

GCSE English Literature

Love and Relationships Poetry - Grade 9 Analysis · AQA Anthology

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AQA Anthology

27 entries

Grade-9 analysis of all fifteen poems in the AQA Love and Relationships cluster. Each entry leads with the poet's conceptualised **argument** about love, then unpicks **method, form and structure** and roots the reading in **context (AO3)**. The aim is not to retell the poem but to argue what the writer is doing to the reader and why. Use the comparison clusters to plan pairings, and the grade-9 method group for the comparative essay structure. Quotes are kept short for precise, embedded analysis; choose the pairing that lets you track a real difference in method, not just in subject.

The 15 poems

When We Two Parted (Lord Byron)

Argument: Byron presents the end of a secret affair as a wound that never closes; silence and secrecy poison grief and curdle love into shame and quiet revenge. **Method/form:** four regular ballad-like octaves give the illusion of control, but the cyclical structure (the final stanza echoes the first) traps the speaker in unending pain. Semantic field of cold and death - 'pale grew thy cheek', 'colder thy kiss' - makes the woman a corpse to his feeling. **Anchor:** *'In silence and tears.'* The framing refrain enacts how the affair must stay hidden. **Context/AO3:** likely written about a real, scandalous liaison (often linked to Lady Frances Webster); the secrecy reflects rigid Regency codes of reputation, and the bitterness fits Byron's own notorious romantic history.

Love's Philosophy (Percy Bysshe Shelley)

Argument: Shelley builds a seductive 'logical' case that since all of nature mingles, the beloved must reciprocate - love is presented as a universal law the woman is breaking. **Method/form:** two stanzas of expanding natural imagery (fountains, rivers, winds) build to a rhetorical question that demands a kiss; the persuasive structure mirrors a flirtatious argument. The volta-like final couplet exposes the real motive. **Anchor:** *'What is all this sweet work worth / If thou kiss not me?'* The needy question undercuts the cosmic confidence. **Context/AO3:** Shelley's Romantic pantheism (nature as divine and unified) is bent into a chat-up line; the sophistry can be read as either charming or self-serving.

Porphyria's Lover (Robert Browning)

Argument: Browning anatomises possessive, controlling love: the speaker murders Porphyria to freeze a 'perfect' moment of devotion, exposing how the desire to own a person destroys them. **Method/form:** a dramatic monologue with a disturbingly calm, regular ABABB rhyme and iambic tetrameter - the steady metre makes the violence chillingly rational. The speaker reorders her body like a doll. **Anchor:** *'I found / A thing to do.'* The euphemism reveals a chilling lack of remorse. **Context/AO3:** Victorian anxieties about female sexuality and male power; the silence of God ('And yet God has not said a word!') questions moral and religious order.

Sonnet 29 - 'I think of thee' (Elizabeth Barrett Browning)

Argument: Barrett Browning argues that thought is no substitute for presence - obsessive longing risks smothering the beloved, so she demands physical reunion over mere imagining. **Method/form:** a Petrarchan sonnet whose extended conceit of 'wild vines' twining a tree turns overwhelming; the volta ('Renew thy presence') reasserts the real over the imagined. Enjambment makes the thoughts spill and climb. **Anchor:** *'I do not think of thee - I am too near thee.'* Presence silences thought. **Context/AO3:** from *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, written during her courtship with Robert Browning; a Victorian woman voicing frank physical desire is quietly radical.

Neutral Tones (Thomas Hardy)	Argument: Hardy presents love's death as a deadening, draining force that bleaches colour and meaning from the world; the memory of a failed relationship becomes a lasting lesson in disillusionment. Method/form: the title's 'neutral' is enacted by a grey, colourless palette ('white', 'grey', 'ash') and a cyclical frame returning to the same pond. The muted, monosyllabic diction flattens emotion. Anchor: <i>'The smile on your mouth was the dearest thing.'</i> Oxymoron fuses life and death. Context/AO3: Hardy's pessimistic, often agnostic worldview; an early poem whose retrospective frame ('Since then') shows love souring into a fixed, bitter memory.
Letters from Yorkshire (Maura Dooley)	Argument: Dooley argues that love and connection survive physical distance through communication; the gulf between an outdoor, seasonal life and an indoor, screen-bound one is bridged by genuine human contact. Method/form: loose tercets and frequent enjambment mimic the easy flow of letters and conversation across miles; the shift to direct address ('you', 'me') closes the gap the poem describes. Anchor: <i>'Is your life more real because you dig and sow?'</i> The question weighs two ways of living. Context/AO3: a modern, domestic poem; the contrast between manual, natural work and the speaker's 'heartful of headlines' reflects contemporary worries about technology distancing us from real life.
The Farmer's Bride (Charlotte Mew)	Argument: Mew exposes a loveless, coercive marriage in which a frightened young wife is treated as livestock; the poem critiques male ownership while uneasily voicing the farmer's growing, frustrated desire. Method/form: a dramatic monologue in rough dialect and irregular rhyme; animal imagery ('like a mouse', 'a leveret') frames the bride as prey, while the broken final lines stage barely-controlled longing. Anchor: <i>'Her hair, her hair!'</i> Repetition betrays obsessive want. Context/AO3: early-twentieth-century rural patriarchy and arranged practicality; the bride's terror and flight hint at trauma and the powerlessness of women within marriage.
Walking Away (Cecil Day-Lewis)	Argument: Day-Lewis argues that parental love means accepting painful separation; letting a child grow into independence is both a small death and the truest proof of love. Method/form: measured quatrains with a controlled ABACA rhyme hold the emotion in check; natural and seasonal imagery ('like a satellite / Wrenched from its orbit') makes the parting feel both ordinary and cosmic. Anchor: <i>'How selfhood begins with a walking away.'</i> Loss enables growth. Context/AO3: autobiographical - the speaker recalls his son's first day at school 'eighteen years ago'; the closing turn to 'God' frames release as a kind of love beyond possession.
Eden Rock (Charles Causley)	Argument: Causley reimagines reunion with dead parents as a tender, hopeful crossing into the afterlife; remembered love makes the prospect of death feel gentle and homely rather than frightening. Method/form: warm, idealised domestic detail (the picnic, the 'sky-blue' plates) builds a heavenly tableau; the short, stark final line and the metaphor of crossing a stream gently reveal mortality. Anchor: <i>'I had not thought that it would be like this.'</i> The single line carries quiet revelation. Context/AO3: Causley's parents (his father died when he was young); the Eden allusion implies paradise regained and a faith in loving reunion beyond death.
Follower (Seamus Heaney)	Argument: Heaney charts how a child's worship of a skilled father inverts over time; the poem honours admiration but ends on the guilt and role-reversal of an ageing parent who now 'follows'. Method/form: controlled quatrains and precise ploughing diction ('mapping the furrow') mirror the father's expertise; the turn in the final stanza reverses the title's meaning. Anchor: <i>'It is my father who keeps stumbling / Behind me.'</i> The roles have switched. Context/AO3: Heaney's rural Northern Irish upbringing and his move from farming to poetry; the poem weighs inheritance, pride and the quiet ache of generational change.

Mother, any distance (Simon Armitage)

Argument: Armitage presents the bond between mother and child stretching but not breaking as the speaker moves out; love must give freedom even at the risk of the connection snapping. **Method/form:** an extended conceit of a tape measure as an umbilical cord; the form loosens from a near-sonnet into a single, breathless final line that enacts the leap to independence. **Anchor:** *'to fall or fly.'* The open ending balances risk and freedom. **Context/AO3:** from *Book of Matches*; the domestic act of measuring a new home becomes a universal rite of passage between parent and grown child.

Before You Were Mine (Carol Ann Duffy)

Argument: Duffy lovingly imagines her mother's vivid, carefree youth before motherhood; the poem celebrates and gently mourns the glamorous life the mother gave up, blurring possession of one another. **Method/form:** direct address and a non-linear, cinematic structure move through time; sensory, glamorous imagery (the 'ballroom with a mirror ball') and the possessive 'mine' turn the parent-child bond inside out. **Anchor:** *'I'm not here yet.'* The child claims a pre-history of love. **Context/AO3:** autobiographical; 1950s working-class Glasgow glamour, and the universal idea of a child only half-knowing the whole person their parent once was.

Winter Swans (Owen Sheers)

Argument: Sheers argues that love can heal after conflict; observing the swans' instinctive partnership teaches an estranged couple to come back together wordlessly. **Method/form:** the swans work as an extended symbol of loyal partnership ('mute prayer'); the irregular tercets tighten into a final couplet as the couple's hands reunite, form mirroring reconciliation. **Anchor:** *'like a pair of wings settling.'* The simile fuses the couple with the swans. **Context/AO3:** from *Skirrid Hill* (about separation and division); swans' lifelong monogamy gives a natural model of enduring love after a rough patch.

Singh Song! (Daljit Nagra)

Argument: Nagra celebrates joyful, mischievous newlywed love that rebels against duty and convention; private passion gleefully wins out over the demands of work, family and the shop. **Method/form:** a playful dramatic monologue in phonetic 'Punglish' ('vid', 'di') and a song-like refrain captures a dual British-Indian identity; comic customer complaints frame the couple's escape upstairs. **Anchor:** *'my bride / she effing at my mum.'* Affectionate rebellion against tradition. **Context/AO3:** second-generation British-Asian experience; Nagra reclaims a stereotyped voice to honour cross-cultural love and a bride who refuses the obedient ideal.

Climbing My Grandfather (Andrew Waterhouse)

Argument: Waterhouse renders deep admiration and intimacy with a grandfather as a mountain climb; patient, loving exploration of another person becomes an achievement and a place of safety. **Method/form:** a single sustained extended metaphor (the body as terrain - 'screed cheek', 'firm shoulder') in one unbroken free-verse stanza mirrors the slow, continuous ascent. Tactile verbs make the bond physical. **Anchor:** *'the summit, / where gasping for breath I can only lie.'* Reaching him is a peak. **Context/AO3:** a modern poem of generational love and respect; the grandfather's weathered, gentle solidity ('good thick skin') makes him both a person and a landscape to be known and trusted.

Comparison clusters**Romantic / passionate love**

Pair: Love's Philosophy and Sonnet 29, or Singh Song! and Winter Swans. **Method focus:** contrast how desire is voiced - Shelley's rhetorical questions and natural imagery argue for a kiss, while Barrett Browning's Petrarchan conceit of twining vines makes longing physical and demands presence. Nagra's joyful refrain and dialect celebrate playful, rebellious passion, whereas Sheers uses the swan symbol and a closing couplet to show love as quiet reconciliation. **Line of argument:** all present love as a powerful force, but differ on whether it is persuasive, possessive, rebellious or restorative.

Loss, longing and faded love	Pair: When We Two Parted and Neutral Tones. Method focus: both use cyclical structures (returning to the opening) to trap the speaker in a fixed, unhealing past, and both drain colour and warmth - Byron's cold and death imagery versus Hardy's grey, neutral palette. Byron's bitterness tips toward shame and revenge ('silence and tears'); Hardy's disillusionment hardens into a detached 'lesson'. Line of argument: compare bitter, personal betrayal against weary, philosophical despair, tracking how form encodes a refusal or inability to move on.
Family and parental love	Pair: Before You Were Mine and Eden Rock, or Follower and Climbing My Grandfather. Method focus: Duffy's cinematic, non-linear address imagines a parent's lost youth, while Causley's idealised domestic tableau and crossing-the-stream metaphor reimagine reunion after death. Heaney's controlled quatrains and role-reversal weigh admiration against guilt, whereas Waterhouse's single extended metaphor turns reverence into a safe ascent. Line of argument: all celebrate a generational bond, but vary from glamour and mourning to faith, inheritance and intimate respect.
Distance and separation	Pair: Mother, any distance and Walking Away, or Letters from Yorkshire. Method focus: Armitage's tape-measure conceit and breathless final line make separation a hopeful 'fall or fly'; Day-Lewis's tight quatrains and 'satellite' simile present letting go as painful but necessary love. Dooley's enjambed tercets and direct address show communication bridging a physical gulf. Line of argument: compare how each poet frames distance - as growth, as sacrifice, or as a gap love reaches across - and how form stretches, snaps or flows to match.
Power and control in relationships	Pair: Porphyria's Lover and The Farmer's Bride. Method focus: both are dramatic monologues that expose male possession - Browning's unnervingly regular metre rationalises murder, while Mew's animal imagery and fractured lines stage ownership and frustrated desire. Both unsettle the reader by trapping us inside a controlling male voice. Line of argument: contrast cold, completed violence with simmering, unresolved longing, using form to show how each speaker mistakes control for love.

Grade 9 comparison method

Conceptualised thesis	Open with a comparative argument about ideas and methods, not a plot summary. State what each poet is doing differently. Model: <i>'Both poets present parting as a wound that cannot heal, yet Byron weaponises silence into private revenge while Hardy bleaches the memory into detached despair.'</i> A grade-9 thesis names a shared concept and an essential difference the rest of the essay will prove.
Integrated, method-led structure	Compare poem-to-poem within each paragraph, never one whole poem then the other. Build each paragraph around a shared idea (e.g. cyclical structure, natural imagery, the controlling voice) and weave both texts together with comparative connectives - 'whereas', 'similarly', 'by contrast', 'where Duffy... Causley instead...'. Lead with method, then effect, then meaning.
Embedded short quotations	Use precise, short quotations woven into your sentence, then zoom in on a single word, sound or punctuation mark. Avoid quoting whole lines. Model: <i>the verb 'wrenched' makes the parting feel violent and cosmic.</i> Analyse one detail in depth rather than listing several - depth over coverage signals top-band control.
Form and structure as argument (AO2)	Treat form as a deliberate choice that carries meaning: a dramatic monologue traps us in one mind; a sonnet's volta turns thought; a cyclical frame refuses closure; a single unbroken stanza enacts a continuous climb. Always link the structural feature back to the poet's argument about love, rather than just labelling it.
Purposeful context (AO3)	Weave context into analysis to deepen meaning, never bolt it on. Connect the writer's ideas to relevant frames - Regency scandal and reputation, Victorian attitudes to female desire and male power, Romantic pantheism, second-generation British-Asian identity. Context should explain why the poet might present love this way, supporting the thesis.

Top-band conceptualised lines Sound like a critic. Model phrasings: *'Both poets interrogate whether love is liberation or possession.'*; *'The regular metre becomes ironic, dressing violence as devotion.'*; *'Where Shelley's nature unifies to seduce, Hardy's nature withers to disillusion.'* Aim for exploratory verbs - 'interrogates', 'subverts', 'reframes', 'destabilises' - and a clear evaluative line throughout.

Evaluative conclusion End by weighing the two poets, not just restating. Judge which presents love more powerfully or pessimistically, and why. Model: *'Ultimately, while both expose love's fragility, Hardy's quiet neutrality lingers more disturbingly than Byron's loud bitterness, because despair without blame offers no release.'* A confident judgement seals the top band.