

Edexcel English Literature GCSE

Poetry Collection: Relationships

“1st Date – She & 1st Date – He” - *Wendy Cope*

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1ST DATE – SHE & 1ST DATE – HE

Wendy Cope

Brief Summary

These are two parallel poems which portray the classic male and female perspectives on a common situation. Cope describes a first date from the viewpoint of the two halves of the couple. She employs extensive dramatic irony to convey the humorous and awkward stages of starting a relationship.

Synopsis

- In the woman's perspective poem, she states she exaggerated her interest in classical music to seem more intelligent and highbrow, so she was invited to a date at a classical music concert. However, she's having to pay a lot of attention in order to have something interesting to say. She looks at her date and it appears that he's "quite undistracted by me"
- The man's poem presents a very similar narrative, obviously because they're centralising on the same situation. It suggests he's looked for an appropriate date location and he's feeling embarrassed that he was late to meet her. He also feels that his date is "totally undistracted by me". Whilst he is distracted by his date, he tries to pay attention to the music so he'll also have something to say later on.

Context

Wendy Cope (1945 -)

Cope was born in Kent, and went to Oxford University to read History before becoming a Primary School Teacher. She also held occupations as an arts and reviews editor before becoming a professional writer. She is known for the humorous tone she adopts in many of her poems, often with sarcasm and wit, but is also conscious of writing relatable poetry. She has an OBE for her work.



1st Date – She & 1st Date – He

1st Date – She

I said I liked **classical music**.

It **wasn't exactly a lie**.

I **hoped** he would get the impression

That my **brow** was acceptably **high**.

I **said I liked classical music**.

I mentioned Vivaldi and Bach.

And he **asked me along to this concert**.

Here we are, sitting in the **half-dark**.

I was thrilled **to be asked** to this concert.

I **couldn't care less** what they play

But I'm **trying my hardest** to listen

So I'll have something clever to say.

When I **glance** at his face it's a picture

Of rapt concentration. I see

He is totally into this music

And quite undistracted by me.

Suggests a half lie, and by saying it "wasn't exactly", the character is trying to reassure or comfort herself.

She is attempting to appear more intellectual - refers to the idea that he needs to be intelligent enough for the man to accept her.

The tense changes between these two lines, in order to involve the audience more in the story.

Furthers the idea that she has lied / exaggerated about liking classical music.

Makes the date - which is supposed to be a fun experience - into a hard chore or something requiring a lot of effort, which may be the poet warning the consequences of lying to a partner or prospective partner.

Repeated in both poems for dramatic irony, because in reality both parties are paying a lot of attention to the other person.

The speaker implies she has chosen to say she likes a certain type of music to appear impressive and sophisticated, in order to make a good impression on the man. The poem is opening anecdotally.

The speaker is clearly eager to impress him.

Repeating the line from the first stanza to emphasise the comical situation, or alternatively could be the speaker reassuring herself.

This shows a setting of uncertainty and wariness, which suggests she is unsure as to whether she made the right choice to exaggerate her interest in classical music. Half-dark reflects the half-lies both characters have been telling, or the limited information they have about each other.

The passive "to be asked" conforms to societal stereotypes that the man has to make the first move in the relationship, perhaps implying the speaker has traditional views on love and relationships.

Hoping to make eye contact with him.



1st Date – He

She said she liked **classical music**.

I **implied** I was keen on it too.

Though I don't often go to a concert,

It wasn't entirely untrue.

I looked for a suitable concert

And here we are, on our first date.

The traffic was **dreadful this evening**

And I arrived ten minutes late.

So we haven't had much time for talking

And **I'm a bit nervous**. I see

She is totally lost in the music

And quite undistracted by me.

In that dress she is very attractive –

The **neckline can't fail to intrigue**.

I musn't appear too besotted.

Perhaps she is out of my league.

Where are we? I glance at the programme

But I've put my glasses away.

I'd better start paying attention

Or else I'll have nothing to say.

This isn't concrete enough to imply he's telling the truth instead of a half-lie

Suggests he is being submissive which subverts stereotypes of men in relationships.

Shows that the speaker is a pragmatic and organised character, also mirrors patriarchal expectations.

Shows how they are both misleading each other completely. Reflects the general untruthfulness and miscommunication presented in the poem as a whole.

Sexual element in his attraction to the other speaker / his date.

Implies he doesn't really know what's going on or has any interest in classical music.

This first stanza mirrors the woman's first stanza - they both exaggerate their interest in classical music. This parallelism is used for a humorous effect.

The tense also changes here, like in the second stanza of the woman's poem, which is another way parallelism is incorporated into the poem.

Perhaps a role reversal in the stereotypes of men & women here.

The focus on appearance imply that he is only interested in a sexual relationship with the woman, or may play on the stereotype that men are obsessed with sex, because the female perspective is void of reference to attractiveness or sex.

Seems to juxtapose the idea that he's about to start paying attention



The title “1st Date – She & 1st Date”

The fact it is a first date suggests the two characters probably don't know each other well, if at all, yet.

Both poems have a similarly structured title, like a refrain, which could contrast the miscommunication and disconnect in the poem.

1st Date – She & 1st Date – He

First dates have a lot of social stigma and are presented a lot in fictitious media, which may interest readers.

Perspective

Cope employs a very interesting contrast of perspectives in her two poems. They're both from a different half of a couple embarking on a first date. This **contrasting perspective** both plays on the trope of men vs women and their takes on their experiences.

The contrasting viewpoints heightens a sense of **dramatic irony** and **humour** in the poem as the reader is aware of both halves of the situation whereas obviously the speakers can only see their own perspective.

This **manipulation of perspective** creates a humorous and engaging tone to the poem, and makes it relatable to readers who may have been in similar dating experiences.



Structure

Parallelism

PARALLELISM | The use of grammatically identical / similar components repeated in a sentence or multiple sentences.

There are many **similarities in syntax** between the two poems. For example, they both employ the line: **“And quite undistracted by me”** though this isn’t true in either case as both of them are fixated on each other while pretending they aren’t. Here Cole is showing the reader how much people can overthink dating.

I’d better start paying attention
Or else I’ll have nothing to say.

But I’m trying my hardest to listen
So I’ll have something clever to say.

Additionally, the phrases **“wasn’t exactly a lie”** and **“wasn’t entirely true”** have the same sentiment and have the same **syntactic structure**. The similar structure shows the reader that they are All these examples highlight how perhaps the couple are quite compatible after all.

Stanza Structure

The reader can read a stanza from each poem in turn to create an impression of a dialogue between the man and the woman in the poem. The additional stanza in the “He” perspective, which centres on **sexual attraction** and appearance, may be drawing on the stereotype that men often focus on appearance and sexuality.

ABCB Rhyme Scheme

The gentle but solid **ABCB rhyme scheme** provides a lighthearted, slightly humorous tone to the poem which mirrors the situation and language used.

Tetrameter

IAMBIC TETRAMETER | Technique where the poet uses eight syllables in each line, with pairs of sounds going da-DA with the emphasis on the second syllable.

Cole’s use of **tetrameter** creates a **fast pace** which reflects the **panic and nervousness** of both characters.

→ **Tetrameter** is used by “She” on every second line of each stanza as well as the fourth line on the final stanza.





→ It is used by “He” in stanzas two, three and five on the second and fourth lines, and just the fourth in the fourth stanza. This places emphasis especially on lines which deviate from this pattern.

1st Date – She

1st Date – He

<p>I said I liked classical music. It wasn't exactly a lie. I hoped he would get the impression That my brow was acceptably high.</p>	<p>She said she liked classical music. I implied I was keen on it too. Though I don't often go to a concert, It wasn't entirely untrue.</p>	<p><i>In “He”, there is initially no conforming meter at all, which suggests he is flustered by being late to the date and uncomfortable and nervous, reflecting the sentiment of the poem.</i></p>
<p>I said I liked classical music. I mentioned Vivaldi and Bach. And he asked me along to this concert. Here we are, sitting in the half-dark.</p>	<p>I looked for a suitable concert And here we are, on our first date. The traffic was dreadful this evening And I arrived ten minutes late.</p>	<p><i>The two poems start to slowly mirror the other's meter, suggesting that behind the miscommunication and half lies, they're compatible.</i></p>
<p>I was thrilled to be asked to this concert. I couldn't care less what they play But I'm trying my hardest to listen So I'll have something clever to say.</p>	<p>So we haven't had much time for talking And I'm a bit nervous. I see She is totally lost in the music And quite undistracted by me.</p>	
	<p>In that dress she is very attractive – The neckline can't fail to intrigue. I musn't appear too besotted. Perhaps she is out of my league.</p>	<p><i>This could divert from the meter from the rest of the “He” poem, because it doesn't have a paired stanza in the “She” poem.</i></p>
<p>When I glance at his face it's a picture Of rapt concentration. I see He is totally into this music And quite undistracted by me.</p>	<p>Where are we? I glance at the programme But I've put my glasses away. I'd better start paying attention Or else I'll have nothing to say.</p>	<p><i>Both of the final stanzas have the same meter, which could suggest that now they have settled down into the concert, they will get to know each other later in the night. Also reflects how perhaps they are compatible, despite the miscommunication and exaggeration</i></p>



Language

Contrast of formal language & colloquialisms

COLLOQUIALISM | An informal phrase common at its time of utterance.

Cole's use of **colloquialisms** reflects the exaggeration that both characters have made as to how much they like classical music; they both use certain pieces of **formal language** to try and appear intellectual, which **contrasts to the colloquialism phrases** they actually use when thinking. For example, the lines from the second poem:

I musn't appear too **besotted**.
Perhaps she is **out of my league**.

Here, the speaker uses the **archaic phrase "besotted"**, which means 'strongly infatuated', but then he goes on to use the colloquial, casual phrase **"out of my league"**. This reflects the **miscommunication** and **exaggerations** both characters have been making in relation to the date.

Dramatic Irony

DRAMATIC IRONY | [when the audience knows something the speaker doesn't] when a character or speaker expresses something which usually signifies the opposite.

In the two poems, the reader is aware of the two halves of the situation whereas the speaker in each case is only aware of their own perspective. This leads to an amusing situation for the reader, as they are aware that neither party really likes classical music, they are both being hyper-attentive as to their date, and both are making a big effort to impress the other.

The frustrating nature of the **miscommunication** displayed in the poem contrasts the actually quite similar way both people try to handle the first date and their thoughts on it. This may be Cope suggesting that the couple actually have a lot in common, despite trying to base their initial relationship on half-truths and exaggerations. As a result, they don't get the chance to explore the connection they may have had.

