

Themes: Honesty, the darker side of love.

What is most important about this poem is the fact that the whole thing is an extended metaphor for the passionate and often violent nature of love.

Carol Ann Duffy

Valentine

Word Choice

Duffy starts the poem in a negative tone which is unusual when describing love. She rejects the traditional symbols of love and is forceful in her opinion of this.

Metaphor

Here is the first sign of romance - moonlight is a romantic notion but she tries to hide it in the ordinary. This is, again, a more honest presentation of love. She compares the onion skin to brown paper, which underlines her idea of the onion being a gift.

Symbolism

Light symbolizes goodness and deeper meaning - something you can't get from normal gifts. Her present might not look like much, but it promises much.

Word Choice

The poem becomes bold with her gift - it also gives the gift simplicity. It doesn't need all the fancy notions associated with other gifts.

Imagery

When we are looking through the eyes of the upset lover, who may be looking at a mirror and crying at the same time. Love makes a mess of who we are.

Word Choice

Although seemingly romantic, these quotes underline the close contact between violence and passion. Her love is forceful, as well as her gift.

Metaphor

The loops (in an onion) shrink to a wedding ring - implying that marriage is a shortening or lessening of love.

Word Choice

This quote introduces the smell of the onion and the knife. This is violent imagery which implies that the relationship has taken a turn. This is an unexpected end to the poem.

Not a red rose or a satin heart.

I give you an onion.

It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.

It promises light

Like the careful undressing of love.

Here.

It will blind you with tears

Like a lover.

It will make your reflection

A wobbling photo of grief.

I am trying to be truthful.

Not a cute card or kissogram

I give you an onion.

Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,

Possessive and faithful

As we are,

For as long as we are.

Take it.

Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring,

If you like.

Lethal.

Its scent will cling to your fingers,

Cling to your knife.

WC

Imagery

SS

Extended Metaphor

The whole poem is based around the idea that love is an onion. She takes pride in this presentation. She is purposefully unromantic and honest here.

Word Choice

Undressing has deliberately sexual connotations. The idea is that you get to know each other better through this exploration, just as peeling back an onion skin would reveal more layers.

Simile/Personification

The metaphor is extended to show the less positive side of love. Anyone being in love is also at risk of heartbreak. Just as an onion makes our eyes sting when you cut into it, so too love and heart break can make you cry.

Sentence Structure

A single line stanza which serves to underline the bitter truth of the gift and the nature of love. This is a line conveying honesty.

Blunt Statement

At this point the recipient of her gift may be pausing. So she underlines her intention to force this gift upon him.

Symbolism

The scent of an onion is a symbol of the thoughts and emotions which remain when a relationship has ended.