



TO HIS LOVE
Ivor Gurney, 1917

Contexte et objectifs

- Niveau : B2 / C1
- Classe : Terminale, LLCER, Axes possibles : *L'amour et l'amitié* ou *Ancrages et Héritages*
- Objectifs :
 - grammaticaux
 - voix passive
 - AS IF / AS THOUGH + *prétérit modal*
 - structures concessives : However..., No matter how..., ADJ. + as, Much as..., Whatever...
 - expression de la capacitacion : ENABLE / ALLOW / AFFORD A MEANS + TO + V
 - lexicaux
 - lexique de l'analyse d'un poème
 - adjectifs composés en mot + mot + -ED
 - mots composés en SOME-
 - procédés littéraires : forme et fond
 - rhyme scheme
 - assonance, allitération, accumulation
 - enjambement
 - structure et genre

Anticipation du type et de la structure du texte

Repérage de la mise en page et du paratexte

Look at the page layout and the paratext with the different typefaces, numbers and capital letters. What can you deduce?

Judging by the line and page layout, the document must be a poem called To His Love. It is made up of twenty lines which fall into four verses or stanzas of five lines each.

Apport professeur

Lexique de la poésie : line, verse, stanza.

From the paratext we learn that the poem is taken from a book by Ivor Gurney, who lived from 1890 to 1937. The book seems to be a collection of works, as there is a title in italics, but the text also features a title. The title of the collection includes the word War, and is dated 1919, so it seems likely that Ivor Gurney was a First World War poet.

Apport biographique professeur

Yes, Ivor Gurney was a private in the British army, a poet and an accomplished composer, who was gassed and wounded in WW1 and whose experiences exacerbated his innate mental fragility. After the war he spent the rest of his life in and out of mental asylums. He is a well-known poet but is not as famous as Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon, or Wilfred Owen.

Identification des personnages

Repérage des adjectifs possessifs et des pronoms personnels

For the title and each stanza, find the personal pronouns and possessives associated with them.

The pronouns and possessives are:

- Title and stanza 1 : His, He, our, We
- Stanza 2 : His, you, our
- Stanza 3 : You, him, he, him
- Stanza 4: him, him, I

Apport professeur

*The narrator of a poem is called the **persona**.*

Émission d'hypothèses quant aux relations entre les personnages

What relationship does this combination of pronouns and adjectives suggest?

We know that there are three people involved who are referred to as He, You and I, and collectively as We. The first person singular pronoun (I) indicates that it might be the poet speaking, so Ivor Gurney, or else the persona he has created. He speaks to someone directly (You) about someone else (He) they probably both know or have a shared past with (We / our).

Repérage des autres mots du titre

Let's consider the title. Other than the possessive, pick out the other words you can read, and indicate their meaning.

To: a preposition that indicates direction. We can guess that a message is being written and sent to someone.

Love: a noun which indicates affection and feeling, or someone who is the object of those feelings.

Émission d'hypothèses quant à la situation d'énonciation

What does this title suggest?

The person who is sent that message is the other person's (He) love, so probably his partner. The poet (or his persona) is writing a letter to someone's partner.

Apport professeur Gurney wrote the poem to the fiancée of one of his best friends. He was also close friends with her.

Repérage du co-texte droit immédiat du pronom / possessif de 3^{ème} personne en début de strophe

Let's try to learn more about the person the poet and the person he speaks to both know. Spot the word which immediately follows the pronoun / possessive *he / him* at the beginning of the stanzas which feature it.

At the beginning of stanza 1, we learn that He's gone. In stanza 2, the possessive is associated with the noun body.

Émission d'hypothèses quant au sort de la personne décrite dans le poème / message

What happened to him?

We can infer that he is dead: He's gone means that he has passed away, and His body suggests a dead body or a corpse.

Apport professeur In the same line as His body (l. 6), the adjective *quick* has got two meanings. It means fast but its original meaning is alive.

What's more, the use of the preterite (was so quick) confirms that he's not alive anymore.

So we can guess that he is a soldier who died in the war and that the persona is writing to the soldier's wife or girlfriend.

Confirmation avec les indices présents dans le reste du texte

Pick out words confirming this hypothesis in the rest of the text.

he died (l. 12)

Repérage des rimes

Listen to the poem being read, and pick out the rhyming lines (ending in identical sounds).

We notice the rhymes in the second, fourth, and fifth lines of each verse.

Apport professeur Yes, the *rhyme scheme* is ABCBB.

The rhyme in the first verse is the vowel sound [i:] (indeed, feed, heed).

In the second verse the rhyme is on the sound [u:] (you, blue and through).

Apport professeur A repeated vowel sound is called an *assonance*.

In the third verse, the rhyme is on [aɪd] (died, pride, side).

In the fourth verse, the rhyme is [ɛt] (thick-set, wet, and forget).

Émission d'hypothèses quant à la signification des rimes

What is your opinion as to those rhymes? If you think back to the characters involved in the poem, what do they remind you of?

[i:] is like an echo of the pronoun he (or we). [u:] echoes the pronoun you. [aɪd] is an echo of the pronoun I.

[ɛt], on the other hand, does not seem to echo any known character in the poem. It's the odd stanza out.

Listen again to those sounds. Think about the nature of those sounds and the effect they have on you.

There are long, sad vowels in the first three stanzas whereas the final stanza has short, aggressive vowel sounds.

Strophes 1 et 2 : Souvenirs et cadre idyllique du passé

Repérage des strophes où les personnages sont représentés ensemble, contenant le pronom pluriel

We said that the characters had a shared past, let's investigate how they know one another. First, pick out the stanzas which contain the first person plural pronoun / possessive (*we / our*).

Only stanza 1 (our l. 1, we l. 3) and stanza 2 (our l. 10) feature a first person plural pronoun / possessive.

Repérage du co-texte droit immédiat des pronoms pluriels

Let's concentrate on these first two stanzas. Pick out the words which immediately follow the first person plural pronoun / possessive (*we / our*).

l. 1: our plans

l. 3: We'll walk

l. 10: our small boat

Émission d'hypothèses quant à la personne et à la personnalité du défunt

What can you deduce as to the man who died?

This confirms that he and his partner must have been friends with the poet: they are referred to as a group (we), they had plans together, as well as owning a small boat.

The words we picked out seem to indicate dynamism: the deceased is pictured having plans (projection towards the future => cf. modal WILL l. 3 in We'll walk) and as being in constant motion: walking, sailing. Death and the stillness it implies have put a stop to this, and the plans and physical activities have been reduced to a thing of the past (l. 3: no more).

Repérage du mot répété débutant par une majuscule

Pick out repeated words beginning with capitals.

We can see Severn twice within the poem, in l. 8 and l. 15.

Repérage des co-textes immédiats gauche et droit

Pick out the words right before and after Severn.

There are two prepositions of place located before Severn: on (l. 8) and from (l. 15). The words coming immediately after are river (l. 8) and side (l. 16).

Émission d'hypothèses quant à la nature du nom propre repéré

What can you deduce as to the meaning of Severn?

It might be a place (cf. prepositions), therefore a geographical reference, more precisely to a river, which has two sides.

Repérage d'un autre mot débutant par une majuscule

Pick out another word beginning with a capital.

There is the word Cotswold in l. 3.

Repérage du co-texte immédiat gauche et droit

Likewise, pick out the words right before and after Cotswold.

l. 3: on (preposition of place) + l. 4: Where

Émission d'hypothèses quant à la nature du nom propre repéré

What can you deduce as to *Costwold*? Use the words further around it to get more details.

It is another place, where the three friends used to walk (l. 3) and where there are sheep (l.4).

Apport professeur Yes, Gurney was from the town of Gloucester through which the river **Severn** runs. Gloucester is in the **Cotswolds**, an area in Southwest England famous for its hills, grazing sheep and beautiful villages.

Sum up the impression given by these descriptions of place.

The impression is one of past peacefulness, friendship and happiness in a perfect setting with the grazing sheep and the river.

The poet seems nostalgic for his homeland and his life before the war.

Apport professeur This poem can be said to be an **elegy** on account of its serious reflection and its tone of nostalgia and lament for the dead.

Trace écrite

The poem is made up of four stanzas / verses of five lines each. We notice the use of assonance on long vowels, which creates a mournful or sorrowful sound like someone lamenting. It sounds **as if** someone **were weeping** or **mourning**. It sounds **as though** the persona **were sighing**.

The rhyme scheme used in the poem is ABCBB, with each of the first three stanzas rhyming on the vowel sound present in the three pronouns we picked out.

So we can say that the form of the poem reinforces its meaning with the doleful assonance and the rhyming echo of the pronouns referring to the three protagonists.

In the first two stanzas, the persona evokes the idyllic setting of the three protagonists' past life in the Cotswolds and the athletic activities they participated in together.

PRL : structures comparatives en **AS IF / AS THOUGH + V-ED** (prétérit modal)

LEXIQUE : analyse d'un **poème**

Strophe 3 : Hommage au défunt

Repérage du décrochage temporel en fin de premier vers

Let's now move on to stanza 3. Important information is often located towards the end of a line. Pick out the last word of the first line.

now (l. 11)

Émission d'hypothèses quant à la teneur de la strophe

What do you think this indicates?

The first two stanzas were about remembering the characters' time together in their native region of the Cotswolds. The adverb now indicates a discrepancy: the poem comes back to the reality of one of the characters being dead.

Confirmation avec le verbe présent dans la strophe

Confirm with a word present in the third stanza.

he died (l. 12). Again, this is important information because it is located at the end of the line.

Repérage du co-texte droit immédiat

Pick out the word which immediately follows *died*.

Nobly (l. 13).

Émission d'hypothèses quant à la caractérisation de la mort du personnage

What do you think it means to die *nobly*?

This underlines the heroism and the greatness of the soldier who has died. He is considered by the poet's persona as a war hero.

he died | Nobly is spread over two lines of the poem.

Apport professeur An *enjambment* is the continuation of the same sentence over two (or several) lines.

Émission d'hypothèses quant à l'effet stylistique de l'enjambement

What do you think is the effect of the enjambment in this case?

We tend to stop after the word died because of the line layout and so we concentrate on his death first. The nobleness of the way he died comes as a later piece of information that is recalled, then stressed, because it is at the beginning of a line. The poet hints that this idea of a noble death is somehow eclipsed by the death itself and so he must remind himself of the nobility of his friend's death. The enjambment means that we as readers dwell on the soldier's death, just as the poet does, as he has trouble moving on from the fact that his friend is dead.

Confirmation du caractère héroïque du personnage avec un autre mot de fin de vers

Confirm the idea of the character being a war hero with another word at the end of a line (again, bearing important information).

pride (l. 14)

Repérage du co-texte gauche immédiat de pride

Pick out the words which immediately precede the word *pride*.

violets of pride (l. 14)

Émission d'hypothèses quant à la mention de fleurs

Why would *violets* be mentioned in this line?

Violets are flowers, which are probably used in some sort of funeral wreath to pay homage / tribute to someone who died. We picture a burial ceremony, maybe official considering the heroism of the character.

Repérage du co-texte droit de *pride*

Pick out the line which comes right after the mention of *violets*.

Purple from Severn side. (l. 15)

Émission d'hypothèses quant au choix des fleurs

Are *violets* usual flowers for a funeral wreath? Why do you think the poet chose these flowers?

From Severn side means that they grow on the banks of the river Severn in the three characters' hometown.

Apport professeur The *purple* colour of violets is also significant because it is associated with royalty. Indeed, purple dye was expensive and time-consuming to produce in ancient times, and items coloured with it became associated with power and wealth, and that is why purple is now considered to be a royal colour.

The colour purple reinforces the idea that the man who died was noble: he is being elevated by the poet to the rank of a royal.

Trace écrite

The reference to violets in the third stanza **allows** Gurney simultaneously **to evoke** the Cotswolds of the persona's happy past and **to convey** the idea of the soldier's heroism and nobility. After the nostalgic evocation of the protagonists' past in the first two verses, the third stanza focuses on the present and the soldier's death. The enjambment in lines 12 to 13 **enables** Gurney **to stress** both the word died at the end of line 12 and the word Nobly at the beginning of line 13. This double insistence cleverly conveys the idea that the persona is at pains to focus on the nobility and the heroism of his deceased friend, rather than to dwell on finality of the latter's disappearance. Not only does the enjambment **afford** the poet **a means to convey** the persona's disarray but it also puts the reader in the same position as the persona. Just as the persona does, we dwell on the soldier's death before being roused by the adverb Nobly at the beginning of line 13 to celebrate the greatness of his death.

PRL : expression de la **capacitation** (= rendre possible) : **enable / allow / afford the means + TO + V**
LEXIQUE : analyse d'un **poème**

Strophe 4 : Chute du poème

Repérage de la ponctuation remarquable dans la dernière strophe, elle-même remarquable

Let's now concentrate on the last stanza. You remember it was different / remarkable, insofar as it did not echo one of the personal pronouns in the poem. In the same manner, pick out the remarkable signs of punctuation contained in the stanza.

Exclamation mark at the end of l. 16. Single dash at the end of l. 18.

Émission d'hypothèses quant à l'effet du point d'exclamation (l. 16)

What is the effect of the exclamation mark?

An exclamation mark implies a feeling of urgency, having strong emotions as a cause or consequence.

Confirmation de l'urgence par le mot final et la répétition dans le même vers

Confirm the said feeling of urgency with repeated words in the same line.

The adverb soon at the end of the line (therefore important), right before the exclamation, confirms this sense of urgency. It is reinforced by the word cover which is repeated twice: it's a verb, in the imperative (thus a repeated order).

Émission d'hypothèses quant à l'effet du tiret (l. 18)

What do you think is the effect of the dash?

Apport professeur A single dash is used at the end of the line to signal a rather brutal / unexpected interruption.

Repérage du co-texte gauche du tiret

An interruption means that something was actually taking place. Therefore, pick out the words coming immediately before the dash (and consequently, the interruption).

Masses of memoried flowers (l. 18)

Émission d'hypothèses quant à l'effet de l'allitération

Listen to the sound of the line being read. What do you think is the effect produced by this choice of words?

The sound [m] is repeated three times rapidly: Masses of memoried flowers.

Apport professeur An alliteration is the repetition of the same consonant sound.

This stresses the fact that there are many flowers. The tribute to the fallen soldier will feature lots of flowers, proportional to his death as a hero, etc.

Apport professeur This is also confirmed by the compound adjective **thick-set**, which stresses the quantity of flowers: they will be arranged in thick layers.

Travail lexical sur la composition d'adjectifs.

Composition of adjective		Examples
adj.	+ V-EN	thick-set , well-known, well-behaved, long-lived, short-lived, deep-fried
noun		grass-fed, home-bred, middle-aged, sun-dried
adj.	+ noun + -ED	narrow-legged, kind-hearted, wide-eyed, open-minded
V-EN		broken-hearted, dewy-eyed, strong-willed

Repérage du co-texte droit immédiat du tiret

Let's focus on what interrupts the tribute to the soldier. Pick out the word coming immediately after the dash.

Hide (l. 19). Again, this is a verb in the imperative, hence an order.

Émission d'hypothèses quant à la raison de la dissimulation du corps du défunt

What do you think must be hidden at once? Can you connect this verb to what we discussed a while back?

It's probably the soldier himself: the urgent order to cover him soon was repeated twice, with flowers in thick-set layers. His body is probably too mangled to be seen, he was probably the victim of a shell which exploded right next to him.

Confirmation par le co-texte droit du verbe *Hide* (l. 19)

Confirm your hypothesis with the words following the verb *Hide* (l. 19), which indicate what must be hidden.

that red wet / Thing (ll. 19-20)

There is an enjambment again, stressing Thing at the beginning of the line (not a person) + red wet at the end of the previous line (assonance: the two words go together and both describe blood). The man they both used to know is now only a lump of flesh.

Apport professeur *The words in the whole line (and most of the next, cf. enjambment) are made up of solely one syllable. The effect of this monosyllabic description is that the words are almost spat out, indicating something akin to disgust or horror felt by the persona.*

Confirmation par la ponctuation remarquable dans le reste du poème

This was foretold ahead of the revelation by a line bearing remarkable punctuation: pick it out.

You would not know him now... (l. 11): the soldier is now unrecognizable.

Repérage du mot final du poème

Pick out the last word of the stanza and poem, which is extremely important as it is the note which will remain with the reader.

forget (l. 20)

Émission d'hypothèses quant à la signification et à la place de ce mot

Why do you think this word was placed last?

The poet's persona must forget the gruesome appearance of his dead friend. The fact that it is located at the very end of the poem probably means that he can't forget / that he keeps trying but fails each time.

Let's come back to the rhyme in this stanza and the repeated sound that you noticed.

The word forget reinforces the assonance on [ɛ] which also features in red and in wet. The final word forget thus echoes the repeated monosyllabic words evoking the mutilated body of the soldier —precisely the thing he wants to forget.

Apport professeur *somehow* (l. 20) or, in informal American English, *someway* or *someways*: in a way that is unknown, unlikely or unspecified. For a reason that one does not know or understand.

Travail lexical sur le sens de base de **SOME-** dans les mots composés :

I must somehow forget (l. 20) = the persona must find a way to forget the horrific vision, but he doesn't know how. He must wish they had stopped him from seeing his friend's corpse somehow. Somehow or other the persona must forget what he saw in order to find peace of mind.

Somehow, they didn't feel they could trust their superior officer.

Their relationship was different somehow.

Perhaps someone will help him to forget. = There might be a person to help him.

She must have been happy that somebody was with him when he died. = A person was with him.

He will eventually find respite somewhere. = There is a place where he will find peace.

SOME- : non-spécification (on ne sait pas comment / qui / où) + **actualisation** (existence de ce moyen / personne / lieu)

Trace écrite

Thanks to the use of the exclamation mark, of the dash and of repeated imperatives, the reader **is alerted** to the importance of the emotional content of the final verse. Indeed, it is here that the reason for the persona's insistence **on honouring** his deceased friend's body with a thick covering of flowers **is explained**. The assonance on [ɛ] in the final verb forget serves to underline the difficulty the persona has **in moving on from witnessing** his friend's horrific death and the spectacle of his mutilated body —that red wet / Thing. The adverb somehow in the final line of the poem shows us that it has become imperative for the persona —his very mental health would seem to depend on it— to find a way to forget, **however problematic that might be**. He knows he must find a way but he is all too aware that he has no idea of how he is going to manage it, thus his extreme anxiety. He **is torn** between the need to remember his friend and the happiness they shared, and the absolute necessity **of forgetting** the horror of his death.

PRL :	préposition + V-ING	
	voix passive au présent	(approfondie dans la trace écrite finale)
	expression de la concession	(approfondie dans la trace écrite finale)
LEXIQUE :	analyse d'un poème	
PONCTUATION :	utilisation des tirets	

Trace écrite récapitulative

Récapitulation du cheminement du poème et son inscription dans son genre.

Sum up the evolution that you noticed in the poem.

The poem starts with the happy times the persona, the dead soldier and his fiancée spent together in the countryside near their home and ends with the horrible description of his friend's corpse. The persona gradually reveals his obsessive memories. The end of the poem powerfully describes the terrible memory of what his friend's mutilated body looked like.

Apport professeur Yes, this poem is like the poetry of World War One in general. It moves from a more Romantic and nostalgic vision (cf. Rupert Brooke's A Soldier, 1914, John McCrae's In Flanders Fields, 1915) to a realistic description of the horrors of war (cf. Wilfred Owen's Dulce et Decorum Est, 1917).

Trace écrite

Ivor Gurney's poem To His Love is about mourning a close friend killed during battle in the First World War. It opens with the elegiac tropes of Romanticism, celebrating the short-lived happy memories of youth, love and friendship in the beauty of nature, and expressing a desire to honour the heroic dead. **However**, by the end of the poem, we realize that the persona's mind has been circling around the unbearable sight of his friend's corpse. He has hinted at the horror he has experienced by telling his friend's fiancée that she wouldn't recognise her fiancé now (lines 6-8 and 11). **In spite of / Despite** these oblique references to the transforming horror of war and death, **it is only** in the last verse that the shocking shift to realism is **accomplished**. **It is not until** the final lines that the hero's body becomes the mutilated mess that haunts the nightmares of his friend, the persona.

The repetition of the imperative cover and its synonym hide, in addition to the accumulation in the pleonastic description (thick-set masses) and the use of alliteration on [m] to insist on the layers of flowers that **will be needed** to honour the dead soldier **are** now **revealed** as the hysterical insistence of the traumatised persona who has written a remembrance poem about his vital need to forget.

However hard he tries, he cannot wipe the horrific image of his friend's corpse from his mind. **Whatever he does**, nothing can help him to forget the horror of what he has seen. **Eager as he is** to remember his friend as an athletic young man, all he can see in his mind's eye are the mutilated remains of his friend. **Much as he would like to** forget, he cannot move on from his traumatic witnessing of his friend's death.

This poem **can be said** to reflect in miniature the shift in WW1 poetry, which moved from lyrical, patriotic fervour glorifying or at least defending the war (cf. Rupert Brooke's A Soldier, 1914, John McCrae's In Flanders Fields, 1915) to the description of the horrors and the futility of the slaughter in the trenches (cf. Wilfred Owen's Dulce et Decorum Est, 1917). The evolution in the poem **can be seen** as embodying and reflecting the shift that occurred in the genre of WW1 poetry.

PRL : expression de la **concession**
mise en exergue
structures à la **voix passive**

LEXIQUE : analyse d'un **poème**