Annotations: **‘Keeping Orchids’**

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| Line | Annotations |
| 1 | * ‘my mother’/’first met’ – confuses the reader; illogical. **Enjambment** suggests the strangeness, jarring relationship |
| 2 | * **Caesura**: (1) her thoughtfulness, about the orchids (2) consideration of this, a shift in direction. **Enjambment** again to suggest the divide. |
| 3 | * ‘closed as secrets’ **Simile**: idea of concealment, mystery, something impenetrable. A truth that’s unknown. Reinforces the **symbolism** of the orchids. |
| 4 | * ‘like a baby in a shawl’ **Simile**: suggestion of care, protection, care, love. |
| 5 | * Idea of separation – ‘her’ and ‘mine’, then ‘home’. Suggestion of the distance between them. ‘Twice’ – **repetition**, |
| 6 | * **Long vowels** replicate the slow motion fall of the vase. **Assonance** slows the line down. ‘glass’ – fragility; ‘crashed’ – violence of the falling vase. |
| 7 | * **List** – ‘falling ... soaked’ – suggestion of her passivity; happens without her involvement; she must simply deal with the aftermath. ‘My chest of drawers’ – intrusion into the order of her life. Parallel to the unwanted child. |
| 8 | * ‘broken waters’ – birth reference. Disruption to a calm surface – a disturbance beneath the surface. **Caesura** –   re-establishes order in the couplet, emphasised with ‘I have rearranged’. |
| 9 | * **Transferred epithet**; ‘troubled’ – **word choice** to reflect her feelings. ‘The closed ones’ – is there a link between the upset vase and the meeting with the mother. Does ‘one’s suggest people as well as the flowers? ‘skin’ – connection to the mother? Not petals but skin. |
| 10 | * ‘like an eye’ – **simile**; again human. Confusion, lack of sight, awareness, understanding. ‘Lid’ – idea of cutting something off, containing it. |
| 11 | * Memory of the visit is fading; but also idea of her limited inheritance. |
| 12 | * **Alliteration** to emphasise the loss of connection. Train imagery used again (see line 5). |
| 13 | * Idea of the voice being warped in the tunnel – distortion. Moving in opposite directions. |
| 14-16 | * **Synecdoche**. The fragments of memories. ‘her daughter’ – Kay is, of course, ‘her daughter’ too but a sense she doesn’t see it like this. There has been another daughter – who lived a whole lifetime unknown. |
| 17-18 | * Back to the flowers again – ambiguous imagery: ‘hang their heads’ – shame? Guilt? **Oxymoron** in ‘suddenly grow old’ |
| 19 | * Image of the hands repeated (1) to literally hold on to (2) to keep the connection. |
| 21 | * **Repetition** of the movement through assonance |
| 22 | * Is it the story that is ‘Compressed. Airtight’? Suggestion it is an excuse – idea of the excuse for the adoption being airtight? (does it link forward to ‘tricks’?). Is she looking for absolution? **Caesura** begin to pile up as things become further fragmented rather than becoming clearer for the speaker. |
| 23 | * The plastic bag changes shape before her eyes – as so much in life does. **Tone** seems to become more bitter here ‘bag of tricks’? |
| 24 | * ‘secret’ – is this the speaker and her father, or the reverse? Both in a sense secret. ‘Hidden album, a box of love letters’ perhaps suggest it is her life as the speaker’s mother that is hidden away. |
| 25 | * Sense of time being suspended – ‘opens and closes’ – onto her history? But has anything actually changed. It appears not, as time is simply ‘waiting’. This is her real life. The meeting has little effect on her life outside: only the orchids. |
| 26 | * ‘winter room’ – cold, severe, harsh, bare, inhospitable. |
| 27 | * ‘airlocks’ – are these the mother’s or the daughter’s defences? |
| 28-29 | * Ideas of pain and distress BUT they prolong the life of the flowers. Is this the same with the adoption – painful but the right thing to do? ‘cutting’ – umbilical cord (like to ‘broken waters’) |

**Overview notes**

* Symbolism of the orchids – idea of a rarefied flower; difficult to raise and to nurture. Need special growing conditions.
* Title parallels the adoption. But in this case, Kay attempts to keep and nurture the challenging orchids that refuse to open.
* Written over 14 couplets – structure is very formal and precise. Pared back to bare bones almost. Coldness of the voice?
* Focuses on a hugely emotional moment/topic but actually about emptiness. Stripped back and emotionless.
* Seems more about objects than emotions – displacement.

1. Explain how we get a sense of the speaker’s uneasiness in lines 1-12.
2. What is the speaker’s attitude about herself (line 7-16) and how is it suggested?
3. What impression do we get of the mother’s feelings about her own life (lines 19-28)
4. What do you think the speaker is really saying in the last two lines?
5. This poem is about a first person experience. Think of another Kay poem which uses this style and show how it compares and contrasts with this poem in its use of techniques.