

Learner Resource 4 Critical analysis, with a focus on *Wintering* (A01, A02, A03)

Read the following extracts taken from an essay written about *Wintering*. First, decide on the word from each that most neatly summarises it.

1. Wintering is a measurable period of time, and it is just one part of a larger cycle. It is a process whereby you prepare for the winter ahead by storing something up (food for animals, perhaps emotions and memories for poets).
2. The metaphorical funerals, cutting through the rain create an impression of the pain the speaker feels, but the verb used suggests regrowth. The fields are transformed from harvested crops, to earth and so to new growth.
3. It is something that has happened before and it is a sleight of hand and an illusion; it only lasts until it is questioned.
4. Colour seeps away as the speaker yearns for her lover and withdraws into the isolation of grief.
5. The symbols traditionally associated with romance and beauty are undermined.
6. Time passes and the asterisk marks an alteration in tone. When we re-join the poem, the change is clear.
7. There is a sense of estrangement and lack of connection with life, and language is an inadequate way of dealing with it.
8. There is a muffled world of childlike secrecy, full of sibilance, that contrasts with the noise in the previous verse.
9. After this time of stillness and introspection, words start to connect with sense.
10. This is a powerful, cyclical process, the poem suggests: like the seasons, love dismantles itself, strips itself bare and resurrects itself.

Now as a class, take it in turns to justify your choice of word. Be prepared to change it, or to underline others if you hear a good alternative to the one you have chosen.

Read *Wintering*, and take your ten words, using them to annotate the poem. It might help you to look at the list below and select the lines to which the essay refers.

In no particular order:

"Grey fades to black"
 "The Latin names of plants blur like belief"
 "...the smuggling in of snow"
 "Wintering"
 "slow funerals have ploughed the rain"
 "that trick we have of turning love to pain"
 "the stars... //the moon... //birds"
 "* //The garden tenses"
 "what has been//translates to what will be"
 "winter thaws and melts, cannot resist."

Work in six groups to prepare to give feedback to the rest of the class on one particular aspect of this poem. You may choose to use the guidance provided here for each group, or to work independently.

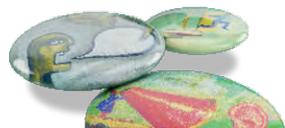
Guidance

Group One: Voice

First person, addressed to the loved one "you" – typical of love poetry. Monologue. Duffy has said that she likes to have room in a poem for the reader, and that the poet should not be in the way. Personal. Lyrical.

Group Two: Figurative language

Use of metaphor, simile – music, cold, entrapment, death. Personification of garden etc. – more character than the anonymous lover.



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Group Three: Rhyme and rhythm and structure

Repeated half-rhymed sound in first verse (“ou”/“ow”) suggesting suffering. Regular rhyme full and slant. Regular verse length – inescapable progression of time – one verse for every month of the year. Asterisk – self-consciously drawing attention to time passing.

Group Four: Lexis

Pronoun “I” is used five times, and possessive pronoun “my” is used four times, whereas “you” is used once, as is “we” – indicating the focus on the speaker. Rare moment of shared experience. Repetition of “turning” and “turn” in first and last verse – the cyclical nature of the love. Pastoral landscape of garden, ice, trees, cloud, wind, sky.

Group Five: Grammar and morphology

Generally present tense, as the speaker plays out moments from the present - past tense in “have ploughed”, “has wept”, and a move into the future in the penultimate verse – indicating a sense of progression and hope. Complex sentence of final two verses – suggesting a slow change: melting and thawing.

Group Six: Context

Poem positioned half-way through this collection, where the relationship is breaking down. Characteristic images from Duffy’s other poems of moon, birds, stone, tree, words and language. Comparison could be made with *You*, where the destructive, obsessive nature of love is apparent. Conventional symbols (moon etc) and clichés of love poetry are undercut. Addressed to the lover in the tradition of love poetry.

