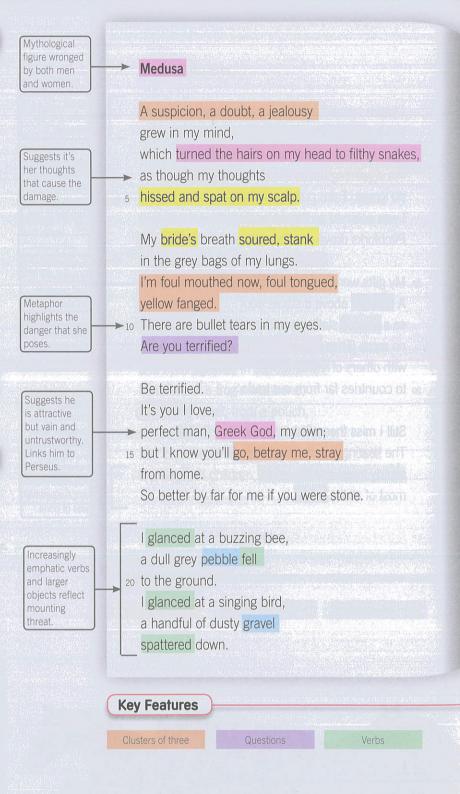
Medusa Medusa

#### **About the Poem**

- Written by Carol Ann Duffy (1955–).
- In this dramatic monologue we hear the voice of a woman who has become consumed with jealousy as she suspects her husband is being unfaithful.
- In an **extended metaphor** she is likened to the Greek mythical figure Medusa, whose head of snakes turned anyone who looked at her into stone. In the myth, Medusa's head of snakes was punishment for falling in love. Perseus killed Medusa as part of a quest.
- The woman's jealousy and battle with her husband is destructive, but she seems to relish the power she has. even though it will destroy her.

#### Ideas, Themes and Issues

- Jealousy and possession: The woman can't let go of her doubts about her husband but is determined to have him to herself, even if she destroys them both in the process.
- Youth and beauty: She describes how she was once beautiful and compares herself to her husband's 'girls'. In contrast, she now describes herself in negative terms.
- Violence and love: Her words have a threatening tone and her actions become increasingly violent. Her husband is linked to Perseus, foreshadowing her destruction.



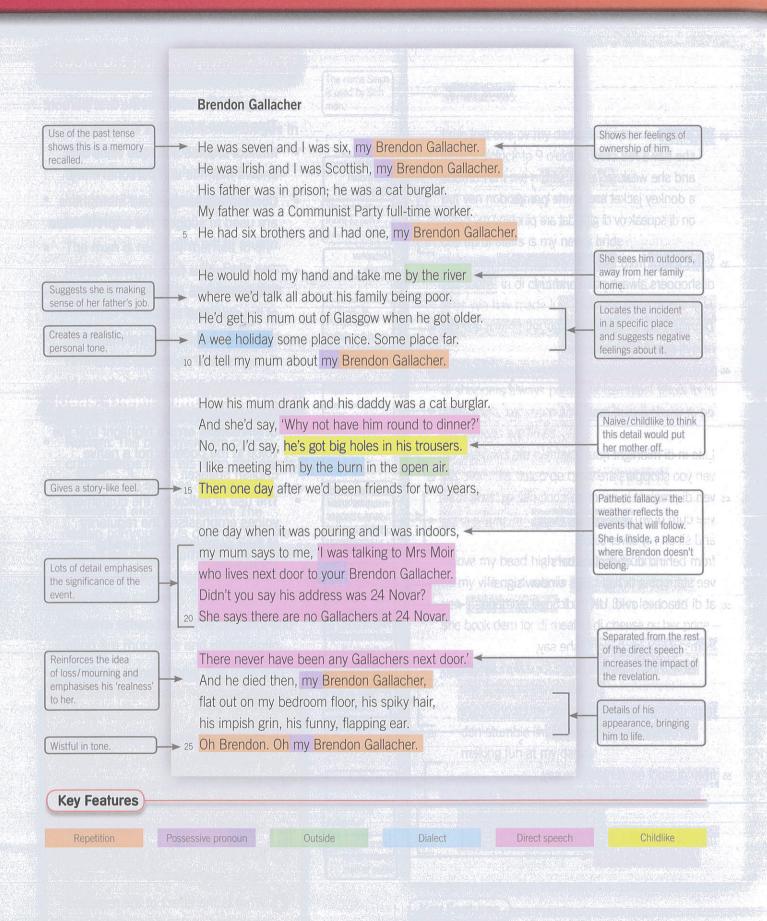
### I looked at a ginger cat, 25 a housebrick shattered a bowl of milk. I looked at a snuffling pig. a boulder rolled Reflects her egative in a heap of shit. ttitude/ perceptions. 30 I stared in the mirror. This is what Love gone bad ← she symbolises showed me a Gorgon. I stared at a dragon. Fire spewed 35 from the mouth of a mountain. He is armed And here you come gainst her. with a shield for a heart eady for battle He has been and a sword for a tongue nfaithful. and your girls, your girls. Suggests youth ind beauty. 40 Wasn't I beautiful? mphasises Wasn't I fragrant and young? what she has ecome. Look at me now. Ambiguous tone. Is she a threat or to be pitied? Types of stone Mythology

### Form, Structure and Language

- Although this is a free verse poem, the repetition, end rhyme and clusters of three create a strong rhythm and link key ideas together.
- The tone is **unambiguous** from the first line with its three negative emotions and sibilance mimicking the hissing snakes.
- The question at the end of the second stanza and its echo in the next line create a threatening tone which continues as the woman uses her powers.
- The verbs become more emphatic and the objects she turns to stone become bigger reflecting an escalation in the threat she poses and her enjoyment of the power.
- Pathos is created through her negative descriptions of herself and the understanding that the man she loves will destroy her.
- The **ambiguity** of the last line, which is isolated from the rest of the poem, is threatening and may create pathos if taken as a desperate plea.

- How are we encouraged to feel sympathy for the woman?
- 2 Explain the significance of the last line of the poem.
- 3 Why do you think she describes her husband as 'Greek God'?

# **Brendon Gallacher**



# **Brendon Gallacher**

### **About the Poem**

- Written by Jackie Kay (1961–).
- The first person narrator recalls an imaginary friend from her childhood and describes the differences between his life and hers.
- She tries to keep him separate from the rest of her life, but her mother doesn't understand this and encourages her to include him in her life.
- When it's revealed that Brendon is an imaginary friend, he dies and is lost to the girl forever.
- The poem has autobiographical elements as there are similarities with Kay's own childhood.

#### Ideas, Themes and Issues

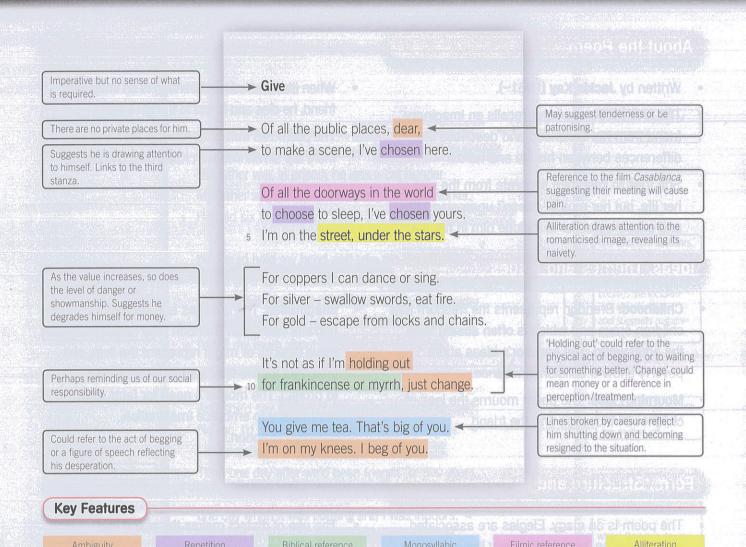
- Childhood: Brendon represents the freedom that children crave and which is often absent from the adult world. The narrator's ideas about poverty show a childish innocence.
- Mourning/loss: The poem mourns the loss of childhood innocence and the friend.
- Imagination: The qualities and life that the narrator has given Brendon may reveal her naive desires or might represent the lives she imagines for the families her father works to protect. The mother's need for facts and her inability to embrace imagination destroys Brendon.

### Form, Structure and Language

- The poem is an elegy. Elegies are associated with mourning, showing us how important and real the loss of Brendon was.
- The first three stanzas begin with a focus on Brendon, emphasising his importance to her.
- Repetition and the possessive pronouns used by the narrator and her mother emphasise her feelings of ownership.
- Direct speech highlights the contrast between the adult's and child's view of the world.

- · The use of dialect makes the poem feel very personal.
- The childish language and half rhyme create a wistful tone and impression of a memory recalled from childhood. The narrator looks back at both Brendon and her younger self with sad fondness.
- The grief at Brendon's loss is shown through pathetic fallacy and is made clear in the last line of the poem.

- What are elegies usually associated with?
- 2 Why might the girl have created Brendon?
- 3 What is the significance of the weather the day Brendon dies?
- 4 Why might the mother want to know more about Brendon?





### **About the Poem**

- Written by Simon Armitage (1963–).
- The poem is narrated through the voice of a homeless person who is sleeping in a doorway.
- The man challenges our perceptions by talking directly to us and describes the attentiongrabbing stunts he performs for change.
- He doesn't appreciate the token gestures that he is offered and wants something more.

### Ideas, Themes and Issues

- Social responsibility: We have a responsibility to help vulnerable people but we need to listen to what they want rather than making assumptions or token gestures.
- Homelessness: Our assumptions about homelessness are presented and challenged. The character in the poem wants to be seen and heard more than he wants money.

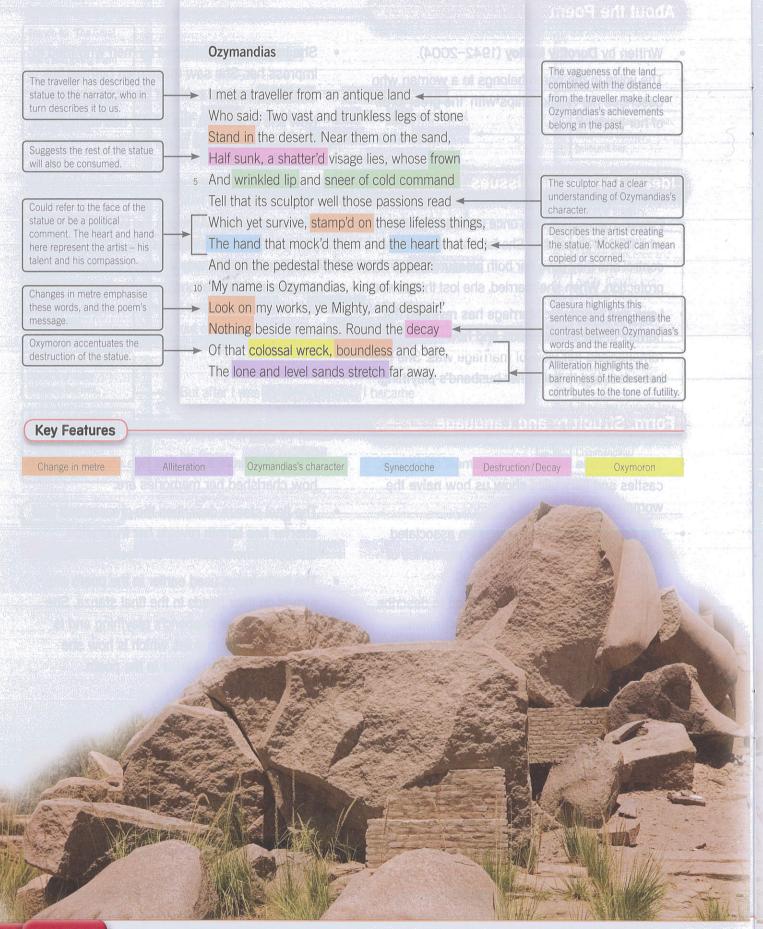
### Form, Structure and Language

- The poem is written in the first person and present tense which makes it very personal and immediate. It's very hard for both the reader and the person the man addresses in the poem to ignore this direct approach.
- The opening of the poem is ambiguous. We may think an adult is talking to a child, or that a couple is arguing. How we interpret those lines influences the way we see the relationship between the characters: tender or patronising.
- The regularity of the syllable count of each line suggests the man's restraint and control.

- As the man becomes despondent and resigned to the situation, he becomes monosyllabic.
- Repeated references to **choices** challenge the belief that homeless people have a choice about the way they live.
- Alliteration draws our attention to a romantic image that seems out of place.
- The **biblical** reference to the wise men in line 10 reminds us of our social responsibility.
- A filmic reference and colloquialisms create a light tone but as the poem progresses, it becomes more pleading and desperate.

- 1 Why have the words 'chosen' / 'choose' been repeated in the first two stanzas?
- 2 How does the language suggest that our attempts to help are sometimes patronising?
- 3 Which line has a romantic image, and why might it have been used?
- 4 The final line of the poem is ambiguous in its meaning. How could it be interpreted?

# **Ozymandias**



# **Ozymandias**

#### **About the Poem**

- Written by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822).
- The narrator of the poem recounts an anonymous traveller's tale.
- The narrator re-tells the traveller's description of the remains of a vast, ruined statue of Ozymandias, the ancient Egyptian Pharaoh Rameses II.

#### Ideas, Themes and Issues

- Death and mortality: The desert symbolises the passing of time that erases all traces of Ozymandias and reminds us that death comes to us all.
- Power: Ozymandias's power was absolute. The face of the statue and the words on the pedestal reveal his character. We feel no sympathy for him.

- The statue is a metaphor and reveals the Pharaoh's character and the foolishness of his pride.
- In effect, the poem focuses on two voices
   those of the traveller and Ozymandias, and
   two characters the artist and Ozymandias.
- The poem can be seen as an analogy: time will challenge any great civilisation or ruler.
- Pride: The vast size of the statue reflects
  Ozymandias's pride. The futility of his pride is
  demonstrated by the ruin of the statue and his
  achievements. His name is significant as it is
  derived from the Greek, 'ozium' (air) and
  'mandate' (rule) and means he is 'ruler of nothing'.
- **Art**: The achievements of the sculptor outlive those of Ozymandias.

### Form, Structure and Language

- The poem is a sonnet written in iambic pentameter. Traditionally sonnets are associated with love poetry, but here political ideas are explored.
- The poem can be divided into three parts. The
  words of the traveller create a picture of
  Ozymandias in the first and last part. The middle
  part introduces the idea of art enduring using
  synecdoche to represent the artist.
- The use of oxymoron highlights the destruction of the statue.

- The broken statue symbolises that power and achievements are weakened by time. The irony is that the artist's work remains.
- Ozymandias's words would have inspired awe and fear, but now they cause despair as they are evidence that even the power of the mighty is temporary.
- Ozymandias's self-given title, 'king of kings', reveals his pride and contrasts with the literal translation of his name.

- 1 How do the setting and narrator contribute to our sense of Ozymandias's diminished power?
- 2 What does the poem suggest about the nature of power?
- 3 How does the poet create a negative impression of Ozymandias's character?
- 4 What is the effect of the last two lines of the poem?

# **My Last Duchess**

# My Last Duchess

#### About the Poem

- Written by Robert Browning (1812– 1889).
- In this poem we hear the voice of a Duke describing a portrait of his late wife to a visiting servant, who is helping arrange a marriage between the Duke and his master's daughter.
- The Duke unwittingly reveals the true character of both himself and the Duchess through the things he says.
- We learn that the Duke had his wife killed as he suspected she was unfaithful to him.
- The Duke boasts about the beautiful. objects he owns, unaware of the effect of his words.

#### Ideas, Themes and Issues

- Violence: The Duke's lack of remorse at having his wife murdered is shocking.
- Power and control: The Duke is obsessed with maintaining his power over his wife. He is so powerful that she is killed at his request.
- **Jealousy**: The Duke is jealous of the attention that his wife gives to others and wants to be the only person in her favour.
- Pride: The Duke is proud of his name and feels the Duchess doesn't respect its value. The manner in which he describes his possessions also reveals his pride. Ultimately, it is his pride which leads him to have his wife killed.

My Last Duchess Ferrara That's my last Duchess painted on the wall, Looking as if she were alive. I call That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands Worked busily a day, and there she stands. 5 Will't please you sit and look at her? I said 'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read Strangers like you that pictured countenance, ositive lescription The depth and passion of its earnest glance, ompare with But to myself they turned (since none puts by nes 13-34. 10 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I) And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst, How such a glance came there; so, not the first A positive Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not lage, framed Her husband's presence only, called that spot n a negative ght by his of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps erceptions. Frà Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint Must never hope to reproduce the faint Half-flush that dies along her throat': such stuff iterruptions uggest 20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough pontaneity, For calling up that spot of joy. She had though it is rehearsed A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad, eech. Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er nplies she She looked on, and her looks went everywhere. as unfaithfu r at least. 25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast, oked at other The dropping of the daylight in the West, The bough of cherries some officious fool Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule **Key Features** Duchess's qualities Possessive pronouns Self interruption

She is gracious She rode with round the terrace - all and each 30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech, out the Duke ees this as a Or blush, at least. She thanked men, - good! but thanked Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked Reveals what he My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name alues - status. With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame 35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this Suggests a Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss, of standards Or there exceed the mark' – and if she let which must be 40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set Implies that Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse, E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose oehaviour is demeaning. Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt, Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without 45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands; Caesura in Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands nese two nes highlights As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet the sinister euphemism. The company below, then. I repeat, The Count your master's known munificence 50 Is ample warrant that no just pretence The reference Of mine for dowry will be disallowed; o his future Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed vife as ny object' At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go s chilling Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though onsidering the content of the 55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity, conversation. Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

# Form, Structure and Language

• The poem is a dramatic monologue which is presented as a conversation. The first person narrative allows us to fully understand the Duke's actions and motivations, perhaps even where he doesn't recognise them himself.

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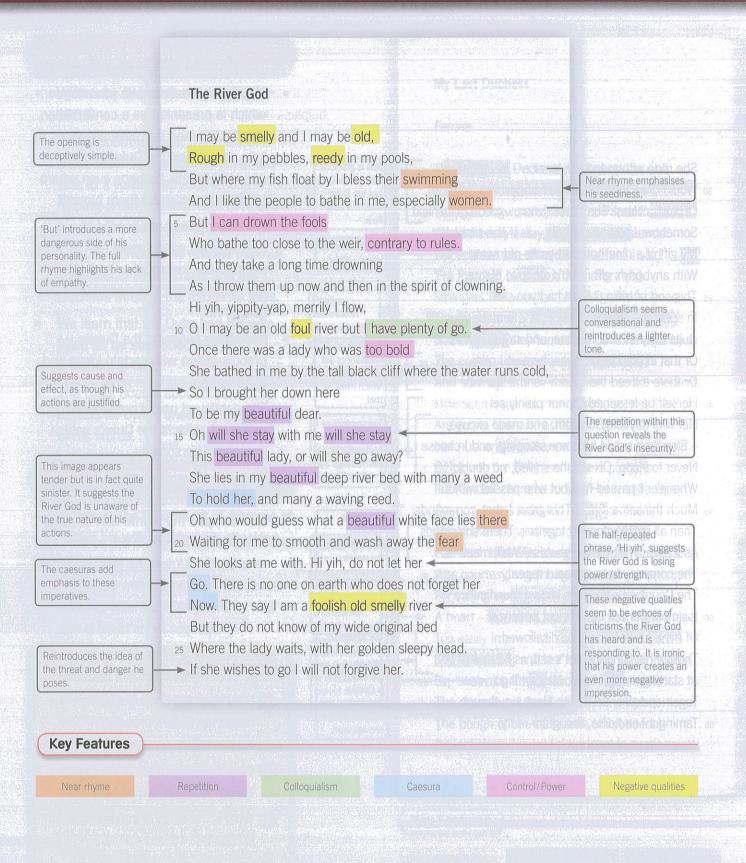
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- His descriptions of his wife reveal a kind woman, which make us sympathetic towards her and show the depth of the Duke's need to control her. To the control her his
- Repetition suggests the Duke's preoccupation with certain ideas and behaviours.
- The continued use of possessive pronouns reflects the Duke's selfish and proud personality.
- The poem is organised into rhyming couplets but because the lines are not end-stopped the rhyme isn't obvious. This pushes the poem on, as the Duke relentlessly pursues his next marriage.

- 1 How does the poem's structure reflect the Duke's present concerns?
- 2 Why do we learn about the Duke's

- actions from his own mouth?
- 3 What is the effect of the repetition in lines 34-43 and 43-46?
- 4 Why does the poem end with the Duke describing another piece of art?

**The River God** The River God



### **About the Poem**

- Written by Stevie Smith (1902–1971).
- The river is **personified** and is given the persona of the River God. It is this voice that we hear in the poem.
- The River God seems to be old, smelly and helpless but as the poem progresses a seedy, dark and dangerous side is revealed.
- He has a weakness for women and takes one for a companion, but his insecurity makes him question whether he will be able to keep her.

#### Ideas, Themes and Issues

- Power: Like the gods in Greek mythology, the River God is powerful but also petty, jealous and vengeful. He meddles in human lives with no thought for the consequences.
- Isolation: The River God is lonely. His only companion has been taken by force and he knows that he has a tenuous hold on her.
- Revenge: He punishes those who don't play by his rules and threatens to take revenge on his companion if she leaves him.

### Form, Structure and Language

- The poem is a dramatic monologue written in free verse. The first person account reveals more about the River God than he intends.
- At first the tone of the poem appears lighthearted but it becomes sinister and macabre.
- The mix of enjambment, end-stopped lines and the varied rhythm and rhyme mimic the everchanging currents and moods of the river and his unpredictable character.
- Repetition of the word 'beautiful' shows his fascination with the woman and his fixation on her appearance.
- The rhyming couplets create a jaunty air, but this doesn't disguise the dark tone that's created by the pleasure the River God takes in tormenting people.
- The description of people as 'fools', and the rhyme linking 'clowning' and 'drowning' show the River God's lack of empathy.

- How would you describe the tone of the first two lines?
- 2 Why might Smith have chosen a god to represent the spirit of the river?
- 3 In which line does the River God use a gentle image to hide the truth about what has happened to the woman he has taken?
- 4 What is the effect of the last line of the poem?

# Casehistory: Alison (head injury)

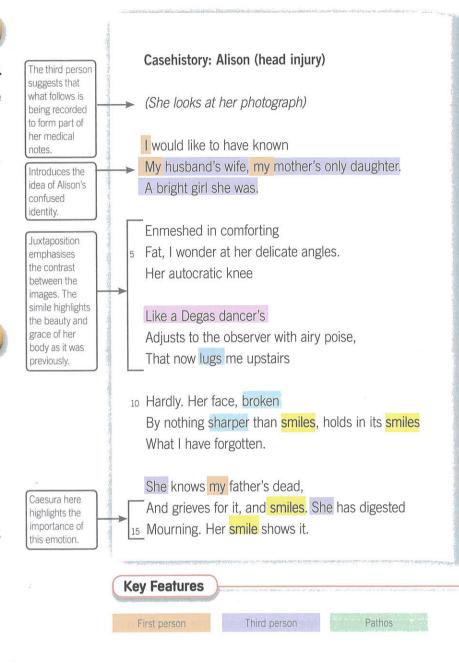
# **Casehistory: Alison (head injury)**

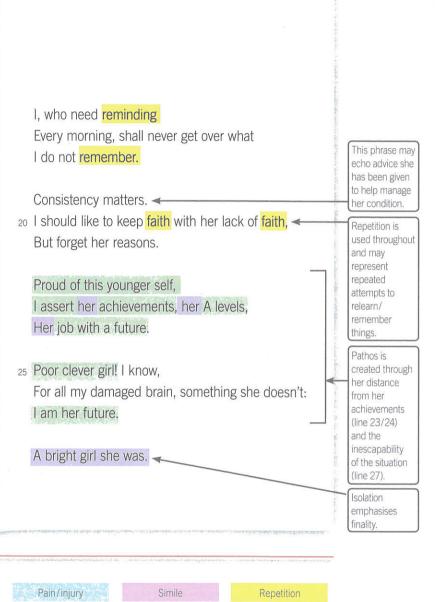
### **About the Poem**

- Written by U. A. Fanthorpe (1929–2009).
- In this dramatic monologue, we hear the voice of Alison, a woman who has suffered a head injury.
- Alison looks at a photograph of herself when she was young and describes the girl in it as if she were a stranger.
- Alison remembers nothing of her past and even has to be reminded daily that her father is dead.

#### Ideas, Themes and Issues

- Youth and age: Alison looks back on a time of innocence. The girl in the photograph looks happy and her future is full of promise.
- Mourning and loss: Alison mourns for the person she once was and the promise her future held. She is also in a constant state of mourning for her father.
- Personal identity: We define ourselves through our memories and our relationships with the people around us. Alison has lost both of these things and can only create a sense of herself by comparing her present life to the details of her past that she gets from her photo.





### Form, Structure and Language

- The regularity of the stanza length and the **shortness** of the majority of the lines may reflect the repetitiveness of Alison's life and her need to break things down into manageable tasks.
- Use of both the first person and third **person** to describe herself highlights Alison's confusion.
- Juxtaposed images of her past and present life emphasise how much has changed for Alison and the difficulties of her present condition.
- The tone is **matter-of-fact** and lacks any self-pity, perhaps reflecting the tone of clinical notes suggested by the title.
- Pathos is created through Alison's admiration of her younger self and her understanding of what the future holds for the girl in the photograph.
- There are lots of references to pain and injury to remind us of Alison's accident and the lasting damage it has caused.
- Riddle-like statements in the first, sixth and seventh stanzas suggest Alison's confusion and her lack of a clear personal identity.

# **Quick Test**

- 1 What do you think the purpose of the first italicised, bracketed line is?
- 2 What ideas about identity are presented in the poem?
- 3 What is the effect of the last line of the poem?



**Dramatic monologue • Stanza • First person** 

# On a Portrait of a Deaf Man

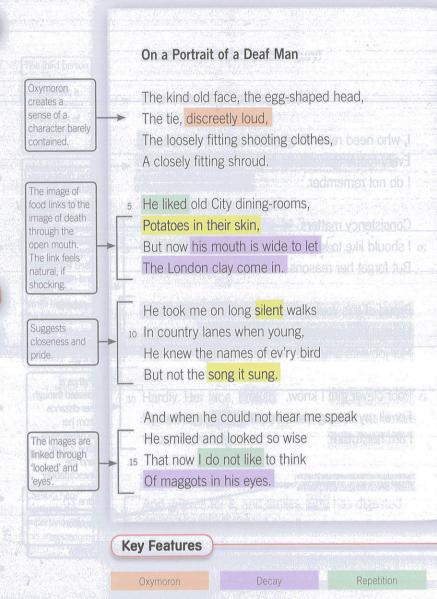
- Written by John Betjeman (1906–1984).
- The voice recalls memories of the poet's father, a deaf man.

**About the Poem** 

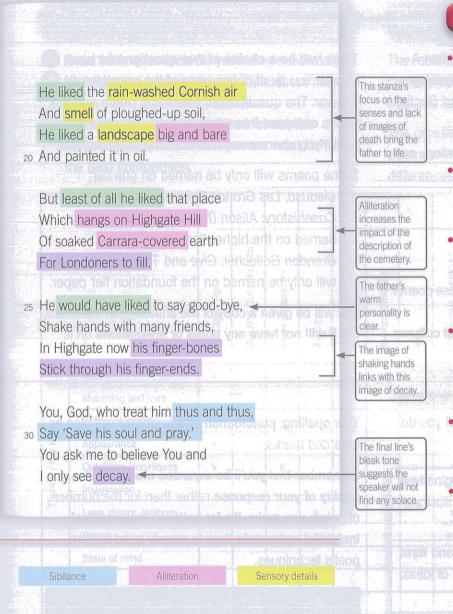
- His father was a kind man who enjoyed simple pleasures.
- The voice can't separate the pleasant images of his father from images of his dead body and it is these images that he is left with.

#### Ideas, Themes and Issues

- Mourning and loss: The voice is haunted by images of his father's decaying body.
- Memories: He has affectionate memories of times he shared with his father and the things his father enjoyed.
- Faith: In the final stanza, he questions the existence of God as he can't accept the Christian message of life after death when he sees only physical decay.



# On a Portrait of a Deaf Man



### Form, Structure and Language

- The poem is an elegy written in ballad form. This mixture of forms may reflect his inability to separate **sentimental** memories of his father from his grief over his loss.
- The simple, uncomplicated language reflects the tastes of his father and doesn't soften the images of death and decay.
- The juxtaposition of past and present highlights the contrast between the father's enjoyment of life's simple pleasures and graphic images of decay.
- The tone is **nostalgic** where memories of the father are described and matterof-fact where images of death and decay are presented.
- The father's kind, warm personality is revealed through affectionately recalled memories.
- The images of decay become increasingly explicit, adding to the horror we feel at the realities of death. This culminates in the final stanza where sibilance reveals his anger as he directly addresses God.

- 1 How does the first stanza prepare us for the stark contrasts in the stanzas that follow?
- 2 What details in the poem paint the picture of a kind man?
- from the rest of the poem?

- 3 How is the final stanza different