



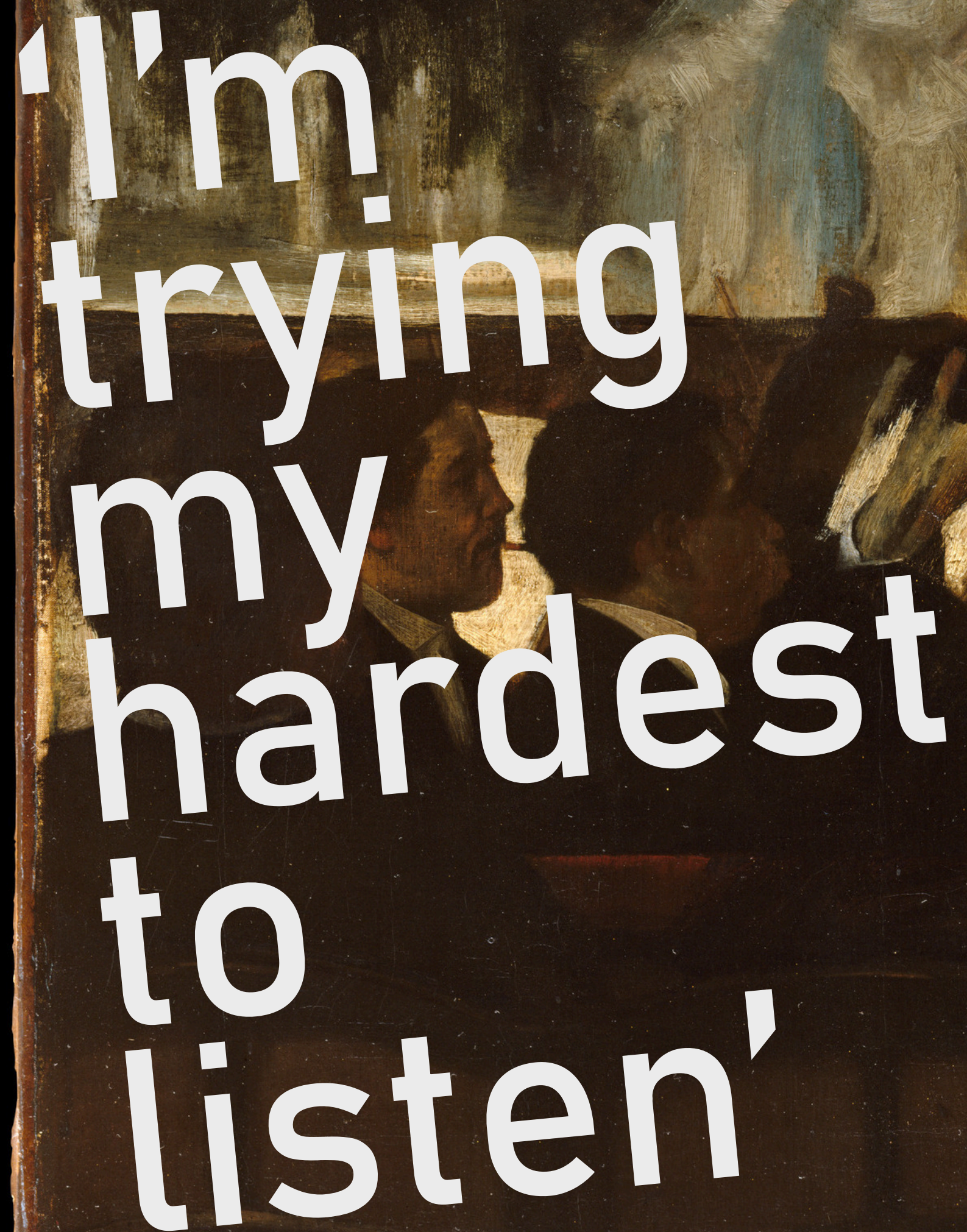
Revision Guide

# 1st Date – She & 1st Date – He

Wendy Cope

Scrbblly.



The background is a dark, textured surface, possibly a book cover or a piece of aged paper. It features a faint, classical-style painting of a man's profile, looking to the right. The man has dark hair and is wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored shirt. The overall tone is somber and historical.

'I'm  
trying  
my  
hardest  
to  
listen'



# 1st Date – She & 1st Date – He

**Wendy Cope**

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.

*(Full poem unable to be reproduced due to copyright restrictions)*

## VOCABULARY

**Brow** - a person's forehead. The phrase 'high brow' idiomatically refers to a person with literary and classical cultural tastes - showing sophistication, education and social refinement. The characters in the poem are aware that they should socially appear to be high brow, even though they are in fact more normal and down to earth in reality

**Rapt** - completely fascinated or absorbed by what one is seeing or hearing

**Intrigue** - arouse the curiosity or interest of; fascinate

**Besotted** - strongly infatuated





## STORY + SUMMARY

### 1st Date – She

I said I liked classical music. It wasn't really a lie. I hoped he would get the impression that I was acceptably high brow (proficient in 'elite' or 'classic' tastes in art).

I said I liked classical music. I mentioned Vivaldi and Bach. And he asked me along to this concert. So, here we are, sitting in the half-dark.

I was thrilled to be asked to this concert. I couldn't care less what the musicians play, but I'm trying my hardest to listen so I'll have something clever to say to him once it's finished.

When I glance at his face it's a picture of total concentration. I see that he is totally into this music and quite undistracted by me.

### 1st Date – He

She said she liked classical music. I implied that I was keen on it too. Although I don't often go to concerts, 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 arouse interest. I must not appear too taken with her. 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 to her once the concert ends.

"But I'm trying my hardest to listen to the music, so I'll have something clever to say."



## SPEAKER + VOICE

The poem has two voices: those of the female, and the male - both parties who are on a first date together. The speakers are both in an **excited, yet anxious mood**.

The poem's depiction of the **frustrating nature of misunderstanding** stands in **contrast** to the two **personas'** attempts to handle and their first date, which are in fact pretty similar. Cope is perhaps implying that despite the fact that both individuals are trying to build their early relationship on exaggerations and half-truths, the pair truly do have a lot in common. Tragically, they are unable to further explore any potential relationship they may have because of their own irrational fears and anxieties.

The reader experiences a section from each speaker in turn to give a sense of the perspective of the date's success from both sides - although, the speakers' thoughts mirror each other, and their perspectives are similar. It's possible that the added stanza in the "He" perspective, which emphasizes sexual appeal and looks, is playing into the **stereotypical** notion that males frequently place a strong emphasis on these aspects of a date, whereas the female persona's experience is purely intellectual and emotional rather than physical.



## LANGUAGE

**Colloquialisms** - both characters use a conversational style of language, but they also **exaggerate** how much they enjoy classical music; in **contrast to the colloquialisms they actually employ when thinking, they both utilise specific formal terminology in an effort to appear intelligent**. In the lines, 'I musn't appear too besotted/Perhaps she is out of my league.', the speaker now employs the **archaic** word "besotted," which means "deeply infatuated," but he then switches to the informal, ordinary **idiomatic expression** "out of my league." This illustrates the misunderstandings and exaggerations that have occurred between the two characters regarding the date.

**Dramatic Irony** - While the speaker in each poem is only aware of their own perspective, the reader in both poems is aware of both sides of the event. The reader likely **finds this circumstance amusing**, since they are aware that neither of the parties really like classical music, they are both paying close attention to the concert purely for the sake of their date, and they are each trying very hard to impress the other.

**Imagery** - 'When I glance at his face it's a picture/Of rapt concentration. I see/He is totally into this music' The poet visually makes the addressee see the man deeply concentrating, indicating just how much he is interested in the music.

## STRUCTURE + FORM

In order to give the poem a pleasant, slightly funny tone that fits the context and words utilised, Cope used a delicate yet effective **ABCB rhyme scheme**. This alternate rhyme structure creates an oscillating effect as the sounds move back and forth through the poem - conveying uncertainty and deliberation.

**Metre** - **iambic tetrameter** generates a **rapid pace** to the lines, that portrays the **anxiety** and panic of both characters. This is occasionally broken, to show awkwardness or uncertainty.

**Parallelism** - The two poems' use of syntax bear a lot of **similarities**. They both use the phrase "And quite undistracted by me,,"; even if this isn't true in either instance, because they are both obsessed with one another they form a negative self esteem which makes them worry about their own lack of attractiveness. The expressions "wasn't quite a falsehood" and "wasn't fully true" also convey the same meaning and share the same syntactic structure, using litotes (understatement) to hide the fact that they knew they were half-lying about liking classical music. These instances demonstrate how the pair may actually be fairly compatible, as they are well matched in their own tastes, instincts and behaviour.





## CONTEXT

Cope was born and raised in Kent. She studied history at Oxford University, before going on to work as a primary school teacher. Before she became a professional writer, she worked as an arts and reviews editor.

She is renowned for the lighthearted and conversational tone that she uses in many of her poems. Frequently, her poems use wit, humour and sarcasm, but she also makes an effort to write poetry that others can relate to on an emotional level - for instance, the poem is **parodic** in many ways, exposing the follies of love and first dates, but at the same time it is highly relatable and the characters seem quite sweet in their concerns for each other.

# ATTITUDES

**We should embrace our true selves** - The poem uses a **parallel structure** to express how similar the pair really are. However, since they told each other contrasting facts about themselves, they have to endure the classical music and attentively work to provide valuable and intellectual comments on it in order to seem 'high brow', cultured and intelligent - despite the fact that both are uncomfortable about this.

**We so often fixate on distractions, rather than focusing on our real goals** - The poet paints a picture of two lovers who are listening to classical music. She points out, in parallel, that they ought to concentrate so as to have something clever to say later, rather than focusing on their personal connection and passion.

**Focusing on peripheral issues could make one lose potential opportunities** - By focusing on side issues (such as how to impress each other via displaying knowledge of classical music), both lovers were unable to address their true attraction towards each other. The message of the poem is clearly **to be fully yourself, as much as possible, rather than pretending to be different or somehow 'better' than you think you really are**. The irony in the poem is that if one of the two people had in fact been truly high brow, they would not have suited

## THEMES

- **Romance**
- **Love**
- **Shyness**
- **Pretence**
- **Humour**
- **Social pressure**
- **Appearance vs Reality**

## TASK

**Pick two of these themes, make a mind map and add four separate quotations from the story that relate to it. Make short notes of analysis, explaining how and why each one relates to your theme. What, in your opinion, is the author's final message or statement about each theme that you chose?**



## EXERCISES

1. Identify and explain a few specific instances of parallelism in Cope's poem, "1st Date – She & 1st Date – He.". Why does Cope use so many parallel structures?
2. What is the ultimate message about love being relayed in Cope's poem?

## ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Discuss how Cope successfully exposes the stupidity of pretence in the poem.
2. "We often miss chances by not being our true selves." Based on Cole's poem, to what extent do you agree with this statement?
3. Evaluate the extent to which social pressure prevents the couple from forming a true connection in the poem.

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