

POETRY SECTION

1) First Love by John Clare

John Clare (13 July 1793 – 20 May 1864) was an English poet. The son of a farm labourer, he became known for his celebrations of the English countryside and sorrows at its disruption. His poetry underwent major re-evaluation in the late 20th century: he is now often seen as a major 19th-century poet. His biographer Jonathan Bate called Clare "the greatest labouring-class poet that England has ever produced. No one has ever written more powerfully of nature, of a rural childhood, and of the alienated and unstable self.

'First Love' is one of the best-known and best-loved poems by John Clare (1793-1864), who is often forgotten when people are recalling the great English Romantic poets. But as this poem demonstrates, Clare's poetry is a curious blend of the simple or direct and the complex, and a few words of analysis of 'First Love' may help to elucidate the poem.

First love is powerful and stays with us, but it can be painful as well as joyous or liberating. This poem, one of John Clare's most widely anthologised, captures this dual nature of first love and the way in which it is a loss of something – namely, innocence – as well as a gaining of something new and special. But in 'First Love', John Clare emphasises that moment we first fall in love with someone also represents a loss of innocence, and, in one sense, a loss of part of ourselves.

In the poem's first stanza, Clare's speaker tells us how he was first 'struck' with love, which was 'sweet' but also 'sudden'. The woman (or girl?) he fell in love with was as beautiful as a sweet spring flower, and stole all of his heart away. Note how Clare contrasts the 'bloom' of his beloved's (presumably reddish, blushing) cheek with his own 'deadly pale' looks: love has left him pale and lovesick. He forgot how to walk: his legs seem rooted to the ground, as if made of clay. When she noticed him, he couldn't very well explain to her what effect she had had on him, but what other explanation is there for being unable to walk away? He's been reduced, rapidly, to a wreck.

In the second stanza, the speaker of the poem has recovered from his deathly pallor, but only because he is now blushing with embarrassment whenever he is around the girl he loves. Indeed, his blood rushing to his face makes him blind, because he is so overcome by embarrassment, so discombobulated, if you will, by the presence of his beloved. Those familiar features of a John Clare poem, the trees and bushes, are dark to him even during broad daylight, because he cannot see clearly. Well, they say love is blind...

Clare concludes this second stanza with a curious image. Until this point, the poem has been remarkably straightforward in its description of a man (or boy) in love for the first time. Now, though, the speaker tells us that 'Words from my eyes did start'. He's so confused, he's speechless: he cannot open his mouth and speak to his beloved, but his eyes tell the full story. The final line brings one of Clare's most memorable images of the human body: 'And blood burnt round my heart.' Six words, all of them monosyllables, yet the image they suggest is visceral (almost literally) and complex. This final line conveys the hot passions of first love, but also the destructive nature of it: his blood is not simply up, but threatening to burn his heart away.

In the final stanza, Clare brings in wintry images to suggest that first love, far from being a springtime of hope and beginnings, is a thing of desolation and coldness. Although the object of his love seems to hear his voice, even his 'silent voice' (when we love someone, we like to believe they are in tune with our thoughts and can read them), even if she didn't heed the 'appeals' or requests of love, that she should know him. Clare concludes 'First Love' by saying that his heart has left its home and will never return: this love has changed everything.

'First Love' is written in iambic tetrameter: that is, there are four iambs per line, with an iamb being a metrical foot comprising one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed one. So in the fourth line, we get 'And STOLE my HEART a-WAY com-LETE'. See how it works? This light, natural rhythm is held to throughout the poem, with only the occasional variation. However, note how several lines – namely lines – are actually shorter than the rest, and are iambic trimeter (so three iambs, not four). This brings us up short, and arguably mirrors the confusion the speaker is feeling as he plunges headlong into first love. However, the metre is, on the whole, straightforward. The same goes for the rhyme scheme of the poem, which is ababcdcd in each of the three stanzas.

2) *All the World's a Stage-William Shakespeare*

The words "All the world's a stage" are actually taken from William Shakespeare's play "As You Like It". With these words begins the monologue by a character in Act II of the play. Shakespeare has been a great playwright and poet of his era. He views life realistically. Shakespeare is known for the realism of his writings and is amongst the most quotable authors in world. The poem's theme is that man is the ultimate loser in the game of life. He says "all the world's a stage and "all the men and women merely its players". Every player plays seven roles during his life. The first stage is that of an infant when he is a helpless child in his mother's arms. In the second role, he is a child who goes "creeping like a snail unwillingly to school". We may notice that man keeps on losing one quality and blessing while qualifying for another one. The third stage brings before us the lover who sings woeful ballads for his beloved. In the youthful age when man is full of energy and might, he may do everything to please his beloved. Even this shift of life, filled with merry making and joyous songs, passes so quickly as well. Soldier, the fourth stage arrives swiftly; here man seeks fame though it is temporary and short lived. He endangers his life for it. But it is nothing more than a bubble. Fifth role is of a middle aged man. He has round belly. He cites modern instances. In sixth age, man becomes very weak. He keeps pouch with him. He wears warm hoses. His shank has shrunk. "His big manly voice is turning again towards childish treble". His voice is not clear due to loss of teeth. In the last stage, the condition of man becomes very bad. Now he has grown very old and weak. He has no relations. He has lost all. He is: "sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste and sans everything. He has lost all his relations. At this stage, man feels that life is nothing except sheer loss for man though he may boast of the success and achievements he has got in his past life. Shakespeare wishes to make us realize that the short life we spend in this world is not worth it if we have a close observation of it. Life is nothing more than a shadow. So, spend it bravely and eagerly.

All the Worlds a Stage Summary Analysis: In-fact, this is not a poem. These are the lines of the play "As You Like It", a play written by William Shakespeare. The words "All the world's a stage" are actually taken from William Shakespeare's play "As You Like It". With these words begins the monologue (a loud speech to oneself) by a character in Act II of the play. Shakespeare has been a great playwright and poet of his era. He views life realistically. Shakespeare is known for the realism of his writings and is amongst the most quotable authors in world. The poem's theme is that man is the ultimate loser in the game of life.

He says “all the world’s a stage and “all the men and women merely its players”. Every player plays seven roles during his life. The first stage is that of an infant when he is helpless in his mother’s arms. He merely pukes in the nurse’s arms.

In the second role, he is a child who goes “creeping like a snail unwillingly to school”. He is innocent. He is not willing to learn. He wants freedom. For learning, he must lose his childish liberty. We may notice that man keeps on losing one quality and blessing while qualifying for another one.

The third stage brings before us the lover who sings woeful ballads for his beloved. In the youthful age when man is full of energy and might, he does everything to please his beloved. Even this shift of life, filled with merrymaking and joyous songs, passes so quickly as well.

Soldier, the fourth stage arrives swiftly; here man seeks fame though it is temporary and short lived. He endangers his life for it. It alludes how man goes every extreme for temporary success. Because success is always temporary.

Fifth role is of a middle aged man. He has round belly. He cites modern instances. In sixth age, man becomes very weak. He keeps pouch with him. He wears warm hoses. Man’s shank(ankle) has shrunk. “His big manly voice is turning again towards childish treble”. His voice is not clear due to loss of teeth. In the last stage, the condition of man becomes very miserable. Now he has grown very old and weak.

He has no relations. He has lost all. Here the poem is a direct comparison with “One Art” by Elizabeth Sewell. He is:

“sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste and sans everything.

He has lost all his relations. At this stage, man feels that life is nothing except sheer loss for man though he may boast of the success and achievements he has got in his past life. Shakespeare wishes to make us realise that the short life we spend in this world is not worth it if we have a close observation of it. Life is nothing more than a shadow.

3) Next Please by Philip Larkin

Larkin was born on 9 August 1922 in Coventry England, the only son and younger child of Sydney Larkin(1884-1948) and his wife, Eva Emily Day (1886-1977). His sister Catherine, known as Kitty, was 10 years older than he was. His father introduced him to the works of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot , James Joyce and above all D. H. Lawrence. His mother was a nervous and passive woman.

In the first stanza, the speaker contends that we're too eager for the future and we spend too much time agonizing over what it will bring. He calls this habit a bad one. All in all, he maintains that we make too much of events that have yet to occur. Long before we see any sign of them, our imaginations take over. We begin to harbor expectations about the "sparkling armada of promises" heading our way.

In the second stanza, the speaker contends that our anticipatory spirit often leads to pointless complaining. We want the future to arrive, to hurry its approach. However, it's like a ship that's traveling too slowly for our liking.

In the third and fourth stanzas, the speaker maintains that the ship will arrive in due time. However, when it does, we will ultimately be disappointed. It seems that reality never quite lives up to all of our fondest hopes and ambitions.

The speaker also likens the future to an approaching ship. As the ship glides towards the harbor, we see more clearly its form. The "big approach" eventually reveals the ship's brasswork, ropes, and even the figurehead. The latter is an ornamental wooden figure mounted onto the bow of a ship. However, the ship itself never anchors. No sooner does it approach, then it passes by completely.

In the fifth stanza, the speaker laments the destruction of our hopes. It seems that each ship in the "armada" of fate always disappoints. Instead of "unloading" good things into our lives, each "ship" leaves us embittered. We wait long and "devoutly" for good things, believing that we are deserving of them. However, our hopes often clash with reality. The speaker contends that we have no right to such vain hopes.

In the last stanza, he explains why this is so. The speaker maintains that there is only one ship heading for us, and it is black in color. As it approaches, we can see it towing a huge, "birdless" silence. Ominously, no waters break in the ship's wake. This macabre imagery leads us to think of death, the kind Larkin feared: one where an oppressive pall grips the soul for eternity.

During his life, Larkin scoffed at the idea of God and religion. He maintained that there was no happy afterlife to look forward to. This grim poem emphasizes Larkin's core beliefs about life and death.

4) *Father Returning Home*-Dilip Chitre

Dilip Chitre, born in 1938, was an Indian poet and artist as well as a translator, meaning his contributions to art in general and the written word specifically are vast enough to make him a versatile poet. As the two-time winner of the Sahitya Academy Award and a World Poetry Congress speaker, his accomplishments extend beyond his list of written works. He passed away in 2009. *Father Returning Home* is a dramatic monologue, the voice of a son or daughter detailing two scenes from the life of their father. The opening scene, the first stanza, concentrates on the city commute home from work, the inherent loneliness of a man who is disillusioned with his life. The tone is a little depressing and bleak, the language that of estrangement and detachment. Perhaps the father has to work long hours to make ends meet because he is on the evening train, passing through suburbs that he takes for granted. It's been raining, the father has been soaked, mud stains his coat. He looks a sorry sight. Like his old bag, he's coming undone, getting on in years. The first person commentary continues as the father gets off the train - Like a word dropped from a long sentence - a simile that implies complete detachment from meaning and sense and language. All in all, the speaker gives the reader a gloomy introduction to their father, a microcosmic view of your typical (or atypical) veteran male commuter. The imagery, together with a down to earth narration, is particularly striking and creates a filmic, documentary type scenario.

In the second stanza the focus is on the domestic side of life with family present, witnessing the sad movements of a once happy father. The weak tea and stale chapati add to the sense of hopelessness. Is there no wife or partner to greet him? No children to run up and hug him? Apparently not. Here is a man who prefers books to conversation, his own company to that of shared social space. Even on the toilet his thoughts are negative; he cannot reconcile how a man can be a stranger in a city teeming with millions of other men. Humans built the city, so how come humans feel estranged in an environment that should encourage positive interaction? Something has gone wrong. The very thought of his own existence in such a place affects his physicality. He trembles. Perhaps the most devastating line in the poem is line 20, when the reader learns that even his children (who reflect his own personality it seems) consciously keep their jokes to themselves instead of sharing them with their father. A truly sad situation.

The father is so far away from his current family life he cannot seem to cope. Something is draining his spirit and there is no one to confide in. Out of habit he puts on the radio, which is

only the noise of interference, a kind of torture. When he sleeps he dreams of the past, of his ancestors, nomads with no static home, who overcame hardships to discover a new land.

5) Dover Beach by Matthew Arnold

The speaker looks out upon a calm sea, and observes the fullness of the tide and the moon reflecting on the water. Looking across the English channel, the speaker sees the lights of the French coast fade away, while the cliffs of the English coast stand tall and bright, and the bay seems calm. Suddenly, the speaker addresses someone else, and implores this person to come and look at what the speaker is looking at, and to enjoy the night's pleasant air. The speaker senses something is not quite right, and describes the spray where the water meets the moonlit land. The speaker instructs the other person to listen to the sound of the pebbles as the waves shift them back and forth, up the beach and down again. The speaker notes this slow repeating action, and identifies it with eternal sadness.

All of a sudden, the speaker thinks about the ancient Greek playwright, Sophocles, and imagines Sophocles hearing the same sadness in the Aegean Sea as the speaker hears now on the English coast. Sophocles, in the mind of the speaker, likens the sad sound of the waves to the general sorrow of humanity, which moves like the waves. The speaker then notices another thought that comes with the sound of the sea.

Explaining this next thought, the speaker describes religious faith as a sea that was once full like the tide. At that time, it reached around the earth like a girdle. Now, though, the speaker just hears that sea's sad retreat. As the Sea of Faith becomes smaller, says the speaker, it disappears into the atmosphere and leaves the edges of the world naked.

The speaker suddenly addresses the companion as "love," and states desperately that the two of them need to treat each other with honesty and authenticity. This is because the world, though it has a dream-like quality of variety, beauty and newness, doesn't actually offer joy, love or clarity. Neither, claims the speaker, can it provide certainty, peace, or relief from pain. The speaker then compares their collective situation to standing on a flat and dark piece of land, which is caught up in the chaos of fighting. Here, battles between unknowing groups continue under the cover of darkness.

“Dover Beach” Themes

Loss of Faith and Certainty

Written during the Victorian era, Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" admits to and laments the loss of religious faith that came with advances in various fields at the time: evolutionary biology, geology, archeology, and textual analysis of the Bible, to name a few. The poem senses the turn of a historical epoch and finds this change echoed in the transitional figure of the beach—the blurry border between land and sea. The poem thus asks the reader to consider what is lost in humankind's movement away from the (debatable) certainties of the Christian faith.

For the speaker, loss of faith equates to loss of certainty. The Dover beach itself seems to embody this loss, both in its sights and its sounds. At first, the poem offers no clues that its main subject is the loss of faith. Instead, it begins by describing the atmosphere in which the speaker stands. The descriptions of the sea and the sound of the pebbles on the beach are lyrically beautiful at first, but they mask "the eternal note of sadness" that is revealed at the end of stanza 1. This sudden intrusion of sadness hints at the speaker's sense of loss, which finds fuller expression later in the poem. Through the symbol of the sea, the poem suggests two key ideas: firstly, that major shifts in the fabric of society occur subtly—the beach's slow, repetitive movements symbolize the gradual but inevitable loss of faith that the speaker senses in this historical moment.

Secondly, mapping the loss of religious faith onto the movement of the waves implies that these kinds of historical changes come in cycles—waves, in other words. Indeed, the speaker imagines the ancient Greek playwright Sophocles hearing the same sadness in the sea that the speaker hears now. That is, the speaker sees an analogy between the irrelevance of the classical Greek Gods in the speaker's time with the coming irrelevance of the Christian God in the near future. That doesn't mean that religious faith will return, but more that something will come along to take its place (in this case, the dominance of science).

The speaker's position on this loss of religious faith becomes clear in the third stanza. Faith once made the world "full" and "bright"—that is, it offered comfort and joy in its certainty. Its loss, then, represents "melancholy." What's more, the "Sea of Faith" once touched the shores of the entire world, but is now "withdrawing." The poem is essentially saying that this loss of faith is global, in turn suggesting the vast reach of scientific advancements at the time. The speaker doubles down on the idea that scientific advancement represents a loss rather than a gain in the poem's final couplet, saying that the new era will herald "confused alarms of struggle and

flight,” and “ignorant armies clash[ing] by night.” In other words, the speaker believes that scientific advancement will bring only scientific—not spiritual—certainty and will lead to more doubt and questioning (which is, in fact, an important part of the scientific method of inquiry). Overall, then, the poem expresses a kind of resignation. The speaker fully admits the change that is in process—it is as inevitable as the waves rising and falling—and challenges the reader to consider whether this loss of faith is progress or a wrong turn. “Dover Beach,” then, is a deeply pessimistic poem that questions the dominant values of its day and embodies the sense of grief that some felt at the prospect of the loss of religion. This questioning still stands up in the 21st century, calling on its readers to examine whether their own lives are spiritually fulfilled.

Nature and Alienation

Linked to the idea of a loss of faith is a shift in the way people relate to the natural environment. Written shortly after the era of the Romantic poets, who praised nature as an antidote to overly rational thinking, “Dover Beach” questions humankind’s relationship with nature. Instead of finding happiness or the sublime in the natural environment, the speaker finds a deep sense of sorrow (even while admitting to the beach’s beauty). The cold indifference and vast power of the natural world make the speaker feel small and insignificant. The poem is therefore an attempt to capture the complexity of human experience as just one part of the natural world, rather than its center.

Central to the poem is an implicit admission that mankind is merely one part of a larger system—the natural world. The natural scene prompts the speaker to think about timescales that make their own life seem less significant. The speaker looks out on a scene that is, on the one hand, beautiful, but on the other, a powerful reminder of nature’s indifference to humankind. The beach and the sea are by far the most prominent figures in the poem. As products of millions of years of erosion and water movement, they represent scales of time well beyond the expanse of human life, and perhaps beyond the mind’s capacity to comprehend them too.

This sense of deep time alienates the speaker from the natural scene that the speaker is observing. The scene makes the speaker feel small and creates a feeling that nature is almost antagonistic towards the trials of humankind, as demonstrated by the harsh sound of the beach, which “roars” with the “eternal note of sadness” as the pebbles move with the waves. The mention of eternity here specifically links the idea of time to the speaker’s alienation—without

God to provide the certainty of eternal afterlife, the timescales evoked by nature seem almost mocking of humankind's limited place in the world.

The speaker's thoughts about the ancient Greek playwright Sophocles further emphasizes the tragedy that the speaker believes is occurring. The speaker imagines Sophocles hearing the same loneliness and sorrow in the sea as the speaker does in the poem. For the speaker, human life is fundamentally sad—and Sophocles, as a writer of tragedies, must have heard that same sadness in the sea. On the one hand, then, the poem argues that nature has always had this alienating effect. But on the other hand, it also seems that the speaker is particularly mindful of the present moment, the moment when the poem was written—the use of present tense throughout demonstrates that the speaker feels that the current moment is an especially alienating time.

The natural setting of the poem, then, makes the speaker question everything about human existence, a state that was once made certain by religious faith. There is a paradoxical nature about the beach—it is always shifting in shape, yet it can stay roughly as it is for millions of years, seemingly always in transition and always the same. This paradox embodies the way in which people try to make sense of their lives while the world itself offers no certainty. In this way, the poem is a precursor of 20th century Existentialism and is often considered ahead of its time. Ultimately, “Dover Beach” exposes the underlying melancholy of awe-inspiring natural sites. While the speaker does admit to the scene's beauty, that beauty doesn't compensate for the way in which the scene makes the speaker feel small and insignificant.

Love

With the retreat of religion causing a crisis of spiritual faith, the speaker turns to love as an answer for the loss of God. Perhaps, the poem suggests, love between people can compensate for the loss of the connection between God and mankind. But the poem only argues that love has the possibility of creating the certainty that religion once did—it doesn't make the case that this is inevitable.

It is generally agreed that Arnold wrote “Dover Beach” while on his honeymoon. Whether or not this is definitely true, the speaker is certainly not alone in the poem. The speaker's interactions with an off-stage (off-page) lover demonstrate the possible restoration of a different kind of faith—in love, rather than in God. The first five lines of the poem give nothing away in terms of whether the speaker has an addressee (beyond the reader). But lines 6 and 8

offer clear instructions to the speaker's companion to come and share the experience of looking out at Dover beach. Given that the beach scene inspires such melancholy in the speaker, the speaker's attempt to share the experience is an argument for intimacy and honesty between people. Togetherness, the poem argues, can help in any situation.

Stanzas 2 and 3, however, lack the direct address to the other person, and therefore seem to show the speaker retreating into their own psyche. The melancholy of the sea echoes the loss of religion, and almost swamps the speaker's psyche entirely. But out of these depths comes the final stanza, which is spoken directly to the speaker's lover. If the two lovers can be true to one another, suggests the speaker, then that will in part provide solace and certainty in a world that offers neither of these. The poem ends on a literal cliff-hanger, with the two lovers standing together—only the second time the poem uses “we”—awaiting what will come. Love, then, may be the only answer to the problems identified by the speaker: loneliness and loss of faith.

But the poem does not end on an optimistic note, casting doubt on the idea that love will save the day. Instead, the speaker anticipates confusion, struggle, and violence. Though love might not be able to defeat these, the speaker presents it as the only potential solution. Love, then, is definitely valued in the poem, and the reader in turn is asked to share in that value. But love shows up in only a few brief moments, leaving its meaning far from certain. The poem can't say for sure that love will be able to make life meaningful, and perhaps even suggests that it ultimately can't—but it is presented as the best option, and worth trying.