

How to tackle the comparative essay

Compare how the idea of being close to someone else is presented in 'The manhunt' by Simon Armitage and in one other poem from 'Relationships'.

Examiner's tips:

- Keep your opening brief but answer the question focusing on both poems and reflecting key words.
- Foreground the author.
- Make as many points as you can about language, form and structure (purple).
- Link points (yellow).
- Explain the effects of the poetic techniques you write about (green).
- Embed your quotations and keep them short, but use them often to illustrate your points about the techniques used.
- Save a good point for your conclusion to link back to and underline your thesis.

Step 1: Your thesis or central point of comparison. Keep it brief!

Both Armitage and Mew's poems contain the idea of a hunt and a desire to be close to another person while one member of the partnership holds back. However, in 'The Farmer's Bride', Mew shows us how and why this closeness is never achieved.

Step 2: The main body of your essay. Starting with one poem, pick up on one way the idea in your thesis has been presented and move back and forth between the poems, making links (see yellow highlights) along the way. 7 to 10 paragraphs.

'The manhunt'

Argumentative frame, signposted throughout. Key words: 'After', 'only then', 'then' (anaphora). Highlights fact that took time for speaker to become close to her lover.

By contrast: lexical choices (emphasise partner incapable of opening up; emotional wound of the past, but can be healed by love of partner): 'blown hinge of his lower jaw', 'damaged...collar-bone', 'fractured...shoulder-blade', 'broken ribs', 'grazed heart' connote idea of physical wound. **Metaphorical:** 'sweating, unexploded mine buried deep in his mind' (also enjambed lines). **Enjambed lines:** 'around which | every nerve in his body had tightened and closed', which connotes surgical operation to restore health. Ending hopeful. Source located. **Last line, a single sentence (added impact):** 'Then, and only then, did I come close': patience and love can heal.

...'first phase' of 'passionate nights' or 'intimate days'...

... (in stark contrast to Armitage's careful and patient lover)...

Like Armitage,

7 to 10 paragraphs like this and save a really good point for your conclusion.

'The farmer's bride'

Less of an argument here, more of a story. Narrative rather than monologue. Dialogue introduced. Sense of character. More dramatic poem. 'Bride's' reluctance to allow 'men-folk' close to her — a one-sided relationship.

By contrast, no such hopefulness. Possessive apostrophe: farmer's bride = a belonging of the farmer. **No...**

...but 'I chose a maid', which gives idea that the marriage is one-sided from start. Farmer's total lack of empathy for partner...

...when he tells us there was 'more to do' at harvest time 'than bide and woo'.

Mew uses metaphors to flag up sensitive nature of bride ('smile went out'). Simile: likened to a 'frightened fay'.

Step 3: Your conclusion. Unite both poems and then introduce your final similarity or difference.

Central to both poems is the motif of a hunt taking place,...

...but while in 'The Manhunt' it is designed to help partner to healthy state (complete union between two),...

...title 'Manhunt': sounds aggressive and violent. Graphic/violent language: injury/invasive surgery, idea = one of healing.

...whereas in Armitage's poem, the speaker is one whom we have to admire for her patient and sensitive hunt to free the spirit of her lover rather than entrap it.

...in Mew's poem the hunt is an abuse (one partner entirely self-absorbed, seeking own gratification). Lexical choices connote entrapment ('chased', 'caught', 'fetched'). Irony: 'home', 'turn the key upon her, fast'. Comma placement important — signals pause, full impact of the final word, 'fast', no escape for her. **Ironic...**

By contrast, 'The farmer's bride' sounds innocuous but really is about violent denial of liberty: she closes up completely as result from man totally alien to her. **Simile:** 'like a mouse'. Farmer entirely unsympathetic character/narrative voice,...

Different central messages but both appear to agree. Healthy or destructive nature of relationships very much tied up with personalities and motives involved. Closeness can only be achieved if both parties love unselfishly.