

### Content

The poem is about the ending of a relationship. We are never told the gender of the narrator or the lover. The time frame is long: the relationship ended years ago, but the narrator expects to be just as broken hearted years into the future.

### Language

References to death occur throughout the poem emphasising the death of love and the relationship.

### Language

The narrator's tone is sad, but clearly they blame the lover for being unfaithful, distant and dishonest. This mixed tone of grief and accusation runs throughout.

### Language

This shameful name continues into the third stanza and is compared to the tolling of a funeral bell as her name sounds like a 'knell' in his ear.

### Language

Emphasis here is on the secrecy of the relationship.

### Language

The narrator foretells a future meeting and questions how they would greet them. The poem comes full circle by ending as it began in 'silence and tears'.

# When we two parted

When we two parted  
In silence and tears,  
Half broken-hearted  
To sever for years,  
5 Pale grew thy cheek and cold,  
Colder thy kiss;  
Truly that hour foretold  
Sorrow to this.

10 The dew of the morning  
Sunk chill on my brow –  
It felt like the warning  
Of what I feel now.  
Thy vows are all broken,  
And light is thy fame;  
15 I hear thy name spoken,  
And share in its shame.

They name thee before me,  
A knell in mine ear;  
A shudder comes o'er me –  
20 Why wert thou so dear?  
They know not I knew thee,  
Who knew thee too well –  
Long, long shall I rue thee,  
Too deeply to tell.

25 In secret we met –  
In silence I grieve,  
That thy heart could forget,  
Thy spirit deceive.  
If I should meet thee  
30 After long years,  
How should I greet thee? –  
With silence and tears.

### Structure

Note the rhyme scheme: short alternate lines rhyme throughout.

### Language

This could mean that only one of the lovers was broken hearted, referring back to unrequited love.

### Language

References to cold and silence occur throughout the poem. This emphasises the emotional detachment as well as the heat of love having grown cold.

### Language

Even though this was a secret relationship, vows were made and broken. Or is this referring to the lover's marriage vows? By taking part in a secret relationship, the lover was breaking the wedding vows.

### Language

There is a suggestion of a scandal associated with the lover. Perhaps this is gossip surrounding the lover which links to their 'shame' in the following line.

### Language

The narrator still reacts to the lover's name, but is this a shudder of grief or horror?

### Language

Bitterness and regret

*Lord Byron*

### Language

The title puts together two elements which, on the surface, seem like opposites. 'Love' can be seen as irrational and unpredictable in its nature, whereas 'Philosophy' suggests a logical and academic approach to an argument. Therefore, Shelley creates a tension between the head and the heart, thinking and feeling, as he draws together elements of the unpredictable natural world to back up his 'rational' argument for a kiss.

### Structure

The language of joining and connection runs throughout the first stanza of poem.

## Love's Philosophy

The fountains mingle with the river  
And the rivers with the Ocean,  
The winds of Heaven mix for ever  
With a sweet emotion;  
5 Nothing in the world is single;  
All things by a law divine  
in one another's being mingle –  
Why not I with thine?

### Structure and Form

The rhyme scheme ABABCD CD uses a ballad form.

### Language

God's law, 'law divine', put all of these connections in place – therefore it cannot be viewed as sinful.

### Language

Personification runs throughout this stanza to show how physical intimacy is enjoyed throughout nature.

10 See the mountains kiss high Heaven  
And the waves clasp one another;  
No sister-flower would be forgiven  
If it disdain'd its brother:  
And the sunlight clasps the earth,  
And the moonbeams kiss the sea –  
15 what are all these kissings worth,  
If thou kiss not me?

### Language

The language of physical intimacy runs throughout the second stanza.

### Language

Ends with a question: the reader doesn't know if it is ever answered.

### Language and Structure

The use of a dash here suggests a break in thought as if the narrator is overcome with emotion – so he blurts out his final question.

*Percy Bysshe Shelley*

### Structure and Form

The poem's lines are iambic tetrameters. The first two lines are perfect examples of this.

# Porphyria's Lover

### Structure and Form

The poem is organised into a series of five-line sections in which lines 1 and 3, and lines 2, 4 and 5 rhyme.

### Language

The wind is personified as something vicious. This supports the narrator's presentation of himself as a victim rather than a murderer.

The rain set early in to-night,

The sullen wind was soon awake,

It tore the elm-tops down for spite,

And did its worst to vex the lake:

5 I listened with heart fit to break.

When glided in Porphyria; straight

She shut the cold out and the storm,

And kneeled and made the cheerless grate

Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;

10 Which done, she rose, and from her form

Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,

And laid her soiled gloves by, untied

Her hat and let the damp hair fall,

And, last, she sat down by my side

15 And called me. When no voice replied,

She put my arm about her waist,

And made her smooth white shoulder bare,

And all her yellow hair displaced,

And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,

20 And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,

Murmuring how she loved me – she

Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,

To set its struggling passion free

From pride, and vainer ties dissever,

25 And give herself to me for ever.

But passion sometimes would prevail,

Nor could tonight's gay feast restrain

A sudden thought of one so pale

For love of her, and all in vain.

30 So, she was come through wind and rain.

### Language

In contrast to the narrator's lethargy, Porphyria is neat and businesslike in her actions. The way her movements are simply listed suggests this.

### Language

Does the fact that her gloves are 'soiled' suggest that the narrator sees her as 'soiled' by the everyday distractions that keep her away from her 'pure' love of him?

### Language

'made' reinforces the narrator's presentation of himself as a passive victim: it is as though he is a sulky patient submitting to his nurse's care. The narrator is clearly 'playing hard to get'.

### Themes

'give' reinforces the idea that the narrator requires Porphyria to become his property.

### Themes

This section of the narrative is what a judge would call 'conjecture': the narrator is assuming that Porphyria has a passion for him, a passion that she often suppresses in favour of 'pride, and vainer ties': she often holds herself back from him out of false modesty, her sense of duty and her commitments to other less deserving people.

### Themes

The narrator interprets Porphyria's care as a sign that she 'worships' him, not just 'loves' him. This indicates his desire to be seen by Porphyria more as a god than an equal lover.

### Language

He narrates Porphyria's murder casually and without feeling: it is just 'a thing to do', yet he also congratulates himself on not hurting her.

### Language

Finally, the narrator uses the word 'we', emphasising the togetherness they have finally 'achieved'.

### Language

The narrator seems surprised that God has not punished him for his terrible crime. Perhaps he deduces from God's silence that he does not exist. Perhaps he assumes that he has God on his side. It's a fascinating line that can be interpreted in many ways.

Be sure I looked up at her eyes

Happy and proud; at last I knew

Porphyria worshipped me: surprise

Made my heart swell, and still it grew

35 While I debated what to do.

That moment she was mine, mine, fair,

Perfectly pure and good: I found

A thing to do, and all her hair

In one long yellow string I wound

40 Three times her little throat around,

And strangled her. No pain felt she;

I am quite sure she felt no pain.

As a shut bud that holds a bee,

I warily oped her lids: again

45 Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.

And I untightened next the tress

About her neck; her cheek once more

Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:

I propped her head up as before,

50 Only, this time my shoulder bore

Her head, which droops upon it still:

The smiling rosy little head,

So glad it has its utmost will,

That all it scorned at once is fled,

55 And I, its love, am gained instead!

Porphyria's love: she guessed not how

Her darling one wish would be heard.

And thus we sit together now,

And all night long we have not stirred,

60 And yet God has not said a word!

### Language

The narrator is proud and delighted that Porphyria is 'mine'. Repeating this word emphasises how much he wants to possess Porphyria, her purity and her goodness.

### Language

Browning's choice of words suggests the narrator believes he has given Porphyria eternal life by killing her in the moment she is 'perfectly pure and good'. This further implies that he sees himself as god-like.

### Language

The narrator claims he has done Porphyria a favour by killing her: he has given her her dearest desire – to be set free from the distractions of ordinary life so that she can give herself to him completely and forever.

*Robert Browning*

### Meaning

These central ideas start and end the sonnet, reinforcing the sonnet's structure – they give the problem and the solution to the problem: the lover's absence and his presence.

### Content

Notice how this is the central idea of the sonnet.

### Language

Extended metaphor for the narrator's thoughts; these plants climb and wind themselves around trees.

## Sonnet 29 – 'I think of thee!'

I think of thee! – my thoughts do twine and bud  
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,  
Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought to see  
Except the straggling green which hides the wood.  
5 Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood  
I will not have my thoughts instead of thee  
Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly  
Renew thy presence; as a strong tree should,  
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare,  
10 And let these bands of greenery which insphere thee  
Drop heavily down, – burst, shattered, everywhere!  
Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee  
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,  
I do not think of thee – I am too near thee.

### Language

The wild and unruly nature of her thoughts

### Language

Imperative (commanding) verb highlighting her need to see him

### Language

Change of pace and rhythm. Note the alliterative 'd' sounds to emphasise the heaviness of the greenery followed by the onomatopoeic 'burst' and 'shattered'.

### Language

and **Context**  
A strong and exotic tree; associated with Christ's triumphant entry to Jerusalem

### Meaning and Context

Is this referring to physical love? This would be unusual in Victorian poetry.

### Language

The repetition of 'thee' emphasises her focus on him.

*Elizabeth Barrett Browning*

### Content

The poet is remembering one specific day.

## Neutral Tones

### Language

These images create a mood of misery and death.

We stood by a pond that winter day,  
And the sun was white, as though chidden of God,  
And a few leaves lay on the starving sod;  
– They had fallen from an ash, and were grey.

### Themes

Even at that time in the past they were already disillusioned with love and their relationship. This makes the poem's mood even more gloomy!

5 Your eyes on me were as eyes that rove  
Over tedious riddles of years ago;  
And some words played between us to and fro  
On which lost the more by our love.

### Themes

They are discussing which of them has been the more injured by their love! Love is usually presented as something positive.

10 The smile on your mouth was the deadest thing  
Alive enough to have strength to die;  
And a grin of bitterness swept thereby  
Like an ominous bird a-wing...

### Language

The images of dread and death are reinforced here.

### Themes

Their relationship has taught him a bitter lesson: he implies that she has deceived him and wronged him painfully.

15 Since then, keen lessons that love deceives,  
And wrings with wrong, have shaped to me  
Your face, and the God-curst sun, and a tree,  
And a pond edged with greyish leaves.

### Themes

Now when he recalls that scene in his mind, he associates it with the deception and wrong he should have recognised at the time.

*Thomas Hardy*

### Meaning

The man sees the 'lapwings' and immediately thinks to write to her. He knows it will be of interest to her and make her happy. These lapwings return showing the changes in the year and the continuation of these natural cycles.

### Structure

Three-line, non-rhyming stanzas (tercets) with irregular line length and rhythm; this suggests a stream of thought where ideas flow between each stanza, for example, 'the seasons/turning'.

### Language

Poem set in February – in the depths of winter. The lapwings signal the start of spring and rebirth, and potatoes are a sign of growth and new life.

## Letters from Yorkshire

In February, digging his garden, planting potatoes, he saw the first lapwings return and came indoors to write to me, his knuckles singing

### Language

Note the shift from 'his' to 'you' suggesting a shift in the audience.

as they reddened in the warmth.

5 It's not romance, simply how things are. You out there, in the cold, seeing the seasons

turning, me with my heartful of headlines feeding words onto a blank screen.

Is your life more real because you dig and sow?

10 You wouldn't say so, breaking ice on a waterbutt, clearing a path through snow. Still, it's you who sends me word of that other world

pouring air and light into an envelope. So that at night, watching the same news in different houses,

15 our souls tap out messages across the icy miles.

### Language

Images of cold used to show the friend/lover in the rawness of nature. She is shut off from that world.

### Structure

The end-stopped lines show a complete thought – often a moment of clarity in a poem full of scattered thoughts.

### Language

Image to show the impact of the letters, giving an insight into his world – and the differences between these worlds.

### Meaning

Even though they are in different worlds, they are still part of the same world.

### Meaning

Is the narrator suggesting that there are other messages – not just letters? Tapping would suggest text messages or computer-based messaging.

Maura Dooley

### Language

The poem is written in the farmer's own voice, using his own non-standard dialect.

### Language

'Properly' suggests that the young wife is expected to behave 'properly' – to stick to the conventional rules and duties.

### Language

She is wild, untamed, and so they shut her in. The separate, extra word, 'fast', emphasises her imprisonment.

### Themes

The farmer thoughtlessly chose her as a wife, but now he feels jealous of her relationship with animals, and regrets that she does not communicate with him at all.

# The Farmer's Bride

Three Summers since I chose a maid,  
Too young maybe – but more's to do  
At harvest-time than bide and woo.

When us was wed she turned afraid  
5 Of love and me and all things human;  
Like the shut of a winter's day  
Her smile went out, and 'twasn't a woman –  
More like a little frightened gay.  
One night, in the Fall, she runned away.

10 'Out 'mong the sheep, her be,' they said,  
Should properly have been abed;  
But sure enough she wasn't there  
Lying awake with her wide brown stare.

So over seven-acre field and up-along across the down

15 We chased her, flying like a hare  
Before our lanterns. To Church-Town  
All in a shiver and a scare  
We caught her, fetched her home at last  
And turned the key upon her, fast

20 She does the work about the house  
As well as most, but like a mouse:  
Happy enough to chat and play  
With birds and rabbits and such as they,  
So long as men-folk keep away.

25 'Not near, not near!' her eyes beseech  
When one of us comes within reach.  
The women say that beasts in stall  
Look round like children at her call.  
I've hardly heard her speak at all.

### Themes

He didn't choose carefully: he chose quickly. The result is that his wife is too young for him.

### Themes

His young wife is terrified of the adult world, and she shuts herself off from it.

### Structure and Form

Notice the way the poem rhymes throughout, but not in a regular way: there is no set pattern to the rhyming. The poet often repeats the same rhyme a number of times.

### Language

The young wife has a close relationship with animals. Here she is hunted like a hare and is then imprisoned in her house as though she is an animal shut in a cage.

### Themes

Again, the young wife is linked to animals and their simple innocence. She has the fear and mistrust of a vulnerable small animal.



### Language

He resents her for shutting him out.

30 Shy as a leveret, swift as he,  
Straight and slight as a young larch tree,  
Sweet as the first wild violets, she,  
To her wild self. But what to me?

### Language

The wife's comparison with wild, free nature is widened now: she is not just like an animal but also trees and flowers.

### Themes

The only positive sign in nature is the berries' red ripeness, but that is a sort of taunt to the farmer: it reminds him of the barrenness of his marriage.

The short days shorten and the oaks are brown,  
35 The blue smoke rises to the low grey sky,  
One leaf in the still air falls slowly down,  
A magpie's spotted feathers lie  
On the black earth spread white with rime,  
The berries redden up to Christmas-time.

### Language

As autumn goes on, nature is full of death and coldness, mirroring the farmer's marriage.

40 What's Christmas-time without there be  
Some other in the house than we!

### Themes

The 'proper' duty that she will not carry out is having children.

She sleeps up in the attic there  
Alone, poor maid. 'Tis but a stair  
Betwixt us. Oh! my God! the down,  
45 The soft young down of her, the brown,  
The brown of her – her eyes, her hair, her hair!

### Language

Now that he cannot get near her he properly appreciates her beauty, her uniqueness – qualities he can never hope to enjoy. The repeated words convey the depth of his feeling for her.

### Themes

She won't even sleep in the same room as the farmer. He now thinks of her as a 'poor maid'. Does he pity her or does he have sympathy for her? Perhaps he finally understands her terror.

*Charlotte Mew*

### Language

Walking away from a situation could be seen as a negative reaction – but this poem shows this action as growth and love despite the sadness.

### Language

The ABACA regular rhyme scheme throughout the poem suggests a measured walking pace and reflection.

### Language

Suggests an unpredictable influence outside the father's control.

### Language

Painful trials to test strength of character and will

### Language

Painful memories that he cannot let go

### Language

Message of the poem: this is at the heart of parent/child relationships.

## Walking Away

It is eighteen years ago, almost to the **day** –

A sunny day with leaves just turning,

The touch-lines new-ruled – since I watched you **play**

Your first game of football, then, like a **satellite**

5 Wrenched from its orbit, go **drifting away**

Behind a **scatter** of boys. I can see

You walking **away** from me towards the school

With the pathos of **a half-fledged thing set free**

Into a wilderness, the gait of one

10 Who finds no path where the path should be.

That hesitant figure, **eddying away**

Like a **winged seed** loosened from its parent stem,

Has something I never quite grasp to convey

About nature's give-and-take – the small, the **scorching**

15 **Ordeals which fire one's irresolute clay.**

I have had worse partings, but none that so

**Gnaws** at my mind still. Perhaps it is roughly

**Saying what God alone could perfectly show** –

How selfhood begins with a walking **away,**

20 **And love is proved in the letting go.**

### Context

When the poem was written, this would have referred to a moon or planet.

### Language

'away' echoes throughout the poem, adding to the sense of melancholy.

### Language

Natural images of movement

### Language

Suggesting that we are shaped and moulded like clay by the people who influence us, for example, our parents. Painful life experiences fire them as clay is fired in a kiln.

### Context

In the Bible, God let his son come to Earth to save mankind.

*Cecil Day-Lewis*

**Themes**

The poem might be a memory *and* a vision of an afterlife reunion with his parents. His parents are waiting for him to rejoin him in an afterlife which is an eternal perfect picnic at Eden Rock.

**Language**

The images in the description are simple, direct and easy to see in the mind.

**Language**

The language is often simple and colloquial, suggesting the ordinariness and modesty of the parents.

**Language**

The details here suggest a family used to making do. The word 'same' is used again here in the way it was in relation to the father's suit.

**Language**

Why 'drifted' rather than 'drifting' which would make more sense?

**Themes**

Although the remembered picnic at Eden Rock seems perfect, here we get the sense that the narrator is cut off from his parents (perhaps by death since that day).

**Themes**

Does calling the place *Eden Rock* suggest that – for Causley – it was a paradise?

**Language**

Perhaps the same in his memory and in his vision of his parents in their afterlife. Or, perhaps 'same' means that this was his *only* suit.

**Language**

Why is the dog trembling? Cold from swimming? Terrified? Excited? 'At his feet' suggests that the dog is very subservient, obedient.

**Structure and Form**

The rhyme scheme is the same throughout: Causley uses near (rather than full) rhymes for the first and third, and second and last line of each stanza.

**Language**

Are *they* the 'three suns'? Does this suggest how special they and their day together are? It might also have a supernatural, even threatening connotation: a whiting out that leads to death.

**Language**

His parents are relaxed and 'leisurely', confident.

**Themes**

His parents are encouraging. They want him to cross over to them. Perhaps this is symbolic of joining them in the afterlife.

**Language and Structure**

The last line is very mysterious and ambiguous. Note that it is given its own line, even though the rhyme scheme suggests it is part of the previous stanza. Isolating the line makes the reader pause before reading it, and gives it extra significance – even if how it is significant is open to interpretation.

# Eden Rock

They are waiting for me somewhere beyond Eden Rock:

My father, twenty-five, in the same suit  
Of Genuine Irish Tweed, his terrier Jack  
Still two years old and trembling at his feet.

5 My mother, twenty-three, in a sprigged dress  
Drawn at the waist, ribbon in her straw hat,  
Has spread the stiff white cloth over the grass.  
Her hair, the colour of wheat, takes on the light.

10 She pours tea from a Thermos, the milk straight  
From an old H.P. sauce bottle, a screw  
Of paper for a cork; slowly sets out  
The same three plates, the tin cups painted blue.

The sky whitens as if lit by three suns.  
My mother shades her eyes and looks my way  
15 Over the drifted stream. My father spins  
A stone along the water. Leisurely,

They beckon to me from the other bank.  
I hear them call, 'See where the stream-path is!  
20 Crossing is not as hard as you might think.'

I had not thought that it would be like this.

Charles Causley

### Meaning

A follower can be literally someone who physically follows, but often it is used for someone who admires and wants to serve their hero.

### Language

This introduces the extended metaphor of his father ploughing as a ship on a rough sea.

### Language

Factual statement to open the poem; it sets up the plain mood and style.

## Follower

My father worked with a horse-plough,  
His shoulders globed like a full sail strung  
Between the shafts and the furrow.  
The horse strained at his clicking tongue.

### Language

Heaney uses a number of technical farming terms to suggest that his father is not an amateur: he has gained his skills and knowledge through practice and learning. His skill is precise and technical.

### Language

An abbreviated, two-word sentence; the grammar mirrors the economy of his father's work and leaves no room for argument about his father's skill.

5 An expert. He would set the wing  
And fit the bright steel-pointed sock.  
The sod rolled over without breaking.  
At the headrig, with a single pluck

### Structure and Form

Every stanza has the same rhyme scheme – ABAB – but Heaney often uses half rather than full rhymes to 'dampen down' the poem's momentum, suggesting the slow and steady progress of the plough.

### Language

Not only does Heaney use technical terms, he also uses simple, factual adjectives to reinforce this idea of a practical skill being used for a functional purpose.

10 Of reins, the sweating team turned round  
And back into the land. His eye  
Narrowed and angled at the ground,  
Mapping the furrow exactly.

### Language

Heaney uses the local word for things – as his father would, so 'sod' rather than 'soil'. By contrast the sod is 'polished', a metaphor which reminds us that this farming memory is being written by a poet.

### Structure

The whole poem has expressed Heaney's desire to follow and be just like his father. The full stop introduces the complete change of view in the last two and a half lines.

15 I stumbled in his hob-nailed wake,  
Fell sometimes on the polished sod;  
Sometimes he rode me on his back  
Dipping and rising to his plod.

### Language

Notice how Heaney hints at familiar sayings in the way he describes things: he has been 'following in his father's footsteps' (literally and metaphorically) and now he is 'in his father's shadow'. At the end of the poem he has come out from his father's shadow.

### Language

In choosing 'will' rather than 'does' Heaney shocks the reader. Despite the admiration and gratitude Heaney expresses in the poem, he now actively wants his father to go away.

20 I wanted to grow up and plough,  
To close one eye, stiffen my arm.  
All I ever did was follow  
In his broad shadow round the farm.

I was a nuisance, tripping, falling,  
Yapping always. But today  
It is my father who keeps stumbling  
Behind me, and will not go away.

## Seamus Heaney

### Context

Originally the poem did not have a title so was given the opening words of the poem as its title.

### Content

Armitage relishes all the make-believe childhood games, but also shows the narrator breaking away from his mother (and not breaking away from her). This poem has less pathos than ones in the anthology on similar topics. The tone is of wonderment than regret.

### Language and Meaning

Reminiscent of childhood games – linked with exploration (the son growing and exploring a new world?) It could also suggest the son's fear of moving away and gaining the wide spaces of independence.

# Mother, any distance

## From *Book of Matches*

### Language

Directly addressing the mother; a formal term suggesting grown-up speech

Mother, any distance greater than a single span requires a second pair of hands.

You come to help me measure windows, pelmets, doors, the acres of the walls, the prairies of the floors.

### Language

The bond remains between mother and son. She 'helps'.

5 You at the zero-end, me with the spool of tape, recording length, reporting metres, centimetres back to base, then leaving up the stairs, the line still feeding out, unreeling years between us. Anchor. Kite

I space-walk through the empty bedrooms, climb

10 the ladder to the loft, to breaking point, where something has to give;

two floors below your fingertips still pinch

the last one-hundredth of an inch ... I reach

towards a hatch that opens on an endless sky

15 to fall or fly.

### Language

Imagery of freedom stretching ahead

### Language

Imagery of things that are tethered to a fixed point – like an umbilical cord

### Language

This line is literally true – the tape will only stretch so far. However, this is also a tone of frustration where there is a need to break free.

### Structure

This poem sits in the group of sonnets yet it has 15 lines not 14. Why is this? If a sonnet is usually a love poem, is Armitage showing that there is a need to break away from the parental bond and love?

*Simon Armitage*

### Meaning

This is interesting as usually the possessive 'mine' is used by parents about their children.

## Before You Were Mine

I'm ten years away from the corner you laugh on  
with your pals, Maggie McGeeney and Jean Duff.  
The three of you bend from the waist, holding  
each other, or your knees, and shriek at the pavement.  
5 Your polka-dot dress blows round your legs. Marilyn.

I'm not here yet. The thought of me doesn't occur  
in the ballroom with the thousand eyes, the fizzy, movie tomorrows  
the right walk home could bring. I knew you would dance  
like that. Before you were mine, your Ma stands at the close  
10 with a hiding for the late one. You reckon it's worth it.

The decade ahead of my loud, possessive yell was the best one, eh?  
I remember my hands in those high-heeled red shoes, relics,  
and now your ghost clatters toward me over George Square  
till I see you, clear as scent, under the tree,  
15 with its lights, and whose small bites on your neck, sweetheart?

Cha cha cha! You'd teach me the steps on the way home from Mass,  
stamping stars from the wrong pavement. Even then  
I wanted the bold girl winking in Portobello, somewhere  
in Scotland, before I was born. That glamorous love lasts  
20 where you sparkle and waltz and laugh before you were mine.

### Language

Direct address to her mother

### Language

Suggests the mother's youth

### Context

Marilyn Monroe, an icon of the 1950s and 1960s. This is a reference to the iconic photograph of Marilyn in a white dress over the subway grating.

### Language and Context

Reference to:  
a) a popular song in 1962 by Bobby Vee;  
b) the glitter ball used in dance halls at the time;  
c) people watching her mother dance.

### Language

Playful tone softens the question. She is not accusing – just teasing.

### Language

An object from the past that has special significance – in this case 'high-heeled red shoes' are symbolic of fun and frivolity. The shoes are now no longer used so have become toys.

### Language

Possessive language

*Carol Ann Duffy*

### Context and Meaning

Although there are more swans in the UK in the winter, they can be seen all year round. Sheers chooses winter as the setting of the poem to accentuate coldness between the couple.

### Language

Colloquial, metaphoric language but also literally true: there is no more rain.

### Language and Structure

'break' being on the end of the line breaks the sentence and hints at their broken relationship.

### Language

The earth is personified as suffocating. Really it is their relationship that is suffocating.

## Winter Swans

The clouds had given their all –  
two days of rain and then a break  
in which we walked,

### Language

This is factually true, but it is clearly meant metaphorically too: they are emotionally apart and no longer have anything to say to each other.

### Language

'show' suggests that the swans are showing off for the couple, but what they are showing is a courtship ritual – as though they are renewing their 'vows' – something the couple should learn from.

the waterlogged earth  
5 gulping for breath at our feet  
as we skirted the lake, silent and apart,

until the swans came and stopped us  
with a show of tipping in unison.  
As if rolling weights down their bodies to their heads

### Language

The hyperboles (exaggerations) in this stanza 'scale up' the swans from birds on a lake to icebergs, and to boats on a stormy sea. Really it is the couple we understand to be like 'boats righting in rough weather': their relationship is recovering after going through a 'rough patch'.

10 they halved themselves in the dark water,  
icebergs of white feather, paused before returning again  
like boats righting in rough weather.

'They mate for life' you said as they left,  
porcelain over the stilling water. I didn't reply  
15 but as we moved on through the afternoon light,

### Language

Sheers continues to use metaphors to suggest lessons the couple are learning from the swans: porcelain is precious, beautiful and *needs looking after*. The water – like their relationship – is calming down.

slow-stepping in the lake's shingle and sand,  
I noticed our hands, that had, somehow,  
swum the distance between us

and folded, one over the other,  
20 like a pair of wings settling after flight.

### Themes

'flight' suggests escape – the couple have been escaping each other. Now they are settling, at peace with one another.

### Language

The swans and their behaviour are used as an allegory of human relationships; 'swum' is therefore appropriate for moving closer. Again, the distance is not just physical.

### Language

'slow-stepping' might just recall the swans' way of moving on land, or it might suggest the couple are hesitant as they move towards each other.

Owen Sheers

### Themes

His father expects him to work unreasonably hard – without a break.

# Singh Song!

I run just one ov my daddy's shops  
from 9 o'clock to 9 o'clock  
and he vunt me not to hav a break  
but ven nobody in, I do di lock –

### Language

Nagra uses phonetic spelling to let us 'hear' the narrator's accent.

5 cos up di stairs is my newly bride  
vee share in chapatti  
vee share in di chutney  
after vee hav made luv  
like vee rowing through Putney –

### Language, Structure and Form

This line of the 'chorus' also has comic rhythm.

10 Ven I return vid my pinnie untied  
di shoppers always point and cry:  
Hey Singh, ver yoo bin?  
*Yor lemons are limes*  
*yor bananas are plantain,*  
15 dis dirty little floor need a little bit of mop  
*in di worst Indian shop*  
*on di whole Indian road –*

Above my head high heel tap di ground  
as my wife on di web is playing wid di mouse  
20 ven she netting two cat on her Sikh lover site  
she book dem for di meat at di cheese ov her price –

### Themes

His wife swears 'colourfully' in her in-laws' own language. Another of her many skills!

my bride  
she effing at my mum  
in all di colours of Punjabi  
25 den stumble like a drunk  
making fun at my daddy

### Language

The 'eyes'/'gun' metaphor suggests the wife's unsettling stare and her danger.

my bride  
tiny eyes ov a gun  
and di tummy ov a teddy

### Themes

His father has other shops. Perhaps he resents being a mere employee of his father. He calls his father 'daddy', perhaps showing affection, perhaps showing he feels he is treated like a child.

### Language, Structure and Form

Occasionally Nagra uses full rhyme, often – as here – for comic effect.

### Language, Structure and Form

The near rhyme of 'Singh' and 'bin' within one line gives this line sudden impact and rhythm as is appropriate to a song chorus.

### Context

Nagra lets us 'hear' the narrator not just by writing his words phonetically, but also in the non-standard dialect he naturally uses. In standard English, these words would read, 'a high heel taps the floor'.

### Language

To make Singh's narrative even funnier, Nagra includes some local slang that presumably Singh has picked up and uses incongruously (in a way that is oddly out of place).



30 my bride

she hav a red crew cut  
and she wear a Tartan sari  
a donkey jacket and some pumps

**Context**

The wife's outlandish clothes show how challenging and unconventional she is.

on di squeak ov di girls dat are pinching my sweeties –

**Language, Structure and Form**

The refrain is repeated here to reinforce the 'singalong' feeling of this part of the poem.

35 Ven I return from di tickle ov my bride

*di shoppers always point and cry:*

Hey Singh, ver yoo bin?

*Di milk is out ov date*

*and di bread is always stale,*

40 *di tings yoo hav on offer yoo hav never got in stock*

*in di worst Indian shop*

*on di whole Indian road –*

Late in di midnight hour

ven yoo shoppers are wrap up quiet

45 ven di precinct is concrete-cool

vee cum down whispering stairs

and sit on my silver stool,

from behind di chocolate bars

vee stare past di half-price window signs

50 at di beaches ov di UK in di brightey moon –

from di stool each night she say,

*How much do yoo charge for dat moon baby?*

from di stool each night I say,

Is half di cost ov yoo baby

55 from di stool each night she say,

*How much does dat come to baby?*

from di stool each night I say,

Is priceless baby –

**Context**

Just as 'effing' comes from the London slang 'effing and blinding' so 'tickle' comes from 'slap and tickle', London slang for sex.

**Themes**

Presumably it is not the stairs but the couple who are whispering. This further emphasises their secrecy and their conspiracy against their families and conventions.

**Themes**

'yoo shoppers' are addressed here showing that the narrative is addressed to the dissatisfied customers. Singh is defying them and their attitudes.

**Structure and Form**

Nagra often uses half rhymes and other repeated sounds to lead the reader through the poem and to keep up its momentum.

**Themes**

The fact that the couple do this 'each night' suggests that their romantic conversation has become a sort of enjoyable ritual. That might suggest that their dreams are unlikely ever to come true.

**Context**

The moon is 'brightey' rather than bright. Perhaps Nagra uses 'brightey' to suggest 'Blighty' – an Indian name for Britain.

**Themes**

She is a formidable wife but the narrator teases her and she seems to invite this teasing: it is part of their secret ritual.

**Themes**

She might be expensive but she is also priceless. In other words she is extremely precious to the narrator.

*Daljit Nagra*

## Meaning and Content

The title clearly tells us what the poem is about – then we launch straight into the adventure in the first line. However, it is important to realise that the poem is metaphorical, the narrator isn't really climbing the grandfather – he is looking into his past and getting to know his grandfather.

## Language

Decisive action

## Language

There are two groups of words: those associated with climbing and mountaineering and words associated with the grandfather's physical appearance and what he represents metaphorically.

## Language

This is a contradiction (oxymoron). It could be read as a literal description. It is warm because it is the finger of his hand and like ice because its smoothness makes it hard to grip onto. It is a difficult metaphor. Perhaps it is hinting that the grandfather/the past can be 'warm' and helpful (as suggested at the end of poem), but it can provide slips and problems.

# Climbing My Grandfather

I decide to do it free, without a rope or net.  
First, the old brogues, dusty and cracked;  
an easy scramble onto his trousers,  
pushing into the weave, trying to get a grip.  
5 By the overhanging shirt I change  
direction, traverse along his belt  
to an earth-stained hand. The nails  
are splintered and give good purchase,  
the skin of his finger is smooth and thick  
10 like warm ice. On his arm I discover  
the glassy ridge of a scar, place my feet  
gently in the old stitches and move on.  
At his still firm shoulder, I rest for a while  
in the shade, not looking down,  
15 for climbing has its dangers, then pull  
myself up the loose skin of his neck  
to a smiling mouth to drink among teeth.  
Refreshed, I cross the scree cheek,  
to stare into his brown eyes, watch a pupil

## Language

The boy is seeing his grandfather closely, perhaps seeing himself reflected in his eyes.

## Language

A climbing term; this is adventurous (and risky) climbing without the aid of any equipment.

## Language and Themes

The grandfather's shoes give clues to him as a character. Literally, solid, dependable but also 'dusty and cracked' suggesting that the grandfather continues with his well-worn and dependable shoes. Metaphorically, they show how the past can be dependable and secure – even with the cracks that might appear. It can be risky delving into the past.

## Language

This is a mixed climb of rock and ice – like a mountaineering route moving to higher ground. 'Nails' are holds on the rock, the skin on the fingers are the smoothness of the 'ice'.

## Language

Suggests solidity and dependability

**Language**

As a climber moving across the face of a mountain, you concentrate intensely on its features. This suggests he is seeing the grandfather (and his past) closely and in detail – getting to know him.

20 slowly open and close. Then up over  
the forehead, the wrinkles well-spaced  
and easy, to his thick hair (soft and white  
at this altitude), reaching for the summit,  
where gasping for breath I can only lie  
25 watching clouds and birds circle,  
feeling his heat, knowing  
the slow pulse of his good heart.

**Language**

Suggests the white snow on the summit

**Themes**

Symbols of freedom but from a dependable platform

**Language**

Steady, calm and sure

**Themes**

Returns to love at the end of the poem; also a symbol of being a good person

*Andrew Waterhouse*