the very circumscribed place where the feather is found, but the reason why this ‘hand’s-breath’ shines out is delayed for the next two lines ‘For there I picked up on the heather’ – yes? what? – ‘And there I put inside my breast’ – well? – ‘A moulded feather’, ah (and notice the internal rhyme there of ‘feather’ with ‘heather’ which draws attention to and emphasizes the harmony of the moment), and then the word ‘feather’ is repeated and expanded: ‘an eagle-feather!’ Clearly the feather of no other bird would do, for ultimately the comparison is of eagle to the poet; Browning knows Shelley through his poetry as he knows the eagle through its feather, and that feather presents a striking visual image.

There is an immediacy about the conversational opening of the poem which, I have suggested, deliberately moves into a more contemplative tone, possibly in the second stanza (think about it), but certainly by the third. We have considered some of the poetic techniques that Browning employs to convince us of the rarity of his find in the third and fourth stanzas. **You might like to think more analytically about the word sounds, not just the rhyme but, for example, the repeated ‘ae’ sound in ‘breath’ ‘heather’ ‘breast’ and ‘feather’.** What, however, do you make of the tone of the last line? Try **saying the last lines of each stanza out loud.** Whether you can identify the metre with technical language or not is beside the point. The important thing is that ‘Well, I forget the rest’ sounds deliberately lame. After the intensity of two extraordinary memories, everything else pales into insignificance and, to reiterate this, the rhythm tails off. While the tone throughout is informal, the last remark is deliberately casual.

In order to come to an understanding of the poem, and to see how the sense of a reader in the text is constructed, we have discussed Browning’s use of repetition, rhyme, rhythm, structure, and visual **imagery.** Our analysis has not by any means exhausted the poem’s potential, but, as it is only through practice that we become confident readers of poetry, this is the moment to turn to something very different and see whether similar questions apply. ‘Poem’, by the American Frank O’Hara (1926–1966), was written in 1962, more than a hundred years after ‘Memorabilia’. **Read it two or three times, first to get a sense of what it’s about, then as you re-read ask yourself if it has anything at all in common with ‘Memorabilia’.**

Lana Turner has collapsed!
I was trotting along and suddenly
it started raining and snowing
and you said it was hailing
but hailing hits you on the head
hard so it was really snowing and
raining and I was in such a hurry
to meet you but the traffic
was acting exactly like the sky
and suddenly I see a headline
LANA TURNER HAS COLLAPSED!
there is no snow in Hollywood
there is no rain in California
I have been to lots of parties
and acted perfectly disgraceful
but I never actually collapsed
oh Lana Turner we love you get up

(O’Hara, 1964, p.78)

Your first thought may well have been that there are no similarities between the poems, and certainly in the long run there are probably more differences. Nevertheless, ‘Poem’ is also about hero worship of a kind – of a film star rather than a poet this time – and it too has a conversational tone as well as at least one reader in the poem, the ‘you’ who says it is hailing, the ‘you’ that the speaker is in ‘such a hurry/to meet’, and Lana Turner herself, to whom the last line is, comically, addressed.