

Stephen Watson
Commonplaces
More challenging questions!

Worksheet by:
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1. "It had been commonplace enough, for his time and place.
'He'd met her back in Durban, when she was still in school.
Within a month they'd set up house, her parents disowning her.
She'd leave their bed, a Berea flat, for one last year in school;
he for his job, as shipping clerk, on Durban's waterfront."
 - Why does the poet specifically mention the man's job and where he worked? (4)
 - What is the implication of "She'd leave their bed"? Why does the poet not rather say, "She'd leave their home"? (4)

2. "Nor was it that unusual when one year to the day,
their young romance already old, she ran off with his best friend.
Six, seven years have passed since then. She's long since
left that friend as well. She never finished school."
 - Comment carefully on the paradox found in the words, "their young romance already old". (4)
 - Explain the irony of "she ran off with his best friend". (4)
 - Why does the poet mention "She never finished school"? (4)

3. "It takes four years, even five -- so the textbooks say --
to get over a bad jilting. So none of this surprised us much -
nothing like the day he mentioned, quite in passing,
he'd lost all contact with her, hadn't heard a word in months."
 - Explain the man's attitude towards his ex-lover. (4)
 - Why does the poet add the words "so the textbooks say"? (4)
 - Explain what it was that did indeed surprise his friends. (4)

4. "'She's history now,' he said, 'something over. Of the past.'
She was no more, by now, than one phrase among the many,
the plain and final phrases, all but painless, that consign
lives to the great rubbish-heap of anyone's past loves, dead hates."
 - Comment on the use of repetition in these lines. (4)
 - The poet says "all but painless". What language device is being used here? What is its purpose? (4)
 - Comment on the image in "the great rubbish-heap of anyone's past loves, dead hates". (4)

5. Comment carefully on the style of this poem. (4)

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