

The Complete Poetry Resource

Fifth Edition

Prescribed Poems and Learning Materials

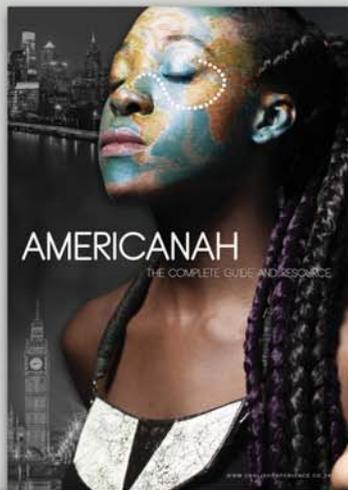
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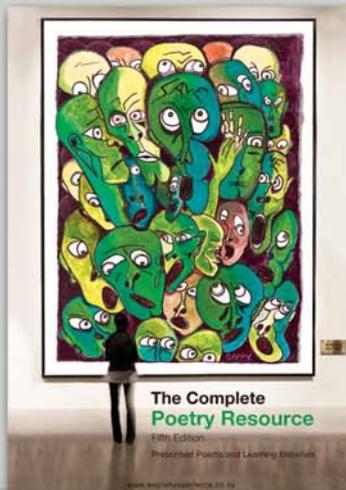
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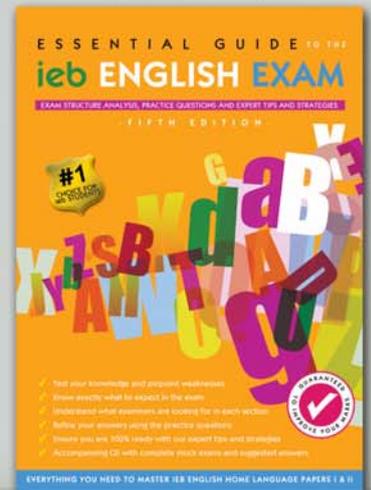
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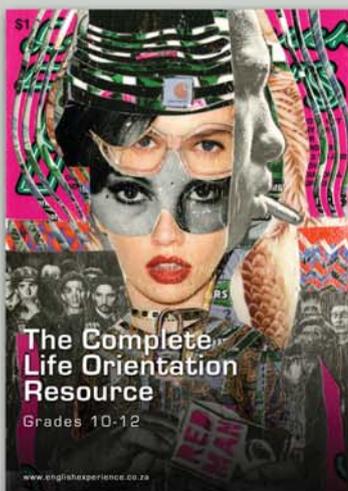
The Complete IEB Poetry Resource for Grade 12 (Fifth Edition)



Essential Guide to the IEB English Exam for Grade 12 (Fifth Edition)



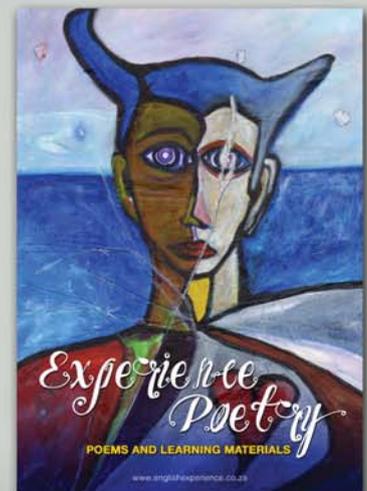
The Complete Life Orientation Resource for Grades 10-12



The Complete Poetry Resource for Grades 10 & 11



Experience Poetry: Poems and Learning Materials for Grades 8 & 9



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the **English** experience

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FOREWORD

ABOUT THE ENGLISH EXPERIENCE

The English Experience is an independent South African publishing house that specialises in developing high-quality English and Life Orientation educational resources for IEB educators and students. The team of passionate, talented experts behind The English Experience works tirelessly to ensure that every resource encourages insight, growth and debate — enriching and challenging both educators and students — without losing sight of the important goal of examination readiness and success.

Focused on bringing the subject to life, every resource The English Experience publishes incorporates a range of features — including content and contextual questions and stimulating enrichment materials — designed to encourage a critical appreciation of the subject and to inspire the higher order thinking for which examiners are always looking.

The world-class English Experience team includes highly experienced educators, some with over 20 years of classroom experience; passionate literary experts in various fields, such as historical fiction, poetry and Shakespeare; fanatical historians and researchers; creative writers; skilled editors; pernickety proofreaders and obsessive fact checkers — together with spirited university lecturers and enthusiastic young minds who help to ensure our approach remains unique and fresh.

While examination readiness and success is a non-negotiable, our aspiration is to inspire a genuine interest in, and love of, English literature.



Visit www.englishexperience.co.za to learn more about The English Experience and the range of educational resources the company publishes. You can scan this QR code to launch the site on your phone automatically. Please note, you will need to have the free 'Tag reader' app installed, which you can download from <http://gettag.mobi>

OUR APPROACH

Perhaps the toughest challenge in teaching poetry to modern learners is convincing them that the effort often required to grasp the meaning of a poem is worth it. Decoding the language and deciphering the message of a poem can be taxing for learners, so it's perhaps not surprising that many of them see poems as works through which they have to slog in order to pass an examination.

This resource has been written with this reality in mind and particular attention has been paid to providing the kind of context and insight necessary to help students engage fully with each poem and to discover for themselves why it has captivated others.

We believe that studying poetry rewards us with a broader, deeper understanding of ourselves and of the world around us; that is why this resource does more than provide learners with a detailed and, hopefully, eye-opening analysis of each poem. It also encourages them to engage with each work on a personal level and to uncover their own responses through the extensive contextual and intertextual questions.

Throughout this resource, learners are challenged to agree or disagree with the analyses provided. By formulating and expressing their own responses to the opinions, ideas and themes explored in the pages of this resource, learners are encouraged to reflect and grow as individuals as well as students.

In the end, we have approached the poetry syllabus the same way we approach every text: with two, interrelated goals in mind. The first non-negotiable objective is to ensure examination readiness and success. The second is to inspire a genuine interest in, and appreciation of, the works being studied.

USING THIS RESOURCE

This comprehensive resource ensures that educators are fully equipped to present the prescribed poems in context and in an interesting way, as well as ensuring that students have everything they need to explore the syllabus with confidence. It includes: the full text of each of the poems prescribed in the IEB Grade 12 syllabus; an introduction to the era in which each poem was written; a biography of every poet; an in-depth analysis of each poem and a set of stimulating contextual and intertextual questions that challenge learners to think critically about, and to formulate their own responses to, each work.

POETRY IN CONTEXT

The poems are arranged into sections that illustrate the progression of English poetry through the two centuries covered by the syllabus, from the Romantic period starting in the late 18th century to the Postmodernist movement of the 1950s, as well as contemporary African verse.

Each section begins with an **introduction** to the period that draws attention to the major events and influences of the time, and some of the themes that are highlighted in the analyses that follow. After this introduction, a concise **biography** of each poet is presented, followed by his or her **poem**, an **analysis** of the poem and then a set of contextual and intertextual **questions**.

The purpose of this structure is to help learners appreciate how English literature has developed over the last 200 years and to provide them with a social, political and personal context that, it is hoped, will help them to understand better and to value the work of each poet. With this in mind, we recommend working through this resource in chronological order.

UNSEEN SECTION

The popular Unseen Poetry section, which prepares learners for tackling poetry they have not yet come across (and, thus, the poem they will be presented with in Paper I, Question 4 of the examination), has been updated and revised and also features guidelines on how to prepare for the contextual poetry section of the final examination.

We hope you enjoy this resource as much as we enjoyed putting it together. If you have any comments, queries or suggestions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

KEY TO USING THE BOXES IN THIS RESOURCE:



Definition or Glossary

Provides the meanings of words and terms used in the text



Information

Provides additional details or facts about a topic



Alert

Something to which you need to pay attention or of which you need to be aware



Quirky Fact

Fun, interesting, extraneous information



Checklist

A list of items or activities required to complete a task satisfactorily

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INTRODUCTION TO POETRY

READING AND UNDERSTANDING POETRY

Reading and analysing poetry effectively is just as much about attitude as it is about mastering the necessary techniques. You will benefit from developing useful methods and honing your skills, but, ultimately, understanding poetry is about being open to new ideas and new ways of seeing the world around you.

Many readers complain that they develop a kind of 'block' when it comes to poetry, which prevents them from understanding the 'hidden message' in the poem; however, poets aren't trying to trick or confuse readers. Their message isn't actually 'hidden', but expressed in a way that is unique, complex and often very striking.

Poets don't wish to frustrate you, but they are trying to challenge or provoke you: not to work out an obscure meaning hidden behind fancy poetic techniques, but to think about their subject in a new, enlightening way. If a poem makes you think about an issue or look at something in a different light, then the poet has succeeded (and so have you!).



Remember that interpreting a poem is not just working out what the poet means, but also **what the poem means to you**. This practice is more than just the fun, potentially enlightening part of the process. Developing and substantiating your own views is exactly the kind of independent, individual thinking the IEB encourages. It will also serve you well in the examination because the examiners will always want to reward a different, fresh interpretation.

HOW TO ANALYSE A POEM

Before tackling a set of contextual questions about a poem, take the time to read through the verse carefully and to conduct a 'mini-analysis' (using the guidelines that follow). That way, when you tackle the questions, you will already have all the answers at your fingertips.

Even if you're unable to use all of your observations in your answers, conducting a mini-analysis will enrich your understanding of the poem as a whole and ensure that your answers are as comprehensive and well-informed as possible.

STEP 1: READ THE POEM

It's rare to understand a poem fully the first time you read it; most poems take several readings to be truly appreciated. Don't try to analyse the poem as soon as you start reading it. If you decide what the poem is about or what message it is trying to convey too early on, you will run the risk of missing an important point later and may try to 'force' a particular meaning on the poem. Be curious, be open-minded, ask questions and enjoy the poem before you start trying to deconstruct and analyse it.

Simply reading the poem through several times without over-thinking it will help you to access the poet's meaning and technique(s). If you can, read the poem aloud. This process will not only help you to detect patterns of rhyme and rhythm, it will often make the meaning of the poem clearer.

Be sure that you are reading the poem correctly by paying special attention to the use of punctuation or lack thereof. The 'sentences' or 'pauses' within the poem, for instance, will help you to decipher its meaning. Make sure that you differentiate between **enjambéd** and **end-stopped** lines.

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Once you've read through the poem a few times, pick up a pencil and read through it again, this time, making notes or marks on the poem.

React to the poem — write in the margins, circle words or phrases that stick out or confuse you, underline repeated words or striking images, and draw lines to indicate related ideas or metaphors.

STEP 2: WHAT'S THE STORY?

Once you've read through the poem several times (not just once, but twice or even three times), you are ready to start deciphering its meaning. Before anything else, ask yourself: What is the poem about? What message is the speaker trying to convey?

If the poem is particularly long, it may help you to re-read each stanza and jot down a few words or phrases that summarise that stanza. Once you have done this, work out one or two sentences that accurately sum up the **subject** and **theme** of the poem.

When determining the subject and theme of a poem, it is important to know something about its **context**. Obviously, knowing a few facts about the poet — such as when he or she lived — will help with your understanding and appreciation of the poem.

If you were to publish a poem now, your poem would be better understood by future generations if they knew a little about you as a person — for example, when and where you lived, your beliefs, what the social climate was, what society expected or frowned upon and what your personal philosophies included.

The same is true for any poem you encounter and, therefore, it's important that you familiarise yourself with the different literary periods and the common concerns or styles of these eras, as well as any major historical events that may have influenced the poets of a particular era.

Many people believe that any work of art — poetry included — should be seen as an independent entity, but you should be aware that no artist exists in a vacuum, free from outside influences. This fact is often particularly true of poets, who regularly feel compelled to offer commentary on their society, and to engage with the social or political concerns of the day.

Even if a poem has a 'universal' or timeless theme, it still helps to know what may have compelled the poet to put pen to paper. The date of birth of the poet will usually give you a good indication of the period or movement to which he or she



An **enjambéd** line occurs when a sentence or phrase (a unit of syntactic meaning) runs on from one line of verse to the next, requiring you to read the two (or more) lines together to grasp their meaning fully.

An **end-stopped** line occurs when the sentence or phrase is completed at the end of the line of verse and is usually indicated by a full stop.

Consider the following extract taken from the opening lines of Mbuyiseni Oswald Mtshali's poem "An Abandoned Bundle":

*The morning mist
and chimney smoke
of White City Jabavu
flowed thick yellow
as pus oozing
from a gigantic sore.*

These lines don't make much sense if you stop or pause at the end of the first, second, third, fourth or fifth line. Read together, on the other hand, the six lines make up one thought. Notice the full stop at the end of the sixth line. This indicates that we should read these lines as one thought or unit of meaning.



TONE VOCABULARY

Words that describe tone can include: admiring, ambivalent, amused, anxious, angry, apologetic, bitter, celebratory, condescending, contemplative, critical, cynical, defensive, defiant, desperate, depressed, determined, disdainful, disgusted, disheartened, dramatic, earnest, enthusiastic, excited, fearful, formal, frank, friendly, frustrated, gloomy, happy, honest, hopeful, humorous, indifferent, indignant, informal, intimate, ironic, irreverent, judgmental, lighthearted, lofty, malevolent, malicious, melancholy, mischievous, mocking, negative, nostalgic, objective, optimistic, patient, patronising, pensive, perplexed, persuasive, pessimistic, reflective, regretful, remorseful, reverent, sarcastic, satirical, scathing, self-pitying, sensationalist, sentimental, serious, sincere, sceptical, solemn, stiff, straightforward, sympathetic, thankful, threatening, tragic, urgent, vindictive and witty.

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belonged, particularly if you aren't given any additional information. Remember, however, that you should **avoid making sweeping statements or generalisations** about a particular time period or literary movement.

You should also determine who is speaking in the poem. Remember that the **speaker** is not necessarily the poet and the views expressed by the speaker are not necessarily an indication of the poet's own views. A 'persona' might have been adopted in order to tell a particular story or present a certain viewpoint. Just as authors create characters in novels, poets often create characters through which to tell the story of their poems.

STEP 3: CLOSE READING

Conducting a close reading of a poem is a skill that you can learn and apply to any verse. Once you have mastered the technique of recognising particular poetic devices and the effects created by them, you will be able to adapt your approach to suit the text you have been asked to analyse.

First, consider **what caught your attention** (the phrases or words you underlined or circled when first reading the poem, perhaps). Why did these particular features strike you as effective or interesting? Is the poet using a particular poetic device or Figure of Speech? Why is the poet trying to draw your attention to this particular aspect of the poem?

Once you have dealt with the aspects of the poem that were most striking to you, return to the beginning of the poem and work carefully through each line, taking note of the more subtle **poetic devices** and **Figures of Speech** employed by the poet. Again, ask yourself each time: *why has the poet done this?*

Remember to consider the **connotations** of the words chosen by the poet, particularly any words that seem unusual or particularly arresting. Every word in a poem is carefully chosen by the poet, and should be considered in context in order to appreciate its impact or effect on your understanding of the poem as a whole. The word 'red', for example, could simply be a colour or it could be representative of anger, passion, hatred or danger.

Punctuation or **typography** may give you further clues about the particular emphasis being given to a word by the poet. A word on its own line, for example, is always significant and the poet is drawing attention to it. Again, always ask: *why has the poet made these particular decisions?*



CLOSE READING CHECKLIST

The basics:

Make sure that you are clear on the following:

- the subject (what the poem is about)
- the context (poet's background and/or literary period)
- the speaker
- the tone/attitude
- the theme or message

Style and technique:

Determine whether the poet has employed any of the following techniques:

- a particular form or structure (such as a sonnet or ode)
- unusual diction (word choice) or punctuation
- striking or unusual typography (layout of the poem)
- a specific rhyme scheme
- a regulated rhythm or meter
- repetition or other forms of emphasis
- metaphors or similes
- Figures of Speech

REMEMBER: As well as pointing out the particular styles or techniques used by the poet, explain what effect they have and how these features enhance or impact on the meaning of the poem as a whole.

Be aware of the speaker's **tone**, as this will influence the way in which a poem should be read. Remember that 'tone' and 'attitude' are synonymous when analysing poetry and will, usually, be indicated by the use of particular **diction** (word choice), punctuation or typography. Try to learn and memorise as many words describing tone as possible so that you have a 'tone vocabulary' at your fingertips, allowing your answers to be more specific.

An important thing to remember is that every choice a poet makes is deliberately implemented to emphasise or **enhance the meaning** of the poem. Whenever you recognise a specific feature of a poem, your main concern should be determining **why** the poet has chosen to express him- or herself in that way; for example, consider some of the possible effects of the following popular **poetic techniques**:

Alliteration:

- to echo the sound of something (e.g. 'whispering winds' mimics the sound of a whistling wind)
- to draw attention to particular words
- to create mood or atmosphere

Assonance:

- to create mood
- to link words and ideas by 'echoing' the sounds of these words

Simile:

- to emphasise certain characteristics
- to illustrate the similarities between the two things compared in a striking manner

Metaphor:

- to clarify an idea with an unusual comparison
- to evoke certain associations or connotations that emphasise or echo the poet's meaning or theme

FINALLY

Understanding poetry has everything to do with being open to new ideas and taking your time when assessing each work. Taking into account pronouncements made by teachers, critics and fellow students is commendable, but every examiner will reward handsomely students who show that they have read the poem carefully and are not afraid to make unique observations in considered, well-constructed answers that reveal a clear understanding and are supported by evidence from the text.



THREE FINAL POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- No statement will be given credit without evidence from the text
- There are no short cuts: revise your work and take the time to interpret the questions properly
- Poetry is meant to be enjoyed; approach a poem with the right attitude and the rest is likely to happen more easily than expected

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GLOSSARY OF POETIC TERMS AND FIGURES OF SPEECH

alliteration: the repetition of consonant sounds, especially at the beginning of words (e.g. 'some sweet sounds')

allusion: a reference to a familiar literary or historical person or event that is used to make an idea more easily understood

apostrophe: a statement or question addressed to an inanimate object, a concept or a nonexistent/absent person

assonance: the repetition of similar vowel sounds in a line of poetry (e.g. 'fleet feet sweep by sleeping geese')

ballad: a short poem with a repeated refrain, that tells a simple story and which was originally intended to be sung

blank verse: a line of poetry or prose in unrhymed iambic pentameter. (Often used by Shakespeare and Milton.)

caesura: an extended or dramatic pause within a line of verse

connotations: the range of associations that a word or phrase suggests, in addition to the straightforward dictionary meaning; for example, the word 'discipline' means order and control, but also has connotations of suffering and pain

convention: a customary or typical feature of a specific type of literary work (e.g. all sonnets contain 14 lines)

couplet: a pair of rhymed lines, often appearing at the end of a poem or stanza

diction: the selection and arrangement of words in a poem

elegy: a lyric poem written to grieve and celebrate the life of a person who has died

epigraph: a short phrase or quotation at the beginning of a literary work that serves to introduce the theme or subject of that work

foot: a unit used to measure the metre of a poem; one foot is made up of two syllables

free verse: poetry without a regular pattern of metre or rhyme

hyperbole: a Figure of Speech in which something is deliberately exaggerated

iamb: a foot containing an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable

image / imagery: the verbal representation of a sense, impression, a feeling or idea

internal rhyme: a rhyme that occurs within a single line of verse

irony: when the intended meaning of a statement or comparison is the exact opposite of what is said

juxtaposition: the placement of two things (often abstract concepts) near each other to create a contrast

lyric: a poem expressing the subjective feelings or emotions of the poet

metaphor: a comparison between essentially unlike objects or ideas without an explicitly comparative word such as 'like' or 'as'

metre: the repetition of sound patterns that creates a rhythm

metonymy: the name of one thing is replaced by the name of something closely associated with it (e.g. 'Hollywood' refers to the American film industry)

octave: a stanza or section of a poem that is eight lines in length and is often used in the sonnet form

ode: an extended lyric poem that is characterised by exalted emotion and a dignified style and is usually concerned with a single, serious theme

onomatopoeia: a word imitates the sound it describes (e.g. 'buzz', 'meow')

oxymoron: a descriptive phrase that combines two contradictory terms (e.g. 'Oh loving hate!' from *Romeo and Juliet*)

paradox: a statement that appears illogical or contradictory at first, but may actually point to an underlying truth

parody: a humorous, mocking imitation of another literary work, usually intended to be playful and respectful of the original work, but can sometimes be sarcastic or critical

pastoral: derived from the word 'pasture' or 'pastor', which means shepherd; a pastoral poem is concerned with a rural or nature-based theme

personification: inanimate objects or concepts are given the qualities of a living thing

pun: a play on words that have similar sounds, but different meanings

quatrain: a four-line stanza

rhythm (metre): the recurrent pattern of accents or natural stresses in lines of verse

satire: a work that criticises or ridicules human vices, misconduct or follies

sestet: a stanza or section of a poem that is six lines in length, which is often used in the sonnet form

simile: a comparison between two unlike things using comparative words, such as 'like', 'as' or 'as though'

sonnet: a fourteen-line poem, usually written in iambic pentameter

subject: what the poem is about; the person, event or theme that forms the focus of the poem

symbol: an object that means more than itself, that represents something beyond itself

synecdoche: the use of a part to symbolise its corresponding whole (e.g. the word 'wheels' may be used to refer to a car)

theme: the main idea or message of a literary work

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ANSWERING CONTEXTUAL POETRY QUESTIONS

1. Examiners want to see that you know what the poem is about; however, many questions are based on how the verse works, how the poem has been constructed, for instance, and what effect the poet has managed to achieve by using certain linguistic techniques. Ensure that you **read the questions carefully** and that you know exactly what is being asked before attempting to answer a question.

2. **Do not re-tell the ‘story’** of the poem unless you have been asked to paraphrase or summarise it.

3. Always answer in **coherent, well-structured sentences** and avoid awkward constructions; for example, do not begin answers as follows:

That the man is ... ✗ **It is evident that the man is ... ✓**
 Because the man is ... ✗ **The man is ... therefore ... ✓**

You are expected to write coherent sentences that address the question. It is also important to note that you are not expected to rewrite the question before you answer it. If the question asks: ‘Quote an adjective that means “outspoken”’, for example, do not answer: *An adjective that means outspoken is: ‘frank’*. It is acceptable simply to write the answer: ‘Frank’.

4. Take note of the **mark allocation**. This is a clear indication of the length and depth of answer that is required. A one-word answer will not suffice for a question worth three marks.

5. Be aware of ‘double-barrelled’ or **multi-layered questions**. Many students do not answer the different aspects or sections of a given question; for example:

“What emotion do the words in line 1 convey, and how does this emotion change by the end of the poem? Provide a reason for your answer.”

The example above requires the student to do three things:

1. State the emotion
2. Explain how it changes by the end of the poem
3. Provide a possible reason for the difference

6. Identifying a **Figure of Speech** will be awarded a mark, but you are also expected to discuss how it adds to the meaning of the poem. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What does the Figure of Speech contribute to the poem?
- Does it clarify a point?
- Is it unusual and therefore striking?
- Does it emphasise a point or add humour?

7. **Be sincere** in your response to the poem. Do not state that a poem is brilliant or deeply moving when, clearly, you do not agree with this sentiment. You should engage with the text and avoid adopting the views you have gathered from a rushed reading of a study guide or website on the internet.

8. Avoid beginning sentences with personal pronouns: *‘I really think that...’* or *‘In my opinion this line means...’* is not acceptable. **Always write in the third person** and in the present tense: *‘Line 1 means...’* or *‘It is obvious that the child is upset because...’*

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9. Avoid sweeping, generalised statements. You must **validate your answers with evidence** from the text. It is no use saying: *'This is a really effective line'* or *'This simile is the best I have ever read'*. You must PROVE the statements and observations that you have made.
10. Be prepared to offer your **honest opinion about the issues** the poem addresses. You should be familiar with the range of themes expressed in the poem and your answers should be well thought out, candid, insightful and well-supported with evidence from the poem..

THE VICTORIANS

INTRODUCTION TO THE VICTORIAN ERA



(Schloß Friedenstein, Gotha, Germany)

Portrait of Queen Victoria, the monarch after whom the era is named.

Like the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, the Victorian era is named after its reigning monarch. Victoria became the queen of Great Britain in 1837 and reigned until her death in 1901. Victoria's reign is often associated with strict social conventions, sexual restraint and prudishness. The legs of tables had to be completely covered, for example, to prevent any indecent association with the same part of the human anatomy. The literature of the period was governed by similarly strict conventions. In contrast to the Romantics, who emphasised the imagination and fantasy, Victorian writers and audiences favoured realism.

It was a period characterised by peace, economic prosperity, positive political reforms and a strong sense of British nationalism. Education was made more widely available (particularly for girls) and rapid progress was made in science, medicine, commerce and manufacturing. Britain also expanded its territorial acquisitions overseas considerably. Despite all these positive developments, however, the Victorian era was also fraught with severe social problems.

The urban population of Britain grew rapidly during this period. The Industrial Revolution triggered massive waves of migration from the countryside to the cities as people sought work in the newly built factories. At the height of the Industrial



(The Premier Photographic View Album of London. (1907) Valentine & Sons, London)

Piccadilly Street in central London at the start of the 20th century

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Revolution, between 1800 and 1851, an estimated 40 per cent of the population of Britain moved from the countryside to urban areas. The infrastructure of the cities could not cope with such rapid expansion and a large portion of the urban population found themselves living in overcrowded, unhygienic slums.

Hunger and malnutrition were rife as increased populations put a strain on urban food supplies. The lack of sanitation facilities in the densely-populated shantytowns — where it was common for up to 10 people to share a single room — meant that disease spread rapidly and children, in particular, were susceptible to deadly diseases like typhoid, cholera and tuberculosis. High levels of unemployment and rampant crime were also common problems, particularly in London.

The abundance of unskilled labourers compounded the situation by keeping wages meagre. Children as young as four years old were routinely made to work to help raise money, performing odd jobs, such as sweeping chimneys, and they were even employed under very dangerous conditions in the factories and mines.

THE VICTORIAN POET

Victorian poets are often viewed as the chroniclers of their day, reflecting the social conditions and concerns of the era. The 19th century saw major developments in poetic ideals; as a movement, however, the Victorian era is often difficult to categorise. Victorian poets were the heirs to the Romantics, and their works often reflect similar concerns. As the century progressed, however, many writers – most notably, Matthew Arnold – began to anticipate the transition to the Modernist movement.

Perhaps one of the most significant literary developments of the 19th century was the emergence of the voices of women writers. Before the Victorian era, very few women achieved recognition as poets. As their access to education and involvement in public life increased during this century, more and more women began to publish their writings, causing some controversy among the more conservative of society.

Among the most famous women writers were the Brontë sisters, Anne, Charlotte and Emily, who produced several volumes of poetry and novels between them. Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti also achieved recognition and acclaim for their poetry. These women were responsible for introducing new voices and perspectives to the reading public, and paved the way for future female writers.



(Warner H. (1912) Spitalfields Nippers)

Many children worked during Victorian times to help supplement family incomes, taking in washing or chopping wood to sell as kindling.

⚡ WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Although attitudes were gradually beginning to change, it was still not considered 'proper' for women to write and publish novels and poetry during the Victorian era. As a result, many female authors concealed their identities and published their works under male pseudonyms. George Eliot, for example, was the penname used by Mary Ann Evans, while the three Brontë sisters wrote under the names of Ellis, Currer and Acton Bell.

⚡ SPIRITUALLY BANKRUPT?

Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Victorian poet-priest, commented that the age in which he lived 'lacked a spiritual centre' because the scientific rationalism and materialism that was flourishing undermined Christian principles.

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RISE OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL

The Victorian era witnessed the rise of the English novel and of the great English novelists. Like their poet counterparts, Victorian novelists frequently engaged with the social problems of the day. The novels of Charles Dickens, for instance, featured the middle and lower classes and tackled poverty and child labour, with the grimy streets of London as a backdrop. George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) also used her novels to comment on societal issues, for example, the position of women in Victorian society.

A reaction to the practice of child labour, efforts to implement compulsory education for children gained significant momentum during the Victorian era. As a result, this time period is also credited with 'inventing' childhood. A positive side effect of these efforts was that the children's publishing industry flourished for the first time in history.

GOOD VERSUS EVIL AND THE BACKLASH OF GOTHICISM

The central theme of many Victorian works is good and evil. When comparing the literature of the era with more modern works, this theme often seems quite didactic. In other words, Victorian works of literature and art often acted as **morality tales**, promoting a stern code of 'correct' behaviour by ensuring that bad characters were always suitably punished and good ones rewarded.

A reaction against this strict morality found expression in an artistic genre called the **Gothic**. Gothic works are often described as scary ghost stories, but there is more to them than that. While the realistic works of Dickens and Eliot draw a firm boundary between right and wrong, Gothic works often cross or question this boundary. One example of this is Heathcliff, the anti-hero of Emily Brontë's **Wuthering Heights**, who resorts to all sorts of trickery to torment the love of his life after she spurns him.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Although they express it differently, the realistic and the Gothic genres of Victorian literature have one thing in common: **nostalgia**. Both look back to the past with longing — to the Elizabethan age in particular. Shakespeare's plays were regularly performed and contemporary poets often wrote odes and sonnets in the Elizabethan style during the 19th century. There was also a revival of interest in classical and mediaeval literature, epitomised by Tennyson's famous "Idylls of the King". It is often argued that this longing was the result of the many changes — some very negative — brought about by industrialisation and urbanisation.

i

The Victorian Era is considered '**the age of the English novel**' and produced some of the most famous authors in literary history:

- Charles Dickens
(*Oliver Twist; Bleak House*)
- Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë
(*Wuthering Heights; Jane Eyre*)
- William Thackeray
(*Vanity Fair*)
- George Eliot
(*Middlemarch*)
- Thomas Hardy
(*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*)
- Elizabeth Gaskell
(*North and South*)
- Oscar Wilde
(*The Importance of Being Earnest*)
- H.G. Wells
(*The War of the Worlds*)
- Arthur Conan Doyle
(*Sherlock Holmes*)
- Lewis Carroll
(*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*)

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING (1806 — 1861)



(Wikimedia Commons)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Critics often cite Elizabeth Barrett Browning as the most popular and influential female poet of the Victorian era. She enjoyed widespread acclaim during her lifetime, and was even hailed as a serious contender for the position of Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom after the death of William Wordsworth in 1850. The post eventually went to Alfred, Lord Tennyson, but Browning remained one of the most esteemed writers of her generation.

Browning was born on 6 March 1806 to an extremely wealthy family in County Durham, England, and was the eldest of 12 children. Her family's fortune originated from the ownership of extensive sugar plantations in Jamaica. Browning immersed herself in books and reading as a child; she once commented that '[b]ooks and dreams were what [she] lived in and domestic life only seemed to buzz gently around, like bees about the grass.' By the age of four, she had already begun to write her own poetry.

Browning's childhood was plagued by illness: she developed a lung condition in her early teens that afflicted her for the rest of her life and, when she was 15, she suffered a painful spinal injury. Despite these setbacks, she was an accomplished and entirely self-taught scholar, reading Shakespeare before the age of 10 and learning Greek, Latin and Hebrew.

A FAMOUS COURTSHIP

During the 1830s, financial mismanagement of the family's fortune forced Browning's father to sell their grand country estate, and the family moved several times over the next few years. In the meantime, Browning was establishing her reputation as a gifted poet: the publication of *The Seraphim and Other Poems* in 1838 and *Poems* in 1844 attracted the attention of notable literary figures.

One of her admirers was the poet Robert Browning, who wrote to her shortly after the publication of *Poems* to praise her work. Over the next 20 months, the two exchanged nearly 600 letters, and eloped in 1846. Their romance was strongly opposed by her father, who jealously guarded what was left of the family's wealth and did not want any of his children to marry. He disinherited Browning after her marriage, and never spoke to her again.

The newlyweds moved to Florence, Italy, where the warmer weather improved Browning's ailing health. She bore a son, Robert Wideman Browning, in 1849 at the age of 43, and continued to write prolifically. In 1850, under the encouragement of her husband, she published what was to become her most famous collection, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*.

Browning had been reluctant to publish *Sonnets*: it was a deeply personal collection to her, consisting of 44 love sonnets she had written during her courtship with her husband. When they were first published, she decided to present them as translations of foreign sonnets, in order to afford herself and her husband some privacy. The title of the collection was a play on her husband's nickname for her: 'my little Portuguese.'

i After her death, Browning's poetic achievements were hailed across the globe. A writer for a Boston publication called *Sonnets from the Portuguese* the greatest love poems in the English language: 'Shakespeare's sonnets, beautiful as they are, cannot be compared with them, and Petrarch's seem commonplace beside them.' *The Edinburgh Review*, meanwhile, declared that 'Such a combination of the finest genius and the choicest results of cultivation and wide-ranging studies has never been seen before in any woman.'

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Browning's health continued to deteriorate, and she became increasingly dependent on morphine to ease her pain. In June 1861, she contracted a severe cold, which further taxed her already-failing lungs. She died in her husband's arms on the morning of 29 June 1861.

“IF THOU MUST LOVE ME” (SONNET 14)

If thou must love me, let it be for naught **1**
 Except for love's sake only. Do not say
 'I love her for her smile ... her look ... her way
 Of speaking gently, ... for a trick of thought
 That falls in well with mine, and certes brought **5**
 A sense of pleasant ease on such a day' –
 For these things in themselves, Belovéd, may
 Be changed, or change for thee, – and love, so wrought,
 May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
 Thine own dear pity's wiping my cheeks dry, – **10**
 A creature might forget to weep, who bore
 Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
 But love me for love's sake, that evermore
 Thou mayst love on, through love's eternity.



GLOSSARY

trick (line 4): a characteristic habit or mannerism

certes (line 5): assuredly, certainly

wrought (line 8): made or fashioned in a specific way

unwrought (line 9): unmade

evermore (line 13): forever, eternally

ANALYSIS

A RELUCTANT ROMANCE

“If thou must love me” is the fourteenth sonnet published as part of Browning's most famous collection, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. The autobiographic nature of this collection is well-documented; Browning was initially reluctant to publish the poems because she felt that they were too personal to be read by the general public.

Sonnets from the Portuguese poignantly chronicles the development of the romance between Browning and her husband, and were written during their secret courtship. Browning's persistently frail health, and the fact that Robert Browning was six years younger than she, made her reluctant, at first, to accept his advances. She worried that she would be a burden to him, and even fretted that his love was based on pity rather than real affection. Theirs proved to be a happy union, however, and, when she finally showed her husband the sonnets in 1849, he insisted that she publish them.

MAKING THE SONNET FORM HER OWN

As the title of her collection suggests, all of the poems in *Sonnets from the Portuguese* are written in the sonnet format; however, Browning did not limit herself too strictly to the conventional formats, instead borrowing aspects from the two major forms of sonnet to suit her purposes.

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Like all sonnets, “If thou must love me” consists of 14 lines and features a regular rhyme scheme. The rhyme scheme that Browning has adopted is typical of the **Petrarchan** or **Italian sonnet**, following a pattern of ABBAABBA CDCDCD; however, unlike Petrarchan sonnets, Browning’s poem cannot be divided into the conventional octave and sestet, and does not feature a volta.

Browning’s sonnet does not exactly resemble the structure of a Shakespearean sonnet, either: the lines cannot be divided into quatrains, which Shakespeare traditionally used to develop a particular theme or problem. She does, however, make use of the concluding couplet, which provides a conclusion to the poem. There is a significant difference in Browning’s use of the couplet, however, in that where Shakespeare’s couplets rhymed, Browning has followed the rhyme scheme of the Petrarchan sonnet.

What Browning’s sonnet has in common with both the Petrarchan and Shakespearean forms is her use of meter: “If thou must love me” is written in loose **iambic pentameter**, with occasional variations to create emphasis.

LOVE FOR LOVE’S SAKE

“If thou must love me” is an unusual love poem, in that the speaker is not describing her love for her partner, but rather pronouncing how *he* should love *her*. The speaker does not wish to be loved for her beauty, which will eventually fade, or even for her way of thinking, which could change; neither does she want to be loved out of pity. Rather, she wishes that her partner would love her ‘for love’s sake only’ (line 2).

The diction used in the **first line** of the poem immediately establishes the speaker’s **tone**. The inclusion of the word ‘must’ (line 1) hints that the speaker is exasperated by her lover’s insistence, suggesting that she has tried many times to reject his advances, but that he insists on declaring his love. It also implies that the speaker is not questioning the authenticity of her lover’s feelings, only their origins.

If her lover insists on loving her, the speaker says, then he must love her ‘for naught / Except for love’s sake only’ (lines 1-2). In other words, there should be no other reason for his love than the pure spontaneity of the emotion. Note how the poet uses **enjambment** throughout the poem, creating a continual flow of dialogue between the speaker and her lover, and ensuring the fast pace of the poem.

The speaker goes on to explain what she means by this statement through the use of dialogue, in which she imaginatively expresses the reasons she would *not* want her lover to harbour affection for her. She does not want to be loved for her ‘smile’ or her ‘look’ (line 3), she says; these are both physical attributes, referring to her beauty. Nor does she want to be adored for ‘her way / Of speaking gently’ (lines 3-4), as this is simply a habit or mannerism.

The speaker continues to explain that she does not wish to be loved for ‘a trick of thought / That falls in well’ (lines 4-5) with her lover’s, meaning that she and her lover think in similar ways or have alike temperaments. Though these similarities may bring about ‘a sense of pleasant ease’ (line 6) between them, ensuring that they enjoy each other’s company without difficulty, the speaker rejects this as a basis for love.

i A **Petrarchan sonnet** is composed of an eight-line octave, which poses a question or problem, and a six-line sestet, which provides a solution or resolution. The two stanzas are separated by a volta, which indicates a change of thought or direction from argument to solution.

i **Iambic pentameter** is one of the most common meters in English poetry. It indicates that each line of verse consists of five feet (or 10 syllables), in an unstressed-stressed syllabic pattern.

 Remember, **enjambment** occurs when a meaningful phrase or sentence flows fluidly from one line to the next, rather than terminating at the end of the line.

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The speaker then explains why none of these reasons is good enough for her lover to adore her: ‘these things in themselves’ (line 7), or in other words, these reasons on their own, ‘may / Be changed, or change for thee’ (lines 7-8). What the speaker means here is that her physical beauty – her smile and good looks – will not last forever, and even her mannerisms and ways of thinking might change. Alternatively, her lover’s temperament may change with time, and the things he once found attractive in her may no longer appeal to him one day.

For this reason, she does not wish to be loved on the basis of these attributes – because ‘love, so wrought / May be unwrought so’ (lines 8-9). In other words, if her lover’s feelings are based on these changeable qualities, then his feelings may change in turn, and he may not love her anymore one day.

The speaker says she does not want to be loved for ‘Thine own dear pity’s wiping my cheeks dry’ (line 10). What she means here is that she does not want her partner’s love to be based on pity for her, or expressed as a means of making her feel better. If this is the case, she says, then the comfort she draws from his love may make her ‘forget to weep’ (line 11), and her lover, in turn, will no longer pity or love her as a result.

A REASON TO LOVE

The first 12 lines of the poem allow the speaker to list the many attributes on which her lover should *not* base his love: her physical beauty, her manner of speaking or thinking, or pity for her. In the **concluding couplet**, the speaker finally describes a good reason for loving her.

The speaker wishes to be loved ‘for love’s sake’ (line 13) – in other words, her partner should feel a spontaneous rush of emotion towards her, one that cannot be pared down to a finite list of reasons. This kind of love, she says, will last for ‘evermore’ (line 13), and will not change with time. If this is why he loves her, then he will ‘love on’ through ‘eternity’ (line 14) – and only then may she truly trust his declarations.

? QUESTIONS

- Using the correct symbols, scan the first two lines of the poem, indicating stressed syllables (■), unstressed syllables (□) and feet (|). (3)

- Based on your answer to the above question, identify the type of meter used by the poet in these lines. (2)

3. How would you describe the tone of the poem as a whole? Provide sound reasoning for your answer. (3)

4. What effect is created by the speaker's fusion of two different sonnet formats? (2)

5. Provide a synonym for the word 'naught' (line 1). (1)

6. Identify the punctuation mark which the poet uses repeatedly in lines 3 to 4, and comment on its effect in this context. (3)

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SAMPLE SECTION NOT FOR REPLICATION

7. Identify the sound device used in line 6, and comment on the effect that is created. (3)

SAMPLE SECTION NOT FOR REPLICATION

8. Identify the punctuation mark after the comma in the middle of line 8, and explain its function in this context. (2)

SAMPLE SECTION NOT FOR REPLICATION

9. Comment on the use of the word 'creature' (line 11), explaining to whom it refers and the effect of this choice of diction. (3)

SAMPLE SECTION NOT FOR REPLICATION

10. Explain the double meaning of the word 'bore' (line 11), and how these meanings inform the reader's understanding of lines 11-12. (4)

11. Identify the punctuation mark at the end of line 12, and comment on its effect on the tone of the poem. (2)

12. Paraphrase the final two lines of the poem in your own words. (2)

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13. Identify and explain the Figure of Speech in the phrase 'love's eternity' (line 14). (2)

14. Compare "If thou must love me" with the 43rd sonnet in Browning's collection, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, entitled "How do I love thee?". In a well-structured paragraph, discuss how the speaker's attitude towards love and her partner have developed between the earlier and later poems, referring to the poet's use of form, tone and diction. (8)

"HOW DO I LOVE THEE?" (SONNET 43)

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. **1**

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height

My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight

For the ends of being and ideal grace.

I love thee to the level of every day's **5**

Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.

I love thee freely, as men strive for right.

I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.

I love thee with the passion put to use

In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith. **10**

I love thee with a love I seemed to lose

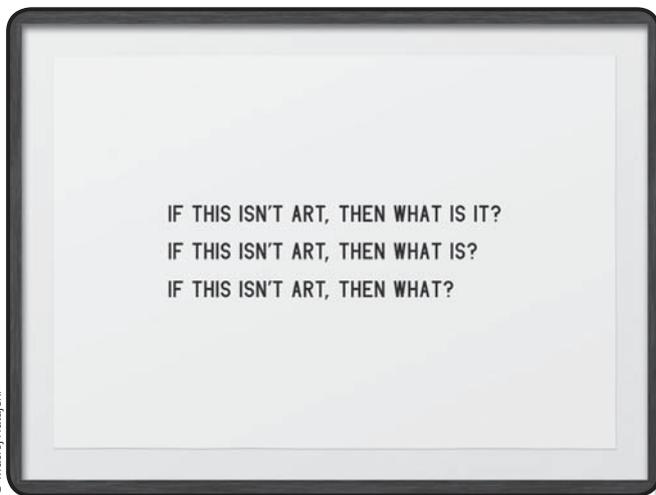
With my lost saints, I love thee with the breath,

Smiles, tears, of all my life; and, if God choose,

I shall but love thee better after death.

LATE MODERNISM / POSTMODERNISM

INTRODUCTION TO LATE MODERNISM / POSTMODERNISM



© Maciej Ratajski

This witty and thought-provoking piece by Polish artist Maciej Ratajski, entitled *Is This Art?*, is an example of Postmodern art that challenges our ideas about what 'art' is or should be. What do you think? Is this art?

The exact 'end' of Modernism remains a contentious debate among scholars. Some academics date the end of Modernism with the outbreak of World War II in 1939, while others argue that Modernist influences continued well into the 1980s. 'Postmodernism' complicates matters even further. A controversial term in itself, postmodernism is used by some scholars simply to refer to the chronological time period after Modernism, others use it to describe a distinctive way of thinking and a lot of academics even argue that the term is now used so broadly and vaguely that it has become meaningless.

Despite the areas of continued contention, most scholars agree that the beginnings of the Modernism movement are found in the late 19th century, when great scientific and technological advances prompted a transformation in the way the world was perceived. The heydays of experimental, *avant-garde* Modernist expression are usually considered to have occurred between 1910 and 1930, and the movement is considered to have reached its peak around the outbreak of World War I, when profound trauma and a collective sense of disillusionment called into question the values on which an entire civilisation had been established.

A REACTION TO THE HORRORS OF WARFARE?

Also known as 'Late Modernism', Postmodernism is difficult to define because the movement is, essentially, a reaction to early Modernism. It is a rejection of the overtly confident, positive and self-satisfied assumptions and values that epitomised early Modernism. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the movement germinated in the aftermath of two World Wars, Postmodernism is characterised by scepticism, subjectivism and an acute sensitivity to the power of economic and political ideologies.

i

DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF POSTMODERNISM:

- Germinated in the late 20th century (sometime between the 1940s and the 1980s)
- Disillusionment with the promises of Modernism (i.e. unrelenting progress, driven by technology)
- Scepticism and doubt replaces reason and certainty (there are no absolute truths)
- Morality and ethics are personal and relative (not traditional, objective or fixed)
- Globalisation instead of nationalism (unity and cooperation instead of division and conflict)

i

SOME OF THE MOST NOTABLE POSTMODERN WRITERS INCLUDE

- Don DeLillo (*White Noise*)
- John Fowles (*The French Lieutenant's Woman*)
- Bret Easton Ellis (*American Psycho*)
- Joseph Heller (*Catch-22*)
- Hunter S. Thompson (*Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*)
- Paul Auster (*The New York Trilogy*)
- Yann Martel (*Life of Pi*)

OBJECTIVE OBSERVATION IS NOT POSSIBLE

Despite the difficulties in defining Postmodernism, the literature considered to be part of the movement exhibits several distinguishing characteristics. Postmodern writers reject many of the concepts upon which Modernism was established. Most notably, they undermine the concepts of universality (the notion that anything can transcend the context of its time and place) and objectivity. In contrast, they explore the issue of subjectivism — rejecting an objective, external reality in favour of contemplating the subjective, inner consciousness.

Postmodern writers argue against the Modernist assumption that personal perspective can be applied to all human experience (i.e. universality); instead, their writing reflects the belief that *objective observation is impossible* to achieve, since every person naturally allows his or her own history, values and understanding to influence his or her assessment of the world.

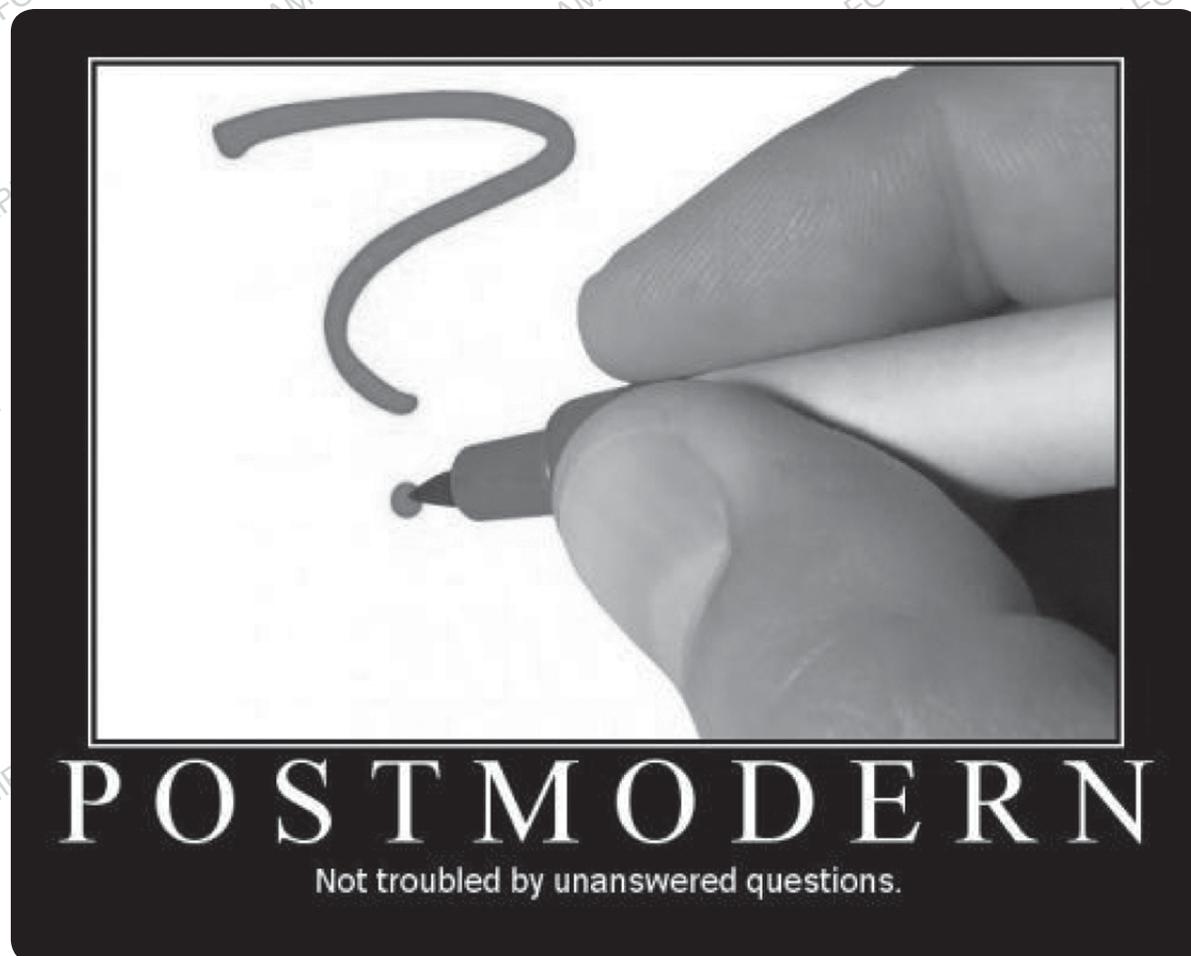
OTHER COMMON FEATURES AND TECHNIQUES OF POSTMODERN LITERATURE:

- Emphasises the subjective and personal
- Ironic, darkly comic and often paranoid
- Mixes up genres and styles (pastiche)
- Features intertextuality and temporal distortions (fragmented, non-linear narratives)



ARE YOU POST-POSTMODERN?

Some academics have taken the 'post' trend one step further and are claiming that we are currently in a Post-postmodern (or Metamodern) era. Once again, no consensus has been reached in defining Post-postmodernism: some critics believe that it marks a return to the principles of Modernism, while others argue that it indicates an escalation or intensification of Postmodern capitalist values in modern society.



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PHOEBE HESKETH (1909 — 2005)



(Enitharmon Press, London)

Phoebe Hesketh

Despite being a lesser-known name in Modernist literature, Phoebe Hesketh's long and fruitful career as a poet produced some of the most beautifully crafted work of the era. Known mostly as a 'nature poet', Hesketh was respected by her peers for the emotional power and directness of her verse, and was compared with the likes of Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson.

Hesketh was born in 1909 in Lancashire, England, where she lived for almost her entire life. Her father, Arthur Rayner, was a renowned radiologist, and her mother was an accomplished violinist. From a young age, she showed great promise as a poet, and her father would take her for long walks around the famed Lake District while reciting poems by William Wordsworth. At the age of 17, she left school to care for her terminally ill mother; a few years later, she married Aubrey Hesketh, with whom she had three children.

Her first volume of poetry, titled simply *Poems*, appeared in 1939, but she later disowned this work to a large extent, dismissing it as juvenile. It was not until her second volume, *Lean Forward, Spring!* appeared nine years later, in 1948, that she earned critical acclaim. In the intervening years, during World War II, she worked as a journalist for the *Bolton Evening News*.

Hesketh went on to produce 14 volumes of poetry, a collection of poems for children, and four biographies and autobiographies, as well as a number of scripts for the BBC. She also worked as a freelance journalist and taught literature and creative writing at several schools and universities. She died in a nursing home in Lancashire at the age of 96.

CONTEMPLATING DEATH AND THE NATURE OF SACRIFICE

The idyllic landscapes of her hometown proved to be a great source of inspiration for Hesketh and her love of nature motivated some of her greatest poetic works; however, personal tragedy also influenced much of her writing. After the tragic death of her young son, she wrote a number of religious poems focused on the Resurrection of Christ and the nature of sacrifice. The slow decline and eventual death of her husband saw the penning of some of her most morbid and sinister verses. Hesketh herself recognised that her focus shifted away from nature as her career progressed, and that her verse steadily became 'less flowery and happy and more bleak'. Over the course of her 60-year career, her precise technical skill, sensitivity to detail and emotional force established her as a poet of considerable talent; though, strangely, her work receives very little critical attention.



As a young girl, Hesketh was inspired to write by her aunt, Edith Rigby, a leading **English suffragette**. Rigby was a fierce activist who founded a school aimed at educating girls, and was incarcerated seven times during her life for her political activities. Hesketh published a biography about her aunt in 1966, titled *My Aunt Edith*.



RESTING IN PEACE?

Before her death, Hesketh told her doctor that she would like her memorial stone to read: 'The day of death is better than the day of one's birth'. When he told her that he didn't like that at all, she replied, 'It doesn't matter, you're not going to have it'.

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“A POEM IS A PAINTING”

*A poem is a painting that is not seen;
A painting is a poem that is not heard.*

That’s what poetry is — **1**
A painting in the mind.
Without palette and brush
it mixes words into images.
The mind’s edge sharpens the knife **5**
slashing the canvas with savage rocks
twisting trees and limbs into tortuous shapes
as Van Gogh did
or bewitched by movement’s grace,
captures the opalescent skirts **10**
of Degas’ ballet dancers.
But words on the page
as paint on canvas
are fixed.
It’s in the spaces between **15**
the poem is quickened.



GLOSSARY

palette (line 3): a thin board or tablet on which an artist mixes paints or pigments

tortuous (line 7): full of twists and turns

opalescent (line 10): exhibiting a kind of milky iridescence, like an opal; a lustrous rainbow-like play of colour that tends to change as the angle of view changes

quickened (line 16): to become enlivened; to make alive

ANALYSIS

“A Poem is a Painting” is a relatively simple, straightforward poem in which Hesketh compares the art of poetry to the art of painting. The speaker suggests that both poetry and paintings create images that are brought to life in the imaginations of the poet/painter and the audience. The most striking aspects of Hesketh’s poem are her use of imagery, metaphor and comparison to emphasise the similarities between poetry and painting. Her vivid and colourful descriptions reinforce the subject of her poem so that words in poetry are used in much the same way as colours on a canvas, in that they are used to create images in the minds of the audience.

TITLE AND EPIGRAPH

The poem opens with a two-line **epigraph** that reads: ‘A poem is a painting that is not seen; / A painting is a poem that is not heard’. Immediately, the subject of the poem and the comparisons it draws are made clear. The speaker is emphasising the similarities and relationship between these two different art forms. The speaker suggests that poetry and painting are essentially the same form, in that they create images for the audience — the difference between the two is the way in which these images are created, or the medium through which they are expressed. The epigraph suggests that the speaker is in some way trying to define the meaning of poetry, whether simply for him- or herself or for a larger audience.

The epigraph recalls a quotation from artist and inventor, Leonardo da Vinci, who once wrote: ‘Painting is poetry which is seen and not heard, and poetry is a painting which is heard but not seen’ (*The Paragone*, 1651).

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A TALE OF TWO PAINTINGS

The **first two lines** of the poem respond to the 'definition' of poetry suggested by the epigraph. The speaker reinforces this definition by declaring that poetry is 'A painting in the mind' (line 2). Once again, the similarities between the two art forms are emphasised, suggesting that although both create images, they use different mediums of expression to do so. The speaker suggests that while the images created by the words of a poem may not be tangible or physically visible, as those created by paintings are, they are nonetheless visible in the mind of the audience and the poet. Poets use a pen, rather than the artist's 'palette and brush' (line 3), to turn 'words into images' (line 4), suggesting the power of words to convey the images in the mind of the poet to the imagination of the audience.

In **line 5**, the speaker extends this comparison between the tools of the artist and the tools of a poet. The speaker uses a metaphor here to liken an artist's palette knife, a blunt tool used to mix and apply paints, to the mind of the poet. Just as the artist uses a palette knife to create and apply the most vivid colours to a canvas, so does a poet use his mind to find the correct 'mix' of words that 'sharpens' (line 5) the poetic image being created.

In the remainder of the **first stanza**, the speaker actually enacts the subject of the poem, by using words to 'paint' or create images for the audience. The speaker achieves this by describing the paintings of two famous artists: Vincent van Gogh and Edgar Degas.

The two paintings the speaker describes are not specifically identified: their subjects are common depictions or themes of the two painters. The **van Gogh** painting is described as portraying 'savage rocks' (line 6) and 'twisting trees' (line 7), a description which could be applied to many of his vivid, dramatically distorted natural landscapes. **Degas**, meanwhile, is famed for his dozens of paintings of graceful ballet dancers (line 11) in the midst of dancing, and is noted for his skill in depicting 'movement's grace' (line 9).

By using rich, vivid descriptions to refer to familiar artwork by famed artists, the speaker is actually enacting the similarities between poetry and painting that are the subject of the poem as a whole. The highly expressive and colourful diction of these lines evokes very vivid images in the imaginations of the audience — images which will be identified as familiar as the speaker reveals the names of the artists only *after* describing their paintings. The speaker suggests that poetry creates images in the minds of the audience, and by describing these paintings, the speaker proves the point by doing just that: creating images with words. The power of these words to create a vast range of images is emphasised by the stark contrast between the descriptions of these two paintings: one is dark, twisted and forbidding, while the other is ethereal, beautiful and enchanting.

IMAGINATION BRINGS ART TO LIFE

A 'twist' or surprising conclusion is contained in the **second stanza**. While the first stanza is dedicated to describing the power of words and paints in creating vivid and potent images, the second stanza undercuts this suggestion of power, by declaring that these images 'are fixed' (line 14). The speaker declares that 'words on the page' (line 12) and 'paint on a canvas' (line 13) are in fact limited; what really gives life and power to the images they create is the imagination. The

i

Vincent van Gogh (1853 – 1890) was a Dutch post-Impressionist painter, who was little-known during his lifetime but later celebrated as one of the most influential figures in 20th century art. Many of his most famous paintings depict natural landscapes, trees, flowers and wheat fields.

i

Edgar Degas (1834 – 1917) was a French artist regarded as one of the founders of Impressionism. He is acclaimed for his mastery in depicting movement, particularly dancing – over half of his works depict dancers – and for his complex portraiture of female nudes.

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The Olive Trees by Vincent van Gogh.



Rehearsal on Stage by Edgar Degas.

speaker uses the word 'quickened' (line 16) to describe this process of coming to life, a word which evokes two meanings. To 'quicken' can mean to hasten or accelerate, which is suggestive of the life or movement given to artistic description by the imagination of the artist or audience. 'Quicken' also means to enliven, and is used in a more archaic form to refer to the first signs of life felt in the womb of an expectant mother. These meanings suggest that art is given life by the imagination. The speaker says that this process of art coming to life occurs 'in the spaces between' (line 15), referring to what is *not* said or depicted in a poem or painting. Read literally, this refers to the blank spaces between lines of poetry. The speaker is suggesting the importance of the role of the audience here: it is up to each individual to fill those blank spaces with his or her own imagination, to bring his or her own creativity and experiences to his or her appreciation of art in order to bring it to life. Without this kind of engagement with the audience, a work of art – whether it is a poem or a painting – remains 'fixed' (line 14) and lifeless. This assertion of the importance of personal, subjective experience is typical of Postmodern philosophy.

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POETIC DEVICES

As noted previously, the speaker frequently makes use of comparison and **metaphor** to emphasise the similarities between the art forms of poetry and painting. A painter’s brush or palette knife is compared with the mind of a poet, for example, as both are the tools with which images are created (line 5).

This poem is an example of **ekphrasis**, or the graphic description of a work of art using words. Ekphrasis is intended to bring the subject into the mind’s eye of the reader, and is evident in this poem in the descriptions of the paintings by van Gogh and Degas. Usually employed to praise rather than criticise a work of art, ekphrasis often addresses an image, makes it speak in turn, interprets the image or describes the experience of viewing the image.

Hesketh has made use of the **free verse** form here: there is no strict or structured rhythm, metre or rhyme scheme, and her stanzas are irregular in length. The lack of a formal structure reflects the freedom of the artist or poet, and the irregular line lengths can be seen as reflecting the movement of brush strokes on a canvas.

? QUESTIONS

1. Explain the function of an epigraph, referring to the poem as an example to illustrate your answer. (4)

2. Why would Hesketh describe poetry as something that is ‘heard’ in the epigraph, rather than something that is read? (3)

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3. Identify the punctuation mark used at the end of the first line of the epigraph, and explain its function in this context. (3)

4. What poetic device is used in the first two lines of the poem ('That's what poetry is— / A painting in the mind'), and what meaning is implied here? (3)

5. Identify the Figure of Speech in the phrase 'twisting trees' (line 7) and comment on its effectiveness. (3)

6. Why does the speaker not choose specific paintings to describe in the first stanza, and what effect is created by revealing the names of the famous painters only after the descriptions of the paintings associated with them? (5)

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13. In your own words, describe how the typography or 'look', as well as the rhythm and rhyme scheme, of the poem reinforces its subject. (4)

14. Consider the following poem "The Starry Night" by Postmodern poet Anne Sexton, which also takes as its subject a painting by Vincent van Gogh. By referring to both this poem and Hesketh's as illustrative examples, provide a definition for the term 'ekphrasis', showing how each poet uses art to explore her particular themes. (7)

"THE STARRY NIGHT" — ANNE SEXTON (1928 – 1974)

The town does not exist 1

except where one black-haired tree slips
up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.

The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars. 5

Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die.

It moves. They are all alive.
Even the moon bulges in its orange irons
to push children, like a god, from its eye.

The old unseen serpent swallows up the stars. 10

Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die:

UNSEEN POEMS

“THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH WITH US” — WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770 – 1850)

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;—

Little we see in Nature that is ours;

We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
5

The winds that will be howling at all hours,

And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;

For this, for everything, we are out of tune;

It moves us not. Great God! I'd rather be

A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
10

So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,

Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;

Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;

Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

? QUESTIONS

1. Identify the form of Wordsworth’s poem, and explain how you were able to do so. (4)

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2. Provide a definition for the term 'volta', using the poem to illustrate your answer. (3)

3. In your own words, paraphrase the speaker's argument in the poem. (2)

4. Identify and explain the Figure of Speech in the phrase 'sordid boon' (line 4). (2)

5. What is meant by a 'creed outworn' (line 10)? (1)

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6. Consider the following explanations of the mythological figures to whom Wordsworth makes reference in the poem ('Proteus' [line 13] and 'Triton' [line 14]):

Proteus is the god of the sea in Greek mythology, who had the ability to change his shape at will. **Triton** is also a figure from Greek mythology, and is the messenger of the sea. He controlled the waves by blowing on his conch shell horn. Both Proteus and Triton have strong connections to the powerful forces of nature and Pagan religion.

Using the above explanation to inform your answer, explain why the speaker refers to Proteus and Triton in the final lines of the poem. (3)

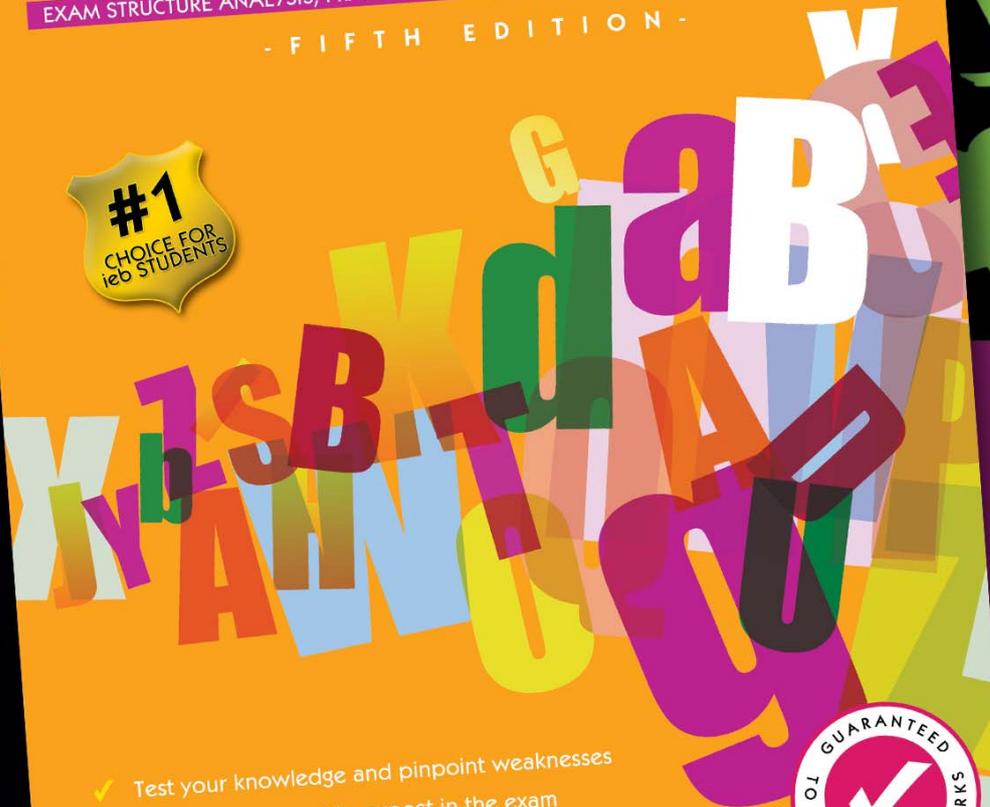
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