




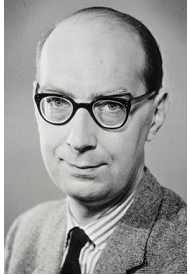


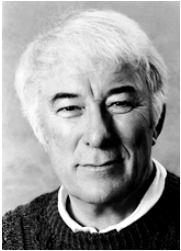






Poem	Date	Social Context	Biographical Context
<p><i>'Love and a Question'</i></p> <p>Robert Frost</p> <p>(American)</p>	1913	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The year before WW1 started</li> <li>The fin-de-siècle (turn of the century) in 1900 had been the end of an era and the start of a new hope for society. There was a growing belief that civilisation needed to reject consumerism and the middle classes.</li> <li>Modernist poetry was characterised by a self-conscious break from traditional styles, experimenting with literary form and expression.</li> <li>Slavery had been abolished in the US in 1865 – 12 million black people were still living in the States and suffering enormous discrimination</li> <li>The USA was predominately Protestant; the Bible teaches the importance of compassion to others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>His father died of tuberculosis when Frost was 11, leaving the family with just \$8.</li> <li>His mother and sister both suffered from depression, with the latter being committed to a mental hospital. His wife also had depression.</li> <li>Although Frost had six children, only two outlived him. The others died to illness, suicide, and childbirth.</li> </ul> 
<p><i>'A Quoi Bon Dire'</i></p> <p>Charlotte Mary Mew</p> <p>(British)</p>	1916	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two years into WW1</li> <li>Conservative attitudes towards women's dress, behaviour, and sexuality. Women still expected to get married and have children.</li> <li>Some unforgiving attitudes towards mental illness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mew had a history of mental illness in her family; a brother and a sister were committed to a mental institution. She vowed never to marry so as not to pass her genes on.</li> <li>She wore men's tailored suits and cut her hair short. Is speculated to have had lesbian tendencies.</li> <li>Her sister Anne died of cancer; Charlotte had been nursing her fulltime prior to this event.</li> <li>Charlotte committed suicide in 1928 aged 59.</li> </ul> 
<p><i>'I, being born a woman and distressed'</i></p> <p>Edna St Vincent Millay</p> <p>(American)</p>	1923	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WW1 had ended five years earlier</li> <li>The Roaring Twenties – prosperous for some, but a decade of poverty for many too, particularly minority groups.</li> <li>Changing role of women as a result of the work they did in WW1</li> <li>In 1920, all women given the vote</li> <li>'Flappers' smoked in public, danced the new dancers, and were sexually liberated</li> <li>Most women were still housewives and not as free as men</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raised by a strong, independent mother who divorced her father when Edna was eight (divorce was still discouraged)</li> <li>Edna Millay engaged in several affairs with both men and women</li> </ul> 

<p><i>'Meeting Point'</i></p> <p>Louis MacNeice</p> <p>(British / Northern Irish)</p>	<p>1939</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The outbreak of WW2 – 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939</li> <li>• Rise in political tension across Europe</li> <li>• Britain had been trying to recover from the Depression after WW1 and had made great strides to reduce unemployment</li> <li>• Food importation into the UK halted in late 1939</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in Belfast – lived in London most of his life but was proud of his Irish heritage</li> <li>• Worked as a writer and BBC radio producer</li> <li>• His wife Giovanna left him after six years of marriage, leaving him to raise their son alone</li> <li>• A member of the Auden Group (a group of Modernist poets including W. H. Auden, and Ezra Pound)</li> </ul> 
<p><i>'Vergissmeinnicht'</i></p> <p>Keith Douglas</p> <p>(British)</p>	<p>1943</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two years before the end of WW2</li> <li>• The Holocaust</li> <li>• Life in the trenches involved food shortages, lack of hygiene, living amongst rats, and boredom</li> <li>• Soldiers had to live with constant danger of enemy shelling and snipers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attended Oxford University. Enlisted as soon as he could during WW2</li> <li>• Spent 27 months in Cairo (which was occupied by the British) during WW2. His poems written in North Africa focused on heroism and mortality within war</li> <li>• He was happy to be considered a war poet but did not want to be self-pitying in his poetry, nor use poetry as propaganda</li> <li>• Was killed during the invasion of Normandy in 1944, aged 24.</li> </ul> 
<p><i>'Talking in Bed'</i></p> <p>Philip Larkin</p> <p>(British)</p>	<p>1960</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entering "the Swinging Sixties"</li> <li>• Britain just recovering from the aftermath of WW2</li> <li>• The first teenage generation free from conscription; parents wanted their youth to have more fun and freedom than they had had during the war years.</li> <li>• "Hippie" movement</li> <li>• Sex before marriage became more common and marriage became a more balanced partnership</li> <li>• Divorces becoming more common, but still favoured men</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Larkin's public persona was that of the no-nonsense, solitary Englishman who disliked fame and had no patience for the trappings of the public literary life</li> <li>• Never committed to a life-long partner – he had several affairs, including with married women</li> </ul> 
<p><i>'Wild Oats'</i></p> <p>Philip Larkin</p> <p>(British)</p>	<p>1962</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See above</li> <li>• Introduction of contraceptive pill in 1961 gave women more sexual liberty</li> <li>• "Sow your wild oats" – refers to societal expectation that young men should have sexual relationships before marriage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The girlfriend in the poem is his first girlfriend, Ruth Bowman; the only woman he came close to marrying. The "bosomy English rose" is her friend Jane Exall. Larkin and Bowman called off their engagement in 1950.</li> </ul>

<p><i>'One Flesh'</i> Elizabeth Jennings (British)</p>	<p>1966</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See above for “Swinging Sixties” and introduction of contraceptive pill, which allowed women to have a career before starting a family.</li> <li>• Family life was less restricted and children given more freedom.</li> <li>• Poem’s title is a reference to Genesis: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh".</li> <li>• Generally speaking, the Catholic Church does not permit divorce save for extreme circumstances. Annulments are permitted, but only if it can be proven that the marriage was invalid.</li> <li>• There was a soar in marriage rates in the 1960s – in 1966, when this poem was published, there were more than 10,000 marriages than the year before.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born a Catholic</li> <li>• When Jennings was 13, WW2 broke out. It was then that religion played a large and important part in her life, and continued to do until her death.</li> <li>• Raised in Oxford where she attended university and then worked as a librarian. She never married; Oxford and academia remained at the centre of her life.</li> <li>• Suffered a mental breakdown in the 1960s which resulted in experimental poems, a deviation from her otherwise traditional style.</li> </ul> 
<p><i>'For My Lover, Returning to His Wife'</i> Anne Sexton (American)</p>	<p>1968</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sexual Revolution in 1960s USA. Because of the contraceptive pill, sex outside the strict bounds of heterosexual marriage was more readily accepted.</li> <li>• Adultery was something of a silent-but-accepted norm in 1960s' USA, especially for men: it was understood that married men could have mistresses, even if this was never publically discussed.</li> <li>• A new wave of thinking was created in regards to the domestic and sexual role of women in society; American women were no longer satisfied with domestic roles.</li> <li>• There had been a drop in the rates of depression in the 1960s; it was considered fairly rare.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in Massachusetts. The daughter of a successful businessman, her life was materially comfortable but unhappy.</li> <li>• Married aged 19 and became a model whilst her husband was serving in Korea. She suffered from post-partum depression after the birth of her first child and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. She struggled with depression for the rest of her life.</li> <li>• During treatment, her therapist Dr Martin Orne encouraged her to write and so she joined writing groups. They began a long affair; he was married.</li> <li>• Committed suicide aged 46.</li> </ul> 
<p><i>'Punishment'</i> Seamus Heaney (Northern Irish)</p>	<p>1975</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first woman referred to is the “bog woman”, known as “Windeby 1”, who until recently was believed to be the remains of a teenage girls (the body has now been identified as a boy’s). When the bog body was first discovered in 1952, it was believed that the [girl] had been blindfolded and drowned in the bog, held down by branches and a large stone. Heaney imagines this is a punishment for adultery.</li> <li>• The second woman in the poem is a Northern Irish woman who was tarred and feathered by her community for falling in love with and planning to marry an English soldier.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in County Derry in Northern Ireland in 1939. His father was a farmer specialising in cattle.</li> <li>• Eldest of nine children.</li> <li>• Attended university in Belfast; then went on to become an English teacher and eventually a university lecturer</li> <li>• Received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1995. One of Ireland’s most celebrated poets.</li> </ul> 

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Troubles in Ireland – 1968-1998. The English had controlled Ireland for many centuries. In 1801, Ireland had become part of the United Kingdom, but many Irish were unhappy about this.</li> <li>• The Troubles began with a civil rights march in Londonderry in 1968 – the Protestant community of Northern Ireland wanted to remain in the UK, but the Catholic population of the Republic of Ireland wanted independence. The IRA used terrorist tactics such as bombings and assassinations to oppose British rule in Ireland.</li> </ul>	
<p><i>'Timer'</i></p> <p>Tony Harrison</p> <p>(English)</p>	1981	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979.</li> <li>• The economy was falling and unemployment was rising.</li> <li>• Prince Charles and Lady Diana married in 1981.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born and grew up in Leeds</li> <li>• Father was a baker</li> <li>• Has written extensively about his parents in his poetry.</li> <li>• Harrison stated that as his expressiveness and mastery of language grew in his poetry, he found it increasingly difficult to communicate with his parents; on the night of his mother's death, he and his father could barely talk to each other.</li> </ul> 
<p><i>'The Long Finish'</i></p> <p>Paul Muldoon</p> <p>(Northern Irish)</p>	1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• See "Seamus Heaney" for context on The Troubles and IRA</li> <li>• Wrote the poem as he was coming up to his ten year anniversary of marriage to Korelitz.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in Northern Ireland. Father was a farmer, mother was a schoolmistress.</li> <li>• Attended university in Belfast, where he met Seamus Heaney.</li> <li>• Married his first wife in 1973; they divorced in 1977.</li> <li>• He worked as a BBC producer in Belfast, where he saw the most bitter period of the Troubles.</li> <li>• Married his second wife Jean Korelitz, a Jewish American writer, in 1987. They are still married, have two children and life in New York City.</li> </ul> 
<p><i>'To John Donne'</i></p> <p>Michael Symmons Roberts</p> <p>(British)</p>	2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This poem was written following conversations with Sir John Sulston, head of the team mapping the human genome in Cambridge, and whose concerns about gene patenting form the epigraph.</li> <li>• Roberts' poem is a response to John Donne's poem "To His Mistress Going to Bed". Roberts' poem begins, 'Now, as your</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symmons Roberts spent his childhood in Lancashire</li> <li>• Attended Oxford University</li> <li>• Was an atheist in his adolescence, but then converted to Roman Catholicism</li> <li>• Became a newspaper journalist and then</li> </ul> 

		<p>mistress strips for bed,' but rather than a love poem like Donne's, it continues: 'her body is already mapped', an abrupt and unromantic continuation which takes the reader by surprise and suggests an unpleasant form of ownership of the female body.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A gene patent is the exclusive rights to a specific sequence of DNA (a gene) given by a government to the individual, organization, or corporation who claims to have first identified the gene. Once granted a gene patent, the holder of the patent dictates how the gene can be used, in both commercial settings, such as clinical genetic testing, and in noncommercial settings, including research, for 20 years from the date of the patent.</li> </ul>	<p>a radio producer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Was Executive Producer and Head of Development for BBC Religion and Ethics.</li> <li>• Although rooted in the English lyric tradition, his work draws on the language of science (especially genetics and genomics), theology and philosophy.</li> </ul>
<p>'The Love Poem'</p> <p>Carol Ann Duffy (British)</p>	2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The poem appears in Duffy's collection <i>Rapture</i>, which is about a love affair. One way to interpret 'The Love Poem' and its use of previous poets' words is to say that the affair being described in the poem – and in the whole of <i>Rapture</i> – is over (as the final poem in the volume, simply called 'Over', will make clear). Duffy's reference to 'an epitaph' in 'The Love Poem' hints at this: she is trying to memorialise or enshrine her love affair in words that will last, like those of the poets she quotes.</li> <li>• 'The Love Poem' shows that Duffy is aware of a rich tradition of love-poem sequences in English literature: it is a poem that feels the weight of these former masters – Shakespeare, Sidney, Donne, Shelley, Barrett Browning – and finds it difficult to write a love poem that won't sound like a bad pastiche or copy of these literary greats. 'I love you', as Jacques Derrida was fond of pointing out, is always a quotation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in Scotland in 1955.</li> <li>• Appointed as Poet Laureate in 2009</li> <li>• Duffy is openly homosexual</li> </ul> 
<p>'After the Lunch'</p> <p>Wendy Cope</p>	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Waterloo Bridge named after the Battle of Waterloo in 1815, which took place in modern-day Belgium (then part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands). An English-led army under the command of Duke Wellington defeated Napoleon's French army. The defeat at Waterloo ended Napoleon's rule as Emperor of the French, and ended the First French Empire.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in Kent in 1945 and attended Oxford University.</li> <li>• Was a primary school teacher before becoming an Arts and Reviews editor</li> <li>• Married Scottish poet Lachlan Mackinnon after 19 years of living together</li> </ul> 