal idea, perception or belief

**battered:** injured by repeated blows or punishment

**aspired:** hoped to achieve

**eloquent:** fluent or persuasive in speaking or writing

**shrivelled:** wrinkled and shrunken, especially as a result of loss of moisture or old age

**assent:** the expression of approval or agreement

**ascent:** an instance of rising or moving upward

### Summary

“Random note to my son” is a wise and complex poem, an imaginative exploration through which the speaker warns his imagined son that words are powerful tools. However, if used carelessly, the words could readily distract from any possible truth or meaning.

The poem uses original and evocative figurative language to convey the power of words, all arranged in free verse. The register seems conversational and has a stream-of-consciousness quality; however, the message and the language are carefully considered.

### Questions:

1. Name two things against which the speaker warns his son. (2)
2. Quote two separate images of despair in the poem. (2)
3. Explain what “blind desire” is. (2)
4. Look at the simile of the shrubs on “parched” ground. This could be seen as a symbol of defeat or resilience. Which do you think it is? Explain with close reference to the poem. (2)
5. Discuss your response to one image in the poem that evokes the strongest reaction from you. (2)

### Analysis

Line 1:

***Beware, my son, ...***

Mr Kgositsile is warning his son Thebe, a.k.a. Earl Sweatshirt. It’s unlikely that Earl will listen to the man that left his life when he was six. Thebe was under a lot of pressure not only growing up without a father, but also living in his poetic shadow as he mentions in “Burgundy”:

*And when them expectations raise in me cause daddy was a poet, right?*

*Talk all you want, I’m taking no advice, nigga ...*

Line 1-4:

***... words***

***carry the loudnesses***

***of blind desire also carry***

***the slime of illusion***

The poet is telling his son that his work/words should not be loud and without purpose. That will only give people an unpleasant illusion; they are being distracted from the truth. His words do not give

people direction. The 'blind desire' he speaks of is the same as ambition/aspiration that has no direction/purpose. His son's words are used to anger or incite a response from people. Keorapetse is trying to tell Earl that words are very powerful tools; but, if used incorrectly, they only serve as an illusion to distract people from the truth. He wants his son to realize that being famous gives him a platform to speak and be heard. His son should use this platform purposefully.

In plain terms he says "words also carry illusion", something imagined. He extends this statement by creating an image of illusion as slime, a negative word. It gets worse when he compares illusion to pus dripping off the back of a slave who has been beaten and whose wounds have become infected. All of this together creates a very negative image of something rotting and diseased. He is describing words! This emphasises how carefully words must be used.

It makes sense that Keorapetse is concerned as a father. The early work of Earl and his band, *Odd Future*, were known for being dark, loud, obnoxious, and very offensive to many people. One of the few examples is the song "Epar", which is Rape backwards. This song is about a story of murder and rape and is as dark as most of *Odd Future's* other early work.

*Note: It seems that Earl has paid attention to his father's words and changed his style. While in Samoa, Earl spent time at the Samoa Victim Support Group, a centre for victims, both children and adults, of sexual abuse. Earl's subject matter no longer involves rape, as is seen in his album 'Doris'.*

Line 5:

***dripping like pus from the slave's battered back***

The image evokes a slave who has been beaten by his master and whose wounds are starting to secrete pus. Kgositsile's simile suggests that illusions are also beaten into us by our culture.

Line 6-7:

***e.g. they speak of black power whose eyes will not threaten the quick whitening of their own intent***

Activists spoke of democracy without allowing anger or fear to stop them. This 'black power' was their dark (secret/hidden) ambition for liberation without restraint.

Line 8-9:

***what days will you inherit?***

***what shadows inhabit your silences?***

Keorapetse is asking his son Earl Sweatshirt what he wants to do with his life. Earl dropped out of high school to become a rap artist and, although successful, Earl and his group *Odd Future* received a lot of criticism for their violent lyrics in their songs. Keorapetse asks Earl to confront his own demons, and leave a lasting legacy. He wants his son to be known for something good, instead of making violent lyrics.



Line 10-11

***I have aspired to expression, all these years,  
elegant past the most eloquent word...***

Keorapetse has been a poet for a very long time, and has refined his craft to a point where his wordplay and linguistic skills are heralded as legendary. This can also be seen in his son's music, which makes use of conventions usually seen only in poetry.

Line 11-13

***... But here now  
our tongue dries into maggots as we continue our slimy  
death and grin...***

We are losing our ability to speak ("tongue dries"), i.e. the ability to say anything meaningful. We don't know how to express ourselves, sharing messages and topics like those that Keorapetse has covered throughout his life.

Line 13-15

***Except today it is fashionable to scream  
of pride and beauty as though it were not known that  
'slaves and dead people have no beauty'***

These lines suggest that in modern times, most people seem to talk more about superficial topics, such as their looks or their money and jewellery, than about deeper human issues. This brings to mind the general pop mentality (refer to rap songs) that black people were (and still are) slaves (in Africa and America) and, as such, neither beauty nor pride can be attained.

Line 16-18

***Confusion  
in me and around me  
confusion. ...***

Though this is not what Kgositsile is referencing here, his son went through his own share of confusion with his father not being around. Earl delves deep into the issue in "Chum":

*"It's probably been twelve years since my father left, left me fatherless  
And I just used to say I hate him in dishonest jest  
When honestly I miss this nigga, like when I was six  
And every time I got the chance to say it I would swallow it."*

Kgositsile may rather refer to confusion that arises because of all the negative experiences people have to face in life; they lack understanding and this results in emotional turmoil. Perhaps Kgositsile knows that Earl's work (rap themes/words) is influenced by his confusion as to why his father left him when he was still so young (6 years old), a vulnerable age. He carries emotional scars because of what happened to him. When you look around, you become aware of all the confused (broken) people around you.

Line 18-24

***... This pain was  
not from the past. This pain was  
not because we had failed  
to understand:  
this land is mine  
confusion and borrowed fears  
it was...***

The choices made to divorce his wife and leave his son are painful mistakes of the past. The pain, however, did not start there. The pain started in his country of birth. The Apartheid laws stripped him of his identity, which led to confusion. The fear that the oppressed people had in South Africa was

borrowed – it was not natural fear. Natural fear is what a person is born with. Borrowed fear is what a person adopts from parents or other people/experiences.

Line 24-26

**... We stood like shrubs  
shrivelled on this piece of earth  
the ground parched and cracked through the cracks my cry:**

This is a powerful and expansive comparison. Its aspects are delicately cast across individual lines. Kgositsile casts himself and his peers as shrubs, which manage to grow on dried out ground; the people are able to survive despite inhospitable conditions, and are even able to turn those conditions to their advantage: “through the cracks my cry”. Perhaps here is a message to his son. Despite the conditions of growing up without his father, he has been able to survive and become successful. He needs to focus, however, on his purpose/influence.

Lines 27-32

**And what shapes  
in assent and ascent  
must people the eye of newborn  
determined desire know  
no frightened tear ever rolls on  
to the elegance of fire...**

What does the speaker cry (line 26) through the cracks in the parched ground? Different to a ‘blind desire’ (ambition without purpose), there is ‘determined desire’. This desire is ‘newborn’ when changes have been made. It doesn’t matter how people change their attitude (assent) or rise above their challenges (ascent); however, it matters that they are determined to speak words of purpose, influencing people not to live in the past or live in fear; people need to move forward and fear should be controlled or destroyed. Fire destroys, but it also refines (‘elegance of fire’). The speaker obviously refers to refinement when he says that “no frightened tear ever rolls on to the elegance of fire I have fallen”. Fear should never be refined, but controlled or destroyed. He speaks from experience. He was driven by his past and his fears.

Lines 32-37

**... I have  
fallen with all the names I am  
but the newborn eye, old as  
childbirth, must touch the day  
that, speaking my language, will  
say, today we move, we move?**

We are given many labels (‘names’) in life – each a perceived identity, which is not necessarily truth. The speaker is aware of this. Many of the labels he has had to endure have caused him to stumble and fall. The ‘newborn eye’ is the ability to change one’s perspective allowing one to see the truth and, hence, speak the truth; it is the ability to see things from a new angle and then influence others to see the truth. This ability to change our perspective is something natural to us, we are born with it. When we are able to rise (ascent) above our past and all the perspectives that we have formed (assent) over the years that have burdened us and kept us in slavery, we will speak the same language as the poet. This is a language of purpose. As an activist, his messages/words made a difference to many people during turbulent times. He was active. The repetition of “we move” at the close of the poem imparts a call to action, away from passivity. He is urging his son to use words wisely, to have “intent”, an aim in what he says. He acknowledges the suffering of blacks everywhere, but is worried about how the youth are trying to achieve change. He refers to a “newborn eye”, an eye that sees things differently, will speak “my language”, in other words, wise words that have a meaning and purpose, and that cause a move forward to better things.

## LITERARY DEVICES

### Metaphor

Line 3: "blind desire" - ambition without purpose.

Line 4: "slime of illusion" – imagined things

Line 4-5 (extended metaphor) "slime of illusion dripping like pus" – the mind imagines negative things and speaks negative words

Line 7: "whitening of their own intent" – incited anger

Line 9: "shadows" – fears; silences – thoughts/words not spoken

Line 29: "eye of newborn" – perspectives/attitude

Line 30: "determined desire" – ambition with purpose/intent

### Simile

Line 5: "dripping like pus" – pus creates the image of infected wounds; years of slavery have "infected" the minds/emotions of the people; the people are rotting because they are living in the past.

### Alliteration

Line 5: "battered back"

Line 9: "shadows inhabit silences"

Line 11: "elegant past the most eloquent"

Lines 24-25: "shrubs/shrivelled"

Line 26: "cracked through the cracks my cry"

Line 28: "assent and ascend"

Line 30: "determined desire"

### Rhetoric

Lines 8-9: rhetorical questions to make the reader/the speaker's son think.

### Personification

Line 31: "no frightened tear" – human attributes/emotions given to tears

### Repetition

Line 37: "we move, we move" – to emphasize progression.



The speaker opens the poem with the declaration that we wear masks that hide our true feelings. He goes on to emphasize the severity of the pain and suffering that these masks try to cover up. By the end, we understand that all of the politeness and subdued emotions are just phony disguises of the painful truths that hide behind them. Those masks certainly aren't doing anyone any favours.

### Questions

1. Name two things that the mask hides. (2)
2. Quote two words from line 10 that clearly contradict each other. (2)
3. How does the image of "torn and bleeding hearts" impact on your understanding of what the mask is concealing? (2)
4. What is the speaker's motivation for wearing a mask? (2)
5. Do you empathize with the speaker of the poem? What action would you take if you found yourself living under similar circumstances? (2)

### Form

The poem takes the form of a *rondeau*. It has 15 lines with only two repeating rhymes and a refrain (chorus).

### Title

Since the title is also the poem's refrain, we know it's very important. It's also common for the title of a *rondeau* to match its refrain. Either way, there's no mistaking that "we wear the mask" is the poem's main point and also the biggest problem contextually. Dunbar is reminding us – with the title and the repetition – that people wear masks that may look nice with lots of smiles and singing, but they're nothing more than a series of lies that cover up painful truths.

### Analysis

Lines 1-2

***We wear the mask that grins and lies  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,***

Repetition of the title to emphasize that we wear masks.

The use of "we" suggests that it is something everyone does, a universal act. Since we're not sure who exactly that "we" is referring to, we can assume it more specifically refers to black Americans of the time, since Dunbar was an early pioneer of the Harlem Renaissance that came later in the 1920s.

Masks are often used as symbols for disguises and deception. We hide behind them for different reasons, but here we notice that these masks aren't just for dress-up. What else could they represent?

In line 2 the people wear them because it "hides" their "cheeks" (expressions/emotions) "shades" their "eyes" (thoughts/emotions). Note: The eyes are the window to the soul; they can show our emotions).

In this case, we think of the slaves who worked under harsh conditions and were beaten (some to death). They would obviously want to hide their expressions/thoughts, i.e. their emotions.

Lines 3 and 4

***This debt we pay to human guile;  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,***

Line 3 tells us that the people wearing these masks owe it all to "human guile." The word "guile" simply means a sort of deceitfulness, not being real.

Notice that the speaker says "human guile"; this suggests that the poem can be applied to not only the black American struggle, but also the general human struggle. After all, telling lies and being someone we're not is just a common part of daily life.

As we saw in lines 1 and 2, these lines also have a lot of figurative language that's building upon the extended metaphor of masks representing human deception: "torn and bleeding hearts we smile".

Line 4 begins to develop the truths behind those masks and we get the sense that there's a lot of pain there.

Those hearts are not just "torn", but also "bleeding"; this emphasizes the struggle and duality that the speaker is addressing.

If someone is "torn", it usually means that there are two sides pulling at the same time. If someone is "bleeding", we can assume that that person is injured – figuratively, of course.

We understand the metaphor even more when we consider the imagery of a mask. On one side there's the disguise, and on the other there's the truth.

The "smile" also builds on the original description of the mask that "grins and lies". It emphasizes the duality in line 4 that starts with torn hearts and ends with a smile. As a slave, for the sake of survival, it is easier to comply and "smile".

Line 5

***And mouth with myriad subtleties.***

The word "mouth" here is used for talking (not eating). Line 5 refers to the many ("myriad") polite formalities ("subtleties") that were common in the nineteenth century for black Americans, especially those used to address white people in conversation.

Remember, this poem was written way before the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s; life was very racist and dangerous for black Americans if they didn't use these "subtleties".

By using the word "mouth" instead of "talk", the speaker conveys the feeling that there is something mechanical about these "subtleties", maybe even less than human.

Considering the slaves (his parents' experiences), we can imagine that, again, for the sake of survival, the slaves would mumble in compliance a "myriad subtleties" (polite words) in order not to make their masters/slave drivers aggressive.

The mood: there is something vacant, dull, and even lifeless about line 5. People aren't living; they are trying to survive their circumstances.

Lines 6-7

***Why should the world be over-wise,  
In counting all our tears and sighs?***

The second stanza starts with a rhetorical question (a question in which we don't expect someone to give us a real answer). Rhetorical questions are usually used to prove a point, so we know the speaker is trying to emphasize what we've seen so far in terms of masks, suffering, hypocrisies, etc. The question has a slightly sarcastic tone to it, as if the speaker is suggesting that there's nothing "over-wise" about knowing the truth that's plain to see, with or without the masks. In other words: if something is staring you in the face (e.g. segregation, lack of civil rights, violence), then taking notice of it doesn't take all that much "wisdom".

By line 6, we also get more of the universal themes behind the poem when the speaker includes the word "world". The problems he is referring to involves everyone, even if some people choose to ignore them.

We have more figurative language in line 7: "counting all our tears and sighs" emphasizes the severity of the truth behind those masks. The words "all our" tell us that there are many tears and many sighs to "count" and they don't just belong to the speaker.



The second stanza highlights that the speaker represents a much larger group beyond himself, even if he doesn't provide specifics.

Lines 6 and 7 show that people feel real pain; the world has a responsibility to recognize human suffering. Perhaps the people wearing the masks also have a responsibility to themselves and each other to be honest about their suffering.

Lines 8-9

***Nay, let them only see us, while  
We wear the mask.***

In lines 6 and 7 we saw the rhetorical question that emphasized the truth behind the masks, while here in lines 8 and 9 we see just the mask and the people wearing them.

The speaker is saying here that, instead of the world seeing the truth, they see only the masks and the lies.

The tone here in "let them" suggests that the world is being spared the truth, via ignorance, perhaps because the truth is harder to accept than the mask.

The speaker is reminding us that the people wearing the mask need to be more honest about their situation too. So, all the sarcasm that we hear is stressing the problem that exists on both sides: the world that ignores the problem and the people suffering who aren't being honest.

We have our first instance of enjambment that takes us from one line to the next without any pauses (punctuation). We are eased right into the refrain "we wear the mask", which makes it stand out in comparison to the rest of the poem.

Pertaining to the slaves and black Americans, the masks protected them from the perspectives and judgments that were cast upon them by white people. Instead of showing the people what they felt, they pretended to be okay with their circumstances/conditions. They didn't want to worsen their suffering.

Lines 10-11

***We smile, but, O great Christ, our cries  
To thee from tortured souls arise.***

Line 10 begins with the repetition of that "smile" that covers everything up, reminding us that the false masks are the real problem.

The speaker then addresses Christ; he is looking for spiritual guidance ("O great Christ") and the chance for salvation ("souls arise").

The allusion to Christ emphasizes the speaker's need for help that the world will not provide.

Additionally, "O great Christ" is an example of an apostrophe (addressing someone who's not really there), which makes the speaker's emotional conflict feel all the more daunting.

Also we see more duality in line 10 that begins with "smile" and ends with "cries". The speaker seems to be emphasizing that "torn" metaphor that we saw earlier in lines 3 and 4 with all of these opposing forces.

So, by the third stanza, we start to see more of the truth behind the masks. And as we see the truth, we begin to notice that the speaker's language is becoming more emotional and distraught: "O great Christ", "cries", "tortured".

The plain truth of the matter is that these are "tortured souls" (e.g. slaves) that are crying for help even if they *appear* to "smile".

We have more enjambment here too that keeps the ideas in lines 10 and 11 connected without interruption. So we get the sense that the speaker is meditating here on his people's plight and need for spiritual guidance without any punctuation getting in the way.

Lines 12-13

***We sing, but oh the clay is vile  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;***

So not only are these people smiling through their pain, but they are also singing. Again, here's more of an indication of something that appears to be content but isn't. Think of blues music, for example. What musicians sing about is awfully sad, even if it still sounds nice.

All that "singing" might also be an allusion to the common stereotypes associated with black Americans who all supposedly love to sing and entertain, or the slaves who sing to help them endure.

The second half of line 12 works more with the Biblical allusion we saw in the previous lines. The "clay" is the earth, but it may also be a reference to the origins of man: "Remember that you have made me like clay" (Job 10:8-12).

So the speaker is saying that they're singing through the pain while standing above the earth that's "vile" (wicked) because it provides only pain and suffering for these folks. And yet that vile earth is still their home/origins, which makes things even worse.

Notice too that the language here has that same sort of emotional distress ("oh the clay is vile") that we saw in lines 10 and 11 ("O great Christ"). At this point, we see behind the mask more fully and things are awfully sad back there.

Yet, those "feet" and the imagery of walking that long mile indicate that there's hope. Perhaps this is all part of the journey, as difficult as it may be.

Since that mile is "long", we understand that there's still quite a way to go before any salvation or redemption can be had.

Lines 14-15

***But let the world dream otherwise,  
We wear the mask!***

The speaker is reminding us of that worldly responsibility that has yet to be acknowledged: "let the world dream otherwise".

If the world is dreaming, it's safe to assume that people aren't clever enough to see what's really going on, mostly because the world chooses not to be. Again, perhaps it's easier to just accept the mask and avoid the truth.

We hear that word "let" again as if the world is being spared the harsh reality. It's similar to the way a child might experience things; we "let" children do things. Because the people who are wearing the masks are adults, the tone is patronizing on purpose.

Bear in mind too that this dream that the world is having is more of a nightmare to the speaker and those he represents than anything else.

So, by the very end we see the mask in the same sort of way it appeared in the first stanza, only this time we get that extra exclamation point to drive it all home. By now we know what is behind the mask: lies, cries, and pain that people aren't being honest about. (In the case of the slaves, they had no choice; they wore masks to protect themselves from being beaten to death or thrown into the sea.)

We also understand that the "masks" people wear, no matter what they look like, are not to be completely trusted. What can be trusted is honest discussion and the efforts people make to fix the hurtful and destructive stuff they see around them.

## **Symbols**

### **The Mask**

Before the days of simply wearing them for Halloween, masks were often used as a symbol for deception, hypocrisy, and lies. Dunbar's poem is no different. The speaker refers to them, directly and indirectly, as the reason why black Americans, slaves and people in general are unable to speak honestly about their suffering. He's not talking about a real mask of course, but rather it's a symbolic one that represents the things people say and do that aren't honest. Dunbar also reminds us that

masks are sometimes a crucial part of self-preservation, bearing in mind the dangers that black Americans/slaves often faced if they chose the more honest route.

- Title: We know that mask is at the heart of the poem and the problems the speaker addresses. Perhaps we can go even deeper to say that the entire poem, therefore, wears a “mask” since a title defines a poem.
- Line 1: The opening words are not only the poem’s refrain, but also get right to the point about what Dunbar’s poem is about. Those masks may “grin”, but they also “lie”.
- Line 2: The mask hides everything, including “cheeks” (facial expressions/emotions) and “eyes” (thoughts/emotions), which symbolize the truer essence of humanity since we often express ourselves best using facial muscles (cheeks) and our eyes.
- Lines 9, 15: The refrain reminds us just how pervasive that mask is. It’s not enough to just mention it in the title. The speaker strategically reminds us throughout the poem that this is no small occurrence, and therefore needs to be emphasized.

## Smile

This is not the sort of smile you have after indulging in your favourite chocolate bar. It’s more like the kind of smile a person has when (s)he is upset, but doesn’t want to upset you, too. So that person may just grin and bear it and hide his true feelings. But that kind of smile isn’t helping matters in Dunbar’s poem. In fact, it’s making things worse because that smile is hiding the full extent of the emotional conflict he’s referring to.

- Line 1: Although people may “grin”, they also “lie”. This sort of smile doesn’t get more false. By saying “grin” instead of “smile”, the speaker also hints at the sinister quality of it, when we consider the connotations of the word “grin”. One can only imagine the hate that black Americans/slaves had, and their vengeful thoughts while “grinning”.
- Lines 4, 10: It’s also used to emphasize the duality of the emotional conflict the speaker is addressing. Notice that both lines have on one side: the “smile”, and on the other: words like “cries” and “torn hearts”.
- Line 12: Although the speaker is talking about “singing”, we get the sense that he’s referring to the same sort of smiling appearance. Singing and smiling are usually happy expressions, but here they are covering up the painful truth.

## We

Who are “we”? That’s a great question and we have a few possible answers too. The “we” that we get in Dunbar’s poem is primarily directed towards black American people as a whole or the slaves (his parents). In a more general sense, the “we” can be all people. Since the “we” is so ambiguous, it also serves a literary purpose too in suggesting that maybe the poem also wears a mask that hides its specific subject, perhaps to protect the poet.

- Title: Having “we” in the title really adds to the literary purpose of suggesting that the entire poem wears an ambiguous mask that’s hiding the truth. The speaker isn’t omitting specifics because he forgot about them. He’s clearly doing it with a purpose.
- Line 1: It’s in the title and in the refrain. It also invites the reader to include himself in that “we”. We can apply the idea of wearing masks to any person we choose.
- Lines 3: First, we get more of the sense that the speaker is speaking to a universal audience with the phrase “human guile”. The “we” shares this experience of “human guile”, so it’s not limited to just the black American struggle or slavery.

Line 4: The “we” is maybe getting a little more specific, since the speaker talks about “torn and bleeding hearts”, which suggests that these wounds are fresh. Historically speaking, they were very fresh.

Lines 9, 15: The phrase “we wear the mask” stands alone in these lines so the reader can draw as many connections as he chooses.

Lines 10, 12: Just like that “smile”, the “we” in these lines functions in a similarly dualistic sort of way. On one side the “we” is “smiling” and “singing”, while on the other the “we” is “crying”. In the end, the “we” is torn and not being honest.

## The World

It's a big place – in real life and in Dunbar's poem. The world also has a responsibility to recognize the suffering that occurs not just in a personal sense, but a worldly one too. Unfortunately, the "world" often ignores the kind of suffering that doesn't immediately affect it (specific people/places). By keeping things universal, thematically and stylistically, the speaker is suggesting that it's all connected. So ignoring problems doesn't keep them away.

Lines 6-7: The rhetorical question we get here is directed at the "world". Since it has a slightly sarcastic tone, we get the sense that the world was acting ignorant and cold towards the suffering of black Americans/slaves.

Line 14: The world is allowed to "dream otherwise", which just like the previous lines suggests that the world is behaving kind of like a child. It's dreaming instead of getting real. So the speaker is saying it's time to wake up.

### **Speaker**

Our speaker is relatively understated, considering the subject matter he's talking about. He's not getting angry or yelling about social injustices. Instead, he has a more objective perspective. So, the speaker has a universal sort of voice that's not exclusively limited to any one person or people. He takes a step back and gives us a fuller perspective of what's really going on with all these lies and hypocrisies. In doing so, he seems to suggest that this is not the sort of problem that's limited to any one culture, or person, or time.

Instead, this detached approach helps us to consider how masks are all over the place, that sometimes they're also a matter of survival in cultures where may react violently to people speaking honestly about social problems. Perhaps this is also why Dunbar's poem is still widely read today. Thanks to our detached speaker, it can be applied to all sorts of social circumstances and places.

## **LITERARY DEVICES**

### **Repetition**

Line 1, 9, 15: "We wear the mask" – of the title to emphasize that we wear masks.

### **Metaphor**

Line 1, 9, 15, title: "mask" – human deception

### **Rhetorical question**

Line 6-7: "Why should the world be over-wise/ In counting all our tears and sighs?" – to emphasize the inhumane acts of slavery; to emphasize the needlessness of masks, suffering, hypocrisies, etc.

### **Apostrophe/Allusion**

Line 10: "O great Christ!" – the speaker is addressing Christ; he is looking for spiritual guidance ("O great Christ") and a chance for salvation ("souls arise").

The allusion to Christ emphasizes the speaker's need for help that the world will not provide.

### **Allusion**

Lines 12: "We sing" – singing is supposed to be a sign of happiness. All the "singing" may, thus, allude to the common stereotypes associated with black Americans who all supposedly love to sing and entertain, or the slaves who are content because they sing while they work. This is not true. The black Americans created Blues music, which expresses their pain and suffering during turbulent racist times; the slaves only sang to create unity to endure their pain and suffering.

Lines 12: "... the clay is vile" – the "clay" is the earth, but it may also be a reference to the origins of man: "Remember that you have made me like clay" (Job 10:8-12).

### **Consonance**

Stanza 1 has a lot of repetition of consonant sounds: “grins”, “lies”, “cheeks”, “shades”, “eyes”, “hearts”, “smile”, and “subtleties”. The repeated sound not only helps to accent the first rhyme of the poem (“lies” and “eyes”), it also gives us an underlying sense of multitudes.

### **Alliteration**

Line 5: “mouth” and “myriad”.

Line 11: repetition of the T sound in “To thee” and “tortured” souls.

### **Paradox**

Paradox: The poem conceals and reveals.

- Conceals: The poem does not mention black people or racial prejudice. In other words, the poem itself wears a mask.
- Reveals: The poem openly parades Dunbar's feelings as a frustrated black person. Thus, the poem takes off the mask and doffs all pretence and imposture.

