The Poet –Carol Ann Duffy

Carol Ann Duffy was the eldest sister to four brothers who were born into a working class, catholic family, in Glasgow in 1955. She moved to Stafford when she was six, where her aspirations to become a writer were encouraged by her education, with her earlier poems being published whilst at school. Her father worked as an electrical fitter. His position as a Trade Unionist and involvement in attempting to become a Labour Councillor in Stafford gave her an insight into politics.

Duffy went on to study philosophy at Liverpool University from 1974 to 1977, before working for Granada Television and then in the early 80s becoming a freelance writer in London, whilst also working as a writer in residence in East End Schools. In 1985 she became a full-time writer and has written a number of plays, along with her poetry collections, for which she has received numerous awards. She went on to become Professor of Creative Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University. She is also currently Britain's first woman Poet Laureate, for which she was appointed in 2009. She is also a mother to her only daughter.

War Photographer

Overview

Duffy was inspired to write this poem through her friendship with someone who was a war photographer. She was especially intrigued by the peculiar challenge faced by these people whose job requires them to record terrible, horrific events without being able to help them directly. Duffy perhaps shares an affinity with these photo journalists; while they use the medium of photography to convey certain truths about the human condition, she uses words and language to do the same job. Throughout the poem, Duffy provokes her reader to consider their own response when confronted with the photographs that we regularly see in our newspaper supplements and why so many of us have become desensitized to these images. By viewing this issue from the perspective of the photographer, she also reveals the difficulties of such an occupation. By the end of the poem, it is clear our subject straddles two vastly different worlds yet increasingly feels he belongs to neither.

Form and Structure

The poem is laid out in 4 regular 6 line stanzas, with each stanza ending in a rhyming couplet. This structure is interesting since its very rigid order contrasts with the chaotic, disturbing images described in the poem. This organisation mirrors the actions of the photographer, who lays out his films in "ordered rows", as though in doing so he can in some way help to restore order to this chaotic world. The poem moves through a series of observations in the first three stanzas to a conclusion of sorts in the fourth. The style is almost clinical and matter of fact, perhaps to imitate the clinical approach required by people in this line of work to allow them to do their job under extreme pressure. Unlike the readers of the newspaper he works for, this sense of distance is a necessary requirement for the photographer.

Unsurprisingly, in a poem that is so focused on the images of human suffering, Duffy concentrates on the sense of sight throughout the poem and the final image is almost like a photograph itself, depicting the journalist surveying the landscape and its inhabitants below "impassively" as he travels to his next assignment.

Stanza One Summary and Analysis

The poem opens in the intimate, tranquil setting of the poet's darkroom. He is compared to a priest and there is a definite sense of ritual in the way he develops his film. He sets out the film: **"spools of suffering"** in **"ordered rows",** perhaps in an attempt to restore order to the chaotic images contained within them. He handles them with the same respect with which a priest would prepare for communion and there is a definite spirituality to this process. This religious imagery is effective in not only conveying the dedication the photographer feels towards his occupation but also because, like a priest he too is exposed often to death and suffering.

The "**red light"** of the darkroom has connotations of the light that burns continuously in catholic churches to symbolise the presence of Christ and also of blood – a sight that he must be all too familiar with. Aside from the function of the

light to help process the films and protect the images he has taken, there is more than a suggestion that the darkroom is a place of sanctuary for the photographer, just as a religious or spiritual person may look for the same kind of solace in a church had they been confronted with the same horrors that the photographer must endure.

However, instead of preparing for mass, the photographer is developing images of war – evidence of man's continuing inhumanity to man which only serves to contradict the fundamental teachings of the Church. The final line of the stanza ends in a list of the places where he has recorded images of conflict. Her deliberate use of full stops here helps to "fix" the images– the final part of the printing process - into the mind of the reader. The stanza ends with the quotation **"all flesh is grass",** which comes from the New Testament and reinforces the religious imagery as well as emphasising the fragility of life.

Stanza Two Summary and Analysis

This stanza breaks the reverie and calm of the dark room with the line **"He has a job to do."** The phrase "**solutions slop in trays**" has a dual meaning, referring both directly to the onomatopoeic sound of the chemicals he is using to develop but also the hope that in some way these photographs may help to contribute to the resolution of the conflicts they depict. Significantly, the photographer's hands are shaking though they "**did not tremble then".** The implication is that in order to function and do his job properly in the field, the photographer must be able to distance himself from the subjects of his photographs. However, he is able to let down his guard in the privacy of the darkroom as he finally allows himself to react to the terrible suffering he was forced to witness and record.

He considers the contrast between "Rural England" and the war zones that he visits, noting how our "ordinary" problems can be dispelled by the simplicity of clement weather. The injustice of the situation is exemplified when he notes how our children don't have to be fearful of landmines when they are at play. One of the most iconic images of war photography is deliberately evoked in the final line of stanza two: **"of running children in a nightmare heat".** This photograph, of children fleeing a napalm attack in Vietnam directly helped to end this conflict and emphasises just how indifferent we have become today when similar images fail to resonate with us.

Stanza Three Summary and Analysis

The opening line "**something is happening"** injects drama and suspense into the poem and suggests the photographer is not wholly in control of the development process. Duffy allows us to "see" the horrific photograph develop before our eyes. In it, the photographer has captured the image of a man in his dying moments and he is described as a "half formed ghost". This description is dually effective since it both describes the way the figure is gradually appearing on the paper, while also alluding to the fact that since he no longer exists he has effectively become a "ghost". The photographer recalls how , unable to speak the same language, he "**sought approval"** through the unspoken exchange of looks from the victim's wife. Again the analogy to a priest is effective here as they, like this photographer, must tend to people in their final moments. The impact of this memory on the photographer and his sensitivity in seeking permission to capture such an intimate moment on film is clear. Just like a priest, he feels his job is a vocation, a calling rather than a career as he asserts he does**" what someone must".** Although he is aware of the intrusiveness of his occupation, he conducts himself with the utmost compassion and sensitivity.

Stanza Four Summary and Analysis

As the poet begins to reach her conclusion, she makes a comment on the way these images are received by the people they are produced for: both the newspaper editors who commission the work and us, the readers of these publications. The "**hundred agonies"** that the photographer has selected for his editor contrasts immediately with the phrase "**will pick out five or six"** in the next line. The careless indifference in the way the editor selects the images reinforces how little regard we have for the subjects in the pictures. Duffy extends this disingenuous response to us, the readers of the newspapers, using bathos when describing how our **"eyeballs prick with tears between the bath and pre lunch beers"**.

The poem ends with the photographer departing once more for a new job as the cycle begins again. His sense of separateness from his countrymen is evident as he refers to us as **"they",** emphasising how little he identifies with our

lives and values. As he surveys the landscape of rural England from the aeroplane, there is a growing acceptance that despite his best efforts his photographs will ultimately make no real difference.

Themes

The poem focuses on two main themes:

- The Horror of War
- Our Increasing Indifference to the Victims of Conflict

These themes are revealed not only through Duffy's word choice and imagery, but the **central paradox** that while the imagery of war is more widespread and prevalent than at any other time in history, its impact upon those of us exposed to it is rapidly declining.

The Horror of War

Duffy's skilful yet understated imagery helps to convey the terrible personal stories that lie behind every conflict. Perhaps almost in an attempt to counter the graphic imagery that we have become so used to seeing, her depictions are subtle and understated and she often leaves the reader to compose their own images. For example, in the line **"to fields which don't explode beneath the feet /of running children"**, she takes an image that we would usually associate with something innocent and happy and subverts it into something much more sinister. Similarly, her description of the dying man contains almost no visual imagery and instead focuses on the sense of sound through the word-choice **"cries"** and the unspoken communication between the photographer and the victim's wife. By focusing on just one image rather than the countless others that were taken, Duffy forces us to confront the personal cost of war. In doing so, Duffy again exposes another paradox inherent in the coverage of modern conflict, implying that we have lost the capacity to view the subjects of war as real human beings, each with unique, individual stories and tragedies.

Our Increasing Indifference to the Victims of Conflict

Throughout the poem, Duffy conveys the increasing separateness and isolation the poet feels both towards his own country and the newspaper he works for. Unlike us and his editor, he is unable to protect himself from the horror of the subjects he photographs and there is a sense of growing bitterness as he continues to feed the voracious need for news in the knowledge that despite his best efforts we are increasingly unmoved and unaffected by the photographs. Our disingenuous response is recorded most clearly in the line **"The reader's eyeballs prick/with tears between the bath and pre - lunch beers."**

His contempt for his editor is revealed in the careless, thoughtless way he notes how he chooses photographs for the paper, picking out "**five or six/for Sunday's supplement."**

Ironically, in an almost parallel response to our desensitization, the photographer too feels increasingly indifferent towards his homeland and fellow countrymen as he stares **"impassively where/ he earns his living and they do not care."**

Answer: It reveals that while he is able to create a professional distance and mindset that allows him to function under extreme stress, he does have an emotional response that he allows himself to experience once he returns home.

From the last stanza, how is the critical attitude of the photographer towards both his editor and the readers of the newspaper conveyed?

Answer: The contrast of the "hundred agonies" contained in his photos with the careless selection of choosing just "five or six" for the supplement shows the photographers contempt for the editor.

The bathetic comment: "The reader's eyeballs prick with tears between the bath and pre lunch beers" reinforces our own scant regard fro the suffering depicted in the newspapers. It barely causes us to pause for more than a moment before we continue with our own plans.

Originally

Overview

In this autobiographical poem, Duffy considers and explores the sense of isolation and confusion felt when as a child her parents moved from the Gorbals in Glasgow to England. She describes both the literal details of the journey and the move as well as the deeper, metaphorical journey that she and her family experienced as a result of this decision. As the title suggests, she considers to what extent our identity is shaped and defined not only by our environment but by changes in dialect and culture. The initial catalyst for the poem, the memories of the move and her gradual assimilation to her new home, provokes a bigger, more philosophical meditation on the subject of childhood itself. Perhaps the most significant line of the poem comes at the start of stanza two when she asserts that ***"All childhood is an emigration"***, revealing clearly the universal truth that the process of growing up is always synonymous with change.

Form and Structure

Like much of Duffy's work, the poem has a regular structure. The three stanzas of eight lines help to divide the poem into a straightforward chronology: Stanza 1 recalls the journey from Glasgow towards her new home; Stanza 2 explores her initial sense of not fitting in to this new landscape while in the third she considers the larger question about how our sense of identity is formed, shaped and affected by such transitions. However, underneath this apparently ordered structure, the poet's anxiety and uncertainty is revealed through the lack of a regular rhythm or rhyme scheme which reinforces the lack of order in her own life at this time. The fact that the poem is mainly composed by of a series of fragmented memories, occasionally using deliberately childish words or phrases is reminiscent of the way most of us recall our own childhoods and adds to the authenticity of the poem.

Stanza One Summary and Analysis

In the first stanza, Duffy emphasises that this decision impacted on her entire family unit through the first person plural in the opening line***: "We came from our own country".*** Similarly, the deliberate assonance of ***"our own"*** reinforces her definite sense of belonging to and possession of a particular place. She describes the interior of the train as a ***"red room"*** which **"fell through the fields"**. The colour red has connotations of passion or anger, perhaps reflecting her own feelings about being forced to leave the city of her birth and early childhood while the word choice and alliteration of ***"fell"*** and ***"fields"*** emphasises her feelings of impotence and lack of control in the making of this important decision. She recalls hearing ***"our mother singing/our father's name to the turn of the wheels".*** The optimistic mood of her mother acts as a distinct contrast to the obvious negativity of Duffy herself and is also slightly ambiguous: the reader is unsure whether their father is in the train carriage with them or if they are travelling to meet him at their destination.

She also remembers the behaviour of her younger brothers whose emotions seem to reflect her own: they ***"cried"*** and one of them is ***"bawling Home/Home"***. The repetition and capitalisation of the word "home" reinforces the misery and overwhelming sense of loss and separation that she associates with this time.

Duffy uses personification in the line ***"the miles rushed back to the city"*** to emphasise her own desire to return to Glasgow, to reverse this trip and reinhabit ***"the street, the house, the vacant rooms/where we didn't live any more"***. Again, the first person plural of "we" emphasises that even though this poem is written from her own perspective, she very clearly considers the impact of the move not just as an individual but for the rest of the family. In contrast to her younger siblings, whose protestations are loud and vocal, Duffy is silent as she ***"stared/ at the eyes of a blind toy".*** The word choice of "blind" again exposes her uncertainty and anxiety as they head towards something unknown and unfamiliar.

Stanza Two Summary and Analysis

This stanza opens with perhaps the most memorable words in the poem in her assertion that ***"All childhood is an emigration"***. This metaphor reveals one of the key ideas explored by Duffy in this work as she considers the wider, more generic experience of childhood itself which, by definition is equated with changes and transitions that are often beyond our control. The construction of the remainder of the stanza; the elongated, drawn out phrasing of the first 3

lines emphasises the "slow" stages of childhood and provides a contrast with the short, abrupt sentences that follow in the lines ***"Others are sudden./ Your accent wrong."*** Having the "wrong" accent conveys how communication and acceptance is much more complex than merely speaking the same language. Her sense of confusion and not belonging is again reinforced as she recalls how ***"Corners, which seem familiar"*** lead to ***"unimagined, pebble-dashed estates".*** The word choice of "seem" and "unimagined" exposes her inability to negotiate her way successfully through this new, strange and unfamiliar landscape. Similarly, her recollection of ***"big boys/eating worms and shouting words you don't understand"*** underpin her sense of confusion as she is confronted by behaviour and language that is alien to her.

In the last two lines of this stanza, the initial optimism of her mother in the first stanza has been replaced with an ***"anxiety"*** that ***"stirred like a loose tooth."*** This is an interesting simile since while it emphasises that her parents too are struggling with aspects of the move, their fears are not enough to provoke a strong reaction – a loose tooth can easily fall out of its own accord or be quickly extracted. The italicisation of the final line of this stanza ***"I want my own country"*** reminds us again of the autobiographical nature of the poem and is a reference back to the first line of stanza one. It acts almost as a childish lament, perhaps one that was constantly repeated during this upsetting transition and reminds us, like the words ***"big boys"*** used earlier, how young Duffy was when this event occurred.

Stanza Three Summary and Analysis

The final stanza opens with the conjunctive **"But"** to indicate a change in the writer's line of thought as she meditates on the inevitability of change and adaptation. She uses the 2nd person ***"you forget, or don't recall"*** to directly expose the often fragile nature of childhood memory. The speaker in this stanza is older and more reflective as she considers her own gradual transition. Recalling seeing her brother ***"swallow a slug***" refers back to the boys eating worms in the second stanza and implies that this act is evidence that he has fully assimilated to his new home, the simple alliteration indicating that this was a straightforward process for him. However, the deliberate employment of the Scottish dialect in the phrase "***a skelf of shame"*** reveals that she still feels attached to her Scottish roots unwilling to fully relinquish the last traces of her Scottish dialect. While her brothers have successfully adapted, she still feels out of place and like a splinter, memories of her former life continue to trouble her. While she remembers eventually her ***"tongue shedding its skin like a snake"*** and her ***"voice in the classroom sounding just like the rest***" there is a definite implication that despite these outward signs that she had adapted she continues to feel out of place.

As the poet moves towards her conclusion, she asks the first of three questions: ***"Do I only think/ I lost a river, culture, speech, sense of first space/and the right place?"*** It is this question that the poet has been attempting to answer throughout the entire poem and yet still by the end she is nowhere nearer to a resolution. In asking this, she challenges both herself and the reader to consider our own notions of self and identity. The deliberate inversion of the ***"I only"*** again emphasises her feelings of isolation and separateness from the other members of her family during this period. By the end of the poem it is clear that the poet is no closer to defining her identity. When asked the question***"where do you come from" she*** still has to qualify and clarify this simple query with the response **"Originally?"** This momentary hesitation reveals that even though older, the speaker continues to have mixed feeling about her true origins.

Themes

In this poem, Duffy reveals the importance of early childhood memories and experiences in shaping identity and also considers the impact of significant domestic changes during the formative years. It is clear that even though Duffy was only six when she moved to England, her sense of Scottishness has stayed with her. However, this affinity has resulted in a sense of confusion about her own identity and where she belongs and the poem is her own attempt to define more precisely where her true origins lie. Although asserting that all childhoods involve change and transition, she feels a distinct pull towards this country that she left so young and there is a definite feeling of loss running through the poem. In recalling how easily her brothers were able to adapt she emphasises her own sense of separateness.

Mrs Midas

Overview

Mrs Midas is a poem written from the viewpoint of the wife of the mythological King Midas, from Ovid's Metamorphoses. King Midas was granted a wish by the god Dionysus whereby everything he touched would turn to gold. With comical undertones, a wide range of emotions is presented through the persona of Mrs Midas as she speaks out against her husband's foolish actions and gradually separates herself from him, leaving him to waste away in isolation whilst she laments the loss of their physical relationship and the chance to have a baby together to fulfil their dreams.

Form and Structure

This poem is written in the form of a dramatic monologue from a female perspective, similar to all of the poems from The World's Wife collection in which well-known characters from myths or history are presented from the perspective of their forgotten or disregarded and wives. Duffy focuses on an aspect of this well-known character and presents an imaginary response from the wife's viewpoint, providing fresh, thought-provoking and comical insight into their lives.

Mrs Midas is made up of eleven stanzas of irregular line length ranging from six lines to ten in order to reflect how unpredictable and chaotic life has become for this couple in that at any second with a simple touch, Mrs Midas could also soon be turned to gold.

Stanzas 1 to 6 deal with the discovery of King Midas' granted wish and the realisation and then sheer panic of how he has been given such a tremendous power, whilst a comic tone is maintained throughout, as Mrs Midas even catalogues everyday items being turned to gold.

The remainder of the poem reveals the harsh heartfelt implications of Midas' gift, highlighting the damage it has done to the couple's relationship and their future together. The final line in the poem sums up Mrs Midas' regret at the loss of physical contact with her isolated husband.

Stanzas One – Six Summary and Analysis

In the first stanza, Duffy presents Mrs Midas in a typical domestic scene, pouring a glass of wine as she cooks and begins to ***'unwind'*** in the personified kitchen; ***'filled with the smell of itself',*** during the peak of the golden autumnal month of September. The kitchen's ***'steamy breath'*** which is ***'gently blanching'*** is in contrast to the life sapping events which are taking place in the garden as Midas snaps a twig from under a pear tree which has miraculously turned to gold. Having wiped the steam from the kitchen window and putting it down to poor visibility, Mrs Midas has to look again and this time witnesses her husband plucking a pear from a branch and describes the way :***'…it sat in his palm like a light-bulb. On.'*** This simile effectively conveys both the shape of the pear and also the brightness emanating from it. The full stops add a comedic effect, highlighting Mrs Midas' shock, disbelief and sudden dawning of awareness in her own mind as to what she has just witnessed. This whimsical, light and humorous imagery is continued and contrasts with the seriousness of what has just happened and her incredulity is evident when she questions whether he is just ***'putting fairy lights in the tree?'***

Stanza 3 relays Midas' return journey through the house as he turns the doorknobs and blinds into gleaming gold making his wife think back to a school history lesson on ***'the Field of the Cloth of Gold'*** which was the meeting place between the Kings of England and France in 1520, near Calais in France. This was embellished with gold to disguise the surrounding deprivation of the nation.

Mrs Midas goes on to describe the ***'strange, wild, vain'*** face of her husband as he realises that he has been given a tremendous power, motivated by greed. As the exasperated wife, Mrs Midas makes a typical expression: ***'What in the name of God is going on?'*** Her perplexed reaction causes her husband to laugh.

In Stanza 4, Mrs Midas attempts to instil a sense of normality by her matter of fact tone in serving up dinner: ***'For starters, corn on the cob.'*** This comedic effect is maintained as Midas ends up '…***spitting out the teeth of the rich'***.

This line clearly demonstrates the negative effects of such a "gift" as Midas can no longer enjoy the simple pleasures of food while emphasising that gold teeth are usually only seen in the mouths of he wealthy. With the catalogue of food utensils also having been turned to gold, Mrs Midas' anxiety about what is happening is revealed in the way she pours wine with ***'a shaking hand.'*** Alliteration is used to highlight the seriousness and reality of the situation when she witnesses the transformation of a glass into a '***golden chalice'*** .She notes how ***'as he picked up the glass, goblet, golden chalice, drank.'*** The blend of the vowels with the letter 'l' links to the golden luxury of the item, whilst the harsh alliterative 'g' sound drives home the seriousness of this so-called gift.

The sinking in of reality is further echoed in the first line of Stanza 5 when Mrs Midas '***started to scream'*** while her husband '***sank to his knees'***. As both come to terms with his new power, Mrs Midas finishes off the wine and forces her husband to sit ***'on the other side of the room and keep his hands to himself.***' Even after becoming aware of the consequences, this humorous line reveals that while Midas still seeks to enjoy a physical relationship with his wife, his new "gift" means that he will be deprived this pleasure.

The stanza ends with Mrs Midas relaying the precautions she took to protect the cat by locking it in the cellar and then moving the phone, but allowing the toilet to be changed into gold. Duffy then inserts a deliberate pause to imitate the speaker's incredulity upon hearing how her husband has been "***granted"*** a wish. The word ***'granted'*** is a pun which is repeated to convey her opinion, that in general, people do and can make wishes but if they are going to be given, then of course her ***'fool'*** of a husband had to be the one to have his wish come true. She is truly aggrieved by this and goes on to justify the futility of such a wish since gold '***feeds no one'***. In doing so she exposes the inherent lack of real value of gold. Even so, humour is injected to contrast with this harsh fact as Mrs Midas considers, on a more positive note, how the situation will mean that at least Midas will ***'…be able to give up smoking for good.'***

Stanzas 7 -11 Summary and Analysis

The remainder of the poem continues to highlight the damage Midas' gift has done to their relationship with the beginning of Stanza 7 summarising the full effect with the single statement: '***Separate beds.'*** Mrs Midas' terror of her husband touching her is continued and emphasised as she reveals how she even puts a chair against the door at night as she is ***'near petrified'***, scared of being turned into stone, a harsh consequence and the reality, should he come near her. Humour again, offers a bit of light relief as she relays how the spare room has been transformed into the impressive '***tomb of Tutankhamen'.***This symbolises that their relationship and dreams are effectively dead. The separateness of the couple is further highlighted as she focuses on the physical suffering they must now endure, in contrast to the fulfilling relationship they enjoyed before he was granted his wish: these were***'halcyon days'***, days of joy when they were ***'passionate'*** and ***'unwrapping each other, rapidly, like presents, fast food.'*** However, she now rightly fears Midas' ***'honeyed embrace'*** since it would be deadly to her.

In Stanza 8, Mrs Midas presents her sadness now of being deprived the opportunity to have a real baby. She begs the question: ***'who…can live with a heart of gold?'*** Usually, this expression has positive connations and is associated with kindness and empathy.Here, this familiar metaphor is ironically inverted as the literal meaning is implied, inferring that it would be impossible to survive as a living being with such a heart. A superficial, initially attractive description of the baby she dreamt about is presented with it's '***perfect ore limbs'*** and '***amber eyes',*** but this descends into a disturbing image as these flame coloured eyes are deemed to be ***'holding their pupils like flies.'*** Sadly, her milk will remain only a 'dream' too as her breasts can never bear any milk as long as her husband has this 'gift'. Waking to the '***streaming sun'***, again, poignantly reminds us that each day she will awake to a world in which gold dominates every waking moment.

In Stanza 9, the consequences of the myth and the effect on their lives continues to destroy their relationship as Mrs Midas bluntly informs us: ***'So he had to move out.'*** She then conveys how she had to drive him to live in their isolated caravan 'under cover of dark' and how she returns alone as: ***'the woman who married the fool'***, clearly blaming her husband for stupidly wishing for gold. She tells of how at first she visited at odd times, always parking the car a safe distance away in case she was affected by his gift.

Stanza 10 continues to present images of this solitary, distanced, detached separate lifestyle as she describes the rural single golden items she discovers on her walk from the parked car to her husband: ***'Golden trout'*** and '***a hare hung from a larch'***. She describes him in a sorrowful state ***as 'thin, delirious, hearing, he said, the music of Pan.'*** This associates him to another Greek God, this time the isolated figure of Pan who was the God of shepherds and flocks and we note the irony that a gift so equated with wealth and prosperity should result in such emotional poverty.

The final Stanza stresses Mrs Midas' anger at her husband's ***'pure selfishness'*** in making his wish which has not only affected him but also deprived both of any physical relationship but also of his wife's chance to have her dream baby. The poet is reminding us in the end that the myth of Midas, normally only viewed in connection with how it affected Midas and his life, also affected his poor wife, whom even after all her anger has been unleashed, is still left alone with nothing but a wistful, regretful sense of loss for the man she married. In a poignant line, she remembers fondly their once full, physical relationship and mourns its passing: ***'even now, his hands, his warm hands on my skin, his touch.'*** The repetition of the words "***hands***" emphasises too that his touch, once a potent symbol of their intimacy is now lost forever and reminds us that unlike human skin to skin contact, gold is cold and hard.

Themes

Greed is certainly a recurring theme as this what motivated Midas to make his wife in the first place and the damaging effects are portrayed throughout with both husband and wife, in the end, being left alone to suffer the effects of wishing to possess a substance which ultimately 'feeds no one.'

Consequences of our actions: This is a prevalent theme as both Midas and his wife pay the price of not really taking the time to deliberate and think through what would follow if they chose one action over another.

Loneliness and Solitude are all that is left for both characters by the end of the poem as a result of one selfish act. A life of solitude is chosen as soon as Midas is 'granted' his foolish and selfish wish.

Valentine

Overview

Valentine is from a collection of poems entitled Mean Time of 1993, and expresses love and affection in the form of a conceit whereby the symbol of love being offered by the persona is an unconventional onion. The poem challenges the stereotypical view of valentine's gift as the speaker presents their lover with the metaphorical onion as **'a moon wrapped in brown paper'**. This is reminiscent of the metaphysical poets such as John Donne, who approached ordinary objects in original and surprising ways. The multi-layered complexity of the onion represents a real relationship and is used as an extended metaphor throughout. The strangeness of this unusual gift, which can make a lover cry, highlights the negative as well as positive effects of a deep and loving relationship. The forceful presentation of this gift and final word choice also suggests this is a relationship which is cruel, domineering and menacing.

Form and Structure

The poem is written in free verse using irregular stanzas to support the content and purpose of the poem; to reject traditional restrictive conventions such as marriage and other notions of love and warn lovers that being overly possessive can have fatal undesirable consequences. While ostensibly a poem on the theme of love, Duffy deliberately avoids the use of language or imagery that we associate with this type of poetry. Instead, the words are often stark and monosyllabic to allow her to present her ideas clearly and unambiguously.

Summary and Analysis

Stanzas 1-2

The title itself, 'Valentine', initially suggests that this poem will deal with the fairly conventional notions of love with the connotations of flowers, hearts and romance which one associates with this word. However, the traditional idea as suggested from the title is subverted from the very beginning in the opening line: '***Not a red rose or a satin heart.'*** and also in line 12: '***not a cute card or a kissogram'*** By inserting a negative at the opening of both these lines, the speaker is effectively dismissing traditional symbols of love and instead presents an object that is much more truthfully representative of love. In the repetition of the line ***'I give you an onion '***in line 2 and again in line 13, the poet emphasises the importance that this gift be accepted by their lover. The use of the imperative commands "***Here*** "(line 6) and ***'Take it '(***line 18), further establishes the forceful character of the speaker.

The gift, the metaphorical onion is described as ***"a moon wrapped in brown paper."*** Thus although initially puzzling and unconventional, the allusion to the moon does remind us of more traditional notions of romance. The ***"brown paper"*** refers both to the texture and colour of the outer layer of the onion as well as reminding us that real romantic gifts do not need to be embellished or concealed within expensive wrapping. The speaker is asserting then that the onion symbolises a positive aspect of love since it represents refreshing honesty and optimism, often experienced at the beginning of a relationship. The line ***'It promises light'*** also indicates that this will be an enriching and fulfilling relationship for both parties. This too conveys the optimism and hopefulness of lovers embarking on a new relationship.

The simile ***'like the careful undressing of love'*** can be interpreted both as a reference to the sexual aspect of their relationship love and also the growth of their emotional bond which the peeling away of clothes and layers of personality may bring. The word ***'careful'*** suggests tenderness, affection, warmth and sensitivity between the lovers as they gradually allow external barriers to come down and expose their true selves to each other.

Stanza 3

This verse opens with one commanding single word line: ***'Here.'*** The full stop and solitary stance emphasises the forceful presentation of the gift. However, this gift also bears a warning that ***'It will blind you with tears'*** conveying the realisation that this relationship may occasionally cause pain and make you cry, just as getting too close to a chopped up onion can bring tears to your eyes. In doing so, the speaker reminds us that the onion, just like a lover, can elicit pain and distress as well as love and passion.

An additional warning in the form of an extended metaphor follows with the words ***'It will make your reflection a wobbling photo of grief'***. This emphasises once more the vulnerability and danger one exposes themselves to when they submit wholly and completely to a romantic relationship and reminds us of its destructive potential.

Stanza 4

This harsh disclosure is further supported by a single emphatic statement: ***"I am trying to be truthful".*** In doing so, the speaker is perhaps attempting to justify all that's been said so far, and continues to stress the desire for honesty within the relationship. Through this openness and frankness, the speaker is attempting to stress the significance of truthfulness and honesty in their relationship. Before this line, the persona had spoken of their love in mainly gentle terms to show the sincerity of their feelings, yet what follows from this is a change in tone to one which appears to be more brutal and threatening. Through the use of the first person, the poet conveys the strength of feeling in the speaker in their desire for a relationship which is based on honesty.

Stanza 5 and 6

Having echoed the opening with a single line rejecting more stereotypical Valentine's gifts of ***'a cute card'*** and a ***'kissogram'***, Stanza 6 then goes on to stress their insistence that the onion be accepted by their lover: ***'I give you an onion.'*** The full stop signifies a pause as the speaker awaits their gift to be received. As the poem continues in the line ***"Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,"*** the lover is attempting to articulate not only the romantic, positive aspects of love bit its more negative, darker associations through the deliberate word choice of "fierce" There is also the continued allusion to the senses through the taste of the onion, which just like some romatic relationships is strong, unpleasant and difficult to erase. Similarly whilst the word choice of ***'faithful'*** has positive connotations of a trusting shared relationship, the word choice of ***'possessive'*** signals a change in the relationship as it suggests an element of jealousy, distrust, control and insecurity.

In **Stanza 7**, Duffy builds to a penultimate climax with the speaker becoming even more insistent by using the imperative command in the words '***Take it'***. The speaker then reminds us that traditional romantic relationships usually culminate in marriage which here is considered to be similar to a constricting death. She compares the creamy white rings of the onion with the precious metal platinum loops of a wedding-ring which over time will, like the onion rings, ***'shrink'*** in size. Here the poet is inferring that marriage requires an adjustment which may in fact restrict a person both physically as well as emotionally, warning others of the consequences of following conventions which can be destructive, diminutive and even unnecessary when compared to free romantic love.

The final stanza begins with the single minor sentence and powerful adjective ***'Lethal'*** which reinforces the notion of imminent death to individuality, where a long-term union is pursued. The 'scent' from this relationship has positive connotations of the pleasant smell of perfume; echoing back to the 'fierce kiss', reiterating the fact that the memory of a deep relationship may last, even long after the relationship has ended. However there is no doubt that even where powerful love is very difficult to forget, it may lead you into dangerous situations where the final outcome could be brutal and violent as suggested by the final word 'knife'. Violence is very much threatened but is in keeping with the preceding honest examination of a relationship, as just like a knife, a relationship can bring much pain and suffering. A knife can slice through an onion just as honest language can incisively reveal the truth concerning a loving relationship.

Themes

Similar to most of the poems from Duffy's Mean Time collection, the poem Valentine deals with those involved in damaged or irreconcilable relationships. This also reflected the gloomy atmosphere of the political climate of this time. In Valentine, Duffy ends on a warning note that love can be 'Lethal' and so life-threatening, forcing the reader to confront the notion that a real love based on honesty and truthfulness can be painful and destructive as well as fulfilling and enriching. The allusion to the negative aspects of conventional relationships suggests that ultimately such relationships can often be restrictive to the individual, while a love which is free from such constraints is an ideal worth pursuing.

In Mrs Tilscher's Class

Duffy explores the theme of childhood and growing up in this poem. She describes the joys of primary school before the children are exposed to a more frightening adult world.

Overview

The poem explores a young child growing up within a nurturing primary school environment. Mrs Tilscher, from the poem's title, is portrayed as a loving teacher who has a profound effect on her pupils. This poem is drawn from Duffy's own experience. Mrs Tilscher was a real teacher and therefore the use of the personal pronoun 'you' places her back into the past, as she recalls her positive memories of school. It also enables the reader to identify with her experience, drawing them in to the poem. Duffy uses different times of year to represent the stages in the child's journey towards adolescence.

Duffy conjures a classroom from the past, by mentioning **"chalk"**and a **"skittle of milk"**. The reference to Brady and Hindley, the 'Moors Murderers' serial killers, sets the poem in the 1960s, sets the poem at around the 1950s/ 1960s, as they would have featured greatly in the news during this time. The delight of Mrs Tilscher's Class seems to protect the children from the insalubrious outside world, but it does not last forever. The children grow and move towards adolescence, where they experience new feelings and sensations, and ultimately leave Mrs Tilscher behind.

Form and structure

The poem takes the form of four stanzas. The first two have an even eight lines. They describe the positive atmosphere of the primary school classroom. Stanzas three and four introduce the theme of change and growing up. Each has seven lines, which perhaps reflects the destabilising nature of adolescence.

Stanza one introduces an idyllic primary classroom. The speaker is spellbound by her teacher who makes learning an adventure. It ends on a note of happiness with the laughing school bell, calling the lessons and the stanza to a close.

In stanza two, Duffy continues to portray the same wonderful environment of a classroom, comparing it to a sweetshop. However, she juxtaposes the horrors of the external world (by including the names of Brady and Hindley) with the almost magical descriptions of the classrooms.

Structurally, while these names shock the reader, they have little impact on the rest of the verse, as they are enclosed within lines of positive description. But, like the **"smudge"** they leave behind, they do remind us that the innocence and joy of childhood is precarious thing.

Duffy introduces a turning point in stanza three. The time is Easter, when in the Christian calendar Christ rose again. It is a time of growth and new beginnings. And it is appositely at this point that the child speaker learns how she was born. It is interesting that this stanza takes place outside the classroom, as if this growth could not happen in the comforting bubble Mrs Tilscher created.

The final stanza describes the child's sexual awakening, as she experiences unfamiliar feelings and no longer finds the answers with Mrs Tilscher. Significantly, the poem ends with the speaker leaving the school gates perhaps to embark on the next stage in her life.

Stanza one

The use of the personal pronoun 'you' opens the poem. The poem is autobiographical and Duffy seems to be addressing herself and her own memories. But the subject matter is universal and invites the reader to remember their own experience of primary school. The effect immediately involves the reader in this child's experience. We are going on a journey up the **"Blue Nile"** with the speaker who is fully engaged in Mrs Tilscher's lesson.

This poem is full of senses and we begin with the visual 'blue' of the river, followed by the sound of the teacher **"chanting"** the names **"Tana. Ethiopia. Khartoum. Aswan."** The minor sentences here evoke the teacher

dropping these foreign names into the young child's imagination so that they will follow her on the adventure of learning. Duffy conveys the sense of wonder and excitement of a young child. Then, still with Mrs Tilscher, the class has their milk - something all primary children were provided with for free at the time. Duffy describes the milk being in a **"skittle"** ". This suggests the shape of bottle but also suggests playing a game.

As the class move on, the lesson on Egypt is cleared from the board: **"the chalky Pyramids rubbed into dust".** The use of the passive here gives the action magical connotations. We assume it is Mrs Tilscher who erases the wonder of pyramids that she just created in order to move onto the next lesson. The word **"dust"** conveys chalk dust but also implies that to the child they were real. This image is the first suggestion of the passing of time and of something ending and being lost.

The opening of the window with a pole provides a specific detail of school life that keeps the poem feeling real. Up until now the poem has all taken place in the classroom and the imagination. Here for the first time Duffy suggests the idea of the wider world outside.

The stanza ends with the closing of the school day: **"The laugh of a bell swung by a running child"** .Duffy personifies the bell, projecting the child's laughter onto it, which creates a happy atmosphere. The energy in **"swung"** and **"running"**also work to establish an uplifting and carefree world, where children are free to grow and find themselves within a nurturing setting.

Stanza two

This stanza begins with an indisputable short sentence: **"This was better than home".** The implication here is that perhaps the child's life at home is uninspiring and does not have the **"Enthralling books"** that fill the classroom. "Enthralling" tells us the speaker is easily absorbed by literature.

The use of the simile: **"The classroom glowed like a sweetshop"** is very effective, as sweetshops are places full of colour and wonder for children; they offer temptation and delight. The comparison therefore suggests that the classroom is full of things to trigger the children's interest and imagination.

The minor sentences **"Sugar paper. Coloured shapes."** extend this idea. Duffy creates a listing effect here as if she is documenting the surroundings. These are simple things, but they are enough to transport the child into a magical world, just a Mrs Tilscher listed places along the Nile in Stanza one.

Juxtaposed with this positive and secure environment is the mention of a very different side of life. Ian Brady and Myra Hindley were serial killers who were active in the early 1960s. The reference here is particularly hard hitting as their victims were children. The 'Moors Murderers' black and white images, which appeared in newspapers, contrast starkly with the colourful sweetshop classroom.

The power of this loving environment is such that these figures can almost be wiped away, reduced to a "smudge" on the page. The children in Mrs Tilscher's class cannot be harmed. And yet, she cannot erase evil completely. Its mark is still there on the pages that inform their lives.

But no matter. What concerns the child is the **"good gold star"** left almost as if a fairy had put it there by their name. Then another sensory line: **"The scent of a pencil slowly, carefully, shaved."** The adverbs here prolong the line, mimicking the slow act of sharpening a pencil, a universal memory of childhood.

The personification of sound once again closes this stanza. Xylophones are common in primary schools and "nonsense" implies that whoever is playing it is young and hasn't mastered it yet. This is fine, however, as the experience sounds fun and appealing.

Stanza three

This stanza introduces the theme of change: **“Over the Easter term, the inky tadpoles changed/ from commas into exclamation marks”**. It is the Easter term, a time of growth and regeneration. Duffy signals this with the mixed metaphor that links developing frogs to writing. The metaphor here is in keeping with the school setting, but also the move from the insignificant "comma" to the bolder (and taller) "exclamation" skillfully reflects the altered atmosphere within the playground. The exclamation mark also anticipates the shock the child feels when she is told how she was born. The tadpoles suggest sexual reproduction as well as development and growth.

The growing children are described through the frogs **"jumping and croaking away from the lunch queue"** – "croaking" could imply their voices breaking. Instead of gold stars and coloured paper we now have a "dunce" and a "rough boy" taking charge and causing havoc. The feeling is the child narrator is exposed. She is no longer in the protective classroom, but outside learning about the facts of life.

Her first reaction is anger: **"You kicked him"**. The short sentence here evokes her disbelief and perhaps her fear of the unknown.

The use of "appalled” parenthesis places the word in the middle of the line: **“stared/ at your parents, appalled, when you got back home”**, adding emphasis to her horror as her familiar and safe world disintegrates in front of her eyes.

Stanza four

By the final stanza, we have reached the summer: **“That feverish July, the air tasted of electricity**”. School, and this part of childhood is coming to an end.

The weather is significantly hot. The word "feverish" conveys the flustered, agitated mood. The electricity metaphor extends this. It implies there is a new energy and excitement fuelling the children. But it also suggests the threat of lightening and storms, suggesting the difficult time of adolescence.

The laughing bell from stanza one has become a **"tangible alarm"**, a state of stress and excitement that the child perceives in physical terms. "alarm" also suggests a warning of what is ahead. The child is now **"always untidy, hot, fractious"** and we can infer from this that they are experiencing the beginning of puberty. Duffy uses pathetic fallacy to make this point clear when she describes this taking place under a **"heavy sexy sky"**, which suggests that a storm is building. "heavy" also suggests the burden of their new knowledge and emotions, while "sexy" refers to their sexual awakening.

This time, when the child goes to Mrs Tilscher for help and security it is no longer there: “**Mrs Tilscher smiles,/ then turned away”**. The line break is deliberate here to mimic the new division between teacher and pupil. Instead of a magical world, she is given her report. Mrs Tilscher's role has become matter of fact and ordinary.

The poem ends with the child symbolically running out of the school gates **"impatient to be grown"**. The fear and alarm has translated into an urge to experience life, leaving Mrs Tilscher's classroom behind her.

Duffy uses pathetic fallacy once again to close the poem: **“the sky split open into a thunderstorm”.** This illustrates the impact that growing up has on a child – it can be full of drama and strong emotions. There is also an implication that there is danger out there beyond Mrs Tilshcher's safe haven and that the child is racing into a world that, despite its excitement, will do little to protect her.

Themes

Childhood

Duffy conveys a childhood idyll in the first two stanzas. The classroom is a place of colour, safety, learning, delight. All elements of a happy childhood. In the second two stanzas, the child is exposed to the outside world and the knowledge this brings.

Duffy mentions Brady and Hindley, the infamous Moors Murderers, but they are "faded" in the positive world Mrs Tilscher creates. This conveys how in childhood the horrors of the adult world often do not have an impact, as it is a time of innocence and make believe. It is also short-lived as the second half of the poem confirms when the children begin to grow up.

Change/ growing up

The poem charts the speaker moving from childhood to early adolescence. The secure, innocent world of Mrs Tilscher's class is interrupted by the outside world. A "rough boy" tells her how she was born and gives her knowledge she is not ready for.

The final stanza depicts a sexual awakening as Mrs Tilscher 'turns away', leaving the child to explore her new feelings independently. She is growing up and cannot go back to her childhood of innocence and safety any more. She has to move forward, push the limits and handle the storm that looms on the horizon.

Comparisons

This poem would pair well with *Originally* as both explore childhood and growing up. While *In Mrs Tilscher's Class* focusses on the joy of primary school that is closely followed by adolescence, *Originally* looks at the impact of physically moving country as a child and having to fit in as well as moving from childhood into adulthood.

The both also deal with powerful memories. In terms of language to conjure place, the use of senses and the portrayal of character, you could also pair it with almost all of the other poems.

The Way My Mother Speaks

Overview

In this poem the poet/persona is on a train that **"goes down England"**. The journey is both literal and metaphorical, as here Duffy is concerned with the transition between childhood and adulthood, from dependence to independence, from seeing herself as being closely tied to her mother to then forming her own identity. Like *Originally* and *In Mrs Tilscher's Class*, Duffy explores how change causes conflicting emotions, which is why this poem is full of contradictions and contrasts.

The poem's title could imply "the way" her mother speaks in terms of her use of dialect and set expressions, but it might also suggest the manner in which her mother's words come to her – they are bound up with her own thinking and breathing – they are part of her being.

The poem ends on a note of optimism insisting that you can be "free" but also still connected to your background and family.

Form and structure

The poem takes the form of an opening five-line stanza followed by two stanzas of nine lines. In the first stanza, she describes repeating her mother's words in her head and under her breath. This suggests that they are bound up with her own self.

This union between mother and daughter is emphasised by the brevity of the stanza and the inclusion of the two women in it. The next two stanzas then, could represent the 'journey' or the different stages ahead of the speaker in becoming an adult, which she embarks on, equipped with the close connection she had with her mother.

Duffy also uses rhythm and rhyme throughout this poem to great effect. The repetition of her mother's expressions create the rhythm of the train in each stanza to remind us that she is on a journey. The use of half rhyme **"head"** and **"breath"**, **"think"** and **"silent"** also work to hold each stanza together. There are also stronger rhymes such as **"moving"** and **"evening"**. These connect the words, in this case implying that this moment in time is one of transition.

Stanza one

Duffy writes in the first person and the reader is immediately drawn into her personal thoughts and feelings. She links herself with her mother in a sentence that mixes **"her phrases"** with **"myself"** and **"my head"**.**"Her"** is possessive suggesting the words belong to her mother but the fact they are in "my head" clearly shows a deep and personal bond.

Duffy is saying the words quietly to herself: **"under the shallows of my breath".** Shallow breathing suggests anxiety - she is nervous on this journey. Perhaps she is repeating her mother's words to comfort herself. The word **"shallows"** has connotations of water and perhaps recalls the sound waves themselves merging with the poet's own breathing. This implies that her mother's sayings are integral to her very existence.

They become **"restful shapes moving,"** which suggests the daughter is soothed by them. This links the words with the journey. The line relates to the journey taking place, as scenes and landscapes that are still or resting seem to move when viewed from a train. **"restful"** and **"moving"** is a contradiction which perhaps links to the fact that on a train you seem to be still while the rest of the world races past you.

Although it is Duffy who is on a journey, this seems like a moment of stillness and reflection while it is the world that changes around her. **"Moving"** can also be seen in another sense, suggesting the poet's feelings - the phrases and journey are emotionally moving.

Just as Duffy has linked her mother's words with what she sees through the window, now she uses a repeating phrase to suggest the sound of the train: **"*The day and ever. The day and ever".*** The repetition mimics the rhythm of the travelling train. It also suggests the poet repeating the words to herself, calming herself. Italics stress the importance of the phrase and show that this is a direct quotation - one of the mother's phrases. The use of **"ever"** at the end of phrase refers to eternity, as if this journey will last her whole life and this connection with her mother will always be there.

Stanza two

In this stanza, Duffy refers in more detail to the train journey. She sets the time **"this slow evening"** and the place **"goes down England"**. The use of **"this"** tells us that this is a very specific time Duffy is referring to, possibly "The day" from her mother's phrase. The journey seems to be taking forever. The evening is **"slow"** suggesting that time itself has stretched, and that she has the chance to think and reflect. The train is **"browsing"** also has an unrushed, leisurely feel to it. Moreover, the use of long vowel sounds in **"slow"**, **"goes down"** and **"browsing"** slows the pace of the words adding to the unhurried mood.

Here Duffy uses another contrast between the colours **"blue"** and **"grey"** to reflect both a real and a metaphorical change. The move from blue to grey reflects the change from day to night on this evening journey. It also represents the move from child to adult. The **"too blue"** could represent childhood, as it has connotations of sunshine and happiness – the use of **"too"** also makes us think of the phrase "too good to be true", as if we always look at our youth with rose-tinted spectacles. The **"cool grey"** suggests the uncertainty of becoming an adult. Life is becoming darker.

"Browsing" suggests that the train hasn't quite decided where it is going - the poet is not sure of her destination. This could reflect the idea of a young person leaving home, trying things out and looking for a new place in life. The fact that she is still trying to find **"the right sky"** implies that she is yet to find a way of life that suits her.

Again, in this stanza, her mother's voice emerges: **"What like is it".** Duffy introduces another of her phrases and again the use of italics tells us this is her mother speaking. As before, the phrase repeats and suggests the sounds of the train.Duffy says that these words come to her when she **'thinks'**, which conveys that her inner voice is linked to her mother's. These phrases repeat themselves in her head. She is not speaking them out loud. This shows just how much of an effect her mother had on her development: she is still within her thought processes.

The relationship between internal and external dialogue is explored further in the line: **"Nothing is silent. Nothing is not silent."** Here the repetition of "nothing" connects the two short sentences. The double negative in the second implies that, what doesn't exist in the here and now (your memories, your past) still has a voice in your head. It still has influence.

Stanza three

This stanza begins with **"Only tonight"** which asserts that this transition, this journey is a singular experience. She expresses contradictory, uncertain emotions: **"I am happy and sad.".** Perhaps she is sad to be leaving her mother behind or even mourning the end of her childhood. But she is also positive about what the future holds for her and that fact she still has this connection with her past to take with her. She compares her feelings to those of moving from childhood to adulthood to the change of seasons. It is the **"end of summer"** which links back to her switching the **"too blue"** sky for **"cool grey"**.

The delight and innocence of childhood is ending. She alludes to the archetypal image of a child by the frog pond, but this time it is a **"green, erotic pond"**. There is a slight contradiction here as "green" has connotations of naivety while "erotic" connotes a more adult theme. This juxtaposition could reflect the innocent child coming face to face with the wider world.

Perhaps because of this, she returns to her mother's phrases **"The day and ever"**, repeating them like a comforting mantra. No matter what she has to confront, she has her mother's voice within her, giving her strength.

Thus the poem concludes with: "**I am homesick, free, in love with the way my mother speaks".** These lines unite some of the contradictions from earlier in the poem. She is "homesick" for her childhood, her past, her mother, but she also feels "free" to establish her new identity, to stride forward, to continue travelling "down England" and further. The line break just after "in love" leaves it hanging for a moment, as if she is **"in love"** with life, a love which was given to her earlier by her mother. The final line then confirms this. It returns to the title and tells us that she is pleased to have such a bond with her past. She loves that in this **"slow evening"** her mother's voice comes back to her and will continue to do so for "ever.

Themes

Change/growing up

The reference to the child by the frog pond is an effective way of portraying the act of growing up. This poem describes a transition between a nostalgia for youth and an anticipation of what's ahead. Duffy uses the train journey to signify this. She repeats her mother's phrases which have obviously been with her since she was a child. This implies the 'child-in-her' is still present. Her reference to the child by the frog pond is an effective way of portraying the act of growing up, but her overall message is that we still keep hold of that part of ourselves who was so closely nurtured by a parent. We still remember our mother's words.

Relationships

The relationship between Duffy and her mother is poignantly handled in this poem. The poet recalls her mother's expressions with fondness. They are part of her. She hears them in her thoughts and **"under the shallows of my breath."** At the end she says she is "homesick" for her childhood, which she remembers in a positive light. She refers to her "love" for her mother's words, as if she is still comforted by them.

Comparisons

This poem would connect well with *Originally* as both explore the transition between childhood and adulthood as a journey or 'emigration'. The idea of moving from a brightly coloured, protective environment, and a nurturing female figure, to a more greyer, more threatening future is shared with *In Mrs Tilscher's Class*.