

# 1st Date – She 1<sup>st</sup> Date - He

**Overview:** An amusing poem showing a couple on a first date at a concert from both of their perspectives. The reader can appreciate how similar they are yet the potential for misunderstanding is great as neither has been entirely honest – both pretending they like classical music. Cope is showing the human need to be liked and how we may be economical with the truth in an attempt to impress.

## Context:

- Wendy Cope is a contemporary poet whose poems are often light-hearted. Like an observational comic, she often writes about things her readers can relate to, using relatively simple language. Yet her poems can be sarcastic and satirical and their accessibility can be deceptive, hiding subtlety and skill. As a poet she plays around with form.
- “The great quality of her poetry is that it is true.” (The Telegraph)
- The context of a date is relevant here and the idea that most of us wish to present a positive impression and some of us may embellish the truth in order to do so. These half-truths perhaps imply an initial lack of confidence. It resists gender stereotyping with both sexes being equally concerned as to the impression they are making. He is vain enough to take off his glasses; she wants to say something clever.
- The poem comes from a larger cycle of poems called ‘The Concert’ about different audience

## Structure:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Date is effectively two poems that are connected. The first poem is four stanzas long with an ABCB rhyme scheme, giving the poem a jaunty rhythm and helping to emphasise its comic tone. The second poem (the male perspective) is six stanzas long (does he have more to say?) but mirrors the pattern and feelings in the first poem.
- Most readers would probably read one perspective first (1st Date – She) and then go on to the second poem, but it is possible to read across so the similarities of their feelings is almost immediate.

## Key Images:

- The language is conversational and informal.
- The couples hesitation in lying and the justification of the half-truths they told are mirrored in lines such as ‘It wasn’t exactly a lie’ (she) and ‘It wasn’t entirely untrue’ (he)
- The woman seems concerned that she comes across as cultured and clever ‘that my brow was acceptably high’ (word play). He too feels unconfident. He finds her attractive ‘The neckline can’t fail to intrigue’.
- The poems work nicely together to almost create dramatic irony. She tells us his face is a ‘picture / Of rapt concentration’ but he tells us that he’s put his glasses away! There is humour in this.

## Potential Comparisons

The start of a relationship: La Belle Dame Sans Merci

The start of a relationship compared to the end: One Flesh, Neutral Tones



## Dual perspective / two people:

La Belle Dame Sans Merci, One Flesh, Neutral Tones

## Hiding something:

The Manhunt

**Humour / irony of self-presentation:** I wanna be yours, My Last Duchess