**In Mrs Tilscher’s Class**

Nostalgia and memory-childhood setting

In Mrs Tilscher's class

Personal pronoun connects reader to common childhood memories

Possibility and potential

You could travel up the Blue Nile

Contrast-Nile=largest river, contrasted with tiny child’s finger

with your finger, tracing the route

Knowledgeable, practised

while Mrs Tilscher chanted the scenery.

List of exotic places contrasts with normality of classroom

"Tana. Ethiopia. Khartoum. Aswan."

Playful, everything seen as a toy

That for an hour,

Contrast-ancient monuments reduced to nothing

then a skittle of milk

and the chalky Pyramids rubbed into dust.

Joyful, pleasant imagery-a safe place

A window opened with a long pole.

The laugh of a bell swung by a running child.

captivating

This was better than home. Enthralling books.

Simile-bright, appealing, exciting

The classroom glowed like a sweetshop.

Child murderers-Moors Murders of 1960s-allusion to fear and distress

Sugar paper. Coloured shapes. Brady and Hindley

faded, like the faint, uneasy smudge of a mistake.

Simple statement, comfort in knowledge you are cared for

Sense of safety and comfort from danger, hazy days of youth where only positives stand out

Mrs Tilscher loved you. Some mornings, you found

Sense of honour, reward

she'd left a gold star by your name.

Assonance-strong link between smell and memory

The scent of a pencil slowly, carefully, shaved.

Childish instrument, idea of playfulness, loud, chaotic nature of primary school

A xylophone's nonsense heard from another form.

Time passing, growing older

Time passing, growing older

Imagery-more powerful, dramatic, independent-link with school work-punctuation; children becoming bolder, more independent

Over the Easter term the inky tadpoles changed

from commas into exclamation marks. Three frogs

Disparaging, judgemental

playful

hopped in the playground, freed by a dunce

Changes in children-puberty-‘croaking’ changing voices

followed by a line of kids, jumping and croaking

Idea of maturing, growing older-frightening

away from the lunch queue. A rough boy

told you how you were born. You kicked him, but stared

Unwillingness to accept information

at your parents, appalled, when you got back

Loss of innocence

home

That feverish July, the air tasted of electricity.

Can be felt, palpable

Excitement, energy, anticipation

Chaotic, hot, sweaty

A tangible alarm made you always untidy, hot,

Personification-weather reflecting mood of pupils-on brink of puberty

irritable

fractious under the heavy, sexy sky. You asked her

Refusal to acknowledge growing up, maturing-child-like and innocent in her mind

how you were born and Mrs Tilscher smiled

then turned away. Reports were handed out.

Short statement-sense of finality

You ran through the gates, impatient to be grown

Symbolic-out of gates of childhood, into unknown in-between

the sky split open into a thunderstorm.

Pathetic fallacy-Sense of change/disruption as one grows older

**Originally**

Imagery-car as room=comfort, containing all belongings

Alliteration-coziness, comfort

Inclusive language-possession, ownership, identity and belonging

We came from our own country in a red room

Loss of control, displacement

which fell through the fields, our mother singing

Assonance-loose link

soothing

our father’s name to the turn of the wheels.

Repetition emphasises distress, longing

distress

My brothers cried, one of them bawling, Home,

Home, as the miles rushed back to the city,

Rule of three-emphasis on world around child

Flashback, reminiscing

the street, the house, the vacant rooms

where we didn’t live any more. I stared

Blank, prolonged gaze

at the eyes of a blind toy, holding its paw.

Need for comfort, support, emphasises childish nature

Reflecting on experience-toy as useleess

Short statement-extended metaphor-childhood as a movement from one state of being to another-‘life is a journey’

All childhood is an emigration. Some are slow,

Slow distancing with age-growing up and growing apart-adult loneliness

leaving you standing, resigned, up an avenue

where no one you know stays. Others are sudden.

Abruptness of sentence highlights feeling of alienation

Short sentence highlights abrupt/traumatic nature of change

Your accent wrong. Corners, which seem familiar,

Unable to adjust, environment hard, unwelcoming

leading to unimagined pebble-dashed estates, big boys

eating worms and shouting words you don’t understand.

Loose tooth-constantly aware of it, wiggling it-anxiety over whereabouts/safety always present, always on edge-like to childhood change

Unwelcoming, frightening

My parents’ anxiety stirred like a loose tooth

in my head. I want our own country, I said.

Nostalgia, plea of longing for a sense of familiarity

But then you forget, or don’t recall, or change,

Scots word-link back to original home-betrayal of old ways

Link back to ‘eating worms’-idea of proving oneself, adapting

Assimilation-survival, adaption

Turning point

and, seeing your brother swallow a slug, feel only

Loss of patriotism

a skelf of shame. I remember my tongue

Enjambment mimics snake shape; signal new beginnings, but reference to betrayal?

shedding its skin like a snake, my voice

Assimilation, lost all individuality

in the classroom sounding just like the rest. Do I only think

Rhetorical Q-not a purely geographical or social change, but part of herself lost

I lost a river, culture, speech, sense of first space

Italics= change of voice

and the right place? Now, *Where do you come from?*

strangers ask. *Originally?* And I hesitate.

Abrupt ending, no answer-still unsure of identity

**The Way My Mother Speaks**

Personal poem

I say her phrases to myself

Absence, loneliness, isolation

in my head

Metaphor-‘shallows’=water-feeling of anxiety, drowning. Shallow breathing=panicky, short sharp breaths

or under the shallows of my breath,

Contrast with shallow breathing-soothed by words

restful shapes moving.

Repetition=comfort of words; mimics trains rhythmic movements

The day and ever. The day and ever.

The train this slow evening

Assonance-elongated vowels mimic slow, languid nature of journey

goes down England

Meandering, slow pace of journey emphasised

browsing for the right sky,

Colour symbolism-blue skies=happiness, joy; grey=boredom, misery, bad things to come-journey from Scotland (happy) to England (sad)

too blue swapped for a cool grey.

For miles I have been saying

Inversion/dialectal speech-contrasts with standard English of rest of poem

Language and identity strongly linked

What like is it

Idea of secrecy-unspoken language, but integral to speaker

the way I say things when I think.

Repetition/contrast-overwhelmed/unnerved by feelings of leaving home

Nothing is silent. Nothing is not silent.

Repetition-soothing, comfort of mother’s dialect

What like is it.

Briefness of moment, reflection

Only tonight

Contrast-firm ambiguity in emotions

I am happy and sad

Simile-innocent, naïve-ending of one chapter of life, starting anew-nostalgia for past, childhood

like a child

who stood at the end of summer

Tentative, careful

and dipped a net

Unknown, mysterious nature of new place-pond-hidden depths to explore

in a green, erotic pond. The day

Repetition-journey continuing towards new destination

and ever. The day and ever.

Contrast-conflicting emotions in departure from home

I am homesick, free, in love

Nostalgia-strong ties to home and family

with the way my mother speaks.

**‘Mrs Midas’**

Domestic scene-removed from grand ideas of Greek mythology-contemporised

Typical housewife type scene-creates submissive role for Mrs Midas

Golden, autumnal month

Subverts expectations-Midas always a king, wife never mentioned

Dramatic monologue –character telling story about their life

It was late September. I’d just poured a glass of wine, begun

Relaxed environment

to unwind, while the vegetables cooked. The kitchen

Personification-calm, harmonious environment

filled with the smell of itself, relaxed, its steamy breath

Peaceful, content

gently blanching the windows. So I opened one,

Simile-gentle movement-house becomes extension of self-caring for it, preening it

then with my fingers wiped the other’s glass like a brow.

He was standing under the pear tree snapping a twig.

Depersonalised-no name-hinting at resentment

Breaks calm environment, contrasts with relaxed nature of Mrs Midas

Personification-ominous environment-light drained, replaced with mystery

Now the garden was long and the visibility poor, the way

the dark of the ground seems to drink the light of the sky,

Contrast, indication of Midas touch

but that twig in his hand was gold. And then he plucked

Sugary sweet pear grown in Sept

Alliteration-harsh sound

Take forcefully

a pear from a branch. – we grew Fondante d’Automne –

Simile-shape and brightness of pear/’lightbulb moment’-realisation/innovation

and it sat in his palm, like a lightbulb. On.

S.S-realisation

I thought to myself, Is he putting fairy lights in the tree?

Humorous image, detracts from excitement of moment-understatement

Indicates rational nature of speaker

He came into the house. The doorknobs gleamed.

Historical ref-meeting place between Kings of England and France in 1520 (France)-two kinds tried to outdo each other in displays of wealth

Secrecy, intimacy

Conversational tone

Bright, shining

He drew the blinds. You know the mind; I thought of

the Field of the Cloth of Gold and of Miss Macready.

Simile-linking idea to original King Midas-grandeur

History teacher-brings grandness back to reality

He sat in that chair like a king on a burnished throne.

Negative description of husband

Shining, sparkling

The look on his face was strange, wild, vain. I said,

What in the name of God is going on? He started to laugh.

Inappropriate response to wife’s fear

Negative tone-confusion/shock; worried

Symbolic-gold colour, prosperity

Attempt at normality

I served up the meal. For starters, corn on the cob.

Corn turns to gold, no longer able to enjoy simple pleasure of food-ambition will cause him to starve

Within seconds he was spitting out the teeth of the rich.

Child-like

He toyed with his spoon, then mine, then with the knives, the forks.

fearful

He asked where was the wine. I poured with a shaking hand,

Poisoned chalice-when a reward brings with it a hidden price

Suggests already high quality

a fragrant, bone-dry white from Italy, then watched

as he picked up the glass, goblet, golden chalice, drank.

Alliteration/rule of three-captures transformation of glass-heavy ‘g’ sound indicates shock during transformation

It was then that I started to scream. He sank to his knees.

Humorous image-becomes child-like, scolded for his ambitious actions

powerless

horror

After we’d both calmed down, I finished the wine

on my own, hearing him out. I made him sit

on the other side of the room and keep his hands to himself.

Protective-realisation of danger

I locked the cat in the cellar. I moved the phone.

Despair, shock, disapproval

The toilet I didn’t mind. I couldn’t believe my ears:

Humour-reference to ‘throne’

Pun, wishes granted/ granted (understandably)

conversational

how he’d had a wish. Look, we all have wishes; granted.

Rhetorical Qs convey disapproval

But who has wishes granted? Him. Do you know about gold?

Blunt, suggests disgust, bitterness, judgement

Latin for gold

Physical-ref back to corn, spiritual=no reward

It feeds no one; aurum, soft, untarnishable; slakes

Ref back to wine, but also thirst=desire

no thirst. He tried to light a cigarette; I gazed, entranced,

Humour, contrasts with serious musings about gold’s inability to satisfy desires

Orange/yellow

as the blue flame played on its luteous stem. At least,

I said, you’ll be able to give up smoking for good.

Blunt statement-divide in relationship

fear

Separate beds. in fact, I put a chair against my door,

near petrified. He was below, turning the spare room

into the tomb of Tutankhamun. You see, we were passionate then,

Metaphor-honey is sweet but sticks, hard to remove

Glory days

Darker imagery-tomb=end of relationship

Rhyme creates contrast-normality with grandeur

in those halcyon days; unwrapping each other, rapidly,

Simile-lust, immediacy, treat

like presents, fast food. But now I feared his honeyed embrace,

Preserved in gold, silenced

the kiss that would turn my lips to a work of art.

Usually a positive image, now negative-literal, but also how can she continue to be kind towards her husband after foolishness has torn them apart?

And who, when it comes to the crunch, can live

with a heart of gold? That night, I dreamt I bore

metal

his child, its perfect ore limbs, its little tongue

Poignant image-revealing of sarcastic character-sadness at not having a child-hers is the true price paid for Midas’ greed

Mechanical, dehumanised

like a precious latch, its amber eyes

lifeless

Bizarre, animal like

holding their pupils like flies. My dream milk

toxic

burned in my breasts. I woke to the streaming sun.

Not exotic, removed from society, isolated

Further distance created

Gold dominates each moment

So he had to move out. We’d a caravan

in the wilds, in a glade of its own. I drove him up

Blunt statement-distanced, embarrassment; relegated to child’s position

Shame, secrecy

under the cover of dark. He sat in the back.

And then I came home, the woman who married the fool

Use of third person narration-depersonalised, turns herself into character to be mocked

who wished for gold. At first, I visited, odd times,

Shame and secrecy

parking the car a good way off, then walking.

Fishing=solitary pursuit, cannot even enjoy this

Contrasts with distance of previous stanza openings-closer to death, destruction

You knew you were getting close. Golden trout

Images/trophies preserving memory of him

on the grass. One day, a hare hung from a larch,

A lemon=a dud

a beautiful lemon mistake. And then his footprints,

Greek god of shepherds and flocks-drawing Midas to him-gifted with gold but loses his mind

Situation worsening

glistening next to the river’s path. He was thin,

Pathetic image

delirious; hearing, he said, the music of Pan

from the woods. Listen. That was the last straw.

Reflecting on experience

Mrs Midas=rational woman, cannot cope with delirium of husband

Classic Midas story teaches about the perils of these qualities

What gets me now is not the idiocy or greed

Bitter, but also quite self-involved-hypocritical? Husband is wasting away

but lack of thought for me. Pure selfishness. I sold

Resigned to fate

the contents of the house and came down here.

Fondness, ‘golden hour’

Reflecting, hints at loss-wistful, regretful

I think of him in certain lights, dawn, late afternoon,

and once a bowl of apples stopped me dead. I miss most,

even now, his hands, his warm hands on my skin, his touch.

Hands=once a symbol of intimacy, warmth, closeness; now cold, tainted by Midas touch-sad final image

**War Photographer**

Suggests stressful, busy lifestyle-at peace in dark room

Indicates, job, sense of mystery

In his dark room he is finally alone

Alliteration-suggests endless footage of disasters

with spools of suffering set out in ordered rows.

Contrast with red-harshness

Solitary

Detached, meticulous nature suggests he is unfazed by horrific images

The only light is red and softly glows,

Imagery (simile) Solemn, respectful, dutiful

Connotations of violence, bloodshed

as though this were a church and he

Biblical reference, metaphor-human life is transitory, brief-detached nature, no grief

In power, control, respected status

a priest preparing to intone a Mass.

Belfast. Beirut. Phnom Penh. All flesh is grass.

**War torn places-Belfast=The Troubles** (1960s-1998); **Beirut=Lebanese Civil war** (1975-1990); **Phnom Penh=Cambodia, Vietnam War** (1955-1975)-**internal conflicts reflect war photographer’s conflict**

Matter-of-fact, short statement-detached

He has a job to do. Solutions slop in trays

Reflecting on events-trauma only real in aftermath-like PTSD soldiers

Alliteration-messiness of workstation mimics chaos of war

beneath his hands, which did not tremble then

though seem to now. Rural England. Home again

Comparing lifestyles

Contrast to locations in first stanza-quaint, cozy, comforting

to ordinary pain which simple weather can dispel,

Violence, danger

to fields which don’t explode beneath the feet

Hellish landscape

of running children in a nightmare heat.

Desperation, fear

Something is happening. A stranger’s features

Dehumanised

Detached, no connection

Short statement-immediacy

faintly start to twist before his eyes,

Metaphor-dehumanised, lifeless, no connection

a half-formed ghost. He remembers the cries

Injection of life

of this man’s wife, how he sought approval

Sense of duty, job requirement

disconnect

without words to do what someone must

Vivid image contrasts with ‘ghost’ of photo

and how the blood stained into foreign dust.

Contrast between variety and uniqueness of pain with simplistic imagery/colouring of photos

A hundred agonies in black and white

Suggests complete detachment from horror of situations depicted

from which his editor will pick out five or six

Sunday-day of rest, relaxation; supplement-an extra, additional piece-photos not seen as essential viewing

for Sunday’s supplement. The reader’s eyeballs prick

‘prick’=momentarily affected before returning to lives

with tears between the bath and pre-lunch beers.

Emotionless, even in moment; cycle beginning again

From the aeroplane he stares impassively at where

he earns his living and they do not care.

Mutual detachment in warzone-no emotional attachment between subject and photographer

**Valentine’-Carol Ann Duffy**

Not a red rose or a satin heart.

Alliteration-strong sound, fits negative tone

Unexpected, everyday item-unromantic

One sentence stanza-blunt, direct, almost forceful-‘I give you’-making something simple seem grand

I give you an onion.

Metaphor-compares shape and colour of moon to onion-iridescent, shining, round-gives it a magical quality; “brown paper”-onion skin-something beautiful hidden in a boring, ordinary shell-surprising

Meaning-love can surprise you-good things come in simple packages-doesn’t need to be showy to be special

It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.

Positivity, joy

It promises light

like the careful undressing of love.

One word sentence-grabbing attention, forceful-suggests receiver is reluctant to accept onion

Simile-appearances can be deceiving, what’s underneath matters most-“undressing”-romantic and emotional meaning

“love is blind”-blinded to faults of another-dangerous/harmful in this way

Here.

It will blind you with tears

Simile-cutting onions can make you cry, and sometimes relationships can cause upset-not always positive

like a lover.

It will make your reflection

Metaphor-love is fragile, can have powerful effect on emotions, long-lasting impact

a wobbling photo of grief.

Theme-honesty; going against typical ideals of romance and love

I am trying to be truthful.

Romantic stereotypes, typical displays of affection

Single line stanzas/short sentences-Abrupt, blunt, matter-of-fact tone

uhjjjjjjjjjjjjjjj

Not a cute card or a kissogram.

Negative-rejecting romantic stereotypes

Repeats structure of first line-emphasising dislike for romantic clichés

Short statement, repeated from stanza 2-still trying to justify the onion as a gift, make it seem important

I give you an onion.

Metaphor-kiss=taste of onion. Just as the taste of onion lingers, so too the memory of a powerful kiss remains

“fierce”= dangerous, harmful-taste of onion as strong

Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,

Contrast-kiss usually delicate, caring

possessive and faithful

Positive and negative aspects of loyalty in a relationship

as we are,

Repetition twists meaning

Acknowledging that not all relationships last-but can be powerful in the moment

for as long as we are.

Take it.

Precious metal-expensive, rare, shining

Short, abrupt command-forceful, desperate

Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring,

Claustrophobic imagery-negative

Comparison-both circular-a loop never ends-like relationship?

if you like.

‘til death do us part-marriage like a life sentence

Contrasts with demanding nature of first line in stanza-self-conscious, unaware of partner’s opinion on marriage

Lethal.`

memory

Its scent will cling to your fingers,

Annoying, desperate, never lets go

A relationship has a lasting impact-strong memories; shapes the way you approach love in the future

cling to your knife.

Oddly threatening image to end poem-negative aspects of love