Annotations: **‘Gap Year’**

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| **Line** | | **Annotations** | |
| **Tit** | | * Alludes to physical ‘gap’ between Kay and Matthew * Also reflects the 18 years that have felt like a short ‘gap’ to Kay between Matthew’s birth and being 18 | |
| Section 1 | | | |
| **1** | | * **Image** of basket referred to at end of poem – framing device * Starts with Matthew absent and Kay yearning – how the poem also ends | |
| **2** | | * **Word choice** – ‘stare’ – repeated throughout poem, conveying intensity of longing | |
| **3 & 4** | | * ‘willing you to arrive’ – sentiment repeated at end of the poem * Inability to believe baby will arrive reflected at start of section 2 when cannot imagine his return | |
| **5** | | * **Metaphor** – image of a container. By the end of poem, it is clear Matthew cannot be contained | |
| **6 & 7** | | * **Metaphor** of ‘foot against my heart’ and ‘elbow in my ribcage’ – source of joy and pain. Reflected at end of poem with mixed emotions of pride and longing | |
| **7** | | * **List** of baby’s actions – constant, continuous, ever present. (cf. absence later) | |
| **8** | | * ‘felt you laugh’ – **synaesthesia** – closeness of pregnancy. His experience are hers. (cf. later in poem when his experiences must be lived vicariously through atlas/webcam) | |
| **9-10** | | * She does the things parents are told to do * Adds to atmosphere of calm and peacefulness | |
| **10** | | * **Oxymoron** – ‘close stranger’ – physically close but unknown. Mirrored/inverted at end of poem: mother-son bond is close, but he has become a stranger physically through distance | |
| **11** | | * **Colloquial** nickname – affectionate * Sense of longing for arrival again – echoed at end of poem | |
| **12 & 13** | | * **Rhyme** of ‘late’ with ‘eight’ – emphasises auspicious due date missed * ‘Due date’ repeated later in poem referring to return from travels | |
| **14** | | * **Irony** – had to be pulled out with forceps / unwilling to leave; now unwilling to return home from travels | |
| **15 & 16** | | * Sunday 🡪 Monday – idea of new week **symbolising** a new chapter beginning * Circular structure – the empty basket at the start of the section is now full | |
| Section 2 | | | |
| **17** | * **Word choice** – ‘peek’ – actions of a parent checking on a sleeping child * **Word choice** – ‘stare’ – intensity of longing. Echoes earlier reference looking at empty basket | | |
| **18** | * Links back to stanza 1. However, then she couldn’t imagine his presence. Now she can’t imagine anything but his absence. | | |
| **19** | * Affectionate descriptions of face. * Image of face as ‘soft, open’ will be contrasted by appearance on webcam later | | |
| **20** | * **Repetition** of ‘away’ emphasises the distance * **List** of South American countries – exotic, distant, connotations of exploration/adventure | | |
| **21** | * Role reversal – mother following child’s lead. * ‘trails’ – **connotations** of plotting a journey across the face of the world * ‘Times Atlas’ – British institution, roots her in the UK * **Contrast** in the smallness of her actions (armchair travelling) compared with his adventure2s | | |
| **22 - 24** | * Repeated structure of “from…to” * Traversing from one side of South America to the other. * **Contrast** between ‘baby turtles’ and ‘massive leatherbacks’ * All serve to emphasise range and scale of Matthew’s travels | | |
| **24-26** | * Intrusion of Grandather’s warning humorous * **Enjambment** across stanzas reflects interruptions to Kay’s romanticised imagining of Matthews travels | | |
| **27** | * ‘lost city of the Incas, Macchu Picchu’ – connotations of discovering new worlds, like a conquistador | | |
| **29** | * ‘the original Tupac’ – humorous * ‘Peruvian hat’ a symbol of changing/experiencing new things | | |
| **30** | * Constantly on the move | | |
| **31** | * **Word choice** – ‘suddenly’ – fleeting | | |
| **32** | * Haircut a marker of change/new/unfamiliar to Kay * ‘grainy, blurry’ face contrasts with her imagining of his face in l.19 | | |
| **33-36** | * Comparison between present and past / webcam and prenatal scan | | |
| **37 & 38** | * ‘started….Arctic […] end up in subtropical’ – emphasises range/diversity of his travels | | |
| **38** | * ‘plan the Amazon’ – ambitious, broad, sweeping plans – continues image of Matthew as explorer/conquistador | | |
| **39-44** | * Grandfather represents the voice of age: limitation, fear, worry, caution. Contrasts with Matthew’s carefree, free-wheeling plans to see the biggest and best (‘largest salt-flats’ ‘Amazonian rainforest’) | | |
| **45 & 46** | | | * Mirrors being four-weeks overdue |
| **46-48** | * ‘Bolivia […] Argentina […] Chile’ – ranging across whole countries, skipping across the continent | | |
| **47 & 48** | * ‘a friend’s Auntie’ and ‘friends of Diane’s’ –plans are ad-hoc. Kay struggling to keep up with who and where? | | |
| **49** | * ‘maybe’ – plans are fluid, uncertain. | | |
| **50** | * Pun on ‘home-alone’ – usually applied to a child. Role reversal. | | |
| **50-52** | * Darkness symbolic of Matthew’s absence (‘lights have gone out’ and ‘black’) * Role reversal – Kay wearing Matthews slippers * **Onomatopoeia** – ‘flip-flopping’: a pathetic, sad sound, lacking energy. Idea of going back and forth to his room? | | |
| **53 & 54** | * ‘empty bedroom’ recalls empty cot at start. Sense of empty nest syndrome * ‘trying to imagine you / in your bed’ recalls ‘willing you to arrive’ at start of poem | | |
| **54** | * **Word choice** - ‘stare’ – longing. Word repeated several times throughout poem | | |
| **55** | * **Metaphor** – ‘you on top of the world’ | | |
| **56** | * Blue and white of sky and snow recalls the blue of Matthew when born, and while of the fleecy blankets * ‘beaming’ – reinforces symbolism of light. Matthew as light of her life. His absence brings darkness to the house. His happiness brings light to his face. | | |
| **57 & 58** | * **Simile** – ‘heart soars like the birds’ – image of joy and pride * **Simile** – ‘love glows like the sunrise over a lost city’ – reinforces idea of Matthew as light. * Kay is imagining herself present with Matthew in the form of her love. * **Long vowel sounds** of these two lines reflect the wide, open all-encompassing love that spans continents between Kay and Matthew. | | |
| **59** | * Ella Fitzgerald – associated with the blues: reflecting tinge of sadness/longing? * Nursery rhyme – ‘A tisket, A tasket’ – recalls Matthews babyhood. Lyrics are about delivering a love letter to a little boy. | | |
| **60** | * Proud, declarative statement – proud of him. Proud of herself? Is there a tone of wistfulness too in ‘big, wide’? | | |
| **61** | * ‘flip’ and ‘skip’ – tiny moments. Reflected in short ‘I’ sound. He has grown up (too?) quickly. * ‘you were dreaming’ – his dreaming has turned into living. Now it is Kay who dreams of his return? * ‘basket’ – **rhyme** with ‘tasket’ emphasises important of word. Kay’s longing for that time when he could be contained/protected. | | |

**Overview notes**

* + There are many resonances, parallels, mirrorings and contrasts throughout the poem.
  + The first section details the peace and tranquillity of the perfect union of mother and baby. It is much shorter than the second section, suggesting that the experience felt brief/short.
  + The second stanza starts with a flash forward of 18 years. The way this long period is dispatched by a simple section break, perhaps imitates the idea that, to Kay, Matthew’s birth just seemed like yesterday, and the intervening years have flashed past almost instantly.
  + The second stanza is far longer in length than the first, suggesting that the experience of tracking Matthew’s travels and awaiting his return is a painfully long and drawn-out one.
  + As with most of the poems in the selection, there is a wider range of tones present in the poem than might appear at first glance. Longing, pride, sadness, humour and nostalgia are all present in varying degrees.