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Literature in English

for Cambridge International AS & A Level

COURSEBOOK

Elizabeth Whittome

Executive
Preview



Second edition

 Cambridge Assessment
International Education

Endorsed for full syllabus coverage

Brighter Thinking

Better Learning

At Cambridge University Press, **Brighter Thinking** drives our approach to English literature. A solid foundation of research and partnerships with teachers around the world underpins the resources we publish to support students. This research, alongside best practice pedagogy, helps us understand the needs of English students, allowing us to tailor our resources to best support them.

Through a flexible suite of resources, designed to meet a wide range of needs in the classroom, **Better Learning** is possible. Students can accelerate their learning and develop skills for life.

With texts spanning 650 years from over 20 different countries, the second edition of our series for Cambridge International AS & A Level Literature in English inspires students with a love of literature and helps them to develop the necessary skills with ease.

Parts 1 and 2 provide flexible, in-depth guidance on how to analyse poetry, prose and drama, with lots of opportunities to practise critical essays, passage-based questions and analysis of unseen texts. The final part provides invaluable advice about how to improve essay technique and avoid common errors so that your students can approach any text with confidence.

We have increased the amount of content in the coursebook, meaning that there is more material than ever for engaging English lessons. With more sample answers, self-assessment sections and a scaffolded approach that enables students to learn independently, the new series provides full coverage of the Cambridge International AS & A Level Literature in English syllabus for examination from 2021.

A comprehensive teacher's resource saves you time with ready-made lesson plans, PowerPoint presentations and worksheets, and provides lots of ideas for active learning.

You may also be interested in the *Stories of Ourselves* and *Songs of Ourselves* anthologies, which include short stories and poems from the AS Level Literature in English set text lists.

If you are studying Shakespeare, then I can recommend our *Cambridge School Shakespeare** series, which promotes an active approach to studying the Bard.

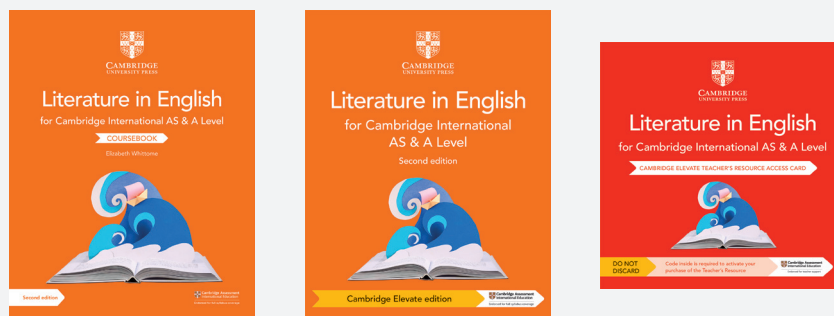
I'm very pleased to share with you a sample from our forthcoming coursebook for Cambridge International AS & A Level Literature in English. Please do take the time to look through and consider how it could support your students.

If you would like more information, or have any questions, please contact your local sales representative: [cambridge.org/education/find-your-sales-consultant](https://www.cambridge.org/education/find-your-sales-consultant)

Florence Kemsley

Commissioning Editor - English
Cambridge University Press

*These texts have not been through the Cambridge International endorsement process.



Dear colleagues

It's a great pleasure to introduce myself and give you some information about the exciting new content in the second edition of our coursebook for Cambridge International AS & A Level Literature in English. Our new edition has been fully updated to reflect the changes to the revised syllabus for examination from 2021, reflecting a more streamlined format while maintaining the emphasis on poetry, prose and drama.

A significant change to the syllabus is the inclusion at AS Level of an 'unseen' element. In order for your students to be prepared as well as possible for this change, the new second edition of our coursebook for Cambridge International AS & A Level Literature in English includes whole new units focusing on the unseen elements. Throughout the new edition, advice is given on tackling unseen material with confidence.

In addition, you will find in the new coursebook:

- An emphasis throughout on skills for success, with reference to Assessment Objectives and Key Concepts
- Clear Learning Objectives at the start, Reflection activities throughout and a Self-Assessment grid at the end of every unit
- Plenty of questions for exam-style practice in addition to many exercises to encourage reading, discussion and writing
- Updated texts which cover all the different genres and range across the centuries, with authors writing in English from around 20 different national backgrounds
- An extended Skills and Techniques section with advice and examples for improving essays and trouble-shooting common problems
- A wealth of student writing throughout, with my comments in the margin and at the end of each essay, showing why it has been successful or how it could have been improved

I sincerely hope that you and your students will enjoy using this new second edition, and wish everyone success and the enjoyment that comes with sharing literature.

Kind regards,

Elizabeth Whittome

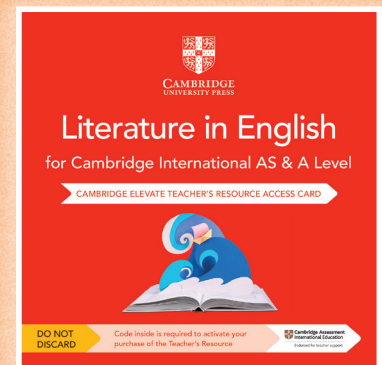
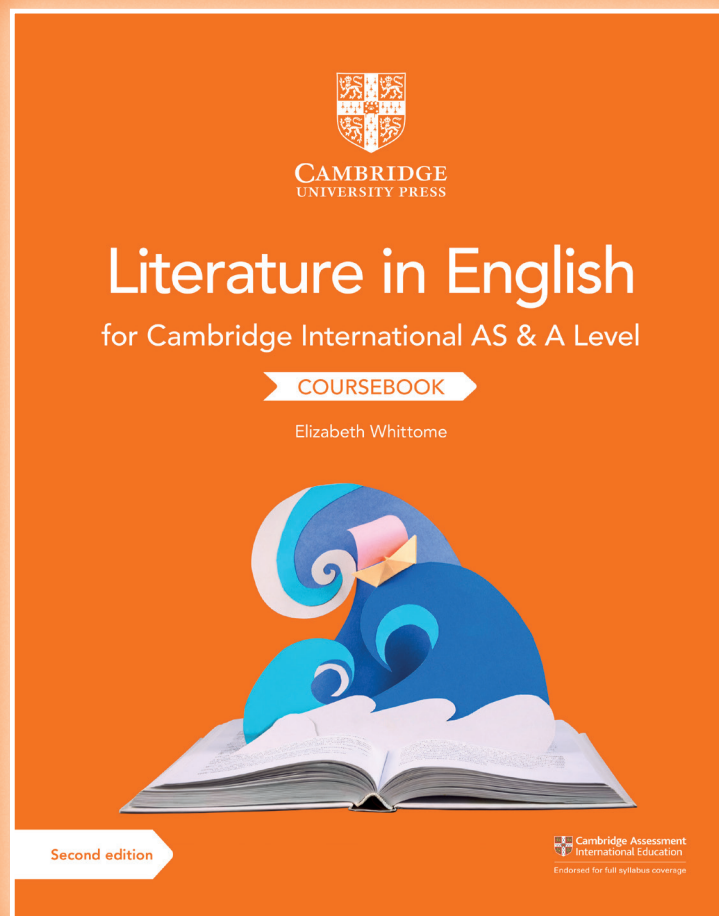
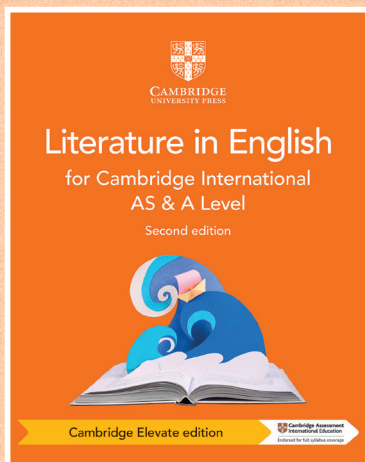
Author of *Literature in English for Cambridge International AS & A Level*

*For further information on the revised syllabus, we recommend visiting www.cambridgeinternational.org

Series overview

Teacher's
resource
coming soon

The *Literature in English for Cambridge International AS & A Level* series is made up of a coursebook, a Cambridge Elevate edition coursebook and a Cambridge Elevate teacher's resource access card.



The second edition is suitable for Cambridge International AS & A Level Literature in English (9695) for first examination from 2021.

Updated and fully aligned with the revised syllabus, texts in this series range across 650 years and from authors from 20 different nationalities. Through exploring these texts students will find they are building essential skills, such as the ability to write clearly and effectively, construct an argument, manage information and analyse complex pieces.

Brighter Thinking
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Reflection boxes encourage active thinking about what you are studying.

Reflection: Think of a favourite poem and how different it would be if you made it into a normal prose order.

FURTHER READING

Angela Carter's 'The Bloody Chamber' is a great example of the use of language to create a dark and sinister atmosphere. This is reflected in the title of the book, 'The Bloody Chamber', and the use of language to create a dark and sinister atmosphere. This is reflected in the title of the book, 'The Bloody Chamber', and the use of language to create a dark and sinister atmosphere.

Further reading suggestions in each unit give advice on developing your range of understanding.

Sample response boxes are annotated responses to essay questions where you can analyse the response, make improvements or compare with your own work.

SAMPLE RESPONSE

In *Mountain Lion*, the word *men* is repeated three times, in one- and two-word sentences with exclamation marks to emphasise their destructiveness. The third stanza uses parallelism in *They hesitate, / We hesitate, and / They have a gun, / We have no gun*. Both parties are uncertain, but only one group has a weapon. Enjambments are used as part of the natural description at the beginning and end of the extract, lending an emphatic quality to the words sounds and still in the first section and snow and incoherence in the last. Additionally, the first lines of the first and fifth stanzas do not contain a finite verb, giving a sense that the actions of climbing and emerging are still continuing, helped by the enjambment. If read aloud, the pauses between lines give a dramatic significance to the encounter being described, and the final line of the extract is a direct question, which also lends dramatic emphasis.

Student response boxes are actual student responses to essay questions, with marker comments (written by the author) to help you to appreciate good practice in the subject and to improve your own work.

STUDENT RESPONSE

The poem depicts a very scary, indeed terrifying, situation. However, the poet, through the use of words and phrases, creates a sense of tension and suspense. The poem is written in a way that makes the reader feel like they are part of the story. The poet uses a lot of descriptive language to create a vivid picture of the scene. The use of words like 'dark', 'black', and 'night' helps to create a sense of mystery and fear. The poet also uses a lot of repetition, which makes the poem easier to remember. Overall, the poem is a very effective piece of writing.

Reference to the setting helps to create a sense of atmosphere.

COMMENT

The most obvious repetition is in the final four lines of each stanza where most of the words are the same (and this continues through the poem to the final stanza). Lines 2, 3 and 4 of the final quatrain (four lines) are exactly the same, but in quatrain 1 she says *My life is dreary* and in quatrain 2 she says *The night is dreary*. This pattern is found with *The day is dreary* used in other stanzas in alternation. The use of a line or lines repeated in this way is typical of certain kinds of poem, such as the ballad, and it is known as a refrain.

Her tears fall is repeated in lines 1 and 2 of the second stanza and there is a mention of the dew, although this is worded slightly differently.

Comment boxes provide additional feedback and guidance.

KEY TERM

Parallelism: a device in which parts of the wording of a sentence are the same, repeating or paralleling each other for emphasis.

Key terms are important terms in the topic you are learning. They are highlighted in **black bold** and defined where they first appear in the book.

How to use this book

This book contains a number of features to help you in your study.

Learning objectives appear at the start of each unit to outline what you will have covered and understood by the end.

Learning objectives

In this unit you will:

- Examine the characters and themes of poems
- Consider the layout of poems on the page and the effect this has
- Identify yourself as some important literary and dramatic genres
- Identify and describe the text tradition of the sonnet

Before you start

- Analyse and discuss the structure, content and style of a text and discuss what you gain from it. See your journal to help with knowledge memory.

Before you start activities are designed to activate the prior knowledge you need for each unit.

KEY CONCEPTS

The effects of the First World War and of the patriarchal society are elements that could validly be developed as a contextual background.

Key concepts summarise the key concepts relevant to each unit with explanatory reminders for understanding different texts featuring throughout the book.

Self-assessment checklist

Reflect on what you've learnt in this unit and indicate your confidence level between 1 and 5. If you score below 3, revisit that section. Come back to this list later in your course. Has your confidence grown?

| | Confidence level | Revisited? |
|---|------------------|------------|
| I can distinguish between character and characterisation | | |
| I am more knowledgeable about types of character and their function | | |
| I can acknowledge the relationship between character and symbol | | |
| I see and discuss the value of parallels and contrasts of character | | |

Self-assessment checklist features at the end of each unit make sure you are fully confident of the work of the unit before you move on.

Activities accompany the exercises, some for you to complete on your own as self-study, others to share with a friend or classmate. They include reading, writing and discussion, as well as watching films and video clips.

ACTIVITY 14.2

Make a list of the names of characters in the play you are studying, what name they are given in the text, and how they are referred to in the play. How are they referred to in the text? How are they referred to in the play? How are they referred to in the text? How are they referred to in the play?

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Introduction

This is the second edition of your coursebook, packed with new material and features designed specially to help you to succeed in your study of literature in English at more advanced levels.

The emphasis in this book is on skills; the development of your capabilities as a literary critic and commentator. In addition to many varied exercises in reading, analysis, writing and discussion, there are features in every unit here which encourage self-assessment and progress. In this respect, the book is a significant improvement on the first edition. Any advanced student, no matter what your particular syllabus, will find the tools here to help them to success in handling any text confidently. The book is primarily designed for the Cambridge International AS & A Level syllabuses, but is equally applicable to others. However, do check your own specification for its particular requirements. Any good syllabus will certainly contain the basic elements of poetry, prose and drama, including Shakespeare, however.

What this book does not do is clear. It does not refer to the set texts on the syllabus in a particular year. Set texts come and go on a regular basis and your coursebook would soon be out of date if all the examples in the book were from a particular year's set texts. You will discover that the range of activities can be transferred to any text you are studying, so that you benefit from all the examples given, developing your skills and confidence progressively.

Additionally, there are many new examples of student writing in this coursebook, which have been annotated with comments (written by the author). These exemplars guide and encourage you to good writing as well as giving you an idea of how not to write an essay. The popular final section of the book, on essay skills, techniques and problem-solving has been enhanced in this second edition, with further examples.

The ability to read and analyse closely material which has not been pre-prepared is a core skill of the subject at advanced level. Your coursebook emphasises this core skill of unseen, now one of the compulsory examination elements at AS level in the new Cambridge International AS & A Level Literature in English syllabus and often a feature in other specifications. (Students looking to further develop their skills with responding to unseen passages would find units 22, 25 and 28 particularly useful.) These exercises also offer some elements of wider reading. The works cited in the coursebook as a whole come from the widest range of different national backgrounds from across the world, all writing in English. You won't necessarily find these on any particular year's set text list. They also span some 650 years and include Chaucer, Milton, the Metaphysicals, novels of the Indian subcontinent, Restoration drama and contemporary poetry, for example. These, and others, are all introduced by means of close analysis of poems or short passages, with further reading suggested after each.

I hope you enjoy the 'new look' edition. I've certainly enjoyed putting it together!

Elizabeth Whittome

Assessment overview and key concepts

Assessment overview

The assessment for the revised Cambridge syllabus is very clear and straightforward. You do two papers for the AS Level (Papers 1 and 2) and two more for the A Level (Papers 3 and 4); each paper lasts two hours. All papers are compulsory: there are no optional papers.

| AS Level | A Level |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Paper 1: Drama and poetry | Paper 3: Shakespeare and drama |
| Paper 2: Prose and unseen | Paper 4: Pre-/Post-1900 poetry & prose |

You have a choice of questions with each set text: either a critical essay or a passage-based question, and you'll need to spend an hour on each one. Altogether, then, you'll be studying three set texts for the AS Level and four for the A Level, so seven set texts in all for the full A Level, as well as preparation for the unseen question in AS Level Paper 2, which is a new element. Each question carries equal marks.

The unseen question will allow you to choose between two passages printed on the exam paper: a poem/piece of prose, or poem/drama or prose/drama. There will be different combinations each time, so you will need to practise unseens in all three forms.

The set and unseen texts will all be written in English originally, but they come from different periods and cultures.

This book gives you practice in all aspects of analysis of poetry, prose and drama, with special chapters on the approach to unseens and examples of assessed student work. The poetry, prose and drama examples given in this book are designed to extend your reading and illustrate the basic principles of study of the subject at this level. They are not guides to your set texts, but a means of exploring the subject in detail and developing your skills of close reading, analysis and communication.

Assessment objectives

The assessment objectives show clearly the different but interconnected abilities needed for writing a literature essay at this level.

| | |
|------------|--|
| AO1 | The ability to respond with understanding to literary texts in a variety of forms, from different cultures; with an appreciation of relevant contexts that illuminate readings of the texts. |
| AO2 | The ability to analyse ways in which writers' choices of form, structure and language shape meanings and effects. |
| AO3 | The ability to produce informed, independent opinions and interpretations of literary texts. |
| AO4 | The ability to communicate a relevant, structured and supported response appropriate to literary study. |
| AO5 | The ability to discuss and evaluate varying opinions and interpretations of literary texts (Cambridge International A Level only). |

Key concepts

The key concepts of any subject are the essential underpinning ideas that characterise it. Knowing what they are helps students to appreciate the subject and to work productively within it. Each unit in this book shows which key concepts are incorporated. The key concepts are focused on three areas: the subject of Literature, the craft of the writer and the reading and writing of the student.

First of all, literature is an imaginative art form with written texts in distinctive forms such as poetry, prose and drama, and there are different conventions for these forms which have been established over hundreds of years. There is also a wide variety of genres, such as comedy, tragedy or satire. Students need to know about these forms and how they communicate their interpretations. Specifically, you should remember:

- The context in which literature is written and received is an important part of the background to a text.
- In detail, the language, style and structure of a text do not just inform the meaning – they are intrinsic to it. A writer makes language choices and these have effects on the reader.
- The student reads and reacts, analyses and interprets the language choices made by writers to communicate their concerns. Students should take note, particularly at A level, of what other readers and critics think.

When an essay is written, it is a response to a particular question which is framed to focus on the skills of the writer. It must be relevant to the question, structured and supported with reference to the text. Appropriate terminology should be used. The student should be aware of the effects of a work on the readers and the audience (in the case of drama).

Pathways

Although specifically designed for the Cambridge International AS & A Level, the activities in this book are all suitable for other Advanced students. The book contains a great deal of advice on undertaking passage-based questions which combine the skills of close reading with wider reference to the text. Part 1 begins with the basics of the subject and is very suitable for revision or for those who have not taken an earlier qualification such as O Level or GCSE or IGCSE in Literature, moving on to Part 2's more Advanced studies later. However, you should look closely at the specific requirements of your own syllabus, because there will be slight differences.

| | AS Level Poetry | AS Level Prose | AS Level Drama | A Level Poetry | A Level Prose | A Level Drama | Essay skills and techniques |
|--|--|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| I am a Cambridge AS Level student | Units 1–6 provide core teaching | Units 7–11 provide core teaching | Units 12–17 provide core teaching | Of future interest | Of future interest | Of future interest | Useful advice for all |
| I am a Cambridge A Level student | Units 1–6 provide foundation teaching and revision | Units 7–11 provide foundation teaching and revision | Units 12–17 provide foundation teaching and revision | Units 18–20 provide core teaching | Units 21–23 provide core teaching | Units 24–26 provide core teaching | Useful advice |
| I am a Cambridge Pre-U student | Units 1–6 provide some of the core teaching required | Units 7–11 provide some of the core teaching required | Units 12–17 provide some of the core teaching required | Units 18–20 provide some of the core teaching required | Units 21–23 provide some of the core teaching required | Units 24–26 | Useful advice |
| I am an AS/A Level student on another syllabus | Relevant background and basics | Relevant background and basics | Relevant background and basics | All useful activities | All useful activities | All useful activities | Useful advice |
| I am an adult on an Access to HE course or just interested | Relevant background and basics | Relevant background and basics | Relevant background and basics | All useful activities | All useful activities | All useful activities | Useful advice |
| I am a teacher | Good for less experienced students and revision | Good for less experienced students and revision | Good for less experienced students and revision | Many useful activities including passage questions and unseen | Many useful activities including passage questions and unseen | Many useful activities including passage questions and unseen | Useful advice – whole unit on Troubleshooting |

Part 1

AS Level



Section 1

Poetry 1

2



Unit 1

Introduction to poetry

Learning objectives

In this unit you will:

- enjoy reviewing the basics of poetry
- reflect on poems you already know and what you think about them
- consider any difficulties you may have experienced in discussing or writing about them
- remind yourself of the importance of words, their meaning and sound.



KEY CONCEPTS

Language, form, structure, genres, context, style, interpretation.

Before you start

- Remember that you are the reader and your personal response is vital! Get ready to read, concentrate and enjoy yourself. This is Unit 1 and it's always reassuring to go back to basics.
- Have your pens and notebook (whether paper or electronic) at your side. Some activities demand your undivided attention, but some can be enjoyed with a friend. If you are working alone, best to switch your phone to silent. You can share afterwards!

Responding to poetry and writing about it

This section of the book will help you to express your thoughts and feelings about poetry. The units on this topic are designed to help you to enjoy poetry to the full and to feel more secure about expressing your responses, formulating your own interpretations and supporting your ideas with examples. When you come to a poem you have never seen before (such as an examined unseen exercise), you will feel confident and alert, able to use everything you've learnt. All your reading experience will help you.

Poetry can stretch words to their limit to record unique, direct impressions of experience. A word can achieve its full potential when a skilled poet combines it with other carefully selected words. The elements of a word – its meaning, associations, context, history, sound, even its shape and length – all combine with other words to produce the distinctive qualities of a poem. No wonder that many writers see poetry as the ultimate achievement of any language, the utterance that can never really be translated without losing some of its magic. Read any poem aloud to savour its sounds and rhythms; critical appreciation will follow with practice.

All syllabuses focus on a very important Assessment Objective that reminds us that every writer chooses forms, structures and words to shape meanings. Both the writer selecting the words and the reader absorbing their effects are important in this process. You are the reader, whose close listening and reading, personal experience and enjoyment are most significant for your appreciation. You may find that you observe and give emphasis in a different way from your classmate. Providing that both of you can express your feelings, identify the evidence from the poem you are discussing and argue your case, then neither of you is wrong, necessarily. Both of you are literary critics.

Reflection: Consider why you came to this conclusion.

ACTIVITY 1.1

Discuss with your group, or teacher if possible, what qualities you think a poem should have in order to be defined as a poem and make a list. If you are working on your own, think particularly of short fragments and any texts you've come across before which didn't seem very 'poetic' (perhaps rhymes in birthday cards). Consider whether song lyrics can be called poems, since they need the music to complete their effect.

What makes a poem?

Here's a table for you, which shows where various points are discussed in the following poetry units. You may have come up with some of these points in your discussion about the qualities that define poems.

| Possible qualities of a poem | Where these are discussed |
|---|---------------------------|
| A: Reading a poem out loud can be very exciting/thrilling/funny/sad even if you don't understand all of it completely. | |
| B: It is usually 'about' something – a theme; but it doesn't have to tell a story. | Later in Unit 1 |
| C: The writer is expressing her/his thoughts on a particular subject, so it can be full of humour or emotion such as anger or sadness. | Later in Unit 1 |
| D: The meaning can sometimes be difficult at first reading because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the words aren't in the usual order • some of them even seem to be missing • they appear to be new words not in the dictionary, or don't have their usual meaning • the language is concentrated or ambiguous. | Unit 2 |
| E: The language can have lots of figures of speech (such as metaphor and personification) and be very descriptive. | Unit 2 |
| F: Sometimes words or phrases or ideas are repeated. | Unit 2 |
| G: It is written in lines and the sentences don't reach the end of the page. | Unit 3 |
| H: There is a pattern to the way it is laid out (e.g. in verses, stanzas or groups of lines). | Unit 3 |
| I: Sometimes it is very rhythmical and there are rhymes or other sound effects such as alliteration. | Unit 4 |

Of all the points in the list, it's probably D, with its range of challenges for readers, that worries students the most, especially when they have never studied poetry before or are looking at a poem for the first time. Try not to be too worried about what you see as difficulties of interpretation. Some students spend too much time trying to chase the 'meaning' of a poem and forget about the real words that *are* the poem. It's important to remember that the poet has made choices to create particular effects, and considering these in detail – their sounds, their rhythm, their combination together – often clarifies meaning where it has seemed tricky.

Unit 5 gives you hints and tips for tackling an unseen poem, helping you to interpret and to write about a poem you've never seen before. You will have more confidence in your work. There are examples of students' essays on an unseen poem, with the marker's comments showing what is good and what could be improved, which you'll find helpful.

Then, in Unit 6 you focus on writing essays on set texts for an exam, with two different examples of questions. Throughout the units you will have Study and Revision tips. The examples used are from past Literature texts on Cambridge syllabuses, as well as others that are especially memorable or appropriate to illustrate particular points. This book uses texts from writers across the world writing in English.

ACTIVITY 1.2

Look again at the table of qualities that could characterise a poem. How many of them can be seen in the following short poetic text?

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound *In a Station of the Metro* (1913)

SAMPLE RESPONSE

At first there do not seem to be enough qualities to make this into a poem as such. It has only two lines, which are not of the same length; there is no distinctive rhythm or rhyme and there is not even a verb to give action to the situation and point to a theme. (Some students think this is too fragmentary to be classed as a poem and you may have some sympathy with that view.) But it is a very descriptive fragment and it uses two different images – one in each line – to capture the poet's experience of seeing people in a crowded station. (The Metro is the Paris underground system. If you do not have an underground train system where you live, imagine crowds pouring off a train.) The poem's title is important because it places the poet's observation and allows the reader to conjure up similar experiences.

The first image is that the faces are an *apparition*, a word that means 'appearance', but also 'ghost', suggesting that they do not look like living beings and perhaps are pale and sad. The second image develops the idea by the metaphor of their faces being like petals on a wet black bough: perhaps the poet is suggesting spring when the trees have blooms, but no leaves and the weather is still rainy; the petals are white or pale pink and delicate, easily blown away. Both images suggest helplessness and transience: there is nothing substantial or robust in the description at all. So although the poet has only offered us images, they are suggestive ones, haunting even, and the experience of seeing people as vulnerable in the hurly-burly of modern urban life has been communicated in two lines and two evocative images.

Reflection: Did the poem's images have this effect on you? Look at some crowds emerging from a station or underground train. Do they look cheerful and lively?



KEY TERM

Imagists: a group of early 20th-century poets who believed that experience was most effectively communicated through images of the senses. This approach is an important element in appreciating *what* a poet is expressing by considering *how* it is expressed. Sense images do not have to be metaphors. The senses are sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell; to these we can add the 'sense' of energy or movement, which could be termed the kinetic sense.

6

Reflection: If possible, with your partner or in a group, discuss in more detail how each theme develops as the poems progress.

The poem is a good example of Imagism. Ezra Pound was one of a group of poets called **Imagists**.

Here is another example of a short poem with vivid images by Singaporean poet Ong Teong Hean. Tai-chi was originally a training for Chinese martial arts but is now considered a very valuable exercise regime. There are some effective rhymes and half-rhymes at the ends of the lines, features that you will discuss in Unit 4.

the man of tai-chi
with such sequestered ease
creates a clean calligraphy
of graceful peace;
a centre of concentration
to pump his heart and arteries
with measured arm-motion
and steps of gnarled artistry.

Ong Teong Hean *The Tai-chi Man* (2010)

What are poems usually about?

Poets can express thoughts and feelings about anything, so poems can have as their subject matter anything in the world you can think of, such as the Underground or exercising in the morning! There are great poems created about apparently trivial objects like a lock of hair, insects such as a flea or mosquito, or growing things such as thistles or mushrooms. Major life dramas such as love, treachery and war do of course also feature. What the poet does with the subject matter, and how these ideas are developed, is the poem's theme, or it can be expressed as 'the poet's concerns'. These ideas are not separate from the words they are expressed in: the words *are* the poem.

Your exam syllabus for AS Level does not set longer narrative poems for study, so all the examples used in this part of the book will be of shorter lyric poems with distinct themes; you will find that length is not necessarily a criterion for excellence. Poems used in an unseen exam question will also be of this kind.

ACTIVITY 1.3

Write down the names of five poems you have studied and, in one or two sentences, say what they are about.

Themes in poetry

It is often easier to summarise the theme of a poem than it is to analyse the poet's methods and the effects of the language used. This poem is about the waste and futility of war, you might say, or the sadness of death, or the passage of time, or how relationships can be difficult, or how some people in power can make others suffer dreadfully.

Perhaps the poet gives a different example in each **stanza** and then concludes by emphasising his point, or uses a little anecdote that illustrates the issue. Or possibly the poet chooses images which are suggestive of a thought but don't express the thought directly, but we still grasp the gist of the argument. You'll look more closely at this in Unit 3.


KEY TERM

Stanza: an Italian word that means 'room', a place to stop. Poetic stanzas can be irregular as well as regular (see Unit 3, Verse and stanza).

ACTIVITY 1.4

Before you read the next poem, *Egrets* (1962) by Australian poet Judith Wright, see if you can find a picture of these graceful white birds, perhaps on the internet. Then, in one sentence, say what you think the poem is about. When you have answered, consider what other elements in the poem could affect the expression of this theme and your appreciation of it.

Once as I travelled through a quiet evening,
I saw a pool, jet-black and mirror-still.
Beyond, the slender paperbarks* stood crowding;
each on its own white image looked its fill,
and nothing moved but thirty egrets wading –
thirty egrets in a quiet evening.

Once in a lifetime, lovely past believing,
your lucky eyes may light on such a pool.
As though for many years I had been waiting,
I watched in silence, till my heart was full
of clear dark water, and white trees unmoving,
and, whiter yet, those thirty egrets wading.

(*A paperbark is an Australian tree with white bark which resembles strips of paper)

Judith Wright, *Egrets* (1962)

**SAMPLE RESPONSE**

The poet speaks of the beauty of some birds she sees at a pool as she is walking one evening and how she is affected by this memorable experience.

What is missing from this response?

This answer interprets the theme of the poem quite successfully, but to focus on theme alone is to neglect other aspects of the poem that influence the theme powerfully. Wright uses images of silence and the stillness of everything except the birds. There is effective colour contrast in the dark pool and the white birds and trees. She uses repetition of words and phrases for emphasis, and the poem's two-stanza structure takes the reader from a single incident (*Once as I travelled through a quiet evening*) to the idea that this is a special *Once in a lifetime* experience which anyone would be lucky to have. When she says *my heart was full / of clear dark water* she is using language metaphorically to express the way that experiences can overwhelm the mind. The rhymes and half-rhymes skilfully enhance the theme. You will revise these in more detail in the next three units.

ACTIVITY 1.5

Another well-known poet has written a poem about white egrets and has a collection of poems with this title, which was first published in 2010 when he was 80 years old. See if you can find out who he is!

In a Station of the Metro, that little fragmentary poem, showed the importance of style in interpretation. You are reminded similarly by Wright's poem that the way a theme is expressed is vital to its meaning: all the work you do on analysis of style will help you to refine your ideas about theme and you will be able to return to your initial statement about the writer's concerns and make it more subtle and comprehensive.



TIP

The words make the poem: its meaning doesn't exist as a separate entity underneath or inside the words like a nut whose shell has to be cracked to find the kernel inside. If you changed some of the words to others with similar meanings but different sounds, the poem would disappear and become something else.

Students usually write about a poem's theme and say little about the poet's style and methods. Any close analysis of the language of a poem will enhance the quality of an essay.



FURTHER READING

- 1 The website 'Poemhunter' is a useful source for poems on particular topics (such as nature, animals, cities and so on).
- 2 *Language for a New Century: Contemporary Poetry from the Middle East, Asia and Beyond*, edited by Ravi Shankar and Nathalie Handal (Norton, 2008).

Self-assessment checklist

Reflect on what you've learnt in this unit and indicate your confidence level between 1 and 5. If you score below 3, revisit that section. Come back to this list later in your course. Has your confidence grown?

| | Confidence level | Revisited? |
|--|------------------|------------|
| I can appreciate and discuss the different elements that may make a poem | | |
| I understand what the Imagists were aiming to do | | |
| I can identify aspects other than theme in Wright's poem about the birds | | |
| I acknowledge the importance of style | | |

Unit 2

The language of poetry

Learning objectives

In this unit you will:

- remind yourself of metaphorical and other non-literal language, with examples to clarify
- revise and consider the effect of language with unusual word order and syntax
- review the importance of repetition and parallelism in poems and their effect.



KEY CONCEPTS

Language, form, structure, genres, context, style, interpretation.

Before you start

- Look back at the poem by Judith Wright in Unit 1 and see if you can find any similes or metaphors. This will put you in the right frame of mind for reviewing figures of speech.

This unit will help you to appreciate and deal with some of the poetic uses of language: first, the figurative language that characterises many poems and expands their imaginative range; second, the uses of language that challenge your understanding.

The meaning of lines of poetry can sometimes be difficult to unravel because the words are new to you, they are not in the usual order, or perhaps some are missing, making the utterance ambiguous. It's important to remember that a poet's style is not seeking difficulty for its own sake but striving for freshness of presentation and thought, so that when you study the poem you will be engaged by it and remember it with pleasure as a unique utterance.

Metaphorical language

The language of poetry can be very concentrated. One of the reasons for this intensity of expression is the use of **metaphor**. Literal language – the language of fixed predictable meaning – is relatively straightforward, but as soon as language becomes figurative (filled with **figures of speech**) then it becomes highly suggestive and open to imaginative interpretation. Look at the difference between *My love is eighteen years old and has black hair* (literal) and *My love is like a red, red rose* (a figurative comparison).

Metaphor is a broad term which encompasses all the comparative figures of speech (**simile** and **personification**, for example) rather as the term 'mammal' includes a wide range of animals. It is based on comparison. In the hands of a skilled poet, metaphor can extend and enrich meaning, often working at more than one level of comparison and extending through several lines or a whole poem.



KEY TERMS

Figures of speech: Don't be put off by the fact that many words for figures of speech are unusual, often deriving from ancient Greek. This shows that using them has been an essential feature of language since ancient times. There are literally scores of them, but the following list gives you the most common ones.

Imagery: the images of any of our senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, smell) produced in the mind by descriptive language. These images are often being compared with something else, so frequently associated with specific figures of speech.

Metaphor: the most important and widespread figure of speech. It is a comparison in which unlike objects are identified with each other so that some element of similarity can be found between them. Here a comparison is made by identifying one thing with another, but without using *as* or *like*. In its identification of one thing with another it goes further than a simile. For example:

If music be the food of love, play on (Shakespeare *Twelfth Night*): music to a lover is like food to a hungry person, feeding and sustaining.

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune (Shakespeare *Hamlet*): life's blows are like missiles thrown at us, but note that fortune is also personified here.

Her skills have blossomed since she started lessons: her skills are growing like a plant – a bud has grown and has gradually become a beautiful flower.

Extended metaphor: where the identification of similar qualities is elaborated over a number of lines, and may run throughout a poem or paragraph of prose.

Simile: a figure of speech (really a kind of metaphor) in which two things are compared using *as* or *like*. A good simile will be clear and economical, but also suggestive; for example, *My love is like a red, red rose* (Robert Burns): beautiful, with soft skin like petals.

Personification: a form of metaphor in which the qualities of a person are transferred to non-human things or abstract qualities, to 'humanise' them and make them easier to understand; for example, *the street lamp muttered* (T.S. Eliot): the environment is just as alive as the person walking down the street.

Hyperbole: exaggeration – an over-statement, used for effect. It isn't used to disguise the truth, but to emphasise. It can be an ingredient of humour too; for example, *An hundred years should go to praise thine eyes* (Andrew Marvell, praising his lover).

Litotes: an understatement used for effect, often using a double negative (such as *not bad*); for example, Wordsworth uses *not seldom* to mean 'quite often' in *The Prelude*.

Antithesis or **contrast:** places contrasting ideas next to each other for effect; often they are in balanced phrases or clauses. This placing can also be termed **juxtaposition** (see Unit 14). You will find many examples of this throughout the book.

Climax: (from a Greek word meaning 'ladder') is the point of highest significance which is gradually reached; for example, *to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield* (Alfred Lord Tennyson). Its opposite, **anti-climax** or **bathos**, suddenly undercuts the climax (and may be humorous); for example, from a poem describing the survivors of a shipwreck (the cutter is the ship carrying foodstuffs): *they grieved for those that perished with the cutter / and also for the biscuit casks and butter* (Lord Byron).

Paradox: two apparently contradictory ideas placed together which make sense when examined closely; for example, *the child is father of the man* (William Wordsworth). If the contradiction is expressed in words in close proximity, it is called an **oxymoron**. In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo makes a whole speech using them (e.g. *Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health*).

Repetition: extremely common for emphasis. The word **parallelism** is used for similar structures, phrases or clauses placed together. You will find many examples of this throughout the book; for example, Tennyson's *Mariana* (see the section on repetition and parallelism later in this unit).

Anaphora: repetition of introductory phrases.

Irony: in its simplest form, irony involves a discrepancy between what is said by a writer and what is actually meant, or a contrast between what the reader expects and what is actually written. More complex forms of irony are dealt with in Part 2 of this book. The word **sarcasm** refers to speech rather than writing, although it would be appropriate for a character speaking in a play.

Sarcasm: The use of a mocking or scornful tone of voice. If analysing a writer's tone you should use the word 'irony', but a character's direct speech can be called sarcastic.

Examples

- 1 In Wilfred Owen's poem *Exposure*, the poet vividly depicts the experience of men in the trenches in winter, waiting for something to happen. The pattern of comparisons here is mostly one of personification, making the inanimate alive, and thereby emphasising the cruelty of the cold weather: *the merciless iced east winds that knife us; the mad gusts tugging on the wire; Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army; the frost which will be shrivelling many hands and puckering foreheads crisp*. At one point, Owen imagines home and its fire, with its *crusted dark-red jewels*: here he compares the shape of the glowing coals to red jewels, precious by virtue of their warmth and beauty.
- 2 When South African poet Dennis Brutus describes in his poem *Nightsong: City* the way that police cars rush about the city at night, he says they *cockroach* through the *tunnel* streets. A cockroach is a hard-shelled insect associated with heat and dirt, which scuttles around in the dark, viewed with distaste by everyone. *Tunnel* has connotations of darkness and danger. He continues the insect imagery when he describes violence in a simile: *Violence like a bug-infested rag is tossed...* This gives the impression of a grim city life in which lower life forms have taken over; nonetheless, he loves his city and his country. *My land, my love, sleep well* is how he ends the poem.
- 3 Caribbean poet Grace Nicholls also uses an insect image in her poem *Up My Spine*, where she sees the old woman *twist-up and shaky like a cripple insect*. In spite of seeming old and feeble, the old woman has great power in the poem. You can find it on the internet.
- 4 In *Sonnet 73* by William Shakespeare, a series of related extended metaphors is used. It is a typical Shakespearean sonnet (see Unit 3) with three sections of four lines followed by a couplet at the end, making 14 lines in all. The speaker of the poem is feeling his age, and he relates his physical self to three extended metaphors: the season of the year, the time of day and the progress of a fire. You will notice that the unit of comparison gradually diminishes, down to the 'ashes', which are his last remains.
- 5 Here are some lines filled with very visual metaphors and similes from the poem *After Midnight* by Indian poet Amit Chaudhuri (born 1962):

Last night, the medallion moon was caught oddly
 between sleek, glowing channels of telephone wire.
 No one stirred, but a Pacific of lights went on burning
 in the vacant porches ...
 Twice, I sensed hands,
 behind windows, strike a match, and a swift badge of flame
 open and shut like a hot mouth.

An extract from *After Midnight* (2008), by Amit Chaudhuri

The *medallion moon* is silver, round, like a jewel printed with significant words, the lights are a vast sea like the Pacific Ocean, and the match is the same colour and shape as a red badge. *Like a hot mouth* is a personification, as if the flame speaks and is then quiet.

ACTIVITY 2.1

Look closely at the metaphors in the poems you are studying; then analyse some of them by writing clearly what things are being compared and what effects these comparisons have. If you like drawing, try making a visual representation of them instead together with a friend.

Reflection: What effects do these comparisons have?



KEY TERMS

Diction: the writer's choice of vocabulary. (You may also come across the word *lexis*, which is a term from the field of Linguistics.) Not to be confused with diction meaning style of pronunciation in speaking.

Neologism: a newly coined word or expression, usually by poets or writers to draw attention to the meaning they are conveying.

Neologisms: One difference between most prose and poetry is that poets sometimes create new words (or neologisms) to draw attention to the meaning they are conveying. You need to work out what the effect of the new word is in its context. Here is an example:

Thomas Hardy wrote many poems when his first wife died, remembering the love they had shared in earlier, happier days. In his poem *The Voice*, he imagines hearing her voice as he is out walking by himself and wishes he could see her as she once was, but she is *ever dissolved to wan wistlessness*. This last word is one coined by Hardy. *Wist* is an archaic word for 'know' and was old when Hardy was writing too. So *wistless* means 'unknowing' and *wistlessness* is the state of not knowing or unconsciousness. All together the word suggests someone who is gone, part of the past, no longer a thinking, feeling person; its sounds are soft, sad and *wistful*, a word very similar in sound which means 'longing'. In both sound and meaning, therefore, the word chosen by Hardy focuses the sense of loss when the living reflect on the absence of the longed-for dead. You don't need to worry about the meaning of unusual or archaic words when you are practising for the unseen paper, as these words will always be given to you.

ACTIVITY 2.2

Try to identify some poems in which new words have been created for a particular effect. Your teacher will help you here. You may need a dictionary to help you find the basic building-block words used by the poet.



KEY TERM

Syntax: the arrangement of words into sentences so that the relationship of each word to the others can be appreciated. (Each language has its own conventions of syntax.) The Ezra Pound poem in Unit 1 was not a complete sentence as it didn't have a finite verb (a verb which has a subject doing the action), appropriate for an utterance that records a fleeting impression rather than an action.

Unusual syntax and omission of words (sometimes called 'deviation')

An important way in which the language of poetry can differ from the language of prose is in its occasionally unusual syntax; word order can be altered and some words omitted to create an interestingly different effect. In this way, the reader is forced to become more attentive to the words and is not able to skim the surface.

The well-known poem by W.H. Auden (1907–1973) *Musée des Beaux Arts* begins by saying *About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old Masters*, rather than *The old masters were never wrong about suffering*. This is known as an inversion; here, the inversion stresses the suffering which is the poet's main concern by placing it directly at the beginning. The poetry of Emily Dickinson (1830–1886) is filled with inversions. For example:

A solemn thing – it was – I said –

A woman – white – to be – ...

A hallowed thing – to drop a life.



Landscape with the Fall of Icarus by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. This painting is described in W.H. Auden's poem *Musée des Beaux Arts*, which is named after the museum in Belgium which holds the painting.

ACTIVITY 2.3

Discuss with a partner the word order and syntax in some poems you are studying. In almost every one you will find deviations from the 'normal' word order, and you will find words omitted. Try to consider the effect these have. A good way to point out the difference is to put the lines into sentences in the usual prose order, adding any words you need to make the meaning clear. The first thing you will notice is how much longer your version is, a reminder that poetry can often be very concentrated compared with prose. The Dickinson stanza would begin *I said it was a solemn thing to be a woman*.

Reflection: Think of a favourite poem and how different it would be if you made it into a normal prose order.

This feature is not confined to poetry. In the play *Death of a Salesman*, Linda speaks of her husband to her sons, saying: *Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person*. The word *attention* is emphasised by its position and by its repetition (rather than the more usual *You should pay attention to a person like that*).

ACTIVITY 2.4

Here is another example: a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889) that uses unusual syntax and omits words to create specific effects. Analyse how Hopkins does this. Whether on your own or with a partner, use a highlighter to pinpoint those areas of the poem where words are in an unusual order or words have apparently been left out.

Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
 Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;
 And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.
 All things counter, original, spare, strange;
 Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
 With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
 He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
 Praise him.

Gerard Manley Hopkins *Pied Beauty* (1877)

SAMPLE RESPONSE

Hopkins omits words and writes very concentratedly in this poem praising God's creation. One characteristic method he uses is to create double-barrelled words such as *couple-colour*, *rose-moles*, *fresh-firecoal* and *fathers-forth*, each of which would require many more words to paraphrase their meaning in prose. The four words *fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls* delightfully sum up the beauties of autumn when chestnuts fall, and fires are made to warm us up and to roast the chestnuts. *Fathers-forth* suggests a loving and enabling parent who cares deeply but is not possessive. Hopkins also uses lists of words, whose meaning and sound work together to image the great variety of multicoloured and multicharactered things and people in the world: *counter, original, spare, strange ... swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim*. He does not need to spell out with unnecessary extra words what he is referring to. The images of the senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell and movement are all implied here), together with the sounds of the words, combine to create a picture of a great creation iridescent with change, and a great creator whose beauty, in contrast, depends upon his unchanging nature. Hopkins's poetry is rich with similar examples.

KEY TERM

Parallelism:

a device in which parts of the wording of a sentence are the same, repeating or paralleling each other for emphasis.

Repetition and parallelism

Poetic method often includes exact repetition of words and phrases, or whole lines, in order to intensify effects. **Parallelism** is repetition which may have some subtle differences. The first example for you to consider is from Tennyson's poem *Mariana*. Here are the first two stanzas:

With blackest moss the flower-pots

Were thickly crusted, one and all:

The rusted nails fell from the knots

That held the pear to the gable-wall.

The broken sheds look'd sad and strange:

Unlifted was the clinking latch;

Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
 Upon the lonely moated grange.
 She only said, 'My life is dreary,
 He cometh not,' she said;
 She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
 I would that I were dead!'
 Her tears fell with the dews at even;
 Her tears fell ere the dews were dried;
 She could not look on the sweet heaven,
 Either at morn or eventide.
 After the flitting of the bats,
 When thickest dark did trance the sky,
 She drew her casement-curtain by,
 And glanced athwart the glooming flats.
 She only said, 'The night is dreary,
 He cometh not,' she said;
 She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
 I would that I were dead!'

An extract from Alfred Lord Tennyson
Mariana (1830)



Mariana in the Moated Grange by John Everett Millais.

ACTIVITY 2.5

See if you can find examples of exact repetition in the two stanzas from *Mariana*. Then look to see if you can find parallelism, where the repeated phrase or construction has a slight variation. Don't include the rhyme at this stage, although it is, of course, a kind of parallelism.

COMMENT

The most obvious repetition is in the final four lines of each stanza where most of the words are the same (and this continues through the poem to the final stanza). Lines 2, 3 and 4 of the final quatrain (four lines) are exactly the same, but in quatrain 1 she says *My life is dreary* and in quatrain 2 she says *The night is dreary*. This pattern is found with *The day is dreary* used in other stanzas in alternation. The use of a line or lines repeated in this way is typical of certain kinds of poem, such as the ballad, and it is known as a refrain.

Her tears fell is repeated in lines 1 and 2 of the second stanza and there is a mention of the dews, although this is worded slightly differently.



There are other examples of parallelism, such as nearly every object being given a descriptive word (an adjective) to qualify it: *blackest moss, rusted nails, broken sheds, clinking latch, ancient thatch, lonely moated grange, sweet heaven, thickest dark, glooming flats*.

There is a relentless pattern here, which is very appropriate for the repetitive, doomed existence of Mariana, waiting for the man who never comes. Her environment is dark and gloomy, and only the *heaven* (which she cannot face) is *sweet*. By the final stanza of the whole poem, the refrain's changes reveal a climax of desperation:

Then, said she, 'I am very dreary,
He will not come,' she said;
She wept, 'I am aweary, aweary,
O God, that I were dead!'

We shall now look at an example of a shorter poem by W.B. Yeats that depends equally upon these features. The whole poem follows Activity 2.6.

**TIP**

By paying close attention to the words in poems – their implications, their sounds and their arrangement – you will gradually become a skilled and responsive literary critic.

ACTIVITY 2.6

See if you can identify the repetition and parallelism in this poem by Irish poet W.B. Yeats: *An Irish Airman Foresees His Death*, written about Yeats's friend Major Robert Gregory who died in the First World War.

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

W.B. Yeats *An Irish Airman Foresees His Death* (1919)

COMMENT

You should have had no difficulty in finding parallel and antithetical (contrasting) phrases and constructions here. Note also its regular metre and rhyme. (You will find discussion of regular rhythms and rhymes in Unit 4.)

What effect does it have that the poem is written using such parallels and contrasts? Remember the 'I' of the poem is not Yeats: he is imagining the thoughts of his friend. What sort of person is the 'I' of the poem? What are his feelings about the war in which he is engaged? Think about the word 'balance', which is used twice towards the end.

Reflection: Discuss with a friend or in class what you think about the lines: *A lonely impulse of delight / Drove to this tumult in the clouds.* I find them very memorable and moving (and they stand alone without repetition and parallelism in other lines). Compare this insight with other war poems you have studied.

FURTHER READING

- 1 The website www.poets.org is a useful resource for studying poetry.
- 2 *100 Best Loved Poems*, edited by Philip Smith (Dover Thrift, 1995).

Self-assessment checklist

Reflect on what you've learnt in this unit and indicate your confidence level between 1 and 5. If you score below 3, revisit that section. Come back to this list later in your course. Has your confidence grown?

| | Confidence level | Revisited? |
|--|------------------|------------|
| I know how to discuss and write about the difference between literal and figurative language | | |
| I can provide some examples of metaphor | | |
| I understand what the effects of unusual syntax and omission of words may be in poetry | | |
| I can see how important the effects of repetition and parallelism are in poetry | | |



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