

A-Level English Literature

Welcome!

A Brief Overview of your English Literature A-Level



The Four Components

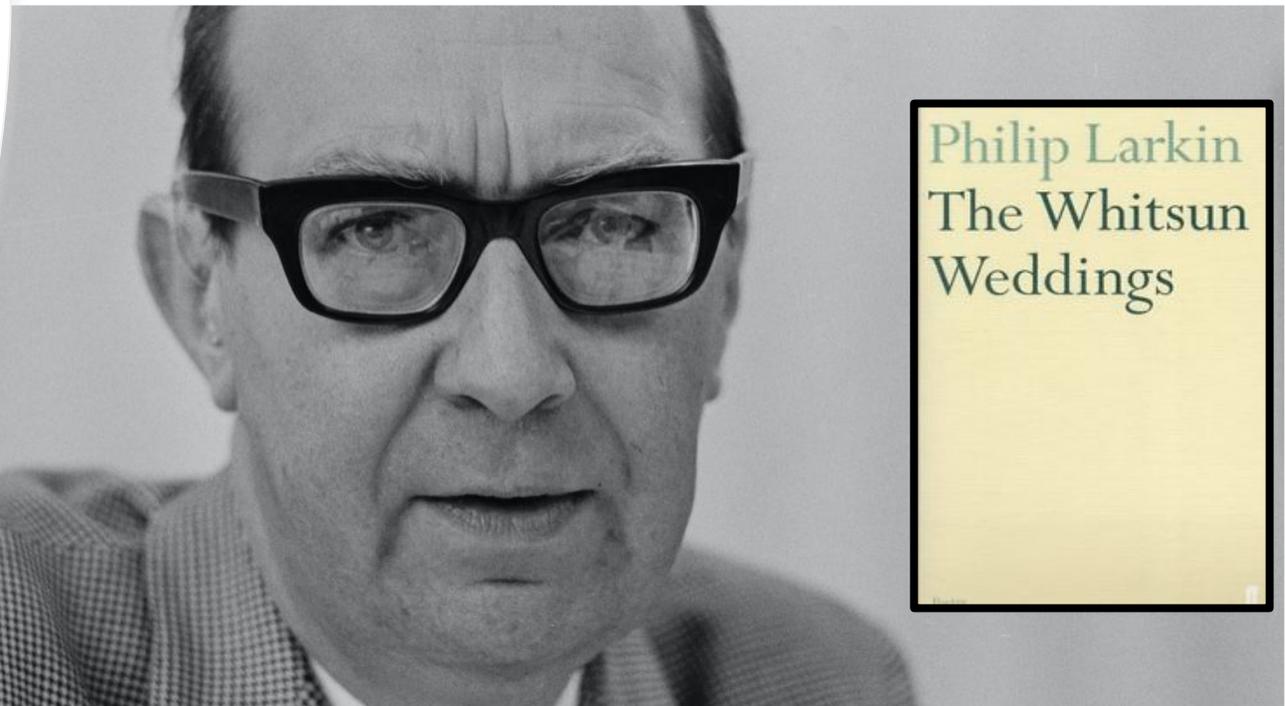
(3 Exam-based, 1 Coursework-based)

- 1) **Poetry** (Duffy & Larkin's poetry, *The Merchant's Tale*)
- 2) **Drama** (*The Duchess of Malfi* & *A Streetcar Named Desire* / *Hamlet*)
- 3) **Unseen Texts** (Unseen Poetry, Unseen Prose 1918-1939)
- 4) **Coursework** (*Fight Club* & *Tenth of December*)



Larkin and Duffy: Studying a Poet's Anthology

- Studying an anthology is far more than just reading a few poems.
- We get an intriguing insight into the poet's thoughts, feelings and their life.
- We need to consider the poems individually, but also the themes which pervade the whole anthology.





Who is Carol Ann Duffy?

- Lapsed Catholic
- Feminist – she grew up during 2nd Wave Feminism
- Scottish heritage but grew up in England
- Complex sexuality
- ‘Mean Time’ – was written during the 1990s, after a relationship break-up and a move to a new town

Who is
Carol
Ann
Duffy?



Dame Carol Ann Duffy

Poet Laureate

Visiting Artist at the
University of Lincoln



UNIVERSITY OF
LINCOLN

Analysing Duffy's 'First Love'

Waking, with a dream of first love forming real words,
as close to my lips as lipstick, I speak your name,
after a silence of years, into the pillow, and the power
of your name brings me here to the window, naked,
to say it again to a garden shaking with light.

This was a child's love, and yet I clench my eyes
till the pictures return, unfocused at first, then
almost clear, an old film played at a slow speed.
All day I will glimpse it, in windows of changing sky,
in mirrors, my lover's eyes, wherever you are.

And later a star, long dead, here, seems precisely
the size of a tear. Tonight, a love-letter out of a dream
stammers itself in my heart. Such faithfulness.
You smile in my head on the last evening. Unseen
flowers suddenly pierce and sweeten the air.

- **What does the title suggest about the subject of the poem?**
- **How do you think Duffy might approach the subject in terms of narrative, characters and imagery?**
- **Knowing Duffy, what stance is she likely to take on the subject?**



Analysing Duffy's 'First Love'

A01

Your response to literary texts:

- What is happening in the poem?
- What is the poem about in terms of subject/theme?
- What is the speaker's attitude towards the subject/theme?

A02

Analyse how language, form, structure and poetic devices shape meaning:

- Are there any particular words, phrases or techniques that stand out?
- What do you think the intended effects of these are?
- How might these intended effects relate to the Duffy's message?
- What is the poem's tone?

A03

Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the context:

Consider how Duffy's own life may have influenced her writing of this poem – here's a reminder :

- Lapsed Catholic
- Feminist – she grew up during 2nd Wave Feminism
- Scottish heritage but grew up in England
- Complex sexuality
- 'Mean Time' – was written during the 1990s, after a relationship break-up and a move to a new town

Be prepared to feedback your ideas!

'first' implies new experience but can only happen once – in the past now

Implies surrealism – like it can't quite be true? - Is 'first love' a myth for the naïve?

An awakening? Start of new day invokes sense of newness/new feelings

Simile suggests emerging sexuality – lipstick being a symbol of adulthood

Sexual connotations throughout stanza suggest enjoyment in the memory

Suggests innocence / naivety?

Mirrors can be the window to the soul – does this suggest they were soulmates? – Or is it about seeing themselves clearly now?

Metaphor for the lasting impact of love – the brightness still pervades. 'tear' reflects the pain & sadness of loss.

First Love

Waking, with a dream of first love forming real words, as close to my lips as lipstick, I speak your name, after a silence of years, into the pillow, and the power of your name brings me here to the window, naked, to say it again to a garden shaking with light.

This was a child's love, and yet I clench my eyes till the pictures return, unfocused at first, then almost clear, an old film played at a slow speed. All day I will glimpse it, in windows of changing sky, in mirrors, my lover's eyes, wherever you are.

And later a star, long dead, here, seems precisely the size of a tear. Tonight, a love-letter out of a dream stammers itself in my heart. Such faithfulness.

You smile in my head on the last evening. Unseen flowers suddenly pierce and sweeten the air.

The past still physically affects the present

Their name still has the power to evoke passionate feelings – reminiscing

Could suggest looking between the two different worlds of past/present

'Clench' = desperation to bring it back

Slowly reminiscing – revelling in the memory

Pathetic fallacy – reflects the transience of emotions

Is she suggesting this is naïve? – perhaps implies that this is lacking later in life?

Perhaps suggests nervousness of first love – or the lasting halting/ heart-clenching feeling

Are the flowers a metaphor for the memory? – bringing sudden shocking thoughts – bitter and sweet?

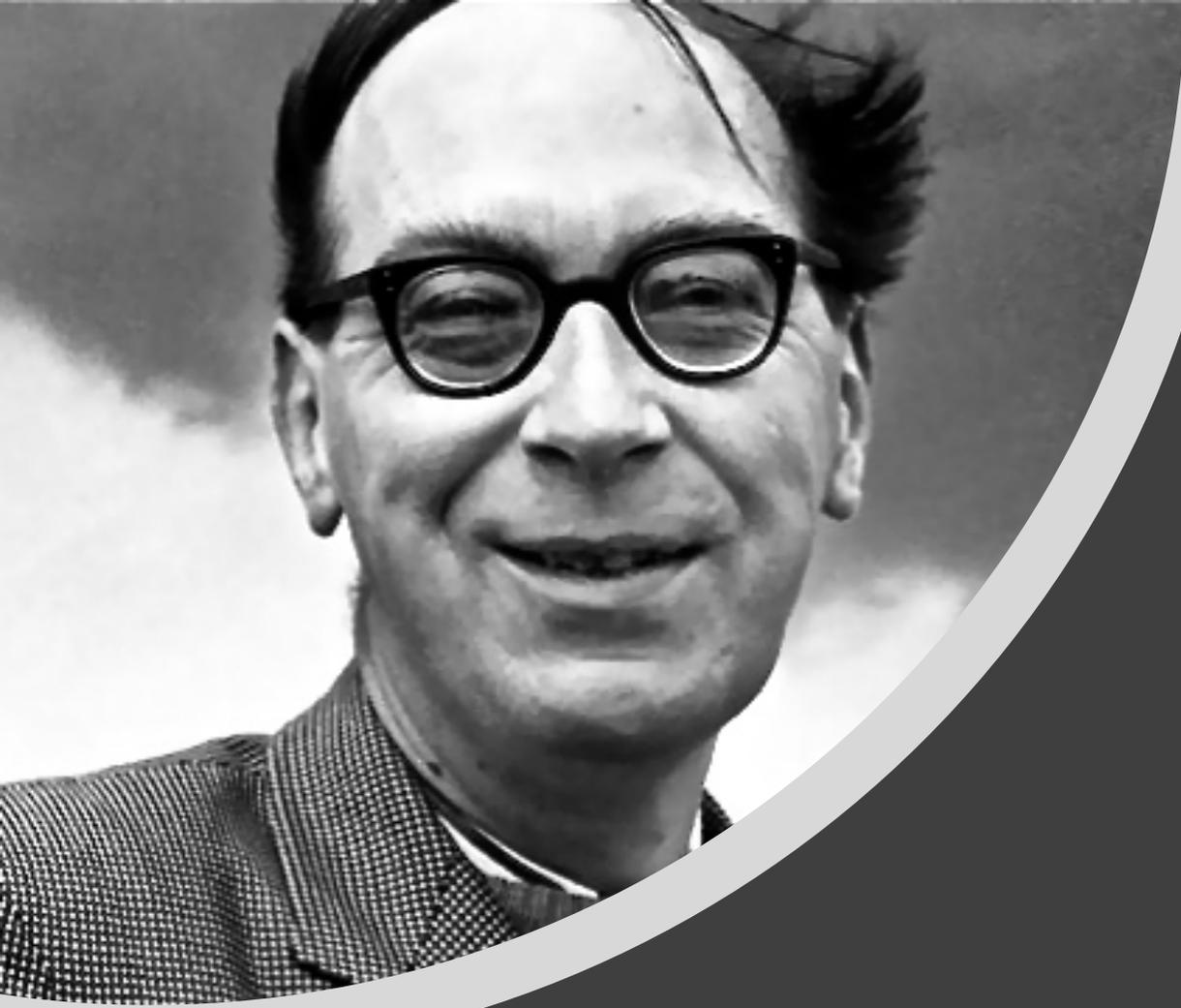
First Love by John Clare

I ne'er was struck before that hour
With love so sudden and so sweet,
Her face it bloomed like a sweet flower
And stole my heart away complete.
My face turned pale as deadly pale,
My legs refused to walk away,
And when she looked, what could I ail?
My life and all seemed turned to clay.

And then my blood rushed to my face
And took my eyesight quite away,
The trees and bushes round the place
Seemed midnight at noonday.
I could not see a single thing,
Words from my eyes did start—
They spoke as chords do from the string,
And blood burnt round my heart.

Are flowers the winter's choice?
Is love's bed always snow?
She seemed to hear my silent voice,
Not love's appeals to know.
I never saw so sweet a face
As that I stood before.
My heart has left its dwelling-place
And can return no more.





Who is Philip Larkin?

- Bachelor – a number of relationships of varying lengths – some concurrent
- Reluctant to be conventional – no marriage, children or mortgage
- Cynical of fame – kept a day job as a librarian at Hull University
- Great observer of British society and habits
- Had a controlling father – not a happy home environment as a child
- Generally considered an Atheist, but with some Agnostic traits
- ‘The Whitsun Weddings’ was written during the 1950s

Who is
Philip
Larkin?



Analysing Larkin's 'Wild Oats'

About twenty years ago
Two girls came in where I worked—
A bosomy English rose
And her friend in specs I could talk to.
Faces in those days sparked
The whole shooting-match off, and I doubt
If ever one had like hers:
But it was the friend I took out,

And in seven years after that
Wrote over four hundred letters,
Gave a ten-guinea ring
I got back in the end, and met
At numerous cathedral cities
Unknown to the clergy. I believe
I met beautiful twice. She was trying
Both times (so I thought) not to laugh.

Parting, after about five
Rehearsals, was an agreement
That I was too selfish, withdrawn,
And easily bored to love.
Well, useful to get that learnt.
In my wallet are still two snaps
Of bosomy rose with fur gloves on.
Unlucky charms, perhaps.

- **What does the title suggest about the subject of the poem?**
- **How do you think Larkin might approach the subject in terms of narrative, characters and imagery?**
- **Knowing Larkin, what stance is she likely to take on the subject?**

To "sow your wild oats"

If a young man sows his wild oats, he has a period of his life when he does a lot of exciting things and has a lot of sexual relationships.



Analysing Larkin's 'Wild Oats'

AO1

Your response to literary texts:

- What is happening in the poem?
- What is the poem about in terms of subject/theme?
- What is the speaker's attitude towards the subject/theme?

AO2

Analyse how language, form, structure and poetic devices shape meaning:

- Are there any particular words, phrases or techniques that stand out in your assigned stanza?
- What do you think the intended effects of these are?
- How might these intended effects relate to the Larkin's message?
- What is the stanza's tone?

AO3

Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the context:

Consider how Larkin's own life may have influenced his writing of this poem – here's a reminder :

- Bachelor – a number of relationships of varying lengths – some concurrent
- Reluctant to be conventional – no marriage, children or mortgage
- Cynical of fame – kept a day job as a librarian at Hull University
- Great observer of British society and habits
- Had a controlling father – not a happy home environment as a child
- Generally considered an Atheist, but with some Agnostic traits
- 'The Whitsun Weddings' was written during the 1950s

Be prepared to feedback your ideas!

Conversational tone – like he is recounting something casual/unimportant

Extraordinary beauty – unattainable?

Pivotal 'But' – implying this was not his wish/desire

Starts stanza with time-frame – brushing over their 7-year relationship

A rocky relationship – Larkin unable to commit?

Tongue-in-cheek – use of humour to hide short-comings?

Perhaps reflecting on the fact that his choice/lack of confidence to go for his true desire brought him no luck/happiness

Wild Oats

About twenty years ago

Two girls came in where I worked –

A bosomy English rose

And her friend in specs I could talk to.

Faces in those days sparked

The whole shooting-match off, and I doubt

If ever one had like hers:

But it was the friend I took out,

And in seven years after that

Wrote over four hundred letters,

Gave a ten-guinea ring

I got back in the end, and met

At numerous cathedral cities

Unknown to the clergy. I believe

I met beautiful twice. She was trying

Both times (so I thought) not to laugh.

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Rehearsals, was an agreement

That I was too selfish, withdrawn,

And easily bored to love.

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Of bosomy rose with fur gloves on.

Unlucky charms, perhaps.

Focus on physical beauty - stereotypical

An almost dismissive description of the friend (Ruth Bowman) – though he is clearly more comfortable with her – intimidated by the other's beauty? - self-deprecating

Sums-up the relationship in terms of physical items – lacking emotion Listing

Does this emphasise the lack of marriage?

Self-deprecating/lacking in confidence in face of 'beauty'

Acknowledgement of own faults

Attention to detail in photograph could suggest his regret/wistfulness

Ruth Bowman

Ruth Bowman was engaged to Philip Larkin from 1948 until 1950 and inspired some of his most significant early poems. When he took up the post of librarian in Wellington, Shropshire, in 1943, Larkin was 21 and Ruth was a schoolgirl of 16.



Ruth Bowman
photographed by Philip
Larkin in 1948



A04 Comparing the Texts

Wild Oats

About twenty years ago
Two girls came in where I worked—
A bosomy English rose
And her friend in specs I could talk to.
Faces in those days sparked
The whole shooting-match off, and I doubt
If ever one had like hers:
But it was the friend I took out,

And in seven years after that
Wrote over four hundred letters,
Gave a ten-guinea ring
I got back in the end, and met
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Well, useful to get that learnt.
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Of bosomy rose with fur gloves on.
Unlucky charms, perhaps.

**Consider these next questions
and make notes in the A04
section of your grid, between the
A01 boxes:**

- How do the two poems' presentations of relationships compare?
- Does one present a more positive view of relationships than the other? How?
- What about their form? How similar are they in their perspectives/voices?
- How do the poets' use of language, devices and imagery compare?
- What about the tone?

**Again, be prepared to feedback
you ideas!**

First Love

Waking, with a dream of first love forming real words,
as close to my lips as lipstick, I speak your name,
after a silence of years, into the pillow, and the power
of your name brings me here to the window, naked,
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till the pictures return, unfocused at first, then
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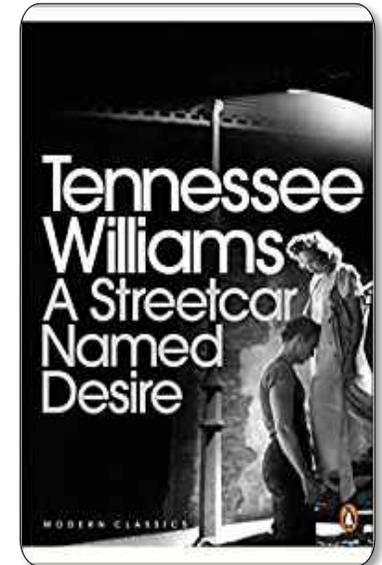
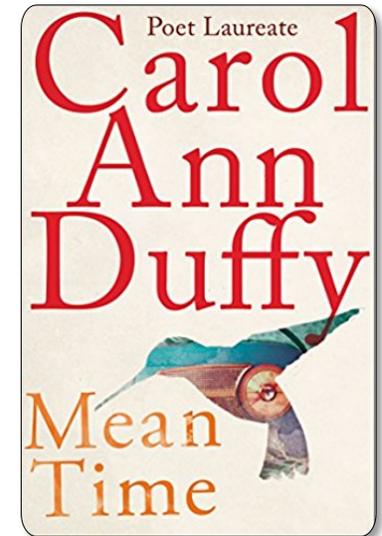
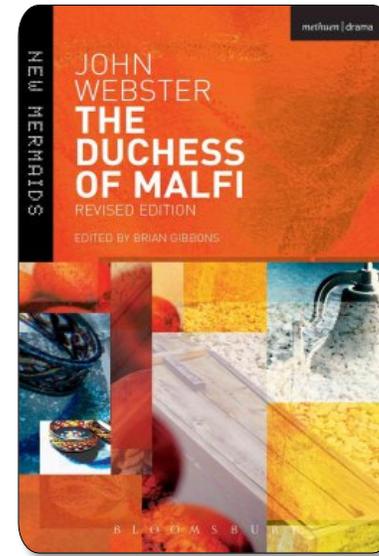
Summer Homework

- **Part One** – please re-read both poems, annotate them with ideas and then finish filling in each section of the AO grid in preparation for the first lesson back, including the AO5 boxes
- **Part Two** – write a short paragraph considering how the poet's experiences and the societies in which they lived might have influenced their writing of the poems
- There is a booklet to help you, containing:
 - ✓ Contextual information about the poets and critical views on their poetry - these will give you points to write about in the AO3 and AO5 boxes
 - ✓ The Assessment Objectives explained



Summer Homework

- **Part Three** – please purchase the following texts over the summer.
- **Part Four** – Read *A Streetcar Named Desire*



You will need these books for your course too – but you can get them at a later date.

