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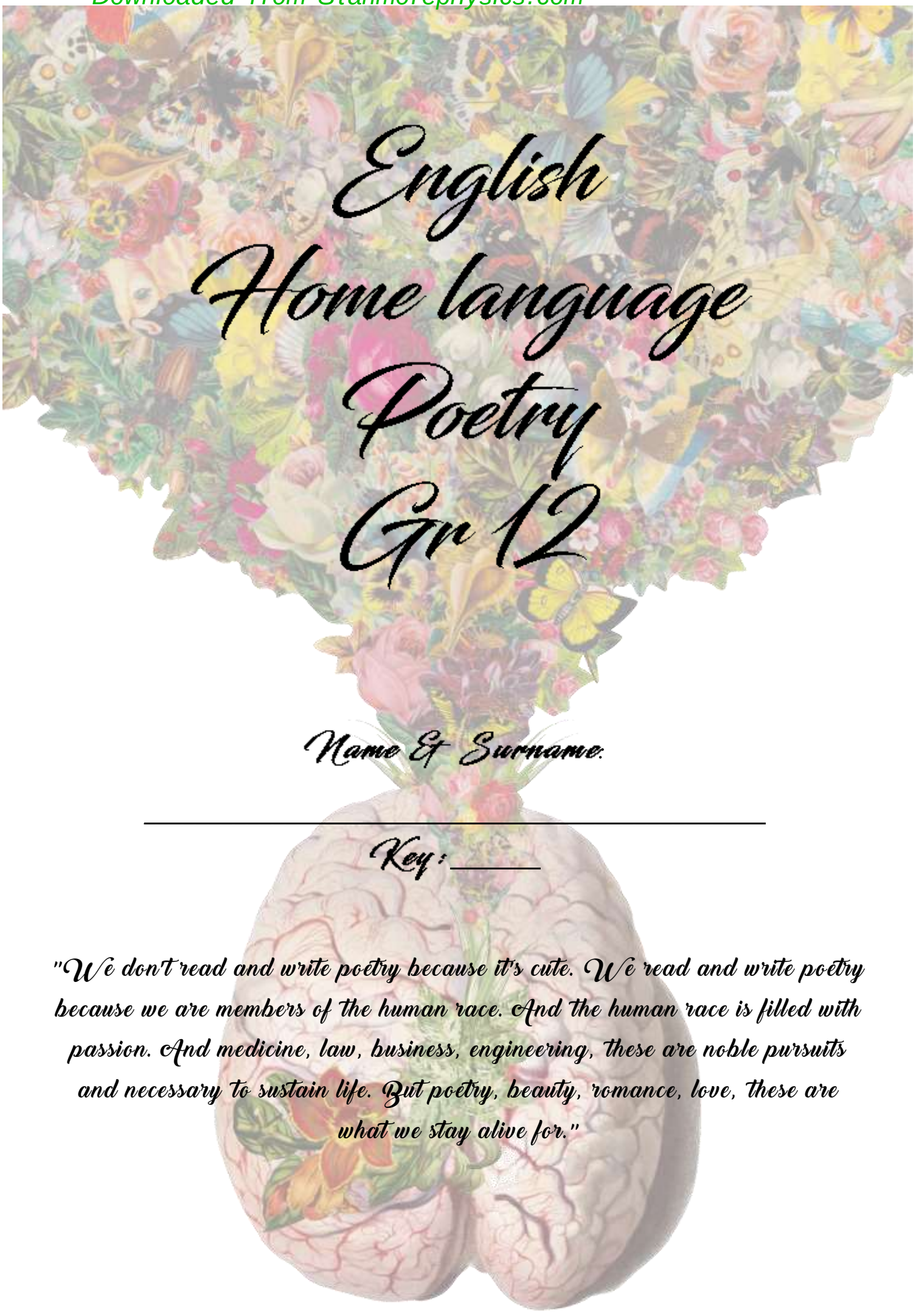


English Home language Poetry Gr 12

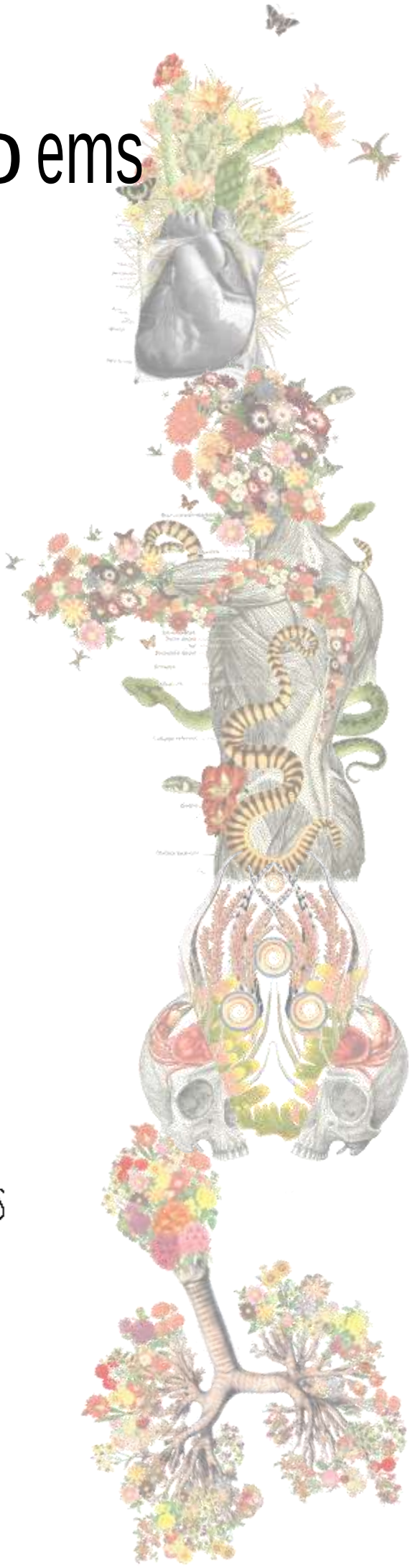
Name & Surname:

_____

Key: _____

"We don't read and write poetry because it's cute. We read and write poetry because we are members of the human race. And the human race is filled with passion. And medicine, law, business, engineering, these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love, these are what we stay alive for."

Prescribed Poems



FIRST TERM

REMEMBER – CHRISTINA ROSETTI

FIRST DAY AFTER THE WAR– MAZISI KUNENE

THE ZULU GIRL – ROY CAMPBELL

MOTHO KE MOTHO KA – JEREMY CRONIN

SECOND TERM

FUNERAL BLUES – WYSTAN HUGH AUDEN

A HARD FROST – CECIL DAY-LEWIS

AN AFRICA THUNDERSTORM - DAVID RUBADIRI

AN AFRICAN ELEGY – BEN OKRI

THIRD TERM

SOMEWHERE I HAVE NEVER TRAVELLED – E. E. CUMMINGS

THE GARDEN OF LOVE – WILLIAM BLAKE

FELIX RANDAL – GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

VULTURES – CHINUA ACHEBE

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Remember

Christina Rosetti (1830–1894)

Victorian Poet

GLOSSARY

Vestige — remnant

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
Mournful then Cheerful

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
Sad then peaceful

Theme:
Death, remembrance, relinquishment, forgiveness.

It's a command/order. Summarizes the poems major theme—remembrance. Woman is thinking about her death+ doesn't want her beloved to forget her. This poem starts off depressing with sad content but then becomes a poem that celebrates life. Remembrance—a way of keeping someone metaphorically alive.

FORM

Petrarchan/Italian Sonnet (14 lines)
Rhyme Scheme: ABBA / ABBA / CDD / ECE

Elegiac

Sound Devices
Long syllables force a slow, mournful reading of the sonnet.

Contrasted by the pace of L 9 & 13 which is more upbeat + positive.

Anaphora: 'remember'

Juxtaposed

1 Remember me when I am gone away,

2 Gone far away into the silent land;

Euphemisms/Metaphor:
'gone away' death
'silent land' afterlife

3 When you can no more hold me by the hand,

4 Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.

Metaphor for death

5 Remember me when no more day by day

6 You tell me of our future that you plann'd:

Physical presence + life
Death eliminates
Not forever so death seems less permanent

Ambiguity

7 Only remember me; you understand

8 It will be late to counsel then or pray.

Octave: Looks back and clings to memories (memories + remembering)

'you' + 'our' - addressing a loved one—letter written after their death

9 Yet if you should forget me for a while

Tone shift L 9
Finds a way to move forward

10 And afterwards remember, do not grieve:

11 For if the darkness and corruption leave

Leftover
Life/defies death

Sickness

12 A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,

13 Better by far you should forget and smile

14 Than that you should remember and be sad.

Sestet: seeks to find a way forward (forgetting + moving forward)

Focuses on memories of moments spent together

She deals with being forgotten as her lover will remain happy. Change of heart symbolizes speaker's love. She sacrifices her memory-metaphorically kills herself.

Permission to let go; memories and sorrow results in a smile which shows the speaker lives positively after the passing

Remember – Christina Rossetti

1) Provide a different euphemism that Rossetti could have used in place of 'gone away' (line 1).
2) Think of a euphemism that is commonly used in modern life to substitute for Rossetti's 'silent land' (line 2). Explore the connotation of the expression.
3) Line 4 seems to suggest that the speaker is unable to make up her mind. What underlying emotion might cause her to behave this way?
4) Consider the poets choice of word 'corruption' in line 11. What meaning do you think is intended in this context.
5) Which line of the poem shows that the couple expected to share many years of life together?
6) What does 'to counsel' (line 8) mean in the context of the poem?
7) What can you infer about the character of the speakers beloved? Support your answer with evidence from the poem.
8) How does the form of the poem contribute to its content?
9) Which of the following descriptions fits the speaker 'egocentric', 'self-sacrificing' or 'thoughtful'? Use evidence from the poem to motivate your choice.

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First Day After the War

Mazisi Kunene (1930–2006)

Political/Activist/Protest

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

Glossary
Coiling — form spirals
Ululating — wailing/howling

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
Energetic

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
Joyful

Theme:
Triumphs over oppression

Form:
Free verse
Repetitive form of the line structure (l12-15)
Implying the overwhelming joy prompted an unrestrained physical response and people responded impulsively

Poetic Devices
Simple/effective diction to capture the scene adds spontaneous nature of excitement displayed—actions speak for themselves

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

Begins with reference to songs

creates an image of contained optimism + hope. Viewers aren't sure to believe what the light may indicate.

This uncertainty in L4 shows hesitation until the truth emerges in L5 + the realisation sets in.

Onomatopoeia

Anaphora: Poem lists no. of ways people celebrate the end of apartheid. Variety of actions & jubilation L12-15

people's enthusiasm competing with nature's music

Alliteration: alerts the reader to the significant moment while this device in the final line lends the ancestors renewed stature as they are 'travelling tall' in response to the event.

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First Day After the War– Mazisi Kunene

1) Which senses does Kunene use in this poem?
2) Think about the connotations of the word 'coiling' (line 3). Do you think it is intended to be understood as a positive image in this context?
3) Consider the pronoun 'her' in line 4. How could this be interpreted in an abstract way?
4) How does Kunene convey the joy of the time?
5) What clues suggest the rural setting of the poem? Quote from the poem to support your answer.
6) Why do you think the people 'ran to the open space' (line 9)?
7) Discuss the possible literal and figurative meanings of the 'footprints' (line 4) and the 'young blades' (line 3).
8) What does the expression 'shook up' (line 12) mean?
9) How do you interpret it in this context?
10) Who might the 'old man' (line 12) be?
11) Critically comment on the effectiveness of the final line of Kunene's poem.

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The Zulu Girl

Roy Campbell (1901–1957)

Modern/South African Poet

GLOSSARY

Acres — remnant
Smoulder — burn slowly w/o flames
Hoe — remnant
Prowl — remnant
Languor's — tenderness
Imbibes — absorb/soak up
Unquenched — unsatisfied
Unsmotherable — inextinguishable/cant put out
Ferocity — fierceness
Looms — rises before

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
Serious

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
Foreboding

Setting: Description of a hot landscape where labourers work. Simply an observation of a Zulu woman feeding her child. Closer it becomes clear it's about oppression of women.

Theme: Triumph over exploitation/pathetic recreation of hardship of endurance of SA people

Form:
Regulated form
5 stanzas with 4 lines with same rhyme pattern= 5 quatrains
Stanzas relate because of pattern
Rhyme scheme: ABAB / CDCD / EFFE / GHGH / IJIJ

Sympathy/admiration

Epithet—adjectives of similar meaning

Not a wife—lost tradition to modern world

1 When in the sun the hot red acres smoulder
2 Down where the sweating gang its labour plies
3 A girl flings down her hoe, and from her shoulder
4 Unslings her child tormented by flies.

Gang = people instead of individuals/no identity/forced to work/no individuality/identity.

Girl flings her hoe to feed her child= rebellious act
Mass production vs. reproduction responsibilities.

Malnourished

5 She takes him to a ring of shadow pooled
6 By the thorn-tree: purpled with the blood of ticks,
7 While her sharp nails, in slow caresses ruled
8 Prowl through his hair with sharp electric clicks.

Metaphor: coolness of a shadow = pool

The care that the mother shows for her child: looking for ticks + lice = emphasizes the poor conditions in which they're forced to live.

Metaphor: fierce animal—shows protective nature of mother

Onomatopoeia: hard + sharp sound

Onomatopoeia

9 His sleepy mouth, plugged by the heavy nipple,
10 Tugs like a puppy, grunting as he feels;
11 Through his frail nerves her own deep languor's ripple
12 Like a broad river sighing through the reeds.

Weary/unenthusiastic/hopeless

Woman breastfeeds her child. Plugged—immense hunger: He's hungry + tugs her nipple. How people are viewed:
Puppy=child
Dog=mom
Mom doesn't see her child like this. She feels overwhelming tenderness.

Simile:
L10—innocent/harmless + natural activity
L12—more than nutritional sustenance
Pain + sadness of history– great river

Paradox: he drinks milk/she drinks from the river

13 Yet in that drowsy stream his flesh imbibes
14 And old unquenched, unsmotherable heat-
15 The curbed ferocity of beaten tribes,
16 The sullen dignity of their defeat.

Personification—sighing—groaning/tired after hard work.

Metaphor: unstoppable African spirit. Underlying message = child is symbol of Zulu nation
L14—refers to fierce warriors of Zulu tribe. Strength of Zulu people still exist despite oppression.

Alliteration: forceful pattern L15-16

Life has value: important life process

Not alone/abandoned
Tradition of human struggle + survival

Gloomy silence

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

Looking up at her from child eyes
Impressive statuesque—shielding + protecting

Simile: protects all oppressed children. Mother metaphorically becomes a hill that overshadows a whole village. No longer just the mother of the child she represents all the mothers of all the children of the oppressed.

Words relating to heat:
→ Sun
→ Hot
→ Red
→ Smoulder
→ Sweating
→ Unquenched

Land is almost to hot to bear + could burst into flames.

Not final—Day of reckoning is inevitable

Cloud that brings the rain that'll lead to a harvest. Metaphor: children of the oppressed will one day reap the harvest of their suffering they'll overcome their oppression with the help from their mothers like the 'Zulu Girl' in the poem.

Personification: revolution/freedom

Men = culture
Women = Nature

The Zulu Girl – Roy Campbell

1) Where is the setting of the poem?
2) What is the job that the girl is doing?
3) What does the word 'flings' (line 3) suggest about her attitude?
4) What are the connotations of 'prowl' (line 8)?
5) Identify the comparisons used in the third stanza.
6) What is being compared to what?
7) Are these comparisons effective?
8) Which word in the fourth stanza alerts the reader to a change in mood?
9) What does the inclusion of the colour 'red' in line 1 tell us about the scene?
10) List all the words in the poem that suggest heat, and provide short definition of each of them.
11) What is your understanding of 'curbed ferocity', and who are the 'beaten tribes' (line 15)?
12) Explain what the child 'imbibes' (line 13) on both a literal and figurative level.
13) Explore how the poet uses tone in the poem. Note how and where it changes over the course of the poem, and quote from the poem to give substance to your response.

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Motho ke Motho ka Batho Babang (A Person is a Person Because of Other People)

Jeremy Cronin (1949-)
Political/Activist/Protest

Poem captures scene of one prisoner communicating with another discreetly under watchful eye of a warder. Cleverness shown maintaining human contact communicating with sign language in defiance of the deprivation of imprisonment. Illustrates truth about the human condition. Cruelty of isolation as a form of punishment and favoured treatment of political prisoners

Glossary
Wat maak hy daar?—what is he doing there?
Baas—boss
Ubuntu—humanity towards others/showing compassion towards people

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
Intimate

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
Thoughtful

Theme:
Resistance
Communication

Form:
Visual layout—narrative presented on the left
Translation in brackets

Sound Devices:
Ironic—w/o any formal/ sound devices centred on sound + lack of it.

Poetic Devices:
Punctuation + typography (the way it's printed/set-out) to convey the poet's message
Use of italics for different purposes as well as the use of dashes. The use of italics in line 20 + 22 indicate direct speech.
Use of present tense – content feels immediate
Last stages—feels as if we're sharing the cell + watching signals with the speaker.

1 By holding my mirror out of the window I see
2 Clear to the end of the passage.
3 There's a person down there.
4 A prisoner polishing a doorhandle.

Time-wasting chores

5 In the mirror I see him see
6 My face in the mirror,
7 I see the fingertips of his free hand
8 Bunch together, as if to make
9 An object the size of a badge
10 Which travels up to his forehead
11 The place of an imaginary cap.

Link to guard

12 (This means: A warder.)

Translation in brackets
Format of this translation/explanation is varied as the poem progresses
1st insertion announces itself as an explanation
2nd L15
3rd L19 give explanations directly

13 Two fingers are extended in a vee
14 And wiggle like two antennae.
15 (He's being watched.)
16 A finger of his free hand makes a watch-hand's arc
17 On the wrist of his polishing arm without
18 Disrupting the slow-slow rhythm of his work.
19 (Later. Maybe, later we can speak.)
20 *Hey! Wat maak jy daar?*

Italics—indicate direct speech

21 –a voice from around the corner.
22 *No. Just polishing baas.*
23 He turns his back to me, now watch
24 His free hand, the talkative one,

Personified: commenting on sound by emphasizing its absence.

25 Slips quietly behind
26 *–Strength brother, it says,*
27 In my mirror,
28 A black fist.

Most effective that L26 also written this way as the prisoners are communicating so effectively the may as well use direct speech.

Last insertions lose the brackets as if the reader has now learned the poem's language + no longer needs them

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Motho ke Motho ka – Jeremy Cronin

1) How many languages are used in this poem? Name them.
2) What is the term given to the African philosophy of the title?
3) Replicate the hand-signals described in the poem.
4) Notice Cronin's use of brackets, italics and line arrangement to describe the incident. How does this help the reader to understand the poem?
5) Provide and explanation for the prisoners use of the mirror.
6) Find evidence in the poem that the prisoners are kept occupied with time-wasting chores.
7) Explain the link between an 'imaginary cap' (line 11) and a guard
8) Discuss Cronin's use of different languages in the poem.
9) The poem is written in an informal style. How does the style contribute to the meaning of the poem?
10) This poem illustrates truths about the human condition. Explore how the poem shows the cruelty of isolation as a form of punishment, and why it was a favoured treatment of political prisoners.
11) Assess whether the poem is an appropriate demonstration of the concept Ubuntu.

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Funeral Blues

Wystan Hugh Auden (1907–1973)

Modern/Political Poet

Most of his poems focus on social ills + concern with the working of the mind.

Glossary

Muffled—wrapped to deaden the sound
Crepe—light crinkled fabric
Dismantle—take apart
Blues—American word for a sad song
Lament—to express grief/ mourn

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
Harsh/Serious

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
Sadness/empathy

Theme: Death + grief
Speaker wants the world to come to an end

Form:
Elegiac: resembling an elegy (expressing sorrow)
4 quatrains (4 stanzas of 4 lines)
Rhyme scheme: AABB/CCDD/ EEFF/GGHH
Iambic pentameter

Expression of grief and heartache.
He describes his pain and links his overwhelming emotion of despair to world around him.

Reference to 'clocks'; 'telephone'; 'dog' 'piano's' examines the mourner's reaction to his immediate domestic surroundings, the lens of loss.

Poem then expands the surroundings to the public arena with 'aeroplane' 'doves' 'traffic policemen'

L8 finally ends in the universal sphere of 'stars' 'moon' 'sun' 'ocean' 'wood'

3rd stanza describes their relationship + gives a personal account of what the dead man meant to the speaker

Stanzas Contrasting Themes
Public vs. private (Stanza 1+2)
Intimate vs. Distant (Stanza 3+4)

Imperatives: pronouncement—someone has died

Private

1 Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,

Hyperbole: exaggeration

Harsh comments
speaker is forceful + angry
Time + communication stopped

2 Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,

3 Silence the pianos and with muffled drum

Mourners walking carrying the coffin

4 Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

No problem—extending it to pianos
Not opposed to the drum—blues music—solemn– relates to the title

Personifcation

Public

5 Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead

To commemorate grief—contradicts stanza 1

6 Scribbling on the sky the message 'He is Dead'.

No name (privacy)

7 Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public doves,

Hyperbole

8 Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

More demands: wants pigeons to be dressed well–acknowledgement of passing

Metaphor-Compass

Intimate

9 He was my North, my South, my East and West,

This person gave the speaker direction, filled his day and it was a joy conversing with him.

10 My working week and my Sunday rest,

Metaphor-Calendar

11 My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;

Metaphor-Time

Broken up, wants the world to feel the same. It's not important world-wide but it is to him.

12 I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

Harsh—loved ones will die/no love lasts

Hyperbole

Distant

13 The stars are not wanted now; put out every one,

14 Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun,

More depressed—his grief is so extreme, it affects the way he sees the cosmos

Forrest

15 Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood;

No wonders of nature will make console him

16 For nothing now can ever come to any good.

Romantic images—are painful
He wants to blot out everything except mourning

Hyperbole

Totally hopeless

Elegy—usually has some hope for the future/small moment of optimism
Not with this poem, there is no light at the end of the tunnel.

Funeral Blues – Wystan Hugh Auden

1) Notice the plea for certain actions to take place in the first stanza.
2) Why would someone want to 'stop all the clocks' (line 1)?
3) Identify all the references to sound.
4) Why would the speaker want these sounds to stop?
5) Why do you think capital letters have been used in 'He is Dead' (line 6)?
6) Consider the implications of the description 'He was my North, my South, my East and West' (line 9).
7) Link the verbs in the final stanza to their objects: 'out out' (line 13), 'pack up', 'dismantle' (line 14), 'Pour away' and 'sweep' (line 15). In what way are all these verbs appropriate?
8) State the possible meanings of the word 'Blues' in the title, and relate this to the poem itself.
9) Identify the color contrast found in the second stanza, and show how this reflects the speaker's mood.
10) Discuss the nature of the relationship described in the third stanza, and comment on how this information is conveyed.
11) Critically evaluate the impact of this poem as an expression of loss and grief. Support your response with evidence from the poem.

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A Hard Frost

Cecil Day-Lewis (1904 – 1972)

Romantic/Modern

Describes the appearance of a hard frost that formed overnight. Patterns of frost form on glass + how it sparkles in morning sunlight

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
Whimsical

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
Mesmerising

<u>Glossary</u>
Changeling — something exchanged secretly
Precocious — developed earlier than usual
Catkin— spiky flower
Maydrift — remnant
Elms — remnant
Amorphous — w/o a form
Mockery — absurd imitation
Disconsolate — w/o comfort/ unhappily
Aconite — flower similar to buttercup
Snowdrop — drooping white flower
Flounce — impatient movement
Filigree — ornamental + delicate
Clods — lumps of earth
Unclenches — loosens

Theme:
Focuses on the tension between appearance + reality

Form:
2 stanzas—similar length
No traditional rhyme scheme + lines + stanza arrangement set up to support content

<u>Sound Devices</u>
No overt reference to sound.

1st Stanza—describes the scene

1 A frost came in the night and stole my world
2 And left this changeling for it - a precocious
3 Image of spring, too brilliant to be true:
4 White lilac on the window-pane, each grass-blade
5 Furred like a catkin, maydrift loading the hedge.
6 The elms behind the house are elms no longer
7 But blossomers in crystal, stems of the mist
8 That hangs yet in the valley below, amorphous
9 As the blind tissue whence creation formed.

2nd Stanza—comments on the scene + exposes the truth of the 1st stanza

10 The sun looks out and the fields blaze with diamonds
11 Mockery spring, to lend this bridal gear
12 For a few hours to a raw country maid,
13 Then leave her all disconsolate with old fairings
14 Of aconite and snowdrop! No, not here
15 Amid this flounce and filigree of death
16 Is the real transformation scene in progress,
17 But deep below where frost
18 Worrying the stiff clods unclenches their
19 Grip on the seed and lets
20 the future breathe.

Speaker comments on how the world's appearance has been altered by a layer of frost—so sudden it almost seems spring-like (opposite in fact)

Glitter + sparkle of reflected frost creates a bright image but the speaker admits this is too 'brilliant to be true'.

Extended metaphor: compare the image of frost on a window to different features of spring.

Imagery suggests spring flowers + freshness of new growth 'maydrift'.

L7 despite the glittering beauty the appearance is deceiving. Accuses the frost of theft—stolen away expected scene + replace it with fake ... frost=given magical mystical powers in its ability to accomplish this transformation.

Oppose to this fake appearance of spring the 'real' spring is beginning to make itself felt unnoticeably underground

The heavy coating of frost would blanket the world in sharp silence + the brittle crispiness of this is implied in the mention of 'crystal' 'diamonds' L7+10

Metaphor: comparing the white frost blanket to a wedding dress. contains quite a disapproving tone.

The wedding dress is being lent to a country maid for a few hours but she will be left terribly sad when she has to return it + resume her usual boring appearance.

Alliteration: suggests the disapproving tone of the speaker.

Personification: image of a contest of strength taking place beneath the ground where the earth is surrendering its frozen hold to the power of spring. This allows the seeds the chance to sprout and break out of the soil to promise future life to go.

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A Hard Frost – Cecil Day-Lewis

1) What does the use of 'brilliant' (line 3) mean in this context?
2) How has the windowpane (line 4) been transformed?
3) Describe the altered appearance of the elm trees in your own words.
4) In what way is this scene a 'mockery' (line 11)?
5) From the context, deduce what the word 'fairings' (line 13) probably means.
6) Explain the comparison of frost to thief, used in the first line of the poem.
7) Name the plants mentioned in the first stanza that are used to describe this 'spring' scene.
8) Comment on the effect of the figure of speech used in the lines 11-14.
9) Explore how the poet uses punctuation to convey emotion in the poem.
10) Critically evaluate the poetic technique of the extended metaphor, and how it is used in this poem. How effective is it?
11) What might be the potential risks of using this technique? Use evidence from the poem to formulate your response.

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An Africa Thunderstorm

David Rubadiri (1930–)

Post-modern/colonial/African Poet

Glossary
Sinister— evil/menacing
Din — loud noise
Jaggered— pointy
Pelting— rain falling fast + hard

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
Outraged/fierce

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
Chaos/distressed

Theme:
Natural disaster. Overcoming oppression. Chaos.

Form:
Two parts which divide the content into the general and the specific.

Wind builds up 4 times (4 interwoven stanzas) like a main act in a plot.

The irregular no. of words on a line, with many single-word lines, captures the unpredictable progress of the wind and the accompanying clouds. This technique is also evident in the second part of the poem, where the frantic movement of the village women as they 'Dart about/In and out/Madly' (lines 22- 24) is physically demonstrated by the line divisions.

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

the setting is in Africa.

Metaphor

1 From the west → Origin of storm identified from the west
2 Clouds come hurrying with the wind
3 Turning sharply — Adjectival connotations
4 Here and there → Juxtaposition
5 Like a plague of locusts → Simile—swarming in
6 Whirling, — Onomatopoeia
7 Tossing up things on its tail
8 Like a madman chasing nothing. → Simile — Juxtaposition

Underlining the appearance and potentially destructive nature of the storm.

Makes room for transition of clouds as a passenger on wings of wind

stanzas one and two, describes the storm as it gathers momentum

9 Pregnant clouds → Personification
10 Ride stately on its back,
11 Gathering to perch on hills
12 Like sinister dark wings; → Simile—Evil archetype
13 The wind whistles by → Onomatopoeia
14 And trees bend to let it pass.

L9 comparing the wind to a monster thrashing its tail about, emphasises the unpredictable nature of the storm, which adds to its danger.

The description of the clouds (lines 12-13) makes the clouds reminiscent of some bird of prey waiting for the opportune moment to strike.

Metaphor

The path of the storm has not been diminished by the trees. In fact, the trees give way to allow it to progress unhindered.

third stanza describes its impact on human existence.

15 In the village
16 Screams of delighted children,
17 Toss and turn
18 In the din of the whirling wind, → Alliteration + Assonance
19 Women,
20 Babies clinging on their backs
21 Dart about
22 In and out
23 Madly;
24 The wind whistles by
25 Whilst trees bend to let it pass.

Mortal man hurried by onrush of wind.

The 3rd stanza continues in its depiction of noise and movement as villagers anticipate the storm's arrival. We notice how the children react with 'Screams' (line 17) of delight, possibly because of the thrill of potential danger. The women hurriedly attempt to prepare for the storm, although it seems that their efforts may be pointless as the 'Clothes wave like tattered flags' (line 27), completely at the mercy of the wind.

Repetition L 14-15 + 25-26
Almost exactly the same; 'And' has been replaced with 'Whilst'.

26 Clothes wave like tattered flags → Simile
27 Flying off
28 To expose dangling breasts → Female anatomy exposes prize possession of the woman
29 As jagged blinding flashes
30 Rumble, tremble and crack → Onomatopoeia: Cacophony
31 Amidst the smell of fired smoke
32 And the pelting march of the storm. → Personification

The poem ends with the storm breaking, but stops before it actually hits. The progress of the 'pelting march of the storm' (line 33) tells the reader that this storm cannot be stopped and will be a mighty one.

An Africa Thunderstorm - David Rubadiri

1) How does the word 'African' in the title affect your expectations of the content of the poem?
2) Count the number of participles (words ending in '-ing') used in line 1-9.
3) What effect does this have n the description of the scene.
4) What image does the line 'Like a madman chasing nothing' (line 9) produce?
5) Consider the connotations of the words 'pregnant' and 'stately' in the lines 'Pregnant clouds/ Ride stately on its back' (lines 10-11).
6) Has the full ferocity of the storm arrived by the end of the poem? Explain your answer.
7) Compare the different reactions of the children and the adults in the village to the approaching storm.
8) Quote an image from the poem that suggests the danger and destructive qualities of the coming storm.
9) Contrast the different ways in which the wind and the clouds in the storm build up.
10) Does the speaker portray these elements as equally powerful?
11) Do their roles change as the storm approaches? Discuss fully, supporting your answer with evidence from the poem.
12) Comment on how the form of this poem enhances its content. Note the structure of the stanzas and lines, particularly.
13) Do you think the poem ends effectively? Should the speaker not have described the impact of the storm on the people and the village, or the storms aftermath? Evaluate the poet's intentions in this poem, and say whether you believe they were effectively realized or not.

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An African Elegy

Ben Okri (1959–)

Post-modern/colonial/African Poet

Glossary
Elegy — mournful poem focuses on death
Shalt — shall/will do
Miracles — acts of God
Destiny — inescapable fate

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
Not mournful reflective + thoughtful

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
Hopeful

Understanding:
The speaker asks the unique African spirit for answers to life's paradoxes. He explores the miracle of what being African means to him: the endurance for suffering, the ability to find joy and beauty in the midst of pain, a spiritual union with nature's bounty, and an irrepressible sense of optimism despite all indicators pointing in the opposite direction. The speaker seems to believe that the tendency to hope and the sensitivity to recognise wonder is a shared trait of Africa's people.

Theme:
One who forgets suffering no longer suffers. Poverty, pain, hope, miracles, destiny, time.

Stages:
1. Grief
2. Sorrow
3. Praise

Form:
Stanza of 5 lines
Regular form with distinct pattern
Variety of line lengths
Short lines—isolated from enclosing lines + tend to stand out for being short
Line breaks add an additional dimension to the interpretation of the poem—promotes multiple interpretations

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

Language Devices:
The poet's diction reflects his interest in African mysticism. He uses words that have religious overtones. He implies that all Africans are able to bear poverty and hardship because they 'are the miracles that Cod made' (line 1).

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

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

11 And that we never curse the air when it is warm
12 Or the fruit when it tastes so good
13 Or the lights that bounce gently on the waters?
14 We bless things even in our pain.
15 We bless them in silence.

16 That is why our music is so sweet.
17 It makes the air remember.
18 There are secret miracles at work
19 That only Time will bring forth.
20 I too have heard the dead singing.

21 And they tell me that
22 This life is good
23 They tell me to live it gently
24 With fire, and always with hope.
25 There is wonder here

26 And there is surprise
27 In everything the unseen moves.
28 The ocean is full of songs.
29 The sky is not an enemy.
30 Destiny is our friend.

Metaphor
Oxymoron: Bitter but optimis-
'We' + 'our' African culture
Assonance
Sensory imagery
contrast
Personification
Metaphor
Personification
Optimistic
Passion
Metaphor

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An African Elegy – Ben Okri

1) What are your expectations of the poem after reading the title?
2) Pick out words that are positive in the first stanza, and then identify negative ones.
3) What is the overall effect, positive or negative?
4) What is the 'mystery' (line 8) referred to in the second stanza?
5) Why do you think 'Time' (lines 2 & 19) is written with a capital letter?
6) How can the ocean be full of songs (line 28)?
7) Make a list of all the positive things that Okri says about Africa and being African.
8) What do you think the speaker means by the line 'We are precious'? (line 3)
9) Does the speaker respect the dead? What makes you say this?
10) How does the poet connect each negative aspect in the poem with something positive?
11) Explain how one can live life 'gently/with fire' (lines 23-24).
12) Do you think Okri is being overly idealistic, or do you agree with what he is saying about Africa and Africans? Motivate your answer.

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Never gave his poem titles so editors just used the first line.

somewhere i have never travelled

E. E. Cummings (1894 - 1962)

Modern Poet

Unconventional love poem—tries to understand beloved's power over him. Admits her appeal is intangible + difficult to pin-point. Images of nature + concept of travel to develop his ideas. The speaker isn't infatuated nor overcome by throes of violent passion. He believes love is transcendent/a religious conversion/connects us to something bigger/ infinite + ultimately unknowable.

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
Soulful/Captivated

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
Hopeful/mysterious

Glossary
Frail— physically weak
Gesture— Movement made to communicate
Descending— moving downwards
Rendering— causing/making

Theme:
Travel/Man vs. natural world/love/power

Form:
No formal rhyme scheme
5 quatrains (5 stanzas of 4 lines)
Regular 4line stanzas + each deals with a new/ separate point
Last stanza regular rhyme scheme: ABAB

Ideas are simple but the following makes the poem seem complicated:

Diserted syntax
Unusual punctuation
New words/slang

Poetic/Language Devices:
Idea of closing + opening occurs:
'enclose' (L3)
'unclose' (L5)
'closed' (L6)
'open' (L7)
'close' (L9)
'shut' (L10)
'closes + opens' (L17-18)

Uses run-on lines/ enjambment. Ll7 skips over Content brackets to find its objects L8.

Imagery
Similes + vivid personification, capitalization 'Spring' L7 'Rain... small hands' L20

→Man + nature in harmony
→Man as nature
→Women are usually associated with flowers

Natural world:
- Flowers
- Rain
- Seasons

Sound Devices:
Alliteration hard 'c' L15 power to words + draws readers attention
'enclose' L3 echoed by opposite 'unclose' L5 beloveds power—both actions are equally wondrous
Little rhyme used 1st 4 stanzas make use of rhyme in final stanza more noticeable

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

Unexplored place—depths of eyes

Hard to read—this excites the speaker

Personification: windows to the soul

Has power

Paradox: evokes mystery—mysterious power of love

Assonance

5 your slightest look easily will unclose me
6 though i have closed myself as fingers,
7 you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
8 (touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose
9 or if your wish be to close me,i and
10 my life will shut very beautifully,suddenly,
11 as when the heart of this flower imagines
12 the snow carefully everywhere descending;

Simile: balled up fist/put up a wall

Speaker describes himself as a flower

Opens with small glances. She is emotionally closed up.

Personification: Spring—nature goddess

Sensual

He gives her power over the physical world. She has the power to bewilder him

Simile: easily understands him/delicate feelings

Not sad but beautiful.

Simile: closing of emotions

Allusion to winter—unstoppable like seasons

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

Paradox + ironic—weakness vs. godly power

Synaesthesia: when senses mingle

Alliteration

Power = control life + death

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

Extended metaphor—no idea of mysterious power she has over him

Personification: more powerful than a rose. Can get lost in its pattern/ eyes are deep + mysterious. He mesmerized—can't be read.

Personification

somewhere i have never travelled – E. E. Cummings

1) List all the errors or deviations present in the poem. What does the poet make these errors?
2) Think of synonyms foe the word 'frail' (line 3). Find other words from the poem with similar meaning.
3) What would be a more usual word to use in place of 'unclose' (line 5)?
4) What is the effect of the poet's invented word?
5) Identify the irony contained in the phrase 'the power of your intense fragility' (line 14).
6) Consider the theme of travel in the poem. Do you think the poet is referring to a physical journey to a foreign country? If not, what sort of travelling is he talking about?
7) List the elements of nature that are referred to in the poem.
8) Quote the word that tells us that the snow is not willfully destructive.
9) Identify the figure of speech in 'though I have closed myself as fingers' (line 6).
10) Explain how 'fragility' can have 'power' (line 14)
11) Describe the extent and ability of this power.
12) Describe the atmosphere or mood of this poem.
13) How does the poet create this mood?
14) Explore the metaphor of travel as it is used in the poem, and evaluate its effectiveness.
15) Comment critically on Cummings' unusual use of punctuation and sentence structure.

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The Garden of Love

William Blake (1757–1827)

Romantic

Glossary

The Green— public/common park
Shalt — shall/will
Binding— restricting
Briars— thorny branches

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
reverie and scorn indignant

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
despondency

Understanding:
The speaker describes revisiting a place he remembers from his childhood, only to find that it has been taken over by a chapel or church. He is prevented from entering, so he attempts to explore the surrounding garden instead. The place which used to be full of 'sweet flowers' (line 8) has been filled with graves and tombstones instead. additionally, patrolling priests, in dark robes, prevent him from experiencing or reliving his 'joys & desires' (line 12). He rebels against the idea of original sin and believes that love can't be sanctioned by religion.

Theme:
Distortion of Christian belief about future life. 'Falleness' on repression of sexuality + emotions

Form:
3 stanzas of 4 lines
Each focuses on a different issue:
1st– speaker's discovery
2nd– speakers feelings about the building but expresses hope for consolation to be found in the garden
3rd– speakers disappointment that this too has undergone drastic change

End rhymes in first 2 stanzas:
ABCB DEFE

Internal rhymes with 'gowns' and 'rounds'; 'briars' and 'desires'

Allusion—Garden of Eden

Use of punctuation to add emphasis to his content: L1 + 7; 3+5 are capitalised 'special place' 'small church' which underlines the importance of its position to the speaker.

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

symbolises growth, fertility + birth. Public park—playful, imagination + innocence.

Gates shut, not free to act, associated with the loss of lives. Private property 'Thou shall not' enter. Capital letter and full stop highlights L6 making the command forbidding + hostile.

5 And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
6 And Thou shalt not. writ over the door;

Allusion—The Ten Commandments

Institutionalized religion destroyed the garden of love

7 So I turn'd to the Garden of Love,
8 That so many sweet flowers bore.

Tenses= L2 + L8 in the past suggests the passage of time.
Figuratively—this experience amounts to a sudden realisation of what has been in front of the speaker for some time, but he was unable to 'see' the reality clearly before.

Anaphora: 'And' repeated

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

L 11 echoed — members of the church loom large in this place.
Not a positive image/ sinister overtones; black = threatening—act like guards/sentinels to keep out undesirables.

Bleak unproductive landscape of unfilled yearning. Change aura of total unease + misery death now.

Sound Devices:
Rhythm—regular mostly due to steady meter + rhyming. However change in rhyme, pace + rhyme structures of the final two lines draws the readers attention.

Perhaps the speaker suggests that his world is now out of balance with his realisation + this new reality requires a different form of expression.

Various interpretations of the poem:
On one level it is simply a mark of the passage of time, and that as a result of human expansion, an open area of his childhood no longer exists. Speaker is in dismay, yet not particularly surprising.

However religious building that has usurped this land could imply a broader comment on organised religion and its influence on 'innocent' pleasures and freedom.

Diction = simple + straightforward , capturing natural expression of speakers experience. Innuendo is apparent as speaker doesn't express his anger, disappointment/ outrage explicitly, but implies— L10+L12

Contrasts:

- Green vs. Black
- Flowers vs. Graves/Tombstones
- Flowers vs. Thorny Briars
- Playing freely vs. priests doing rounds
- Nature vs. man-made objects
- Growth vs. lifelessness (death)
- Softness/tenderness vs. hardness
- Gentleness vs. pain
- Light vs. dark
- Freedom vs. Restriction

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The Garden of Love —William Blake

1) Why do you think the 'Garden of Love' (line 1) is written with capital letters?
2) Why can the speaker not enter the 'chapel' (lines 3 + 5)?
3) How does the speaker feel about the presence of this chapel?
4) What has replaced the flowers in the 'Garden of Love' (lines 8-9)?
5) What do you understand by the expression 'walking their rounds' (line 11)?
6) How do we know that the speaker had positive memories of the place the poem describes?
7) What does the word 'midst' (line 3) mean in the context of the stanza?
8) The speaker seems to paint a negative picture of what the garden has become. Without changing the 'facts', discuss how a different impression could have been created.
9) Comment on the effectiveness of the description 'binding with briars' (line 12).
10) What view of organised religion could Blake be presenting in this poem? Find evidence in the poem to support your answer.

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Felix Randal

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)

Victorian

Glossary

Farrier — blacksmith shoeing horses
Mould — shape
Rambled — talked aimlessly
Anointed — blessed by a priest
Reprieve — temporary improvement
Ransom — deliverance; being saved
Quenched — stopped
Boisterous — lively
Fettle — trim the horse shoe
Drayhorse — horse pulling a wagon
Pining—to become ill/waste away

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
Detached/matter-of-fact then endearing

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
relief→sympathy→impatience→acceptance→comfort→admiration→ends with a triumphant + fiercely energetic mood

Ministering to Randall's soul, developed a sense of compassion + connection with the dying man. Recalls him being a big fellow = to most physically demanding job—shoeing large horses Reflects on long illness + death of Felix Randal + comments on his own role (as priest) in caring for the dying man. More about Hopkins ministry. Ailments England 1885 cause of death

Theme:
Religion & Nature

Form:
Petrarchan/Italian Sonnet
This sonnet consists of two a-b-b-a rhymed quatrains (the octave) followed by two rhymed c-c-d stanzas making up the sestet.
ABBA / ABBA / CDC / CDC
Each section has a particular function, allowing Hopkins to develop his theme.

Four fatal ailments:
→ Melancholy
→ Phlegm
→ Blood
→ Bile

The octave states the situation and establishes the background leading up to Randal's death.

1 Felix Randal the farrier, O is he dead then? my duty all ended,
→ Reaction to news—neither sorrow/joy

2 Who have watched his mould of man, big-boned and hardy-handsome
→ Doesn't speak of good times—just his greatness diminished

3 Pining, pining, till time when reason rambled in it, and some

4 Fatal four disorders, fleshed there, all contended?
Alliteration
→ Illness related to job—losing shape like a piece of metal

5 Sickness broke him. Impatient, he cursed at first, but mended
→ Physical + spiritual health
Prepared his soul for the afterlife

6 Being anointed and all; though a heavenlier heart began some

7 Months earlier, since I had our sweet reprieve and ransom

8 Tendered to him. Ah well, God rest him all road ever he offended!
→ Object of Hopkins ministry—extreme unction—not focused on death but Hopkins work.

The sestet allows the speaker's emotional state to find voice as he addresses the dead man directly, and expresses his regard for him. His own sense of loss and sorrow is made explicit in this section of the poem.

9 This seeing the sick endears them to us, us too it endears.
→ Significant that the entire stanza is about mutual aspect of relationship

10 My tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears,
→ Connection between them portrays relationship as reciprocal

11 Thy tears that touched my heart, child, Felix, poor Felix Randal;
Alliteration
→ Repetition: as if comforting a distressed child

12 How far from then forethought of, all thy more boisterous years,
→ Life—productive, lively + boisterous
Death—weak, cursing + unlikeable

13 When thou at the random grim forge, powerful amidst peers,

14 Didst fettle for the great grey drayhorse his bright and battering sandal!
Assonance

→ Hopkins own disenchantment with his vocation

Sound Devices:
Poem demands to be read aloud. The rhythm of pauses and flow is made clear by the punctuation and word order.

In the first line, three points are made, separated by the commas and the question mark. The use of alliteration in 'hardy- handsome' (line 2), 'reason rambled' (line 3) and 'Fatal four' (line 4) not only increases the impact of the words due to their sound, but also due to the linking of these words.

The final two lines of the poem create a strong rhythm as the short phrases 'random grim forge', 'powerful amidst peers' (iine 1 3), 'great grey drayhorse' and 'bright and battering sandal' (line 14) balance each other and cumulatively build the image of strength.

Poetic Devices:
A notable feature of this sonnet is the shift in tone. The opening line comes across as matter-of-fact, whereas the sestet provides a stark contrast as the raw feelings of the speaker become clear. The tone changes to one of loss and grief.

Hopkins uses his structure to establish some distinct contrasts. He shows us the strapping healthy Randal who once was 'powerful amidst peers' (line 13) and we can then draw the contrast with the 'pining, pining' (line 3) man who was broken by 'some/Fatal four disorders' (lines 3-4).

A contrast is also provided by describing the spiritual state of Randal who acquires a 'heavenlier heart' (line 6) after time spent with the speaker. This time spent together also causes the development of their relationship from perhaps one of mutual tolerance to a close one where each genuinely cared for the other.

Hopkins' use of compound adjectives like 'hardy-handsome' (line 2) gives his poem a liveliness and freshness. The diction of the last stanza lends power to the content, as the reader can visualise Felix Randal 'at the random grim forge' (line 13) performing impressive physical feats.

Felix Randal —Gerard Manley Hopkins

1) What does a farrier do?
2) Identify the tone of the first line. How is the speaker feeling?
3) What does it mean to 'pine'? what is the effect of the repetition 'pining, pining' (line 3)?
4) What do you think caused the death of Felix Randal? What ailments were common in England in 1885?
5) Explain the reference to 'Being anointed' (line 6).
6) Pick out the words and phrases from lines 9-11 that show the speaker's emotional reaction to the death of Felix Randal.
7) Quote the phrase from the poem that tells us of the speaker's belief that Felix Randal's soul had been saved.
8) Relate the physical decline of Felix Randal.
9) Discuss the connotations of the word 'mould' (line 2) and its application in this context.
10) Comment on the poet's use of tone in the poem. Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.

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Vultures

Chinua Achebe (1930–2013)

African Poet/Author

A person or a thing that preys greedily and ruthlessly on others, especially the helpless.

Glossary

Despondent—miserable
Drizzle—light rain
Harbinger—messengers
Gross—unpleasant
Gorged—overate
Remnant—remains
Telescopic—able to see far
Channel-house—place where bodies are kept
Coil—curl
Offspring—children
Bounteous—plentiful
Providence—fate/God
Grants—gives
Ogre—monster
Encapsulated—closed in
Kindred—family
Perpetuity—everlasting

Tone: (Author's attitude or feelings about the subject)
Depressing/miserable

Mood: (Readers emotions from reading the text)
Grim/gloomy

Theme:
Omnipresence of evil. Even warm/loving creatures can be evil

Form:
Enjambment—fast pace
4 stanzas
Free verse
No rhyme pattern
Each section of the poem is marked by a line indentation rather than a new stanza. This could possibly indicate how one idea flows to the next as the poem develops.
The arrangement of lines appears to be almost like a list, a building up of evidence. The short lines running on to the next could suggest a continuous flow of content that supports the poet's theme.

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

The opening scene continues with evocative imagery, prompting an emotional response from the reader.

1 In the greyness
2 and drizzle of one despondent
3 dawn unstirred by harbingers
4 of sunbreak a vulture
5 perching high on broken
6 bones of a dead tree
7 nestled close to his
8 mate his smooth
9 bashed-in head, a pebble
10 on a stem rooted in
11 a dump of gross
12 feathers, inclined affectionately
13 to hers. Yesterday they picked
14 the eyes of a swollen
15 corpse in a water-logged
16 trench and ate the
17 things in its bowel. Full
18 gorged they chose their roost
19 keeping the hollowed remnant
20 in easy range of cold
21 telescopic eyes...
22 Strange
23 indeed how love in other
24 ways so particular
25 will pick a corner
26 in that charnel-house
27 tidy it and coil up there, perhaps
28 even fall asleep - her face
29 turned to the wall!
30 ...Thus the Commandant at Belsen
31 Camp going home for
32 the day with fumes of
33 human roast clinging
34 rebelliously to his hairy
35 nostrils will stop
36 at the wayside sweet-shop
37 and pick up a chocolate
38 for his tender offspring
39 waiting at home for Daddy's
40 return...
41 Praise bounteous
42 providence if you will
43 that grants even an ogre
44 a tiny glow-worm
45 tenderness encapsulated
46 in icy caverns of a cruel
47 heart or else despair
48 for in the very germ
49 of that kindred love is
50 lodged the perpetuity
51 of evil.

Alliteration

Carcass/tree

Mechanical feel—not animal

Personified—love cant pick.
Contrasts:
Light—love
Dark– death (charnel-house)

Lined/gunned to the wall
Can't face the atrocity

Powerful imagery

Only physical description of the Commandant

Kind gesture—shows 2 sides

Empathetic + contrasts
Solace in small mercy

Soft side

Warmth is trapped

Peak in psyche of Commandant—views softer side as a curse/germ

Everlasting bleak note

The poet establishes a depressing mood in the poem through the 'greyness' (line 1) and 'drizzle' (line 2) of the pre-dawn setting where even the dawn is 'despondent' (line 2).

The poem begins with a description of the vultures that makes them seem repulsive and gory. However, they are also portrayed as showing affection, which only makes their behaviour more revolting.

Consider the description of the vultures' appearance perched on 'broken/bone' (lines 5-6) and the 'bashed-in head' (line 9) that is grotesquely prominent above the 'gross' (line 11) feathers. The strong imagery of their picking at the 'swollen/corpse' (lines 14-15) to devour the 'things in its bowel' (line 1 7) effectively disgusts the reader.

Yet we are also told that the scavengers 'nestled' (line 7) 'affectionately' (line 12), which would normally generate a positive response. However, in this instance, the contrast established between the birds' warmth towards each other and their revolting practices, makes their 'cold/telescopic eyes' (lines 20 -21) all the more disturbing.

Vulture + Commandant comparison

The second section of the poem describes the Commandant of Belsen, which was a Nazi concentration camp where thousands of Jewish people were murdered and their bodies burned during World War II. As with the vultures, the Commandant's love for his family makes his evil deeds in being responsible for thousands of deaths seem even worse.

The description of the vultures is in the past tense, while the Belsen Commandant is described in the present tense. This seems to suggest that evil is always present. The use of 'perpetuity' (line 50) reinforces this idea.

Of course there is a huge difference between the behaviour of the vultures and that of the Nazis. The vultures perform a vital ecological service, and act on instinct. The humans, who have the ability to make moral decisions, are where the real evil resides.

The shift to focus on human behaviour in the second section of the poem is even more disturbing. The jarring images of the Commandant, with 'fumes of/human roast clinging/ rebelliously to his hairy/nostrils' (lines 32-35) who then buys a chocolate for his 'tender offspring' (line 38) is alarming and makes the reader feel uncomfortable.

Achebe expresses his theme powerfully due to his choice of diction, the disturbing imagery created, and the use of contrast.

The poem appears to offer us two different conclusions. This leaves the reader with a sense of both hope and of despair.

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Vultures —Chinua Achebe

1) What is your emotive response when you think of a vulture?
2) Why do you think you respond in this way?
3) What mood is established in the opening lines of the poem? How is this achieved?
4) Identify words and expressions in these lines that have a negative impact on the reader. Are there any words with positive connotations? List them.
5) How does the setting of the commentary lines 22-29 link to the vulture scene?
6) What is the effect of the ellipsis in line 30?
7) What does 'Belsen' (line 30) refer to?
8) The poet allows for two options in the final section of the poem (lines 41-51) what are they?
9) What does the words 'nestled' (line 7) mean?
10) Is the 'bashed-in' head (line 9) of the vulture meant to be understood literally/figuratively? Explain your answer.
11) The word 'harbingers' (line 3) is often used in the expression 'harbingers doom'. How does the inversion of this expression link to the message of the poem?
12) The poet seems to be drawing a parallel between the vulture and the Commandant at Belsen. Do you think that this is an appropriate comparison? Discuss.
13) Critically discuss the concept of evil as explored by Achebe in this poem. Can an animal be considered evil? Do you agree with Achebe's comment on human nature?