

Duffy

Education for Leisure

VIOLENCE/NORMAL/ABNORMAL/DARK HUMOUR/
POWER/ENDINGS

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

The narrator speaks a Dramatic Monologue. The way he speaks and what he says reveal his disturbed personality.

Line 1 sounds very normal and matter-of-fact: "Today I am going to kill something". This simple sentence suggests that the man sees killing as a simple thing to do and this makes him seem more dangerous. The fact that he will kill, "Anything" is again frightening because he kills randomly – for no "reason" – he is irrational. The only **reason** indicated in the poem is that the man feels ignored (line 2).

The man is quite arrogant and he repeats the pronoun "I" at the start of lines and particularly in stanza 4. This reflects his obsession with himself. He also brags about himself, comparing himself to God and, "I breathe out talent" and, "he's talking to a superstar".

There is a dark humour in the poem with a lot of what the man says being ironically the opposite of reality. He talks about his "autograph" as though he is a celebrity – but in reality this is his signature to register as unemployed! He says that the cat knows he is a "genius" – but the cat hides because it knows he is a lunatic!

His use of slang, "down the bog", makes the killing of the goldfish more lighthearted.

More dark humour is created at the end of the poem with the use of a pun on the word "cuts". He says that the radio

presenter “cuts me off” and then he picks up the “bread-knife”. So the pun on “cuts” reminds us of what he may do with the knife.

“The pavements glitter suddenly” and the word “glitter” suggests beauty, excitement and, perhaps, fame. This shows us the man links violence with power and thrills.

The word “our” (in “our bread-knife”) may simply be slang for “my” – as it sounds like this man lives alone. But it could have a more sinister meaning. Maybe this person has a “friend” or a “voice” in his head, telling him what to do – one symptom of being a schizophrenic. So, in that case, it really **would** mean “our” bread-knife – in a very disturbed sense!

STRUCTURE:

Structurally, the killing begins with simple creatures – a fly in stanza 2. By stanza 4, he has moved on to bigger things – the goldfish. But the climax and real shock comes in the final stanza – in the final few words: “your arm”. This is a direct address to the reader and emphasises that **we** could be a random victim of such a maniac – unless his “touch” is for purely innocent reasons! (He **does** have a bread-knife – and there is **no** bread around!!)

The very simple nature of many sentences and the monosyllabic language (e.g. “He cuts me off.” and “I touch your arm.”) makes this man seem like a clear, logical thinker which, again, makes him seem even more dangerous. Similarly with, “I pull the chain./I see that it is good.” There is a disturbing lack of emotion with the violence he is committing. There is also an ironic echo, here, of “The Bible” (“Genesis”) when God created the world and “saw that it was good”.

Duffy

Havisham

VIOLENCE/REVENGE/JEALOUSY/MEN+WOMEN/LOSS/
BASED ON ANOTHER STORY

SITUATION: Duffy has based her poem on a character (Miss Havisham) from Charles Dickens' novel "Great Expectations". In the novel, she is betrayed by her lover who does not turn up to their wedding. She then shuts herself away in her mansion – not altering anything in the room prepared for the wedding celebration – including the food and her own clothing! She spends the rest of her days in a state of decay and teaches her adopted, beautiful child, Estella, to ***break men's hearts***.

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

Havisham speaks a dramatic Monologue and ***how*** she speaks – and ***what*** she says – gives us character insight.

The woman's coldness is reflected in the title, "Havisham" – not ***Miss*** Havisham. Perhaps Duffy is showing her own lack of respect for this cold woman – naming her almost like a criminal without a first name and without a title – and emphasising the woman's ***sham*** of a life.

There is dark humour in the ironic oxymoron of the first line. Romance is mocked by the woman by mixing the violent language, "***b***astard" with the romantic cliché "***B***eloved sweetheart". Alliteration of the plosive "b" sound emphasises her violent attitude to mankind.

The metaphor "dark green pebbles for eyes" is very effective. The "dark" makes the reader think of her evil side while the green symbolises her jealousy and, perhaps, her decay (maybe also, the ***poison*** in her mind). The word

“pebbles” has connotations of “coldness”/“hardness” and this links well with her attitude to love and to men. The prominent veins on the back of her hands emphasise her age and her decline and perhaps her anger. Duffy uses the veins as a metaphor for ropes that she would gladly use to strangle her ex-lover.

Her crying is referred to as “cawing” which is the sound of the raven – a bird linked with evil and death. So, this contributes to our negative image of her.

Her **twisted** nature is symbolised by the “slewed” (slanted) mirror which would show her in a weird way. There may also be a pun on “slewed” linking to “slay” which would remind us of her desire to kill. There is also the idea that the mirror shows that her **beauty** has been killed or **slain**.

The erotic fantasy of lines 10-12 – “my fluent tongue...”, etc. – emphasises her sexual frustration in never having had her lover for all these years. Again, the plosive sounds echo her anger: “**b**etter”, “**b**ody” and “**b**ite”. The body in her bed is a “lost” body (because she has “lost” her love) and when her fantasy ends with “bite awake” it is as if she is grinding her teeth in frustration.

“Love’s/hate” is another oxymoron emphasising the contrast between her past love and her present hatred and stressing the link between the two. Ironically, **because** she loved him so much, she now hates him even more so.

The symbolism of the “red balloon” and its link to “my face” perhaps show her embarrassment at having been jilted at the altar and publicly shamed. The “red” also symbolises anger and perhaps also links with the idea of sexual passion – all of which are relevant to Miss Havisham.

Again, the alliteration of the plosive “b” dominates in the final stanza, culminating in the anger of the last word of the poem: “**b**ehind...**b**alloon **b**ursting/...**B**ang...stab**bb**ed...**b** – **b** – **b** – **b**reaks.”. The nervous stammer of the word “breaks” helps to reinforce the alliteration and the stammer reflects her highly emotional state. The word “breaks” itself is, important to the theme of the poem which is about a broken heart and a broken person. (Before we feel too much sympathy for Havisham, we should remember that in the original story she poisons the young Estella’s mind against men by repeatedly telling her to “break” their hearts.)

Her stabbing at the wedding cake symbolises her hatred of love itself and her moral decay is symbolised by her debauched idea of sleeping with a “male corpse” – although this could be seen as a humorous metaphor for men who are “dead” (sexually) in bed. There is also the idea that a “corpse” could never abandon her and the mood of the poem is (perhaps) lightened a little by the idea of the honeymoon being “long” and “slow” – because she is in bed with a “corpse”! This idea helps to present Havisham as a **twisted** individual.

STRUCTURE:

Some odd enjambement and punctuation helps to stress her own weird behaviour. Her isolation is symbolized by the single-word sentence at the start of stanza 2: “Spinster.” This word stands alone with a hiatus created by the full stop – just like she is alone and there has been a hiatus in her life when it “ended” (in the original novel, all the clocks in the room have stopped and time has literally stood still for Miss Havisham). The word “Spinster”, itself, is a hated word to many women as it suggests that they have not married because they are **unwanted** – as opposed to **choosing** to be single. The half-rhyme of “sp**in**ster” and “I st**in**k” perhaps

links of being a spinster to the idea of decay – which is Havisham’s exact situation.

Duffy uses enjambement to split the rhetorical question in lines 8-9. “Who did this/to me? This splits the sentence across stanzas 2 and 3 which is quite unusual.

The hiatus after the first two words of line 9 emphasises those two words (“to me”). This emphasises her obsession with “me”. It also leaves line 8 with an ambiguous meaning. If we read line 8 alone: “...her, myself, who did this” (end of stanza) – this could be Duffy suggesting that it is Havisham **herself** who has wasted her whole life by failing to get over the original loss – it is not just the man’s fault.

This idea is supported by the odd repetition of the pronouns “her” and “myself” which catch the eye because they appear to be opposites. When she sees herself in the mirror it is as if, **for a moment**, she can stand back from her emotions and see reality – she can see “her” true self.

Similar enjambement is used between stanzas 3 and 4, “Love’s/hate”, to emphasise the ideas in the oxymoron (discussed above). The separation across stanzas again could symbolise her feelings of separation or **divorce** – certainly the distance between the time of “love” in her younger days and the “hate” of the present.

Very little rhyme is used in the poem which perhaps reflects her miserable mood and her anti-romantic attitude. The rhyme in lines 14 and 16 “cake” and “breaks” is not a perfect rhyme and this emphasises the lack of **harmony** in her life. The rhyme also emphasises the significant final word of the poem, “breaks” (as discussed above).

Duffy

Salome

MEN + WOMEN/POWER/VIOLENCE/REVENGE/DARK HUMOUR/ENDINGS/BASED ON ANOTHER STORY

SITUATION:

In “The Bible”, Salome was a dancer for King Herod. She was criticised by John the Baptist for her sexual promiscuity. Herod lusted after the beautiful Salome and promised her anything her heart desired. So, she demanded the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Carol Ann Duffy modernises the story and tricks the reader at the start of the poem to add black humour when we are shocked with the truth at the end of the poem.

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

The poem is a Dramatic Monologue spoken by Salome herself. Her use of language and what she says reveal her character.

She is made to sound normal so that she is even more sinister when we find out what she has done. To achieve this, Duffy makes Salome use modern slang: “booze”, “fags”, “wrecked”, “a night on the batter”, “ain’t life a bitch”. She also uses common clichés like “Never again!” – after her hangover.

Her tone is very conversational and chatty containing rhetorical questions. There are pauses using ellipsis (...) in line 12 and dashes (e.g.) in line 4 to imitate natural speech. She also speaks naturally in incomplete sentences: “Yes.” And “Strange.”. This all helps to make her seem quite friendly and normal – when she definitely *isn’t!*

The poem is full of dark ironic humour because the reader does not realise the **twisted** meanings at the start of the poem.

So, line 4, “woke up with a head on the pillow”. The reader thinks this just means she does not know who she has slept with – but it is **literally** “a head” on the pillow!

“Lines around the eyes/from pain” but this is not the pain of love but the pain from having his head removed!

“A beautiful crimson mouth” and “the reddish beard” – these (and the previous example) mock the ideas of conventional romance. His mouth is beautiful to **her** because it is full of blood and it shows her power over men.

His “mouth that obviously knew how to flatter” – this is ironic because he thought that he (modern man, **not** John the Baptist) had the power by sweet-talking Salome into bed – but she brought an end to that sweet-talking mouth!

“Peter?/Simon? Andrew? John?” – this is ironic because the reader thinks she simply does not remember his name but these names link back to “The Bible” because they are the names of some of Jesus’ disciples and the last name links with John the Baptist from the original Salome story.

She uses polite euphemism and jocular language to refer to something quite macabre and grotesque – “it was time to **turf out** the **blighter**” – remember she is lying with a severed head next to her!

She describes her victim with romantic language to mock romance – “good-looking”, “dark hair”, “beautiful crimson mouth”, “which I kissed”. This is all ironic and makes her seem even more disturbed, We get a sick image of her kissing the head as she says it is “colder than pewter”.

Her cold-hearted nature comes across in her sarcastic and unsympathetic use of the cliché, “and ain’t life a bitch”. When she sees in the mirror her eyes “glitter” this shows us the excitement that she has in killing the man (compare “glitter” in “Education for Leisure” and compare beauty and violence in “The Laboratory”). The use of some alliteration of plosive sounds also helps to reveal the violent nature lurking beneath her harmless surface e.g. “**bl**ighter/the **b** eater or **b**iter” (compare “bite” in “Havisham” and “The Laboratory”).

STRUCTURE:

The poem is written in free verse which perhaps reflects Salome’s sexual wildness and free spirit.

There is, however, a heavy use of rhyme and a repetitive use of the “er” sound (compare “Kid”) in the poem which makes the poem sound cheerful and light. This is deliberately ironic because the poem is about a disturbed individual committing a gruesome killing. So, as full rhymes we hear, “clatter”, “patter”, “latter” and “platter” for example.

But then there are half-rhymes which deliberately spoil the musical tone – providing an idea that all is not as cheerful as it **sounds**. So, we hear “pewter” and “Peter”, “better” and “butter”, for example.

The sequence of ideas in the poem allows Duffy to trick the reader and to create dark irony. In the first stanza, we picture a bedroom scene the morning after a boozy one-night stand. This idea is maintained until the very last line of the poem, “was his head on a platter” to maximise the shock value. It is not until the last word in particular that we see the parallel with the Salome of “The Bible” story.

Armitage

My Father Thought It....

FATHER AND SON/YOUNG AND OLD/REBELLION AND CONFORMITY/EMOTIONAL PAIN/NORMAL/ABNORMAL

SITUATION:

The narrator is a man who was criticised when younger for wearing an earring. Years later, he has grown up but is still saddened by his father's cruel words. Ironically, he may now also be hearing himself taking on the same attitude his father had.

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

"Bloody queer" – this sounds like an old-fashioned phrase that shows his father is a traditionalist and may be suggesting that his son is "queer" (i.e. "gay") for wearing an earring or, at least, that he is "strange".

The alliteration of "I hadn't the nerve to numb..." helps to stress that the narrator *wasn't* a real rebel – who would have pierced it himself and put a safety-pin in like a punk rocker.

He did it the traditional and safe way with a jeweller and a sleeper to gradually phase in the earring.

The final stanza confirms that at some point the young man conformed with his father's attitudes – and this upsets him. The man hears his "own voice" suggesting to remove the earring and to leave it out permanently.

This may be an echo of what he eventually thought and did. He describes his voice "breaking like a tear". This **breaking of the voice** may be a symbol of him **losing his wild youth** or adolescence and becoming more (unadventurously) mature – because voices breaking are a sign of puberty in males. The "tear" shows his emotional hurt over his **loss**.

However, “tear” could have a double meaning linking it with the **tear** or **rip** in his ear. This links back to the metaphor in line 11: “the hole became a sore, became a wound, and wept”. The **weeping** sore links with his crying a “tear”. The wound “wept” but he also “wept” for some **emotional** reason. The alliteration, repetition, rhyme and the list of three in this line emphasises the importance of the ideas and feelings contained within it: “it slept/the hole became a sore, became a **w**ound, and **w**ept”.

The man may not just be crying for his lost youth – symbolised by his minor act of rebellion with the earring.

His pierced ear also reminds him of the **emotional** pain caused by his father’s mockery which caused a different type of pain to his ear and a different type of deep “**wound**”. Maybe the italicised quotation of the last two lines of the poem are actually his father’s words which became lodged in his ear (i.e. his mind) because of their hurtfulness. This would explain how the quoted words are, “cried from way back” **in time** – not just from “way back in the spiral of my ear”.

STRUCTURE:

The use of rhyme is quite interesting. The first stanza has a very conventional rhyme pattern: a, a, b, b, b. This may symbolise the traditional and conventional nature of his father’s attitudes – which are being expressed in that stanza.

The second stanza has a much looser use of rhyme – perhaps reflecting that this is the stanza where the boy is making a strike for independence: a, b, a (half-rhyme only), c, d, d. However, there are some internal rhymes in the

stanza: “skin” and “pin” and in” – perhaps symbolising that, deep down, the boy is really a conformist.

The final stanza takes us forward in time and although the rhyme pattern appears quite unconventional (a, b, c, a), the use of internal rhyme in each of the four lines perhaps symbolises the return to conformity which is the theme of the final stanza. So, we hear: “hear”, “tear”, “ear” and “year”.

This sound also echoes the sound of his father in the opening lines of the poem: “queer” and “ear” and this is ironic as one theme of the poem is about the man being haunted by the **sound** of his father’s words. Or else, the man is thinking in the same way as his father thought – and therefore being haunted by his **own** words.

The use of an italicised quotation at the end of the poem is significant because it emphasises how we can be haunted by the precise words said to us (or, indeed, the precise words used by ourselves). So, it is effective, at the end of the poem, to use the words actually spoken.

Armitage

Kid

TRUST/BETRAYAL/ANGER/REVENGE/FANTASY +
REALITY/GLAMOUR/BASED ON ANOTHER STORY

SITUATION:

The poem is *not* just about Batman and Robin. The poet is using that idea as a *metaphor* for *any* situation where we put our trust in a person we look up to and then we are betrayed by that person. More generally, we often hero-worship fantasy figures and older, *real* people when we are younger – but we may discover that real life is not so romantically perfect as we grow up – as Robin does in this poem.

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

The title “Kid” refers to Robin but it may also be an ironic pun meaning “to kid” (to trick, mislead, deceive) someone. This links with the poem’s theme which is about “heroes” who are false – and therefore “kidding” people.

The poem is written as a Dramatic Monologue, revealing Robin’s anger with Batman and his pleasure in the “hero’s” downfall.

The main extended metaphor in the poem (based on the Batman and Robin comic strips/films) really refers to *any* of our relationships where one person hero worships another and where one person controls another. The poem is also stressing that younger people in particular sometimes have an over-romantic/idealistic vision about the “perfection” of other (older) people.

The poet begins the poem with plosive sounds to convey Robin’s anger, “**B**atman, **b**ig shot...”.

The writer also ironically imitates Batman's American slang and catch-phrases throughout the poem so as to mock his fallen hero: "big shot", "blown the cover", "sacked it", "that caper". There is also perhaps a pun on "caper" as Batman was known as a "caped" crusader".

The irony here is that Batman was supposed to be morally perfect but Robin discovers that Batman's "caper" was to have illicit sex with a married woman while submitting a fraudulent "expenses" claim to fund the affair "downtown"!!

Lines 12-13 (the act of betrayal) mock Batman's trademark habit of excitedly rolling a whole sentence into a single, long word – shown by the hyphenation in lines 12-13. Line 12 also cleverly links Robin to the shock at Batman's immoral actions by the pun on "robin-redbreast" (stressed by the alliteration) – by linking Robin with the sexual innuendo of "breast" and "nest-egg" (pregnancy?).

The lines are made more musical and light hearted by the internal rhymes of "breast"/"nest" and "over"/"clover". ("Roll me over in the clover" is a playful song suggesting "snogging" in the fields).

Plosive sounds are again used to show Robin's anger: "I'm not playing **b**all **b**oy any longer/**B**atman...". The emphasis on "ball boy" shows that Robin is tired of being treated as an inferior – as **just** a "kid" – especially by someone who he now knows is a fraud.

Robin, then, shoots down the ideas about Batman being a hero. First there is the romantic, fantasy idea of Batman giving Robin his own space to develop – "to wander/leeward, freely through the wild blue yonder". The assonance of "**le**eward"/"fre**ee**ly" emphasises the romantic

idea – as does the old fashioned and romantic metaphor “leeward” (= **sheltered** from the sea/storm) along with the romantic cliché “wild blue yonder”.

The poet builds this romantic feeling up but then knocks it down (he uses **bathos** (not **pathos**) – a sudden **fall** from the romantic and/or important to the unromantic and/or mundane/trivial). So, we get the harsh **contrast** of, “ditched me rather/in the gutter...well, I turned the corner”.

The internal rhyme on the word “gutter” emphasises Robin’s bitter feelings that Batman “ditched” him – rather than liberated him. The ellipsis after “gutter” shows Robin dwelling on this emotive word – just as the punctuation makes the reader dwell on the word.

Robin loses his childish belief in heroes and this is symbolised by him removing his costume which is what makes him Robin the **superhero** – it is part of the unreal world of heroes and evil wrongdoers: “I’ve doffed (taken off) that off-the-shoulder/Sherwood-Forest-green and scarlet number”.

The internal rhyme of “doff”/”off” emphasises the symbolic importance of what he is doing with the clothes. Again, “doff” is an old-fashioned, romantic word – and Robin is shedding his over-romantic view of life.

The hyphenated phrasing in lines 15 and 16 again mocks the speech patterns of Batman’s “heroic” world.

The poet also introduces another archetypal hero – in Robin Hood – through the metaphor of “Sherwood-Forest-green” – the colour of the clothes which are now being abandoned.

This of course makes an ironic link between the **two** Robins – one the hero from English legend and the modern American Robin who now disbelieves in the whole idea of the “hero” – and so is symbolically casting off his hero’s costume.

Robin is stepping away from this fantasy world as he now knows the harsh truth of reality – so, symbolically, he now wears ordinary, “realistic” clothes: “jeans and crew-neck jumper”.

In a similar way, Batman is reduced from being a glamorous superhero to existing in the mundane world of living alone and cooking for himself: “stewing over/chicken giblets in the pressure cooker”.

The enjambement puts the emphasis on “chicken giblets” – a particularly *unromantic* meal! – and this results in *bathos* and a certain *irony* in Batman’s fall from his previous glamorous lifestyle.

There are also possible puns used to add a touch of dark humour. “Stewing over”: he is cooking *stew* but he is also stressed out – “stewing over” (thinking/worrying over).

“Pressure cooker” – he is also feeling under *pressure* now.

Robin is clearly enjoying Batman’s suffering in later life, as shown by his sarcasm: “it makes a marvellous picture” (emphasised by the alliteration). There may also be an ironic pun on the word “picture” because these heroic comic strip characters appeared in *pictures* in comics or in films at the *pictures* (cinemas) – and now Batman’s present “picture” is far less heroic/glamorous.

Similarly, he describes Batman as “without a shadow” because he no longer has his “shadow”, Robin, by his side. The word could also be suggesting that Batman has lost his heroic status because Batman, the super-hero, was famous for his bat silhouette which often appeared in a shadow projected by moonlight to terrify criminals as he swung though the night sky.

Batman's anger and frustration are captured by the plosive sounds of "**p**unching the **p**alm of your hand all winter" – with the "winter" being a metaphor for his cold and empty life (and possibly old age).

This image also mocks Batman the hero because it ironically twists one of his trademark features – he normally punched the palm of his hand when he came up with a brilliant idea or modelled how he was going to heroically deal with the villains.

At the end of the poem, Robin says **he** is the **real** "boy wonder" which is the nickname of the fantasy figure. This emphasises his shift from seeing things in heroic terms – to seeing things **realistically** – maybe even cynically.

The poem is called "Kid" and this word along with the words "boy" and "baby" (in the final line) emphasise a central theme of the poem – growing up and outgrowing dependence on others – seeing the world as it is and not the world of the comic strip or adventure film.

So, the poem is **not** just about Batman and Robin!

STRUCTURE:

The poem is spoken in one stanza with quite a lot of enjambement to aid its free flowing structure. The heavy use of the "-er" rhyme on every single line (and additional internal rhymes – see above and (e.g.) line 18) speeds the tempo of the poem. This adds a feeling of excitement and anger to Robin's voice which links effectively to his feelings against Batman.

The heavy repetition of the "-er" sound throughout the whole poem is perhaps an ironic echo of the Batman theme

tune: dadder, dadder, dadder, dadder, // dadder, dadder, dadder, dadder – BATMAN!!!

There is a conversational feel to the poem and this is helped by the use of ellipsis in line 5 and the pauses around “₁rather₁” and “well₁” and “Batman₁” all making it sound as though Robin is considering carefully what he is saying and adding to the emotional weight (the gravitas) of what he is feeling about his life.

The direct address to, “Batman,” is repeated on three occasions, at the start of lines, which again adds to the conversational feel so that Robin is heard to be addressing someone directly.

The poem is written in heroic couplets (ten syllable lines rhyming in pairs) **after a fashion** (because they do not **really** divide into couplets because **all** the lines rhyme together) – which is quite ironic, given that the poem is an anti-heroic poem in its theme, teaching us that our heroes both from fiction, **and** from real life, may fall short of our idealistic image of them.

Armitage

Hitcher

VIOLENCE/DARK HUMOUR/DISTURBED MIND/
LANGUAGE FROM OTHER SOURCES AND TEXTS

SITUATION:

A depressed man hitches to where he has a hired car parked up. Then, ironically, he picks up a hitcher himself and kills (or seriously hurts) him before pushing the body out of the moving car.

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

The poem is spoken as a Dramatic Monologue which gives us an insight to the disturbed mind of the speaker.

The language is very ordinary and conversational which makes it even more frightening to think that psychopathic killers can be quite **ordinary** people.

So, the man uses everyday clichés such as “under the weather” and he jokingly imitates the boring language of weather reports, “the outlook for the day was moderate to fair”. This also places the murder in very ordinary weather, showing that it can happen anytime.

He even uses ordinary, mundane language for the actual murder: “I let him have it” and polite, **euphemistic**, phrases: he leant across “to let him out”. This is all darkly ironic as he is not **helping** the man at all but pushing his body out of a moving car! The man’s calm and plain language reflects his lack of any emotion (particularly his lack of anger) – and this makes him seem even more disturbed, especially if he is seen as **joking** about what he has just done. He does not even see his actions as anything out of the ordinary!

He creates a cartoon-like picture in the reader's head by describing the hitcher, "bouncing off the kerb" and by viewing it through the mirror as if the killer is distanced from feeling any sympathy for his victim.

The fact that his victim is selected completely randomly and killed for no particular motive makes the man's violence even more unpredictable and therefore, more sinister.

The man jokes ironically that the hitcher said he "liked the breeze" in his hair – and of course this is what the driver gives him! The driver also mocks the hitcher's *hippy* lifestyle ("the good earth for a bed") and beliefs: "the truth/he said was blowin' in the wind".

This line mimics the 1960s (American), Bob Dylan song, "Blowin' in The Wind", which begins with, "How many roads must a man walk down, before you can call him a man?" This is ironic as the reference to the "wind" and "roads" is relevant to the situation in the poem.

It is as if the driver, trapped as an office worker, is jealous of the freedom of the hitcher. So, the driver adds, ironically, that the "truth" will be "round the next bend" – where he kills the man!

The driver seems jealous of the hitcher's romantic outlook on life and Armitage uses some mundane names and objects to contrast with the romantic (Americanised?) views of the traveller.

So, he mentions ordinary, plain English place names like "Leeds" and "Harrogate" and ordinary brand names like "Vauxhall Astra" and "krooklock".

These give an anti-romantic feel to the driver's attitude and **contrast** with the romantic idea of "following the sun to west

from east”.

The poet also sprinkles ironic puns throughout the poem to build up the dark humour.

The title itself is a pun and explains why the poem is **not** called “**The** Hitcher”. “Hitcher” is what the driver does to the hitcher – “hitsya – hits you”. It is also what the poet does to the reader in this poem because **we** are “hit” with the totally unexpected shock of what happens in the poem.

The warning from his boss about his “sick-note” to explain his many absences points to the fact that this man is mentally “sick” in the poem. There may also be the idea that the man is being warned about sending “**sick**” notes to people within his work place.

Finally, there is the pun at the end of the poem with the driver’s exclamation “Stitch that” which is both a mild curse but also a joke about the man’s head needing **stitches** – if still living!

This is followed by another sick joke when the driver declares that the hitcher “can walk from there” – when clearly he cannot walk anywhere!

The driver is proud of his actions and even brags that he “didn’t even swerve” when carrying out the attack. His self-control again helps to create a more chilling and callous persona.

STRUCTURE:

The poem is written in five line stanzas with very occasional rhyme of lines 3 and 5 and variable line lengths.

Occasionally, internal rhyme helps to stress a key word:

e.g. “hair” and “fair” (lines 22-23) stresses the joke about the victim’s “hair” and the “breeze” (as above) and “tired” and “fired” provide some sort of vague **reason** for the killing.

The conversational tone is helped by the use of the dash in the third stanza to mirror the natural pauses in speech. There are also a number of minor sentences (“It was hired.”, “It was twelve noon.”) and many which begin quite plainly with the subject: “I’d been...”, “I thumbed...”, “I picked...”, “I let him...”, “I dropped it...”, “We were...”, “He’d said...”, “It was...”, etc. Many of these help to emphasise the man’s unhealthy obsession with “I” (himself).

These simple sentence patterns also add to the **normality** and **simplicity** of the tone of the poem – which is even more disturbing as the killing is then conveyed as a very **simple** and **normal** action as far as the killer is concerned – the lack of nerves, excitement or regret (in fact **any** emotion – except humour) is particularly frightening. The driver seems more interested in the time and the weather than the murder victim!

The “cheerful” triple rhyme in the first stanza (“tired”, “fired”, “hired”) and the final stanza (“hair”, “fair”, “there”) again provide an ironic contrast with the dark violence of the poem. Disturbingly, the rhyme may reflect the **cheerful** attitude of the killer after the deed has been carried out.

Pre-1914, **The Man He Killed**
Hardy

VIOLENCE/REGRET/NORMAL/WAR/POLITICS

SITUATION:

An ex-soldier in peace time tells his story of killing someone in war time who was just an ordinary man – in many ways, a man just like himself. There is a question mark over whether he regrets his actions or not.

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

The soldier is speaking a Dramatic Monologue – so *what* he says and *the way* he says it are used to reveal his attitude and character. The poem is pre-1914 so expect some archaic (old-fashioned) language.

The slang he uses shows he is working class and this is important to the theme of the working class being the main people to be sacrificed in a war. The slang also makes the man seem warmer and more friendly – which adds to the irony of him shooting someone dead.

So, “nipperkin” – a slang word for an alcoholic drink sounds cosy – the soldier says that he would have shared a friendly drink with such a man as the victim – so, how strange to shoot him dead! The word “wet” is also slang (for “drink”). “Sat us down” is an example of the man’s non-standard dialect and this all makes him sound more realistic and more working class.

“Some old ancient inn” makes the setting sound rural, relaxed and idyllic and emphasises the man’s down-to-earth nature. The use of the word “fellow” to refer to the victim emphasises that the dead man was a fellow human being and the word suggests some warmth, sympathy and regret on the part of his killer.

The dead man had perhaps sold his “traps” (slang for “trappings” – belongings) because he was so poor. Maybe he had been forced to “list” (enlist) because he “was out of work” – “no other reason why”. This emphasises the fact that many men joined up through poverty rather than patriotism.

The empathy for the dead man is helped by the phrase “just as I” where the soldier recognises that the dead man was very similar to himself.

The soldier points out **sarcastically** that war is very “quaint” – amusingly odd – when clearly it is not! The exclamation mark at the end of line 17 draws attention to the irony of the phrase. The soldier realises that war is insane because you kill people that you could well have shared a drink with or lent money to.

The poem contains a heavy use of pronouns (approx. x15) for such a short poem and this is important to emphasise the similarity between the two soldiers. The repetition of the pronouns in, “**I** shot at **him** as **he** at **me**”, symbolises the fact that the **social** positions of the two men were exactly the same – and that really **both** men were **victims** of their governments.

STRUCTURE:

The poem maintains a clear pattern of five four-line stanzas with a rhyme scheme a, b, a, b in each stanza. The final stanza breaks the pattern slightly because the exact same word (“is”) is used at the end of lines 1 and 3.

There is also an eye rhyme (words **look** like they will rhyme but they actually do **not** rhyme!) in those lines: “war” and “bar” which neatly draws our attention to the important

contrast between the times of war and the times of peace (symbolised by the “bar”).

The general rhyme pattern is known as common metre and it is very straightforward and “common” – just like the ordinary man who is speaking. The clear rhyme pattern adds a lightness to the poem, which again stresses the simple and **cheerful** nature of the speaker – which is ironic, given that he is, in effect, a killer!

The rhyme and flowing rhythm is also helped by short lines and very simple, **ordinary** language. Many words/lines are virtually monosyllabic: “I shot at him as he at me” – and this emphasises that the speaker is representative of the **ordinary** man in the street.

The third stanza reveals the soldier’s attitude quite clearly. The reference to his “foe” is an **ironic** echo of the language of the government’s propaganda.

The repetition of “because” and the use of the dash (in line 9) suggests that the soldier is hesitating in his reasoning and he does **not** believe the lie that the dead soldier was his “foe”.

The colon after “Just so:” again points to the man’s scepticism about the “foe” idea and the rhyme of “so”, “foe”, “although” and the repetition of the word “foe” all point to the **sarcastic** and **ironic** use of the word “foe”.

So the ironic phrase, “that’s clear enough”, followed by the eye rhyme “although” – which is emphasised as the final word of the stanza – point to the man’s doubts about the government lie that he is fighting “the foe” – rather than (as he discovers) fighting a real, individual human being.

Pre-1914,
Yeats

The Song of the Old Mother

AGE/YOUTH/JEALOUSY/SUFFERING/LOSS/CONTRAST

SITUATION:

The old woman is sick and tired of her life of drudgery as a mother and she looks with envy at the carefree lives led by the younger generation. There is also a sadness in the poem for her own loss of youth and her loneliness.

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

The poem is a Dramatic Monologue where the old mother reveals her anger and frustration with her lot in life. Her life of hard work is emphasised by the many verbs describing her life of hard labour. The use of lists of three also increases the emphasis: “rise”, “kneel”, “**blow**” (line 1) and “**scrub**”, “**bake**”, “**sweep**” (plosive sounds for anger).

There is an ironic contrast made between her dull life and the romantic personification of the stars which “blink” and “peep”. “Blink” is ironically linked to “bake” by the half rhyme and “peep” with “sweep”. Even the stars are having fun – while she works and suffers!

The poet uses a repeated symbol in the poem with the mention of the (coal/log) fire which it is her job to make. The poet signposts the importance of the metaphor with the use of alliteration: “the seed of **f** the **f**ire **f**licker and glow”. This is another of her dirty jobs early in the morning.

At the end of the poem, the poet repeats “the seed of **f** the **f**ire grows **f**eeble and cold”. The fire symbolises her life which at its “**dawn**” was once young and **burning** freely but now, in old age, metaphorically, in the **night-time** of her life, she has become “feeble” and **burned out**.

The fire perhaps mirrors her spirit which has been crushed by her harsh life.

In contrast, the young people can lounge in bed, thinking of trivial things like fashion: “ribbons for bosom and head” and they get upset and stressed out over petty things such as the wind spoiling their hair: “if the wind but lift a tress” (a lock of hair) – so, they live lives of “idleness” and vanity.

The poem is a complaint and the old mother sounds resentful of her children’s freedom contrasted with her life of obligation and what she “must” (repeated twice) do every day and night.

The alliteration stresses key phrases like “the young lie long” – which causes her resentment – and “while I must work” – which has the same effect.

STRUCTURE:

The poem is basically in the form of heroic couplets (rhyming couplets of about 10 syllables) and the first four lines flow quickly to mirror the old mother’s hectic day of work. The list of verbs, the clear rhyme and the regular line lengths move the poem along quickly. The repetition of the word “and” (x8 times) also maintains the rushed tempo and the whole poem is only one sentence.

However, in lines 5 and 6 where the laziness and vanity of the young is referred to, the lines move slowly to mirror their sloth. The awkward repetition of “of” in line 6 helps to slow the reader and the use of two extra syllables in the 12 syllable line 6 also slows it down.

The heroic couplets allow the poet to package ideas neatly within a pair of lines – the second line in each couplet in this poem being end-stopped.

So, lines 1 and 2 deal with the mother's duties in the morning.

Lines 3 and 4 refer to the approach of night when she is still carrying out her tasks.

Lines 5 and 6 deal with the young in the morning and 7 and 8 refer to the young in the daytime.

Lines 9 and 10 sum up the woman's sad situation in life and they end the poem on a depressing note to reflect her negative feelings.

All the even numbered lines are end-stopped to emphasise the rhymes at the end of those lines and this gives the poem a very definite **structure** – a bit like the old mother's over-structured and rigid schedule of jobs for the day.

The separation and sequencing of the ideas into a clear structure helps the reader to establish more prominently in the reader's mind the **contrast** between the old and the young in the poem,

The rhymes link some significant words/ideas. So, "old" and "cold" are linked because they are the key ideas and feelings in the poem; the woman's life is now emotionally **cold** and she feels alone and neglected **because** she is **old**.

Pre-1914
Jonson

On my first Sonne

CHILD/PARENT/LOVE/PAIN/ODD ATTITUDE/DEATH

IDEAS:

Ben Jonson writes about the (real) death of his seven year old (first) son – also called Ben Jonson. Although it is a sad poem, the poet wonders why we grieve over the death of a loved one – because **this** life is only full of illness and then old age. Also, if we believe in God, then death will take us to a better place. So we should be happy that our loved ones have gone to a better place – or at least escaped this world of suffering.

Despite this **logical** view the poem is still touched by poignant feelings for the loss of his loved one.

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

METAPHOR:

“thou child of my **right hand**” – this is also a pun because Ben(jamin) means “child of my right hand”. There may also be a pun on “right” linking to the idea that his son’s death has inspired him to **write** this poem.

“lent to me”. He uses a metaphor to describe his son as a loan from god which has now been repaid – a romantic idea and a beautiful image of the **value** of his son.

“his (Jonson’s) **best piece of poe**trie” (plosive sounds and alliteration) – like his poems, his son was a beautiful work of art created by Jonson. (Ironically, his son is being re-created as a work of art in the act of writing this very line and this very poem).

DIRECT ADDRESS:

He speaks directly to his son which emphasises his close bond with the child. Talking directly to his son's spirit is quite touching/poignant:

“**thou** child”, “too much hope of **thee**”, “by **thy** fate”. This repetition of the old form of the pronoun “you”, adds a respectful tone for the boy's death and emphasises the father's closeness to the person behind the pronoun.

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS:

These are used to make the reader question issues about death and grieving: Why should we mourn death and not envy it? – it is an escape from pain. The child has escaped illness (“fleshes rage”) and the “miserie” of (old) “age”.

EMOTIVE LANGUAGE:

Despite the logical argument against grieving, the poem still has a poignant air of sadness for the loss of a child.

“farewell” – a more emotional way of saying “goodbye”, meaning literally “fare ye well”, which emphasises his concern for the child's welfare – even though the child is dead.

“joy”, “lov'd boy”, “lament” (weeps for), “loves”. All are strongly emotive to express his love for his child.

STRUCTURE/RHYME:

The poem is structured in rhyming ten syllable couplets (=heroic couplets) which allows the poet to deal with a single idea in each pair of lines.

So, lines 5+6 ask a single question and 7+8 ask a different question. Lines 9 +10 deal with his son as a work of art and

the final pair of lines leaves us with a single moral: never become too attached to those you love – which of course is impossible – or else why would he be writing this poem about his son!

Sometimes the rhyme is used to link together significant words/ideas. So, “joy” and “boy” emphasises the fact that his son was the source of great happiness.

UNUSUAL LINE DIVISION:

“say here doth lye/Ben. Jonson his best piece of poetrie”

This unusual line split emphasises the word “Ben” at the start of a line, followed, unusually, by a full stop to focus the reader on his son. The poet is comparing his son to a clever piece of poetry and, ironically, the poet **has** been clever with the poetry, here!

Because the poet has exactly the same name as his son, the odd punctuation after “Ben”, gives two meanings:

If we **ignore** the full stop then we read:
“here doth lye/ Ben Jonson” (the child)

If we **obey** the full stop, we read:
“Jonson (the poet) his best piece of poetrie”.

This deliberate confusion of the names referring to two possible people from the poem perhaps symbolises that he sees himself united as one with his son, emphasising the bond of love. He created his son and so they are physically part of each other. By placing “Ben” next to “Jonson”, we see how close he was to his son in life. The full stop, however, also helps to reflect the way death has **separated**

father from son.

Another aspect of this cryptic line is that the final word of the line – “lye” – is emphasised by the unusual line division (“here doth **lye**/Ben. Jonson”). This could be to stress a possible pun on the word “lye” – suggesting the poet knows that Ben Jonson, the poet, is **lying** when he gives us the logical arguments against grieving – because our **natural** emotions are stronger than **logic** and it would be **unnatural** not to grieve – as the poem’s emotive impact testifies.

The witty use of puns and the musical use of rhyme may seem an unusual reaction to your son’s death but Jonson is **celebrating** his son’s life and (**possibly**) the fact that his son is in some ways better off out of this world. So, Jonson wishes to mirror his son’s perfection by producing a poem which shows off his own creative skills.

However, there is still a sad mood achieved in the poem by the use of emotive phrases like, “Rest in soft peace”, with the calming effect of the alliteration. The very simple language helps to convey the simple sincerity of the poet’s feelings. So, we get the completely monosyllabic line: “Rest in soft peace, and, ask’d, say here doth lye”. The hiatus created by the pair of commas reflects the calm and thoughtful tone of the poet in this **philosophical** poem.

The poem is an **elegy** on the death of his child. There is a mixture of happiness for his child but sadness for the death and it results in an **elegiac** mood – one of mixed emotions.

Pre-1914,
Browning

The Laboratory

VIOLENCE/DARK HUMOUR/GLAMOUR/JEALOUSY/
ABNORMAL/BETRAYAL

SITUATION:

The poem is set in France around the time of the French Revolution (late 1700s). One of the King's courtiers (possibly a "dancer" or a courtesan) is buying poison to murder a woman she suspects of stealing her lover.

The period of time of the government (the "Ancien Régime") was infamous for extremely rich (and bored) aristocrats who were often sexually promiscuous men and women at the King's (Louis xvi's) court

The court also had a reputation for other immorality, corruption, personal plotting and political power struggles. So the protagonist and situation in the poem are fairly typical of that time and place.

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

The poem is a Dramatic Monologue and character is revealed by **what** the woman says and **how** she says it.

The amusing and ironic tone is established straight away with the woman's over-polite tone which contrasts with what she is doing – buying poison to cold-bloodedly murder someone! So, the use of "prithee" is ironically polite, here.

There is humour created by her catty jibes at her love rival. She jokes that a large dose of poison is needed because her rival is "not little". More seriously, she declares that the rival is "no minion like me!". The exclamation mark reveals her anger and jealousy that she has been made to **look** "small" by her rival. "Minion" may also suggest that the

poisoner is lower down the social scale than her rival – another reason for her to feel jealousy.

More subtly, she (and Browning) mocks ideas of romantic love, as the protagonist is clearly a cynical woman with plenty of worldly experience. The poisoner jokes that her ex-lover is “sure to remember her dying face”. This turns a romantic cliché on its head because he will remember her grotesque face having died in agony from poison – not her beauty or tranquil death – as the normal meaning of the phrase suggests!

Similarly, the “pulse’s magnificent come-and-go” mixes the idea of sexual passion/love with death and the heart stopping – ironically the victim’s heart will be stopped (as she will be murdered) **because** it originally beat so fast (for her lover) in the first place.

The victim’s sexuality is emphasised through the repetition of “and her” in, “And her breast and her arms and her hands”. This is important as it focuses on the protagonist’s own vanity and her jealousy of the other woman’s attractiveness. It also emphasises the things a man might find attractive and this is what so angers the protagonist.

The romantic sounding French name of Elise as a hypothetical murder victim is again used to mock romance in the poem. The poetry is ironically musical (lyrical) with the alliteration of “l” and the assonance of the long “ee” sound: “light a pastile and Elise” and “Pauline” in the previous line.

These romantic images are then reduced to nothing by the **bathos** and common slang of, “should drop dead!” (with the alliteration emphasising the woman’s anger and

jealousy of physical features). The short vowel sounds (“**should drop dead!”) give the line a bluntness which reflects the woman’s non-romantic attitude and they contrast with the long sounds in the more romantic reference to “Pauline” and “Elise”.**

The method of delivering the poison is also made to seem very elegant and ladylike by using “an earring”, “a signet”, “a filigree basket”. This is all ironic because murder is not elegant or pleasant! Also, by using beauty to deliver the poison, Browning symbolises the destructive potential of female beauty – because it was female beauty which caused the man to **wander** in the first place!

There is a more disturbing idea that in the killer’s mind the poison **is** beautiful because it will get her what she wants – namely, revenge.

So, ironically, language is used to romanticise and beautify the poison itself: “soft **ph**ial”, “exquisite blue”, “taste sweetly”, “gold oozings”, “invisible pleasures”. The source of the poison is romantically personified, “Ah, the brave tree...”. Alliteration further glamorises the description: “delicate droplet”. Metaphor adds to the ironic worship of the poison: “thy treasures...”

The woman’s motive is sexual jealousy so she does not merely want to kill. She is sadistic and wants her rival to suffer and for her beauty to be spoiled: “**B**rand, **b**urn up, **b**ite into its grace”. The list of three and the alliteration of plosive sounds really conveys her fury, her cruelty and her bitterness here.

Her own vanity has been revealed because she is angry that she **believes** she has been belittled: “while they

laugh/laugh at me” (the repetition of “laugh” emphasises what exactly (in **her** mind) has hurt her).

The woman’s strength of character is shown by her control of the apothecary who she orders about with the use of imperatives: “**p**ound at thy **p**owder” (again the plosive sounds) and “brush this dust off me”.

STRUCTURE:

The poem is set out in twelve, four line stanzas of heroic couplets which gives it an ironically cheerful rhythm. The rhymes are often used at the end of humorous, nasty comments to contrast with the elegant, **civilised** tone preceding them e.g. lines 24, 40 and 44 – all final lines of each stanza.

The free flowing rhythm is helped by the rhyme pattern and by the simple, often monosyllabic language, e.g. “You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will”.

Her emotional outbursts add to the conversational tone and the heavy use of exclamation marks signposts her ironic jokes and her underlying anger.

The regular use of dashes shows that she has a certain calmness in her manner and she is thinking things through in a premeditated way despite her high emotions. The repeated use of rhetorical questions also adds to this impression of her being a **calculating** killer. (examples of both?)

The woman is amusingly elegant in her tone and there are ironically contrasting blunt outbursts of emotion but each

one is conveyed in a cheerfully rhyming poem to give the poem a dark humour – given that the theme is revenge and murder.

The **decadent** nature of the world she lives in is shown by her paying so much money to obtain the poison to kill: “take all my jewels”. The apothecary’s greed is conveyed by the phrase “gorge gold to your fill” (with the alliteration for emphasis of “gorge”).

Her **debauched** nature is shown obviously by what she is planning to do. She also mentions that she it is better to watch the poisons being mixed “than go where **men wait me** and dance at the King’s” which makes her sound like some sort of court prostitute.

Finally, she tells the aged apothecary to kiss her – but not just a peck on the cheek!

“You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!”
Again, the exclamation mark is important as it possibly draws attention to her dark sense of humour here.

The alliteration of “**my m**outh” emphasises her sensuality and her flirtatious nature. The phrase is linked to “**may**”, “**me**”, and “**m**an”. The emphasis falls on “**old** man”, because of the pair of commas. Her kissing of an old man points to her sexually debauched nature – as well as her mischievous sense of humour.

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