

GCSE English Literature

OCR Love and Relationships Poems - Grade 9 Analysis · OCR Anthology

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OCR Anthology

24 entries

Grade-9 analysis of the widely-taught OCR (J352) 'Towards a World Unknown' **Love and Relationships** cluster of fifteen poems. Each entry leads with the poet's conceptualised **argument** about love, then unpicks **method, form and structure (AO2)** 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 group to plan pairings and the grade-9 method group for the comparative essay. Quotes are kept short for precise, embedded analysis. Cluster stated as the established OCR Love and Relationships set; always check your own anthology edition, as OCR has refreshed some poems in recent series.

The 15 poems

A Song (Helen Maria Williams)

Argument: Williams presents faithful love as a quiet, enduring constancy that outlasts absence; the speaker's devotion is steadier and more sincere than any showy passion. **Method/form:** regular, song-like quatrains and a gentle refrain enact the unchanging fidelity the poem praises; the controlled rhyme mirrors a heart that will not waver. **Anchor:** *'No riches from his scanty store.'* Plainness signals honest, unbought love. **Context/AO3:** a late-eighteenth-century woman poet writing in the sensibility tradition that prized sincere, tender feeling over wealth or display.

Bright Star (John Keats)

Argument: Keats longs for a love as fixed and eternal as a star, yet rejects cold isolation; he wants permanence fused with warm human intimacy, even at the price of death. **Method/form:** a Shakespearean sonnet whose volta turns from the lonely, 'steadfast' star to the lover's breathing chest; the single sentence builds toward an impossible wish. **Anchor:** *'And so live ever - or else swoon to death.'* Ecstasy edges into mortality. **Context/AO3:** Romantic preoccupation with transience and the eternal; Keats's own illness and his love for Fanny Brawne sharpen the ache for a love that cannot last.

Now (Robert Browning)

Argument: Browning seizes a single instant of total union; love is concentrated into one perfect, urgent moment that fuses two people beyond past or future. **Method/form:** one breathless, headlong sentence and insistent repetition of 'now' compress time to a point; the lack of stanza breaks enacts a moment that refuses to be divided. **Anchor:** *'Out of your whole life give but a moment!'* The imperative demands surrender. **Context/AO3:** Browning's interest in the intense, dramatic instant; the carpe-diem urge to grasp passion before it slips away.

A Broken Appointment (Thomas Hardy)

Argument: Hardy grieves not lost passion but lost kindness; the beloved's failure to come wounds him less as a rejected lover than as a man denied simple compassion. **Method/form:** two measured stanzas with a circling refrain ('You did not come') and the heavy ticking of marked time enact suspended, disappointed waiting. **Anchor:** *'You did not come.'* The flat refrain hardens hope into hurt. **Context/AO3:** Hardy's characteristic pessimism and his quiet faith in 'loving-kindness'; the poem prizes human decency over romantic conquest.

The Sorrow of True Love (Edward Thomas)

Argument: Thomas argues that true love carries an inescapable sadness; the deeper the love, the greater the grief it stores up, so tenderness and sorrow are inseparable. **Method/form:** a single winding sentence and heavy enjambment make the thought spill onward without rest, mirroring a sorrow that cannot be neatly contained. **Anchor:** *'The sorrow of true love.'* The title-phrase fuses joy and pain. **Context/AO3:** Thomas's introspective, melancholic voice on the eve of the First World War; love shadowed by an early modern sense of loss.

Fin de Fete (Charlotte Mew)	Argument: Mew presents love after the 'party' is over as desolate and abandoned; the speaker is left exposed and un comforted once intimacy withdraws. Method/form: shifting line lengths and a fairy-tale echo ('Good-night... Sleep well') turn tender into bleak; the bracketed, fading close enacts a love guttering out. Anchor: <i>'There is no more to say.'</i> Silence marks emotional desertion. Context/AO3: early-twentieth-century isolation; Mew's recurring themes of loneliness and unfulfilled longing give the poem a quiet desperation.
Love and Friendship (Emily Bronte)	Argument: Bronte argues that passionate love is showy but fleeting while steady friendship endures; she values the constant evergreen bond over the brief bloom of romance. Method/form: an extended natural conceit contrasts the wild-rose of love with the holly-tree of friendship; regular quatrains and seasonal imagery let nature carry the argument. Anchor: <i>'The wild rose-briar is sweet in spring.'</i> Beauty that will not last. Context/AO3: Bronte's Romantic communion with nature and a Victorian woman's wary, clear-eyed view of romantic passion.
Morning Song (Sylvia Plath)	Argument: Plath voices the unsettling, ambivalent dawn of maternal love; she feels distance and unreality before tenderness slowly stirs, refusing a sentimental account of motherhood. Method/form: free-verse tercets and startling imagery (the baby as 'new statue', a 'fat gold watch') keep love at arm's length until the final, warming attention to the child's breath. Anchor: <i>'I'm no more your mother.'</i> Honest detachment, not bonding. Context/AO3: a confessional, mid-century woman poet writing maternal feeling with unusual frankness, against the idealised mother of her era.
An Arundel Tomb (Philip Larkin)	Argument: Larkin examines whether love truly survives death; the stone couple's joined hands may prove love's endurance - or may be an accident we sentimentally misread. Method/form: measured, rhyming stanzas and a carefully qualified syntax ('almost true') hold scepticism and hope in tension; the famous final line is deliberately conditional. Anchor: <i>'What will survive of us is love.'</i> Hope hedged by 'almost'. Context/AO3: Larkin's characteristic mistrust of consolation; a mid-century, doubting voice reaching, against itself, for a tentative faith in love.
In Paris with You (James Fenton)	Argument: Fenton presents wounded, defensive love on the rebound; the speaker resists romantic cliché, insisting on raw, physical present desire rather than the storybook 'Paris' of love. Method/form: a colloquial, song-like refrain and bathetic rhymes ('sleazy', 'queasy') puncture sentimentality; the circling repetition enacts a man trying to talk himself out of, and into, love. Anchor: <i>'I'm in Paris with you.'</i> Intimacy redefined on his terms. Context/AO3: a modern, ironic voice that subverts the Parisian romance trope to expose love after heartbreak.
I Wouldn't Thank You for a Valentine (Liz Lochhead)	Argument: Lochhead mockingly rejects the commercialised, performed rituals of romance; she dismisses tacky Valentine cliché as a false, consumerist version of real love. Method/form: energetic free verse, sprawling listing and sardonic, colloquial wit pile up the naff tokens of romance to ridicule them; the headlong rhythm carries the speaker's scorn. Anchor: <i>'I wouldn't thank you for a valentine.'</i> Refusal as self-respect. Context/AO3: a feminist, satirical Scottish voice resisting the marketing of love and the pressure on women to want its clichés.
Love After Love (Derek Walcott)	Argument: Walcott reframes love as self-love and recovery; after a relationship ends, the truest reunion is learning to welcome and value your own restored self. Method/form: gentle free verse and the extended metaphor of greeting a guest at your own door turn healing into a homecoming; the imperative, blessing-like tone soothes. Anchor: <i>'Give wine. Give bread.'</i> Self-care as communion. Context/AO3: Walcott's Caribbean and biblical registers; a redemptive, almost scriptural vision of wholeness reclaimed after loss.
Long Distance II (Tony Harrison)	Argument: Harrison shows grief-stricken love refusing to accept death; his father keeps a dead wife's life going, and the son, who mocked this, finds he does the same - love survives as irrational ritual. Method/form: plain quatrains and a turning final stanza reveal the son's own grief; the controlled form barely holds raw feeling. Anchor: <i>'in my new black leather phone book there's your name.'</i> Love outliving reason. Context/AO3: Harrison's working-class Leeds roots and the universal way the bereaved cannot quite let the dead go.

**Warming Her Pearls
(Carol Ann Duffy)**

Argument: Duffy voices secret, aching, unspoken desire across a class divide; a maid's longing for her mistress is intensely sensual yet forbidden and unfulfilled. **Method/form:** a persona poem in sensuous first person; the pearls work as an extended symbol of intimate contact the lovers cannot openly have, and enjambment lets desire bleed across the lines. **Anchor:** *'I dream about her in my attic bed.'* Distance heightens want. **Context/AO3:** a Victorian setting voiced by a modern poet; class hierarchy and the silencing of same-sex desire make the longing both tender and tragic.

**Dusting the Phone
(Jackie Kay)**

Argument: Kay captures the anxious, obsessive limbo of waiting for a lover's call; love here is need, nerves and powerlessness rather than fulfilment. **Method/form:** nervy free verse, fixation on the phone and restless, fretful repetition enact the speaker's spiralling anxiety; the domestic object becomes the whole focus of longing. **Anchor:** *'I am spending too much money on this.'* Love as helpless compulsion. **Context/AO3:** a contemporary, intimate poem; the everyday agony of modern waiting, and Kay's frank treatment of vulnerable, dependent love.

Comparison method**Endurance vs transience
of love**

Pair: Bright Star and An Arundel Tomb, or Love and Friendship. **Method focus:** contrast how each poet stakes a claim about whether love lasts - Keats's sonnet volta yearns for star-like permanence fused with warmth, while Larkin's qualified syntax ('almost true') keeps endurance hopeful but unproven. Bronte's evergreen-holly conceit argues constancy outlives passion's wild rose. **Line of argument:** all reach for love that endures, but differ on whether permanence is achieved, doubted or relocated into steady friendship.

Loss, grief and waiting

Pair: Long Distance II and A Broken Appointment, or Dusting the Phone. **Method focus:** Harrison's turning final stanza exposes love surviving as irrational ritual after death, while Hardy's circling refrain ('You did not come') hardens hope into wounded disappointment. Kay's fretful repetition stages the agony of waiting for a call. **Line of argument:** compare grief that cannot let go against the smaller ache of being kept waiting, tracking how form encodes suspended, unfinished time.

**Forbidden, secret and
unspoken desire**

Pair: Warming Her Pearls and Fin de Fete. **Method focus:** Duffy's pearl symbol and sensuous enjambment voice a maid's silenced, cross-class longing, while Mew's fading, bracketed close enacts intimacy withdrawn and the speaker left desolate. Both make distance and silence the very medium of desire. **Line of argument:** contrast aching, unfulfilled want with abandonment after intimacy, using form to show love that cannot, or can no longer, be spoken.

**Romance subverted and
self-love**

Pair: In Paris with You and I Wouldn't Thank You for a Valentine, or Love After Love. **Method focus:** Fenton's bathetic rhymes and circling refrain reject the Paris cliché for raw present desire, while Lochhead's sardonic listing ridicules commercialised romance. Walcott's homecoming metaphor relocates love inward as self-acceptance. **Line of argument:** all distrust the script of conventional romance, but resolve into wary desire, feminist refusal or restorative self-love.

**Parental and ambivalent
love**

Pair: Morning Song and A Song, or Now. **Method focus:** Plath's free-verse detachment voices maternal love arriving slowly and uneasily, refusing sentiment, while Williams's song-like refrain praises plain, constant devotion. Browning's headlong single sentence seizes one intense instant of union. **Line of argument:** compare love that is hesitant and honest against love that is steady or urgent, and how form mirrors each emotional pace.

**Conceptualised
comparative thesis**

Open with a comparative argument about ideas and methods, not plot. Name a shared concept and an essential difference. Model: *'Both poets test whether love can survive loss, yet Harrison finds it persists as irrational ritual while Larkin can only call its survival almost true.'* A grade-9 thesis sets up the line of argument the whole 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 method or idea (refrain, natural conceit, symbol, the turning final stanza) and weave both texts with comparative connectives - 'whereas', 'similarly', 'by contrast'. Lead with method, then effect, then meaning.

Embedded short quotation and form (AO2)

Quote a few words, then zoom in on a single verb, sound or punctuation mark, rather than listing several. Treat form as a deliberate choice: a sonnet's volta turns thought, a refrain enacts obsession or constancy, an extended metaphor reframes love, a final-stanza turn reveals hidden grief. Always link the feature back to the poet's argument about love.

Purposeful context and evaluative close (AO3)

Weave context in to deepen meaning, never bolt it on - Romantic transience, Victorian class and silenced desire, feminist resistance to romantic cliché, working-class grief. End by weighing the poets, not restating. Model: *'Ultimately, while both mourn, Duffy's silenced longing unsettles more than Mew's open desolation, because desire that cannot be spoken can never be resolved.'*