‘Havisham’ by Carol Ann Duffy

Stanza 1

1. Look at the title of the poem. Why do you think it only uses her surname?
2. Comment on the oxymoron ‘sweetheart bastard’ of the first line.
3. How is envy suggested in the first stanza?
4. ‘Prayed for it/ so hard I’ve had dark green pebbles for eyes...’ What do these images suggest about Miss Havisham’s feelings?

Stanza 2

1. ‘Spinster.’ Why does this word get its own sentence do you think?
2. ‘I stink ...’ What is the effect of this strong verb?
3. ‘Whole days/ in bed cawing Nooooo at the wall;’ - what does this image suggest about the woman?
4. What’s the double meaning of ‘trembling’ in line 3?
5. ‘her, myself’ - what do these pronouns show us about Miss Havisham’s view of herself?
6. Look at the enjambment on the last line of the stanza. What is the effect of this and what does it add to the poem here?

Stanza 3

1. ‘Who did this/ to me?’ Who did? Him, or her, do you think, and why?
2. ‘... the lost body over me,’ - whose body does this line refer to? What is happening here?
3. On line 3, in what sense is Miss Havisham’s tongue fluent?
4. Comment on the use of the phrase ‘bite awake’.

Stanza 4

1. ‘Hate behind a white veil; a red balloon bursting/in my face.’ What do these violent images suggest about her view of love?
2. What is the effect of the use of the onomatopoeia ‘bang’?
3. ‘Give me a male corpse for a long slow honeymoon.’ What is she imagining here?
4. Describe the effect of the strong plosives in ‘b-b-b-breaks’. What has broken?

Final thoughts

1. Why do you think the poem is unrhymed?
2. How does the lack of end-stopping affect the fluency and pace of the whole poem?
3. Pick out the places where you feel sympathy for Miss Havisham and then pick out the places where you feel disgusted by her? (You could construct a simple table in order to help you pin particular lines down.)