

**STUDY
REVISE** **AND**
for GCSE

AQA Poetry Anthology: Love and Relationships

- ✔ Written by experienced teachers and examiners
- ✔ Guides you to the best understanding of the text
- ✔ Get your best grade

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Contents

Getting the most from this guide	5
1 Introduction	6
2 Timeline	8
3 Poem-by-poem commentaries	9
4 Themes	54
5 Assessment Objectives and skills	59
6 Tackling the exams	62
7 Sample essays	72
8 Top quotations	96
9 Practice questions for the Unseen poetry section	100
Glossary of poetic terms	102
Further reading	103
Answers	104



Getting the most from this guide

This guide is designed to help you raise your achievement in your examination response to the 'Love and Relationships' poetry cluster in the AQA Anthology (Section B) and to the Unseen poems (Section C). It is intended for you to use throughout your AQA GCSE English literature course. It will help you when you are studying the poems for the first time and also during your revision.

The following features have been used throughout this guide:

Target your thinking

A list of **introductory questions** is provided at the beginning of each chapter to give you a breakdown of the material covered. They target your thinking in order to help you work more efficiently by focusing on the key messages.

Build critical skills

These boxes offer an opportunity to consider some **more challenging questions**. They are designed to encourage deeper thinking, analysis and exploration. Building and practising critical skills in this way will give you a real advantage in the examination.

GRADE FOCUS

It is possible to know the poems well and yet still underachieve in the examination if you are unsure what the examiners are looking for. The **GRADE FOCUS** boxes give a clear explanation of how you may be assessed, with an emphasis on the criteria for gaining a Grade 5 and a Grade 8.

REVIEW YOUR LEARNING

At the end of each chapter you will find this section to **test your knowledge**: a series of short, specific questions to ensure you have understood and absorbed the key messages of the chapter. Answers to the 'Review your learning' questions are provided in the final section of the guide (p. 104).

GRADE BOOSTER

Read and remember these pieces of helpful **grade-boosting advice**. They provide top tips from experienced teachers and examiners who can advise you on what to do, as well as what *not* to do, in order to maximise your chances of success in the examination.

Key quotation

Key quotations are highlighted for you, so that if you wish you may use them as **supporting evidence** in your examination answers. Further quotations can be found in the 'Top quotations' section on page 96 of the guide.

And love is proved in the letting go.
(Cecil Day Lewis, 'Walking Away', l. 20)

Glossary

The glossary boxes give **explanations of difficult words in the poems**. Technical terms that arise when discussing the poems are marked in bold and explained in the 'Glossary of poetic terms' on page 102.



Poem-by-poem commentaries

'When We Two Parted' by Lord Byron

Context

Byron is one of two poets in the 'Love and Relationships' cluster who is classified as a Romantic; the other is Shelley, who was a friend of Byron. Romanticism in literature means something very different from the sense of the word 'romantic' when associated with a love affair. Romanticism was an artistic and intellectual movement, a reaction partly against the rational and logical ideas of the Enlightenment that preceded it and partly against the mechanisation of the Industrial Revolution. The movement emphasised the importance of the emotions.

It is generally agreed that Byron wrote this poem about the end of his relationship with Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster, who was married at the time. By the time 'When We Two Parted' was published she was involved in another affair, this time with the Duke of Wellington. Evidence exists of a draft of this poem with an additional **stanza**, in which Byron refers to 'Fanny', a shortened form of Frances. This stanza, however, is not in the published version of the poem that appears in your Anthology. So, although Byron's biography provides evidence that he is the speaker in the poem and that Lady Frances is the other party, the published poem is deliberately vague. There are no specific details about the relationship: features such as the age or gender of the speaker and the addressee are carefully left unidentified. Pronouns – *I*, *thee* and *they* – are used instead of names.

What happens?

The speaker remembers the distressing break-up of a secret relationship some years earlier, and still feels unable to move on. It presents the lover as cold, which is reflected in the background of the cold morning in which the ending of the relationship took place. This is an example of a language feature called **pathetic fallacy**, where the weather or landscape is used to represent the emotions of a character or characters. The persona now hears others – who don't know that the speaker and the lover had been in a relationship – gossiping about the former partner. It ends with the persona wondering what would happen if they met again, and suggesting that the speaker would respond to the former lover 'With silence and tears' (l. 32).

Structure

On the surface the poem looks quite regular. It is made up of four **octets**, each of which has a full stop at the end of the stanza. This appears to divide the poem into four neat, separate units. So at first it looks as

Build critical skills

Do you think the poem can reveal Byron's feelings about a specific relationship as well as being a general expression of the kinds of feelings people may have when a relationship goes wrong?

Build critical skills

The entire poem has only one **caesura**, in line 23: 'Long, long shall I rue thee'. What do you think are the effects of the lack of caesurae generally, and of the use of a caesura at this point?

Key quotation

Pale grew thy **cheek**
and **cold**,

Colder thy **kiss**;

Truly that **hour**
foretold

Sorrow to **this**.
(ll. 5–8)

if each stanza is dealing with a separate point, which could suggest the speaker has come to terms with the break-up. Byron, however, undermines this neat structure, and ideas that start in one stanza flow over into the next. For example, the first stanza creates the idea of cold, with 'cold, / Colder thy kiss' (ll. 5–6); this spills over into the second stanza with 'Sank chill on my brow' (l. 10). The poem also goes round in a circle, as the end repeats the language of 'years' and 'silence and tears' that was employed in the beginning. So, on the surface, the poem seems neat and controlled, but underneath it is disordered. This may reflect the speaker hiding how upset (s)he is beneath a calm exterior.

You can also find tension between regularity and irregularity in the rhythm made by the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. A stressed syllable is one that you say with more emphasis, for example in the word 'blackbird' the syllable 'black' is stressed and 'bird' is unstressed. Byron mostly uses a pattern of two stressed syllables per line, indicated in bold below:

In **silence** and **tears**

(l. 2)

He uses a varying number of unstressed syllables, however. Here, there are three unstressed syllables in the line, in line 6 there are only two, whereas in line 17 there are four. The pattern of stresses in line 6 is shown in the key quotation. When you look at this quotation, can you also see how Byron disrupts the pattern by suddenly switching to three stressed syllables in lines 5 and 7?

You might think that this disruption in the pattern shows that the speaker's attempts to restrain his/her emotion have failed – the speaker has tried to keep everything regular, but loses control here.

Language and imagery

In the key quotation above, there is an effective example of **consonance**. This is the repetition of the same consonant sound, in this case the hard **k** sound in 'cold,' 'Colder' and 'kiss'. You might feel this seems aggressive and cutting. What does this tell you about how the speaker feels at this point? What image does it paint of the lover?

Build critical skills

Many key words in the poem begin with a soft **sibilant** sound: 'silence' (ll. 2,26), 'sever' (l. 4), 'Sorrow' (l. 8), 'Sank' (l. 10), 'shudder' (l. 19), 'secret' (l. 25) and 'spirit' (l. 28). You might feel this seems weak and so reflects the speaker's loss of hope. Look at the sibilant **alliteration** of 'share in its shame' (l. 16). Can you feel a sense of secrecy here? Does it seem sinister? How does this relate to the speaker's feeling that this is dishonourable?

Look out for imagery of death throughout the poem. In the key quotation, the former lover is described as 'pale' and 'cold' (l. 5). This suggests a lack of emotion, but also could suggest (s)he is corpse-like. In line 18 the gossip is described as 'A knell' – this is the slow ring of a bell, as would be used for a funeral. The word 'grieve' (l. 26) also suggests bereavement. It is possible to grieve over any loss, but it is most frequently used to mean a response to a death. So, while Byron never explicitly links the breakdown of the relationship to a death, he repeatedly uses language with connotations of death. What might he be suggesting about the speaker, the former lover and the relationship?

Build critical skills

Notice how many lines are in monosyllables. Think about the impression this gives you of the speaker and of the person being addressed. Does it seem sorrowful, angry or both?

Ideas to consider

Characters in literature are sometimes referred to as 'Byronic heroes'. This is a type of antihero who rebels against rules and society; a man of strong passion, often hiding a melancholy secret. He is considered to be represented by the personality and life of Byron, as well as by the characters he created. Byron, for instance, was notorious during his lifetime for his numerous love affairs. He also rebelled against British society and chose to fight for Greece in its war to gain independence. To what extent do you think these characteristics are represented in the speaker of 'When We Two Parted'?

'Love's Philosophy' by Percy Bysshe Shelley

Context

Shelley is the second poet in the 'Love and Relationships' cluster who is classified as a Romantic (see p. 9). 'Love's Philosophy' demonstrates the Romantic emphasis on the emotions; it also focuses on other key Romantic themes, including nature, beauty and imagination.



▲ Lord Byron, by Thomas Phillips (1813)

GRADE BOOSTER

Shelley believed that beauty stimulated moral goodness. Often his poetry presents nature as a source of beauty and inspiration as well as a metaphor for human ingenuity. You might like to deepen your understanding of Shelley's concerns by looking at some of his other poems, such as 'Ode to a Skylark', for examples of this.



▲ 'Wanderer above the Sea of Fog',
by Caspar David Friedrich (1818)

Glossary

Philosophy: a form of careful investigative thinking or a set of ideas

disdain'd (l. 12): treated with contempt

GRADE BOOSTER

Remember, when you make a point about the form of the poem, always to relate it to its effects, and keep it relevant to the question.

The Romantics were interested in nature as also expressing an idea called the sublime – a sense of boundless, awe-inspiring greatness beyond beauty. Mountains are often seen as a source of the sublime in Romantic art: one celebrated example in painting is 'Wanderer above the Sea of Fog' by Caspar David Friedrich (1818). You can see this idea being used in Shelley's imagery: 'the mountains kiss high heaven' (l. 9).

What happens?

The speaker addresses an unnamed individual, persuading him/her to enter into a romantic relationship. Successive images suggest that it is natural and right for individuals to form couples. The gender of neither speaker nor addressee is specified. The imagery of a 'sister-flower' (l. 11) that 'disdain'd its brother' (l. 12), however, might suggest that the speaker is male and the addressee female, and that the addressee has previously rejected the speaker as a lover.

Structure

The form becomes increasingly certain and bold. There is an ABAB rhyme scheme. The first rhyming pair in each stanza,

however, uses **half rhyme**, where the words almost, but don't quite, rhyme: 'river' with 'ever' in the first stanza, and 'heaven' with 'forgiven' in the second. Shelley makes this seem unbalanced and disturbing, which can make the reader feel more comfortable as each stanza progresses into full rhyme. This can give the impression that the way to feel safe is to give in to the speaker.

You might like to look at patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables. One thing you could notice is how many of the lines end on an unstressed syllable: in the first stanza all but lines 6 and 8; and in the second stanza the whole of the first half. Some examples are the pairs 'single' / 'mingle' (ll. 5,7) and also 'heaven' / 'forgiven' (ll. 9,11). The effect of this can be to make the end of the line feel weak. In lines 6 and 8 this is changed to a stressed syllable at the end of the line: 'divine' / 'thine'. This is also done in the second half of the second stanza, with the two rhyming pairs 'earth' / 'worth' and 'sea' / 'me'. This can feel strong and climactic, as if we are moving from uncertainty to certainty. Just like the move from half rhyme into full rhyme, it can encourage the addressee to submit to the reassurance offered by the speaker.

You could also think about the effects of the repeated use of **enjambment** and the lack of caesurae throughout the poem. One possibility is that these help the poem to feel fluid and smooth, which could make it

seem more affectionate. This links to the argument that everything is connected (see Language and imagery, below).

Language and imagery

The imagery of fluids, with fountains, rivers, the ocean and winds, strengthens Shelley's argument that all things blend into one. This moves towards imagery of the sublime in the second stanza – with mountains, sunlight and moonbeams – so that there is a sense of increasing splendour. These images are interlinked with religious language, such as 'heaven' (l. 3) and 'a law divine' (l. 6), so that rejection of the speaker is presented as a breach of godly as well as natural harmony.

Shelley uses **assonance** of the short vowel *i* at several points in the poem. He often combines this with repetition of the soft consonant *n*, as shown in the key quotation. This creates a gentle, soothing, rhythmic pulse, flowing from one line into the next to reinforce the sense of unity.

In the second stanza we see Shelley repeat 'kiss' and 'clasp' in a symmetrical pattern, so that first 'kiss' appears one line above 'clasp' in lines 9 and 10; then this is reversed, with 'clasp' in line 13 and 'kiss' in line 14. This indicates that two apparent opposites can in fact be harmonious parts of one symmetrical whole. Notice the repetition of the *k* sound here has a different effect to that we found in 'cold,' 'Colder' and 'Kiss' in lines 5–6 of 'When We Two Parted'. There, it sounded harsh and aggressive; here, you might find it sounds clear, clean, neat and fitting.

Ideas to consider

Shelley was expelled from Oxford University after refusing to recant the atheistic views he expressed in a pamphlet called 'The Necessity of Atheism'. How do you think his radical religious ideas at that time sit with his appeal to a divine law in 'Love's Philosophy'?

'Porphyria's Lover' by Robert Browning

Context

Robert Browning, alongside other Victorian poets such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson, is celebrated for developing the **dramatic monologue** – a single narrative voice speaking at a critical moment that is often used to reveal a disturbing personality. You may find it helpful to refer to some of Browning's other dramatic monologues to provide context. In the 'Power and Conflict' section of your Anthology you will find 'My Last Duchess'. This is another poem by Browning and it also presents a man who is frustrated at being unable to control a woman and so chooses that she must die.

Key quotation

*Nothing in the world
is single*

*All things by a law
divine*

*In one another's being
mingle—*

Why not I with thine?
(ll. 5–8)

Build critical skills

You might like to comment on the effect of the shift from short to long vowel assonance at the end of the first stanza. For example, do you think that by slowing the pace it could be seen as more emphatic? Does it show the sadness of the speaker without the beloved?

GRADE BOOSTER

When you are comparing poems, remember that you are looking for differences as well as similarities. An excellent way to do both is to notice when poets use the same technique to different effect.

GRADE BOOSTER

Be careful if you look at a poem from the 'Power and Conflict' cluster as part of the context for a poem in 'Love and Relationships'. When you pick a poem for comparison in your exam, it must be one from the same cluster. If you wish to discuss another poem to pick up marks for context, keep this to a brief reference only, to give yourself time to compare your two poems in depth.

Build critical skills

Do the three titles alter your impression of the poem and of the speaker? Does the original title's focus on Porphyria rather than on the 'Lover' make a difference? Does the context of the pairing with 'Johannes Agricola' affect your interpretation? Think about the reference to God's silence in the final line.

The poem was first published in 1836 and entitled simply 'Porphyria'; it was republished in 1842 paired with another dramatic monologue, 'Johannes Agricola in Meditation', under the title 'Madhouse Cells'. In 'Johannes Agricola' the speaker expresses his belief that God has already determined that his soul will go to heaven, meaning he is free to sin as much as he likes without punishment. It was not until the 1860s that the poem was renamed 'Porphyria's Lover'.

What happens?

After the narrator's description of a raging storm, Porphyria arrives at his cottage. He is entirely passive while she bustles about, making everything cosy and rearranging the position of his body. Suddenly he springs into activity and strangles her with her own hair. He repositions her corpse in a macabre echo of the way that she had positioned him in the first half of the poem, and for the rest of the night lies with her head on his shoulder.

Structure

Browning uses the form to show that, while the speaker believes he is rational and sane, he is in fact mentally unbalanced, and also to reveal his obsessive, compulsive need for control. He writes in **iambic tetrameter**. This is illustrated with the stressed syllables shown in bold here:

A sudden thought of one so pale

(l. 28)

Browning disrupts this pattern at key points. In line 36, for instance, there are three consecutive stressed syllables at the end of the line:

That moment she was mine, mine, fair,

(l. 36)

This could show the strength of the speaker's desire for total control over Porphyria. You might also think about the repetition of 'mine' and how this is emphasised by the consonance with '**moment**'. Does this help to make the speaker seem more self-centred?

Another way Browning disrupts the rhythm is by switching around the stressed and unstressed syllables so that sometimes there is a stressed

syllable at the start of a line. Notice, for instance, 'Only,' at the start of line 50. It comes at a point where the speaker feels really powerful, because he is now controlling Porphyria's body, whereas before she was positioning his. The emphasis this places on the word 'Only' helps convey how much he enjoys this power. It also emphasises the speaker's disturbed mental state, as he identifies the placing of Porphyria's head on his shoulder as the 'Only' difference – failing to point out the most significant change: that Porphyria is now dead.

The poem has an ABABB rhyme scheme. We might interpret this regularity as part of the need of the speaker to control his entire environment. At the same time, you might think that the asymmetry of this rhyme reflects his psychological imbalance and the way this drives him to excess.

Language and imagery

The poem opens with **personification**, whereby things that are not alive are spoken about as if they have human emotions. The wind is shown as on the attack, with the lake and the trees as its victim. It is described as 'sullen' (l. 2) and acting 'for spite' (l. 3), determined to 'vex the lake' (l. 4). At first, it seems as if the weather is a metaphor for the speaker's situation, with himself, like the elm trees and the lake, a victim: 'I listened with heart fit to break' (l. 5). As the poem progresses, though, we learn that he is an unreliable narrator; this is achieved through evidence that the way he sees the world doesn't match reality. For example, we simply cannot accept that, after she was strangled, Porphyria's eyes 'Laughed' (l. 45) or that her head was 'glad' (l. 53). Therefore the reader needs to reconsider the effect created by the personification. The sullen and spiteful character turns out to be the narrator, as shown by the way he behaves throughout the poem. This makes the wind the appropriate metaphor for him, although he sees himself as represented by the lake and the trees.



▲ The wind, determined to 'vex the lake'

GRADE BOOSTER

Avoid simply identifying that the poem is in iambic tetrameter, because the marks for doing this are limited. Instead, focus on the effects of the rhythm and of the points where Browning disrupts the regularity.

Build critical skills

In the commentary on 'When We Two Parted', we looked at the idea of the Byronic hero (p. 11). Do you think that the speaker here sees himself as a Byronic hero?

Key quotation

I found

*A thing to do, and all
her hair*

*In one long yellow
string I wound*

*Three times her little
throat around,*

*And strangled her.
(ll. 37–41)*

Build critical skills

Porphyria's hair is referred to as 'yellow' three times (ll. 18, 20, 39). What connotations do you think this has? You might want to think about stereotypical images of beauty and innocence, both now and in Victorian times; or about the juxtaposition of the yellow fire and the storm outside.

One way Browning shows the obsessive character of the speaker is through his fixation upon parts of Porphyria's body, particularly her hair. It is therefore hardly surprising that he chooses her own hair as the murder weapon. The key quotation is the fourth time he refers to her hair. Now, as he assumes control, it is transformed into an object that is not alive – as 'string'. This helps to show how little interest he has in Porphyria as a person. It can also indicate that he is better at interacting with objects than with people. The rhyme of 'thing' with 'string' can suggest his belief that by transforming her hair into 'string' he has dehumanised Porphyria. His casual tone is almost bored as he refers to this simply as 'A thing to do'.

You can compare this to the way that the narrator uses pronouns to dehumanise Porphyria and to control her. During and immediately after the murder, he refers to 'her hair' (l. 38), 'her little throat' (l. 40), 'her lids' (l. 44), 'her cheek' (l. 47) and 'her head' (l. 49). He then begins to talk not about Porphyria but about her head, so that the pronoun changes to 'it':

*So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!*

(ll. 53–55)

This is consistent with the way that he treats her like an object, rather like a doll, which he controls totally.

Ideas to consider

During his lifetime Robert Browning was far less popular than his wife Elizabeth Barrett Browning, but since then the interest in and popularity of his poetry has increased hugely. Why do you think he may have more appeal for modern audiences than for his contemporary Victorian readers?

Sonnet 29 'I think of thee!' by Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Context

Elizabeth Barrett was already a well-respected poet when in 1844 Robert Browning, at that time unsuccessful as a writer, sent her a letter expressing his admiration for her poetry. She had been living for some time as an invalid in intense pain, spending most of her time in one room and seeing few people outside of her immediate family. A friend arranged for Robert to meet Elizabeth. They continued their relationship in secret, writing more than 570 letters to each other over the course of twenty months. Elizabeth feared the disapproval

of her father, who wished her to remain unmarried; and her brothers, who saw Robert as a gold-digger. In 1846, despite the family's objections, they married and emigrated to Italy. During their courtship Elizabeth wrote a series of 44 sonnets expressing her feelings for Robert. The series shows the development of these feelings. In the first sonnet she expresses sadness and regret for the 'melancholy years' she has spent as an invalid and is surprised that what finds her now is 'Not Death, but Love.' Some of the early sonnets reveal her fear that this attractive and strong man, six years younger than her, could not truly love her. As the sonnets progress, they become more intense and confident, so that by Sonnet 43 she is able to declare: 'I love thee to the depth and breadth and height / My soul can reach'.

What happens?

The speaker develops an extended metaphor, in which the loved one is a palm tree and her thoughts about him are vines growing around it. In his absence, her thoughts about him grow. At first this seems positive, but then the thought-vines grow so thickly that they obscure the tree. She chooses to have not her thoughts of him but his actual presence, and calls upon him as the metaphorical tree to cast down the vines. She ends by saying that when he is there she does not think about him because she is too busy being with him.



▲ Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Language and imagery

The central images of the tree and the vine growing around it present the speaker's thoughts as being dependent on the beloved. At first, the tone seems positive. The image of 'twine and bud' (l. 1) suggests fresh, delicate, new growth. This is rapidly replaced, however, by the 'straggling green' (l. 4). Here they have become ugly, which is reinforced by the harsh *g* consonance. The vines become parasitic. The poem suggests that the problem is that the speaker is thinking about the lover but is actually alone. The opening word of the poem is 'I' and this is echoed in long vowel *i* assonance throughout the first two lines:

I think of thee! – my thoughts do twine and bud

About thee, as wild vines, about a tree

(ll. 1–2)

Key quotation

*Because, in this deep joy
to see and hear thee*

*And breathe within thy
shadow a new air,*

*I do not think of thee – I
am too near thee.*
(ll. 12–14)

Build critical skills

What do you think are the effects of keeping the whole poem in the present tense?

Build critical skills

Look at the use of enjambment at the ends of lines 1 and 3. Could this suggest the thought-vines growing out of control? You might like to contrast this with the effect of the enjambment at the end of lines 10 and 12. Do you feel the speaker's excitement here?

This can make it feel like the speaker is an isolated 'I'. By the end of the poem, assonance shifts the focus away from the word 'I' and on to 'thee'. Long vowel ee assonance is now used in the key quotation: 'in this **deep** joy to **see** and hear **thee** / And **breathe**' (ll. 12–13). This draws the reader's attention to the word 'thee'. This can help the reader feel the excitement of the difference made when the lover is actually present.

She addresses the lover with imperative verbs: 'Renew' (l. 8), 'Rustle' (l. 9), 'set' (l. 9) and 'let' (l. 10). This might imply that in terms of language she has the power. Yet only he has the strength to tear down the vines that she has created, because he is the one who is physically powerful. This is emphasised by the use of **plosives** in: '**Drop** heavily down, – **burst**, **shattered**' (l. 11). Combined with the onomatopoeia, these convey his immense energy and the force with which he is able to free himself.

Structure

Barrett Browning makes the poem feel balanced and controlled, expressing how reassuring the speaker finds the lover. As a **Petrarchan sonnet**, the poem begins with a group of eight lines (an octet), and finishes with a group of six lines (a **sestet**). It is typical of this form that she creates a problem in the opening of the octet that is resolved in the sestet. Together with the regular rhyme scheme and use of full rhyme throughout, this generates a feeling of neatness and closure.

Because sonnets are written in **iambic pentameter**, the lines usually have ten syllables with every second syllable stressed, as in: 'I **think** of **thee**! – my **thoughts** do **twine** and **bud**' (l. 1). Barrett Browning uses this to generate a pulse, which is reassuring in its regularity but at the same time enables us to hear the speaker's growing excitement like the beating of a heart. Where she makes subtle alterations to the rhythm, these can convey the intensity of her emotions or the strength of the lover. For example, there is an extra unstressed syllable at the start of line 7 with: 'Who art **dearer**'. This gives additional energy, so that we can hear her excitement. At the beginning of line 9 the stress pattern is reversed, with the first syllable stressed instead of the second: '**Rustle**'. This expresses the added energy brought by the lover; the way in which he is able at a single stroke to free himself; and the thrill she feels in his actual presence.

The poem also makes effective use of caesurae. The only caesura where the sentence actually comes to an end is in the middle of line 7. On either side of it there are briefer caesurae in the form of commas: 'Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly'. This is the turning point of the poem, where it moves from thoughts about the lover to a desire for his presence. Do you think the dramatic pause mid-line emphasises the speaker's thrill upon recognising this solution?