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SAMPLE

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This sample explores paper 2 section B: anthology poetry.

LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS:

Let's look at a typical question based on the 'Love and Relationships' cluster:

Compare how poets present attitudes towards a loved one in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Sonnet XXIX' and one other poem. [30 marks].

The way to approach this question is to begin by looking at the named poem - in this case 'Sonnet XXIX':

Sonnet XXIX

I think of thee!--my thoughts do twine and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon there 's nought to see
Except the straggling green which hides the wood.
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee
Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly
Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,
And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee
Drop heavily down,--burst, shattered, everywhere!
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.

Before choosing the second poem, it's important to pick out a few key points you might make about the named poem. Sonnet XXIX was written by the poet to the

man she was engaged to marry. In it, she expresses the idea that thinking of her future husband is such an intense feeling that it ultimately overpowers her.

It is useful to take the wording of the question and put it into a phrase:

The attitude towards love that we find in Sonnet XXIX is one of 'the overwhelming feelings felt when apart from the loved one.'

With this in mind, we can now flick through the other poems in the anthology and make a choice about which one seems to compare well. With comparison, we are ideally looking for a poem which has some similarities but also some notable differences. A good choice seems to be 'When We Two Parted' by Byron:

When We Two Parted

When we two parted

In silence and tears,

Half broken-hearted

To sever for years,

Pale grew thy cheek and cold,

Colder thy kiss;

Truly that hour foretold

Sorrow to this.

The dew of the morning

Sank chill on my brow--

It felt like the warning

Of what I feel now.

Thy vows are all broken,

And light is thy fame;

I hear thy name spoken,

And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,

A knell in mine ear;

A shudder come o'er me--

Why wert thou so dear?

They know not I knew thee,

Who knew thee too well--

Long, long shall I rue thee,

Too deeply to tell.

In secret we met--

In silence I grieve,

That thy heart could forget,

Thy spirit deceive.

If I should meet thee

After long years,

How should I greet thee?--

With silence and tears.

'When We Two Parted' is a poem focusing on an illicit relationship Byron was engaged in with a married woman by the name of Lady Frances Wedderburn Webster. Apparently, Byron ended the relationship so that Webster would not be shamed. This poem focuses on his pain at losing the woman he loved.

So, there is definitely a line of comparison in the fact that both poems focus on the pain endured when apart from the one you love. However, Sonnet IIXI focuses on feelings for a future husband, whereas When We Two Parted looks at a love affair. This therefore seems a good choice of comparison, as there are similarities and differences in the poems.

HITTING THE TOP MARKS:

This question is marked out of 30 and marking is divided into 6 bands. There are four major differences between band 5 and 6. Band 6 answers need to:

1. Analyse language, structure and form. Band 5 and below requires only one of these to be focused on, but band 6 demands consideration of all three areas.
2. Give an exploratory answer
3. Give precise references
4. Explore context.

By far the biggest challenge with this criteria is to analyse language AND structure AND form. In terms of poetry analysis, the term 'language' simply means 'words' and covers topics such as simile, metaphor and personification. It's the easiest topic area and the one most students naturally gravitate towards as it is the first thing most students notice. However, structure and form are not so simple.

Structure essentially means 'how the poem is organised, and why this is significant'. This could include: how many verses are there, how long are the lines, where do the verses change and why?

Form is something slightly different again: does the poem follow any particular format. For example, is it a sonnet, a haiku, a limerick? All of these forms have specific conventions. Does the poem follow them fully?

My biggest bit of advice for hitting the top grades is to analyse structure and form wherever possible. Have it at the forefront of your mind. Look for it first, and write about it first in the exam. The top marks in the poetry exam are given to those students who stand out from the rest. If 90% of students are analysing language for at least the majority of their answers, you can be different.

Let's take a closer look at Sonnet XXIX:

THE POET

When it comes to biographical detail, it is important that we only look at the details of a poet's life that are relevant to the poem itself. Therefore the following details should be considered:

- Born in 1806 and died in 1861
- A very successful poet who was published from the age of 15
- Suffered great sickness and invalidity for her entire adult life
- Famous in both the UK and USA during her lifetime
- The poet Robert Browning wrote to her as a fan and ended up becoming her husband
- A deeply Christian woman.

THE FORM: SONNET

The sonnet is a genre of love poetry which originated in Italy in the 13th Century. The 14th Century poet Petrarch is the most recognised Italian sonneteer. Falling in love with a woman known only as 'Laura', he wrote 366 sonnets to her. However, she rejected his proposals. The Italian Sonnet follows a strict form:

- 14 lines
- The first 8 lines (known as the octave) present a problem
- The last 6 lines (known as the sestet) present a solution to the problem

- Line 9 (known as the Volta) introduces a sharp twist, or turn, which brings about the move to the resolution
- ABBA ABBA rhyme scheme.

THE SHAKESPEAREAN SONNET

In the 16th Century, the sonnet made its way into English poetry. Sir Philip Sidney developed what has come to be known as the Shakespearean Sonnet (after Shakespeare made it truly famous). This is written in iambic pentameter (lines of 10 syllables, with alternating stressed and unstressed syllables). It was divided into 3 verses of four lines each, known as 'quatrains', and finished with a rhyming couplet which also served as the Volta. Its rhyme scheme was also different: ABAB CDCD EFEF GG.

Browning's 'Sonnet XXIX' follows the conventions of the Italian sonnet; perhaps Browning related to Petrarch's intense pre-marriage love more than Shakespeare's mixture of romantic and platonic sonnets? Perhaps she related to Petrarch's spirituality and shied away from Shakespeare's overtly sexual poetry.

THE CONTEXT: 'SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGESE'

During their engagement, Elizabeth wrote 44 sonnets to Robert Browning, her husband to be. Robert was so impressed with the sonnets that he pushed Elizabeth to publish them. However, the sonnets were deeply personal and Elizabeth would only agree to publish them anonymously; she didn't want anyone to know that they were written by her.

'Sonnets from the Portugese' was published in 1850, promoted as an English translation of a collection of Portugese poems. The 'Portugese' part is a nod to Luis De Camoes, a Portugese sonneteer who Elizabeth admired greatly. 'My little Portugese' was also Robert's nickname for Elizabeth.

ANALYSING THE POEM

So it is clear that Sonnet XXIX follows the Petrarchan sonnet form, but there are some notable differences. To begin with, the poem is set in iambic pentameter, but occasionally breaks this convention. Consider line three:

Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see

In this line, the words 'out' 'broad' and 'leaves' are all stressed. Why is this? Perhaps Barrett Browning is suggesting how powerful and intense her thoughts are at this moment. Here we can see that the poet is deliberately playing with the form to express her feelings about the intensity of love. Linking back to the question, we might write it into an exam answer like this:

SAMPLE ANSWER:

Barrett-Browning presents love as intense and overwhelming in the poem 'Sonnet XXIX'. The poem is a sonnet, following the conventions of the Petrarchan Sonnet. However, there are occasions when the poet deliberately subverts the form. In line three, there are three stressed syllables in a row, where the poet describes how she will put 'out broad leaves'. This line is used to describe the all-encompassing and all-consuming intensity of the poet's thoughts. By breaking the sonnet conventions we are given a sense of how overwhelming these feelings are. Just as the thoughts can overpower the poet, they can also overpower the form of the poem itself, forcing it beyond its limits.

NOTE:

Now let's consider the structure of the poem. A sonnet should have its 'turn' (a change between the octave and sestet) in line eight. However, in Sonnet XXIX we find the turn straddled between lines 7 and 8:

Rather, instantly
Renew thy presence;

So why does Barrett-Browning deliberately break some of the rules of a sonnet? Well, if the sonnet is a poem of perfect love, perhaps Barrett-Browning refuses to follow the form perfectly to reflect how the love she has for Browning is not perfect and will not be so until the two are together. In other words, 'I can't write the perfect love poem because my love is no perfect - I don't have the one I love with me.

These type of points are complex and difficult, but close study of each poem will reveal something in this area. Let's now look at the form and structure of 'When We Two Parted'.

'When We Two Parted' is an example of accentual verse. This means that each line must contain the same amount of stressed syllables, no matter how many syllables there are in each line. Sound confusing? Let's look at an example:

When we two parted
In silence and tears,
Half broken hearted
To sever for years,

Colder thy kiss;

Sorrow to this

Here we see that there are two stressed syllables per line, even though the lines themselves have anywhere between 4 and 6 syllables, but the stressed syllable count remains at 2. However, look at lines 5 and 7:

5 Pale grew thy cheek and cold,
6 Colder thy kiss;
7 Truly that hour foretold
8 Sorrow to this

Lines 5 and 7 break the rules of accentuated verse, containing 3 stressed syllables. Like Barrett-Browning, Byron is breaking the rules of form and structure, and he is doing so to make an important point.

Pale grew thy cheek and cold,

This line describes the moment when the poet was rejected by his lover. This woman, whom he had loved, was turning 'cold' on him. This action made the poet feel broken and rejected, thus the poem structure is 'broken' too.

So how would we add this to our exam style answer? How about this:

Q: Compare how poets present attitudes towards a loved one in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Sonnet XXIX' and one other poem.

SAMPLE ANSWER:

In Sonnet XXIX, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning presents love as intense and overwhelming. The poem is a sonnet, following the conventions of the Petrarchan Sonnet form. However, there are occasions when the poet deliberately subverts

the form. The poem mostly follows the sonnet convention of Iambic Pentameter, but on occasion it does not. In line three, there are three stressed syllables in a row, where the poet describes how she will put 'out broad leaves'. This line specifically describes the all-consuming intensity of the poet's thoughts. By breaking the sonnet convention we are given a sense of how overwhelming these feelings of love are. Just as the thoughts overpower the poet, they also overpower the form of the poem itself, forcing it to breaking point.

Similarly, Byron also breaks the conventions of his chosen poetic form in the poem 'When We Two Parted'. This poem is an example of accentuated verse, with each line containing two stressed syllables and any number of unstressed syllables. However, this is not the case in line 5 where the poet is shocked that 'pale grew thy cheek and cold'. In this line the words 'pale', 'cheek' and 'cold' are stressed. This line describes the moment when the poet was rejected by his lover. This woman, whom he had loved, was turning 'cold' on him. This action made the poet feel broken and rejected, thus the poem structure is 'broken' too. Both Barrett-Browning and Byron deliberately break the form of their poems to show the intensity which can be caused by love.

Of course, the mark scheme requires language and structure and form, so it's important to look at the language too. To me, there are some interesting points to be made about the religious language in Sonnet XXIX:

I think of thee!--my thoughts do twine and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,

Here the poet describes her future husband as a tree, and herself as a vine. This is reminiscent of the words of Jesus in John 15:5:

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

Jesus is here saying that he is the tree, his followers are its branches. The image of the tree symbolises the notion that Christians can do nothing if not connected to God. In Sonnet XXIX, the poet describes Browning, her future lover, as 'a tree'. In fact, there is a plethora of religious imagery in the poem. When the poet calls Browning 'my palm-tree' she is referencing the Song of Solomon in the Bible. The Song of Solomon is a poem about the sexual love between a man and his bride. Consider the striking similarities here:

I said, I will go up to the palm tree, I will take hold of the boughs thereof: now also thy breasts shall be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy nose like apples (Song of Solomon, 7:8).

The use of 'palm tree' and 'bough' is certainly lifted from Song of Solomon, but why? As a deeply religious woman, Barrett-Browning is here pointing out that she is looking forward to sex in the context of marriage. The references to Song of Solomon are a reminder that God created sex to be enjoyed between husband and wife. There is a sense that sexual attraction between husband and wife is right, honourable and pure. This is not something we see in the Byron poem. In fact, Byron is bereft of religious imagery, because the relationship he is writing of - an affair with a married woman, is not right, honourable and pure. So if there is no religious imagery, what is there?

Byron uses a large amount of sensory imagery in his poem. The poem is filled with sensory description. From the sound imagery of 'hear' and 'knell' to the touch imagery of 'colder' and 'shudder', the poem focuses on the language of sensory description. Could this be Byron's way of pointing out that the relationship was about sensory pleasure? There was no sacred or religious element to it, it was all about physical intimacy. If so, how could we write these two conflicting ideas about the nature of love into our exam answer?

SAMPLE ANSWER:

Barrett-Browning uses language to suggest that love is a pure and religious experience. Many of the images are intertextual references to the Song of Solomon in the Bible. When the poet explains that her 'thoughts do twine and bud about thee, as wild vines, about a tree', there are two obvious Biblical allusions being made. Barrett-Browning describes her future husband as a tree, and herself as a vine. This is reminiscent of the words of Jesus in John 15:5:

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Jesus is here saying that he is the tree, his followers are its branches. The image of the tree symbolises the notion that Christians can do nothing if not connected to God. In Sonnet XXIX, the poet describes Browning, her future

lover, as 'a tree'. What this tells us about the nature of love is that a loved one is so important they can become god-like in the eyes of their lover.

In fact, there is a plethora of religious imagery in the poem. When the poet calls Browning 'my palm-tree' she is referencing the Song of Solomon in the Bible. The Song of Solomon is a poem about the sexual love between a man and his bride. The use of 'palm tree' and 'bough' is certainly lifted from Song of Solomon, but why? As a deeply religious woman, Barrett-Browning is here pointing out that she is looking forward to sex in the context of marriage. The references to Song of Solomon are a reminder that God created sex to be enjoyed between husband and wife. There is a sense that sexual attraction between husband and wife is right, honourable and pure. The use of religious language symbolises that love is sexual and passionate, and that there is nothing wrong with that in the context of marriage.

This is not something we see in the Byron poem. In fact, Byron is bereft of religious imagery, because the relationship he is writing of - an affair with a married woman, is not right, honourable and pure in the eyes of religion. Byron uses language to show us that love is a physical feeling and desire, not a religious one. 'When We Two Parted' is filled with sensory description. From the sound imagery of 'hear' and 'knell' to the touch imagery of 'colder' and 'shudder', the poem focuses on the language of sensory description. This is Byron's way of pointing out that the relationship was about sensory pleasure, not religious connection. There was no sacred or religious element to it, it was all about physical intimacy.

OK, let's put all that together and see what our final exam answer looks like:

Q: Compare how poets present attitudes towards a loved one in Elizabeth Barret Browning's 'Sonnet XXIX' and one other poem.

SAMPLE ANSWER:

In Sonnet XXIX, Elizabeth Barrett-Browning presents love as intense and overwhelming in the The poem is a sonnet, following the conventions of the Petrarchan Sonnet form. However, there are occasions when the poet deliberately subverts the form. The poem mostly follows the sonnet convention of Iambic Pentameter, but on occasion it does not. In line three, there are

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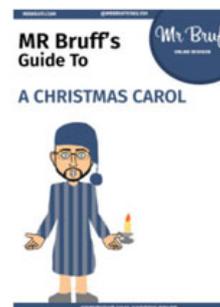
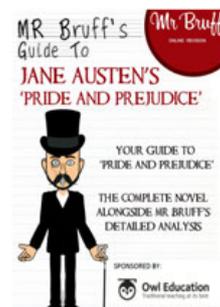
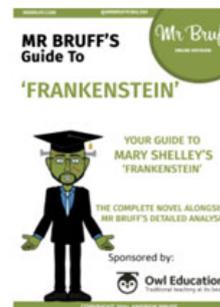
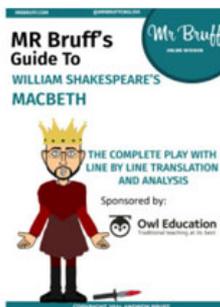
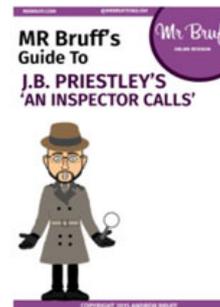
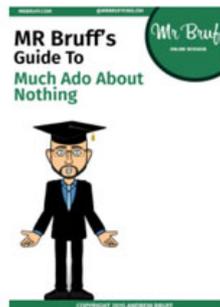
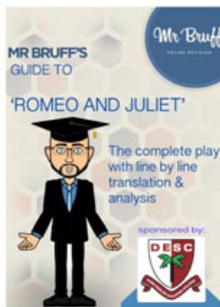
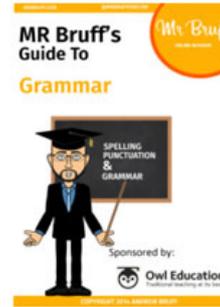
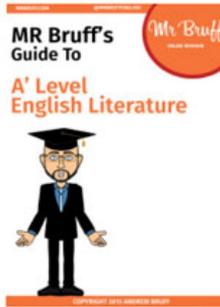
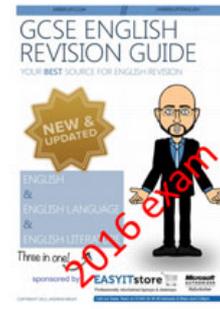
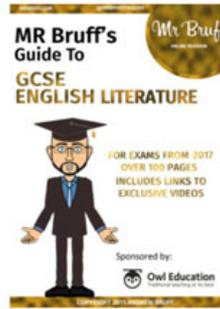
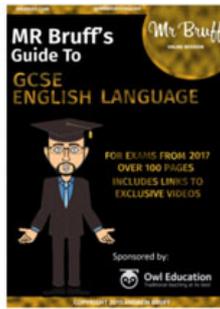
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NOTE:

Although these poems are complex, the exam answers need simply to do what we've been doing all along: analyse language, structure and form.

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