**Context** – *Before You Were Mine* was written by Carol Ann Duffy, and was published in 1993.

**Glasgow after World War II – Following World War II, much of the United Kingdom experienced a decade of austerity. The economy recovered extremely slowly, and food rations were in place several years after the war. Glasgow, which was an integral part of the ship-building industry aiding the bombing raids, was bombed badly in the German raids. The city was devastated, and conditions in areas such as the Gorbals estate (where her mother lived) were terrible. As a result, people lived with considerable restraint.

**Duffy’s Mother – Duffy herself has revealed that the poem is ‘entirely autobiographical’, in the sense that it incorporates her own musings about the life of her mother Bernadette Gallagher. Duffy’s mother had grown up in Glasgow, becoming a teenager during the 1950s. The poem came about because Duffy looked back at old pictures of her mum when she was young and carefree, coupled with stories from her mother glamorising her youth (‘I all mother do’). The end of the poem takes place in Stafford, where the family moved when Duffy was 6.

**Duffy**

Carol Ann Duffy – Carol Ann Duffy (1955-present) is a Scottish author and poet. She is Professor of Poetry at Manchester Metropolitan University, and has been the Poet Laureate since 2009. She is the first woman, Scot, and LGBT poet to hold the position. She was born in Glasgow but grew up in Staffordshire. She studied Philosophy at the University of Liverpool, and was active in the city’s underground poetry scene from the 1970s. Before You Were Mine is a eulogy; a tribute to her mother, written after her death. The poem is a tribute to her mother written after her death. She studied Philosophy at the University of Liverpool, and was active in the city’s underground poetry scene from the 1970s. Before You Were Mine is a eulogy; a tribute to her mother, written after her death.

**Glasgow**

Glasgow is a city in Scotland, and is the main city of the region called Strathclyde. It is the second largest city in Scotland. Glasgow is a major centre for industry, including engineering and shipbuilding. It was once known for its poverty and unemployment, but these problems have been addressed through government intervention, including an extensive house-building programme in the Gorbals area.

**Colloquial Language and Rhetorical Questions** – Both of these techniques help to create an oral, informal, conversational tone across the poem, as would be expected in an interaction between mother and daughter. For example, the use of ‘eh?’ in line 2 to end the rhetorical question, is highly informal, and add empathy to the idea that the speaker and subject know each other exceptionally well. The rhetorical questions seem to help the mother jog her memory.

**Duffy’s metaphorical usage** – Duffy uses a number of metaphors and similes to give specific details about the photographs and memories, helping her to create vivid sight and sound imagery. For example, the verbs used in the final stanza to describe her heeled red shoes, ‘relicts’, enable the reader to picture and hear the sights and sounds of the memory – the reader can thus imagine the finer details regarding her mother’s mannerisms and attributes.

**Language/Structural Devices**

**Sight and Sound Imagery** – Duffy uses a number of adjectives and verbs to give specific details about the photographs and memories, helping her to create vivid sight and sound imagery. For example, the verbs used in the final stanza to describe her heeled red shoes, ‘relicts’, enable the reader to picture and hear the sights and sounds of the memory – the reader can thus imagine the finer details regarding her mother’s mannerisms and attributes.

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**Figurative Language** – Figurative language is used sparingly throughout the poem, it does help to illustrate individual events and ideas. For example, the hyperbole used in describing the ‘thousand eyes’ in the ballroom helps to show her mother’s beauty, turning heads wherever she went. These hyperboles intertextually contrasted with this poem in the *Staffordshire*.

**Personal Pronouns** – Duffy addresses her mother in the *Before You Were Mine*, understanding the sacrifices her mother made in order to provide for her daughter. For example, the verbs used in the final stanza to describe her heeled red shoes, ‘relicts’, enable the reader to picture and hear the sights and sounds of the memory – the reader can thus imagine the finer details regarding her mother’s mannerisms and attributes.

**Narrative Structure** – The poem is roughly structured in chronological order, with events and ideas detailed in the order in which they occurred. Stanza 1 deals with her mother’s teenage years, stanza 2 carefree life on nights out and in ballrooms, stanza 3 shortly after the birth of the speaker, and stanza 4 during the speaker’s childhood.

**Poems for Comparison**

**Before You Were Mine**

*Before You Were Mine* can be compared and contrasted with this poem in the approach to the theme of motherhood, the poem is a tribute to her mother written after her death.

**The Poet’s Influences**

**Mother, Amy Distance**

*Before You Were Mine* is essentially a kind of love poem addressed to the speaker’s mother. Duffy uses a number of metaphors and similes to give specific details about the photographs and memories, helping her to create vivid sight and sound imagery. For example, the verbs used in the final stanza to describe her heeled red shoes, ‘relicts’, enable the reader to picture and hear the sights and sounds of the memory – the reader can thus imagine the finer details regarding her mother’s mannerisms and attributes.

**Walking Away**

*Before You Were Mine* can be compared and contrasted with this poem in the approach to the theme of motherhood, the poem is a tribute to her mother written after her death.