We Remember Your Childhood Well

SUMMARY

A set of parents tell their (now presumably adult) daughter—who has apparently just leveled some sort of accusation at them—that no one harmed her when she was younger. The parents insist that no one switched the light off then had an argument that lasted throughout the night. Whatever "bad man" she remembers being out in the uncultivated fields was just something from a movie, the parents say, adding that no one locked the door.

The parents insist that they've answered their child's questions completely, before adding that whatever she has just accused them of never actually happened. She was never much a singer anyway, the parents say, and then insist that this wasn't something she cared about. Whatever moment she has apparently brought up is fuzzy, a comic book dying of laughter in the fire over the coals. No one really knows what happened.

The parents go on to insist that no one ever made the child do anything against her will. She had wanted to go, having in fact pleaded with her parents to do so. She picked out the dress for the day herself. The parents then pull out pictures from that day as proof. "Look at you," the parents say, before pointing out how the whole family is smiling in the photographs and waving at the camera, everyone younger than they are now. The parents say that she is simply imagining this whole thing.

Her memories are just vague feelings, the parents insist, whereas they themselves recall the objective truth of things. They were the ones in control. What she called the "secret police" of her youth was older, smarter, and larger than her. Remember the sound of their booming voices.

The parents insist that no one ever sent her to live with someone else, declaring that this event was simply an extra vacation with people she seemed to enjoy being around. These people were strict, sure, but there was nothing scary about them. If something made her upset, the parents add, it was her own fault.

The parents ask why any of this even matters at this point, going on to deny that anyone stained her soul with immorality, leaving her ready for Hell. The parents insist that they always loved her, and that they did whatever was best for her. They have a clear memory of her childhood.

THEMES

UNQUESTIONED PARENTAL AUTHORITY

In "We Remember Your Childhood Well," parents deny a series of accusations leveled against them by their (presumably now-adult) child. Rather than asking questions, expressing remorse, or acknowledging their child's point of view, the parents instead choose to flat-out deny their child's experience, insisting only their own memories are incorrect. In this way, the poem implicitly critiques the parents' insistence on their authority over their child's, suggesting that their dismissive and domineering tone does more harm than good by cutting off communication and the possibility of reconciling.

The poem opens with the parents denying accusations made against them by their adult child. The parents begin by saying, "Nobody hurt you." This implies that they have been accused of either hurting their child or of allowing someone else to do so (the degree of hurt isn't indicated; the poem is purposefully vague).

Likewise, when the parents insist that "the secret police of [their child's] childhood was older and wiser" than the child was, the reader is able to infer that the now-adult child has accused the parents of being authoritarian and covert, controlling and secretive. And, indeed, the parents' present tone supports this accusation of control and secrecy. By insisting on the accuracy of their own memories and the inaccuracy of the child's, the parents leave no room for nuance or the possibility of mutual understanding. By presenting themselves as authorities, they deny their child's right to their own version of what happened, and more importantly, their refusal to engage does real damage by disallowing anyone to move forward and heal from real or perceived past harms.

The parents move back and forth between flat-out denial of events ("That didn't occur") and dismissive explanations for why the child remembered things differently ("The bad man on the moors / was only a movie you saw"). They also claim that the child couldn't have "cared less" about something the parents did. In other words, the parents see themselves as authorities not just in terms of what did or didn't happen, but also in terms of their child's feelings regarding those events.

The parents claim to have the "facts" as opposed to the "impressions" remembered by the child. This juxtaposition of childhood memory with adult authority is meant to convince the adult child that the parents had good reasons for everything that they did—reasons that weren't divulged to the child because they were not as "old," "wise," or "big" as their

parents.

They also tell their child that "There was none but yourself to blame if it ended in tears." This statement not only puts the blame on the child for any hurt endured, but it also cuts off any attempt at communication. Their child is then left with not only the hurt of the event itself, but also a sense of responsibility for it having happened.

The parents tell their child that "The whole thing is inside your head." In other words: the child's memories and feelings aren't valid. This is meant to undermine the child's authority over her own experience, rendering her suspicious of her own memories and perceptions, and preventing any potential reconciliation or healing. Unyielding parental authority in the poem is thus presented as both cruel and dangerous.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-18

DENIAL AND SELF-DELUSION

In addition to critiquing absolute parental authority, the poem also explores the mechanisms of self-delusion and denial. The speaker's parents wish to convince their child that her youth was happy and that her recollections of unhappiness are simply untrue. The parents' unwillingness to compromise or consider the child's point of view casts the parents in a suspicious light, however; it seems that their perception of themselves as good and loving parents is more important to them than their child's need for clarity and accountability. In this way, the poem implies that the parents' denial is not so much an attempt to convince the child that she had a happy childhood, but rather self-delusion driven by guilt and fear: they don't want to have to see themselves through their child's eyes.

Throughout the poem, the parents try to convince their adult child that her painful recollections are false and that she in fact had a happy childhood. The parents refuse to genuinely reflect on or engage with their child's accusations, instead claiming that the child's "questions were answered fully" and going on to point out a photograph of the family "smiling and waving" as evidence of how happy the child once was.

They also tell their child that they never sent her away, and that the event in question was simply "an extra holiday." The parents clearly want their child to believe that this decision was made in the interest of her happiness and not for the parents' own benefit—something that seems more than a bit suspicious in light of the child's earlier mention of someone "turn[ing] off the light and argu[ing] with someone else all night." The child wants answers for why she was sent away; instead the parents are insisting she wasn't sent away at all, but treated to an extra vacation with people she "seemed to like."

It's clear from the parents' lack of questions or concessions that they are not interested in the child's perspective, and readers might read the parents' rigid insistence on their own recollections as evidence of guilt—of them not wanting to face the past in its entirety. Their declaration of love at the end of the poem thus feels less reassuring than defensive, as ultimately their perception of themselves as good and loving parents seems more important to them than their child's need for acknowledgement of what she experienced.

Tellingly, the only question the parents ask throughout the entirety of the poem is a rhetorical one: "What does it matter now?" The parents want to believe that despite their child's anger and hurt, the child is in fact unharmed. Their question isn't meant to be answered but is rather meant to imply that in fact none of it matters now; all this dredging up of the past is unnecessary.

To that end, the parents' repetitiveness is almost desperate. They say "no, no, nobody left the skidmarks of sin / on your soul." This repeated denial feels less like certainty and more like a plea not to see what they're being asked to acknowledge, which is something that is potentially quite dark (the child presumably having claimed to have been "left wide open for Hell") and would be painful for them to recognize.

Ultimately, the poem implies that the parents wish to control the way their child thinks and feels about her own childhood because they don't want to take responsibility for having hurt her. They would rather their child believe she misremembered and misunderstood everything than admit to any nuance or possibility of failure on their own part. And only by misleading their child are they able to continue their own self-delusion.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-18

PERCEPTION AND MEMORY

"We Remember Your Childhood Well" illustrates the way people can have vastly different recollections of the same event. This is especially true for parents and children, as parents often have access to more information and a broader understanding of what's going on beneath the surface of things. Children are highly perceptive, however; despite their lack of understanding, they often see and experience more of what's going on in a given situation than parents realize. The poem never lands on any objective "truth" of what actually occurred in this particular family's past, but rather focuses on the contrasting experiences of the parents and child, suggesting the importance of simply recognizing these differences in perception and memory.

Early in the poem, the parents respond to their child's memory of somebody "turn[ing] off the light and argu[ing] / with

someone else all night" by saying that it never happened. While the reader can't be certain of whose memory is correct, the parents' following claim that "The bad man on the moors / was only a movie [the child] saw" throws their own memory into question, as the events implied by the child could very conceivably be in reference to the real and widely televised Moors Murders.

It's easy to imagine that if the parents had been aware of the events surrounding these murders at the time, then they really would have locked the door and perhaps tried to conceal the events from their child to keep her from being frightened. The poem is purposefully ambiguous regarding whose memory is actually correct; what is important is the *difference* in their recollections.

Later, the child seems to recall being "forced" to go somewhere she didn't want to go. The parents claim that "the whole thing is inside [the child's] head." They have proof, or so they think: they point to photographs from that day when everyone, including the child, is "smiling and waving."

While this doesn't necessarily prove that the child wanted to go, it does throw the child's memory of the day into question. Yet perhaps something happened later in the day that spoiled her memory of the event, or perhaps the parents are confusing two different days. Ultimately it doesn't matter who is right and who is wrong; it matters that they are unable to talk about the fact that they remember it differently.

When the parents claim that the child only has impressions while they themselves "have the facts," they're arguing that they have a broader understanding of what was going on due to cognitive differences between adults and children, and due to the fact that they were in charge—they "called the tune." The child's memories may not be as clear due to her age at the time of the events in question and limited awareness of the context of any given situation.

But what the parents fail to acknowledge is that facts aren't the only form of truth; the child's "impressions"—how she felt and what she believed—are also worthy of consideration. The poem implies the importance of acknowledging these differing perceptions and memories, suggesting that there is no one authority when it comes to the past, but rather the ability to reconcile different points of view.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-18

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-2

Nobody hurt you. ...
... else all night.

The poem begins with two negative statements: "Nobody hurt you" and "Nobody turned off the light and argued / with somebody else all night." Because these statements are phrased in the negative, it's safe to assume that the person being addressed by the speaker has accused or at least suggested what the statements are negating: that someone hurt them, and that someone turned off the light and argued with somebody else all night.

This opening, combined with the title—"We Remember Your Childhood Well"—pretty quickly establishes this poem as a conversation between a parent or parents and a child, the latter's childhood being the object of discussion.

The poem also quickly establishes its tone (i.e., its attitude or character) as being rather vague and defensive. The use of anaphora is effective: the word "nobody" is oddly nonspecific. One can imagine that the child either accused the parents of hurting her or of allowing her to be hurt by a specific other person, yet the speaker doesn't respond by saying "I didn't hurt you" or "we didn't hurt you" or "so-and-so didn't hurt you." Instead, there is this vague, repetitive rebuttal: nobody did this.

This allows the speaker to repeat the things the child is remembering so that the poem reveals the child's perspective without actually giving her a voice. The perspective of the poem is the "We" from the title. By saying "Nobody hurt you" instead of "We didn't hurt you," the speaker also seems to assert a kind of omniscient authority—not only are they certain that they didn't hurt the child, but they are confident (or at least professing confidence) that no one else did.

The internal rhyme between "light" in the first line and "night" in the second is a subtle way of juxtaposing (or highlighting the contrast between) the parents' point of view and the child's. It is reminiscent of the phrase "like night and day"—in other words, their perspectives couldn't be more different.

LINES 2-3

The bad man ...
... locked the door.

The third sentence of the poem ("The bad man on the moors / was only a movie you saw."), is enjambed across lines 2-3. This sentence breaks from the pattern created by the use of anaphora (that repetition of "nobody" at the beginnings of the first two sentences). However, it is immediately followed by another sentence beginning with the word "nobody" ("Nobody locked the door."), and so even though it is interrupted, the anaphora still overwhelms the first stanza, establishing a tone of insistent denial.

"The bad man on the moors" is an allusion to the 1965-1966 Moors Murders trial, in which Ian Brady and Myra Hindley were accused and eventually convicted of murdering several young boys and girls and burying them in the moors (essentially

fields) near Manchester, England. This case was notorious and widely televised at the time, and it is worth noting that Duffy herself would have been around 10 years old at the time of the trial; she and her family had moved from Scotland to England only a few years before.

The presence of this allusion undermines the parents' trustworthiness to some degree as they claim that the child's memory "was only a movie [she] saw" when in fact the reader knows the Moors Murders to have actually taken place. However, that doesn't necessarily mean the child's memory is correct or that the parents are even lying—they themselves may have forgotten the trial, or confused it with a movie themselves. Regardless of whose memory is correct (perhaps no one's is), the speaker (i.e., the parents) maintains authority through their insistence that the child's memory is wrong.

The end rhyme between "moors" and "door" draws attention to the relationship between the moors, where the speaker claims there was no "bad man" even while the reader is aware that a series of grotesque murders occurred there, and a door the child remembers someone locking, something the speaker claims never happened. In both cases the objective truth is shrouded and the parents' denial is insistent.

LINES 4-6

Your questions were ...
... fire. Anyone's guess.

Although the second stanza discontinues the use of anaphora (the repetition of "nobody" at the beginning of sentences) established in the first stanza, it maintains the tone, or attitude: the speaker is still firmly and authoritatively shutting down the child's attempts at communication.

Instead of asking clarifying questions or even acknowledging the child's point of view, the speaker claims that the child's "questions were answered fully," a response meant to distract her from her current search for answers. Even more firmly the parents proclaim, "No. That didn't occur." The shortness of this reply discourages any attempt at further communication. While the event in question is unclear, it's evident that the parents don't want to get into the specifics.

Why they don't want to get into the specifics, however, is left ambiguous. Because they have something to hide? Because they simply don't want to admit they might be wrong? Or because they've been through this a hundred times before? This is left up to the reader to interpret.

The imagery in this stanza is also ambiguous. The speaker claims that the child "couldn't sing" and "cared less." They describe the moment in question as "a blur, a Film Fun / laughing itself to death in the coal fire." It is unclear whether the image of the Film Fun (a comic book) burning in the fire is a literal image (i.e., that this is the "moment" being referenced, the moment the child is remembering as painful but the parents are saying was no big deal), or if the image is metaphorical, meant to figuratively describe the "blurriness" of the moment in question.

Because the passage is so ambiguous, what stands out most isn't who is right and who is wrong, but rather the disconnect between these two experiences of the same moment. The description of the Film Fun "laughing itself to death" is a subtle oxymoron; the pairing of "laughing" and "death" once again draws attention to the two very different perspectives at play in this poem.

The use of rhyme also continues to play an important part in the second stanza. The internal rhyme between "occur" at the end of line 4 and "blur" towards the end of line 5 speaks to the fuzziness of the moment in question. The parents claim to have clear knowledge that whatever the child is remembering here "didn't occur," yet the speaker immediately turns around and admits that the moment is "a blur."

Likewise, the rhyme between "less" in the middle of line 5 and "guess" at the end of line 6 highlights an almost identical contradiction. The parents claim that the child couldn't have "cared less" about the event in question, yet they conclude the stanza with the phrase "Anyone's guess," which is the equivalent of saying "Who knows?"

LINES 7-9

Nobody forced you. ...
... inside your head.

The third stanza begins with the word "nobody," echoing the anaphora from the first stanza. The speaker's quick progression from "Nobody forced you" to "You wanted to go" to "Begged" could be read as exaggeration; did the child really *beg* to go, or did the parents just interpret her choosing a dress as enthusiasm? Again, the objective truth is inaccessible, and the reader is left to guess who is exaggerating and who is telling the truth.

In some ways, the third stanza stands out from the others, most notably in its absence of rhyme. There is a somewhat more casual feel to the stanza because of this absence, and also because of the introduction of photographs in which the parents and child both are seen "smiling and waving, younger."

The somewhat sinister imagery from the first two stanzas is at least partially alleviated by this conventional, familial scene: a family smiling and waving for the camera. The parents' attempt to convince the child that she was not unhappy on this given day feel a little more genuine as the reader pictures them digging around for the pictures, handing them to the child, pointing out the smiles. One can believe that even if the child has an unhappy memory of this day, perhaps the parents were unaware of it.

Unfortunately, this moment that might have allowed for genuine communication and reconciliation between the

parents and child is quickly undermined; the parents treat the photograph as evidence which proves their child's feelings unfounded, claiming "[t]he whole thing is inside [her] head."

This return to positioning themselves as authorities of their child's experience has a distancing effect. Whatever good feelings might have been evoked by the photograph are replaced by this rather hostile accusation that the child's unhappiness could only have been imagined.

LINE 10

What you recall ... have the facts.

Stanza 4 begins by juxtaposing the child's "impressions" with the parents' "facts." This juxtaposition is meant to emphasize the parents' authority; "facts" are indisputable, whereas "impressions" are up to interpretation.

While it is true that the parents' likely have a better understanding of the context surrounding the events in question (and probably even have clearer, more coherent memories due to their more fully developed brains), their swift dismissal of the child's "impressions" is misguided at best, as truth is often more complicated than facts alone. At worst, it is intentionally manipulative and meant to obscure something the parents don't want to discuss.

The phrasing of this sentence is also telling, as the parents seem to suggest their own memories are crystal clear as opposed to the "impressions" that the child "recalls." Yet it has already been established earlier in the poem that the parents' memories are not entirely trustworthy—not necessarily because they're lying, but because time erodes *everyone's* memories, not just children's.

A mutual understanding of the past is best arrived at through communication and the sharing and comparison of perspectives, experiences, memories. The parents, however, insist on having the final word. And one of the biggest ways that they position themselves as an authority is by sticking together. Regardless of whether the speaker is both parents or actually just one parent speaking on behalf of both, the use of "we" is meant to overpower the child by virtue of the fact that the child is outnumbered.

LINES 10-12

We called the ...
... Boom. Boom. Boom.

The speaker continues to present themselves as the authority on the childhood in question, saying "We called the tune." In other words, the parents were in control; they were never confused about what was happening in their child's life because they were the ones calling the shots.

The child, it seems, has likened the parents to "the secret police." This metaphor implies that the child finds her parents to be authoritative, controlling, secretive—that she suspect the parents of keeping something from her.

The parents respond to this accusation by saying that they "were older and wiser" than the child, as well as bigger. These comparative adjectives express the parents' greater knowledge and experience of the world, implying that they know what is best for their child. However, the addition of the description "bigger" also implies a kind of protectiveness toward the child that perhaps supports her sense of being lied to—albeit quite possibly for her own good, at least from the parents' perspective.

The poem takes another interesting turn in line 12, however, when the speaker tells the child to "Call back the sound of [the parents'] voices." This is followed by the use of epizeuxis, with the speaker seeming to attribute to these voices a repetitive booming.

This is a strange moment in the poem. The onomatopoeia of the word "boom" and it being repeated three times calls to mind someone banging on the door to the child's memory, as if the parents' voices from all those years ago are demanding to be let in. It's a surprisingly harsh moment of auditory imagery and a rare instance where the poem tells the reader more about the child's perception of the parents than it does the parent's perception of themselves.

This moment almost feels as if it could be spoken by someone other than her parents; it almost makes more sense to think of the child saying lines 11-12 ("The secret police [...] Boom. Boom. Boom.") to herself rather than the parents referring to themselves in the third person. However, the ambiguity of the syntax (the arrangement of words) only emphasizes the continued ambiguity of the poem.

Regardless of what the "Boom. Boom. Boom." refers to in a literal sense, it contributes to the poem's rather oppressive atmosphere. This is not a communicative and open family. There seems to be real harm in the authoritative attitude of the parents, in their secrecy and desire to control the child's feelings.

The assonance of /oo/ sounds throughout the stanza has a visceral effect that is further amplified by the epizeuxis and onomatopoeia. By the end of this stanza, it seems very unlikely that the poem will result in any kind of mutual understanding or reconciliation. In this way, the "Boom. Boom. Boom." could almost be the sound of the coffin of this familial relationship being nailed shut.

LINES 13-15

Nobody sent you ...
... ended in tears.

The fifth stanza again begins with the word "nobody," as the parents deny that the child was ever "sent away." Rather, they insist that the child's memory is of "an extra holiday," one with "people [the child] seemed to like."

The word "seem" does a lot of work here; though the child may have *appeared* to be having a good time, it's possible that she wasn't. It's equally possible the parents never had any clue that their child was unhappy; they didn't ask.

In this moment, the poem presents the possibility that both the parents' and the child's perspectives of what happened are equally correct/incorrect. In other words, perhaps neither party is lying or concealing the truth, and instead there has been some fundamental misunderstanding between them.

However, as has become the pattern for this poem, the parents refuse to acknowledge the possibility of any failure on their own part, instead claiming that the people the child stayed with "were firm, but there was nothing to fear." While this statement might sound assuring, the following is anything but.

The parents insist that "if it ended it tears," there was no one to blame other than the child. In other words, if something happened which hurt the child, the child needs to accept responsibility for it having happened—she brought it on herself. This is a harsh statement, one that undoubtedly alienates the child from her parents, discouraging her from trying to communicate any further.

Some word choices in this stanza are also curious—for instance, the notion of "an extra holiday." The parents seem to want the child to believe this stay was some kind of special treat, yet it raises the question: for whom? The phrase "people / you seemed to like" also suggests that the people the child stayed with weren't family or friends; so who were they?

The child is clearly perplexed, feeling that she was sent away—as punishment? Or so the parents could get some space? The latter certainly echoes the opening image of someone "turn[ing] off the light and argued[ing] / with someone else all night." There is again the sense that though the parents might not be exactly lying, they aren't exactly telling the truth either—at least not the whole truth. But because the poem is told from the parents' perspective and not objectively, the reader cannot be sure.

LINE 16

What does it matter now?

The final stanza begins with a rhetorical question. The point of the question "What does it matter now?" is precisely that it *doesn't* matter; the parents see no point in rehashing all of this ancient history, as it won't change anything or do anyone any good in the present.

And therein lies the problem, the poem implies: while talking about the past can't *change* the past, it can change the way that people *understand* the past, and therefore the way that they engage with the present. To the child in need of closure, it matters. And so it should matter to the parents as well, as the present relationship between them and their child is undoubtedly shaped by everyone's perceptions of past events.

This presence of a rhetorical question this close to the end of the poem is also telling because it is the only question that appears in the poem, and it is not a real question—a question driven by curiosity, a desire to hear someone else's point of view, or a desire to connect and reach a place of mutual understanding. Had the parents asked real questions at any point in the poem, it would have drastically shifted the tone, or attitude, of the poem. Instead, the question comes across as performative, meant to persuade, and more specifically, what it's trying to persuade the child of is that the thing she is still trying to understand and still experiencing pain around doesn't matter. It's a dismissal disguised as a question.

LINES 16-17

No, no, nobody ...
... open for Hell.

The next sentence is either the darkest and most telling in the poem, or the most humorous, depending on readers' interpretation:

> [...] No, no, nobody left the skidmarks of sin
> on your soul and laid you wide open for Hell. [...]

On the one hand, the child is potentially implying something very sinister. The use of the words "sin" and "laid you wide" and "Hell," combined with the child's belief that she was "sent away" to live with someone she feared, could be interpreted to have heartbreaking implications, perhaps suggesting that she was physically hurt or molested.

In such an interpretation, the parents' repetition of the word "no" at the beginning of the sentence feels like an almost frantic denial, an unwillingness to see something that is right in front of them. The allusion to the Moors Murders early in the poem lends itself to a darker reading of the poem, one in which adults are capable of doing significant harm to children.

At the same time, and in keeping with the poem's loyalty to ambiguity, this passage could easily be read as hyperbole—a kind of dramatic exaggeration of whatever the child is claiming to remember. In this interpretation of the poem, it's easy to imagine that the word "skidmarks" is meant to be read humorously and that the parents are overstating the child's accusation in an attempt to add some levity to the conversation, or to illustrate how dramatic she's being. In this case, the "no, no" at the beginning of the sentence might read less like frantic denial and more like an offhand kind of dismissal—as in *no, no, you're being silly*.

The beauty of this sentence is that it doesn't land on one side or the other—it can be understood as evidence of the poem's seriousness, the seriousness of the child's accusations, or it can be understood to introduce humor and lightness, an admission that kids do sometimes blow things out of proportion. The poem is richer for its ambiguity, and also the ambiguity of *what*

happened doesn't take away from the poem's implications regarding the damage caused by unquestioned parental authority.

LINES 17-18

You were loved. ...
... your childhood well.

The final four sentences of the poem shift from the parents' denial of the child's memories to what can perhaps be seen as the motivation for their denial: their love for their child, which they feel is beyond questioning.

Here the poem plays into the common understanding that parents know what is best for their child, or that their decisions are at least made with their child's best interest in mind. And there is something inherently believable about the parents' claim that the child was "loved. Always."

Yet of course parents don't always do what is best for their child—sometimes out of inexplicable malice or selfishness, but most often out of ignorance. The poem points to the possibility that the parents loved their child "always" *and* also failed her in some significant way. It points to the possibility that they genuinely did their best *and* still the child was hurt, either by them or by someone else.

It also points to the possibility that the parents didn't always act in the child's best interest, but that it is important to them that their child perceives them to have been good and loving parents. It points to the possibility that the truth lies somewhere in the middle, that nobody's memory is infallible, and yet, for some reason, the parents need the child to believe that they are the authority, not only of the events of their child's youth, but also of their child's feelings and perceptions.

The speaker ends with a reiteration of the poem's title, "We remember your childhood well." This ending feels closed, not up for discussion, and notably, the final word of the poem comprises half of yet another internal rhyme, the poem's last, this time between "Hell" and "well." This pairing seems to point to the continued distance between perspectives; reconciliation of the two seems unlikely.

POETIC DEVICES

ANAPHORA

The poem's use of anaphora adds authority and a sense of exacerbated insistence to the speaker's tone. That anaphora itself is subtle, however; the most commonly repeated word ("Nobody") is only used a total of six times (so once per stanza, on average), and after the first two times, which happen successively, the anaphora is interrupted by sentences and even entire stanzas in which anaphora doesn't appear. (In fact, one might argue that after the first stanza, the recurrence of the word "Nobody" is just regular repetition and not anaphora at all.)

Despite the anaphora only being used heavily in the first stanza of the poem, the effect of it is huge. By front-loading the poem with the repetition of the word "nobody," the poet sets up an expectation for this kind of insistent denial that the reader feels echoing throughout the rest of the poem, even though sentences vary more often than not.

The repetition of the word "Nobody" has somewhat of a haunting effect as well. The parents deny the accuracy of their child's memories, but rather than saying "we didn't do that" or "so-and-so didn't do that," they use the word "Nobody." Somehow this phrasing is more ambiguous, more evasive than if they were to say "I didn't do that" or "that's not how I remember it."

There are also smaller moments of anaphora with the repetition of "we," as in:

> [...] we have the facts. We called the tune.

And:

> We did what was best. We remember your childhood well.

This anaphora places repeated emphasis on the parents' point of view and authority.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Nobody," "Nobody"
- **Line 3:** "Nobody"
- **Line 7:** "Nobody"
- **Line 10:** "we," "We"
- **Line 13:** "Nobody"
- **Line 16:** "No, no, nobody"
- **Line 18:** "We," "We"

JUXTAPOSITION

The poem uses juxtaposition (which in many moments dovetails with the even more specific device of antithesis) to highlight the differing memories and perspectives of the parents and child. In line 7 ("Nobody forced you [...] Begged. You chose"), for example, the speaker contrasts the child's memory of being "forced" with the parents' assertion that the child "wanted to go that day. Begged." The line ends with the words "You chose," suggesting the exact opposite of the child's memory.

This move is repeated in line 10, when the speaker says to the child, "What you recall are impressions; we have the facts." The juxtaposition of impressions with facts forces a comparison; the parents want the child to accept that her feelings and perceptions are flimsy in comparison to the parents'

knowledge. By forcing a comparison, they distract from the possibility of nuance, the possibility that the truth might lie somewhere in between their knowledge and the child's memories.

This happens again at the end of the poem in lines 16-17 ("What does it [...] You were loved."), when the speaker juxtaposes the child's claim of being "laid [...] wide open for Hell" with their assertion that the child was always loved. By forcing a comparison between the child's accusation and their own insistence on having done what was best, the parents again fail to leave room for the possibility that they could have loved their child *and* failed them in some significant way. The harsh contrast of these juxtapositions reflects the black-and-white attitude of their thinking.

The poem also employs an oxymoron in line 6 with the phrase "laughing itself to death." This more specific form of juxtaposition is particularly compelling here because the image of the Film Fun "laughing itself to death" is suggestive of the very nuance the parents are so quick to discard. The phrase seems to indicate that something can *appear* one way while it *feels* quite the opposite, something that may have been true for this child in regard to these specific memories.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "laughing itself to death"
- **Line 7:** "Nobody forced you. You wanted to go that day. Begged. "
- **Line 10:** "What you recall are impressions; we have the facts."
- **Lines 16-17:** "No, no, nobody left the skidmarks of sin / on your soul and laid you wide open for Hell. You were loved."

ALLUSION

The poem alludes to the 1965-1966 trial of the Moors Murderers, one of the most notorious murder cases in England's history. The murderers, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, raped and murdered multiple children and teenagers over the course of several years, and buried their bodies in the moors (uncultivated land) near Manchester, England. The trial was widely televised and the murderers remained very present in the public imagination even after being imprisoned with life sentences.

This does several things for the poem. To begin with, it offers a reference point in the real world that the reader can use to compare to the events being contested in the poem. Although the reader doesn't know anything about the childhood in question—where it took place, how old this person is now—they do have access to this bit of context. Since Duffy herself would have been around 10 years old at the time of the trials, and since she grew up in England, it's safe to say that the child in this poem has some things in common with the poet, even if it is not necessarily autobiographical in nature.

The parents' assertion that "The bad man on the moors / was only a movie" casts some doubt on the reliability of the parents' memory and/or motives. Despite having presumably been adults at the time of the Moors Murders trial, they either don't recall it or don't want their child to know that they do. Either way, this makes the reader wonder if the parents' version of events is in fact entirely accurate.

At the same time, access to this context allows the reader to see the potential holes in the child's recollection as well. For instance, the child only seems to recall a singular "bad mad," whilst the Moors Murders were committed by a man and a woman. Ultimately the context, like everything else in the poem, blurs the reader's ability to be certain about anything that actually happened.

The allusion to such notoriously heinous crimes also adds a sinister layer to the poem that might not exist otherwise. Once the reader is aware of the details of the Moors Murders case, it's hard not to read something quite serious into words like "hurt," "forced," "fear," "sin," and "Hell." At the same time, it's such an extreme case that one might imagine a child hearing about it and incorporating it into her imagination in a way that she later might not be able to distinguish from facts.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "The bad man on the moors"

PARALLELISM

Parallelism in this poem frequently overlaps with the use of anaphora. In the first stanza, the repetition of "Nobody" is followed by parallel grammatical structures: a past a tense verb ("hurt," "turned off," "locked") and an object ("you," "the light," "the door"). This particular grammatical structure recurs multiple times throughout the poem, contributing to the poem's sense of insistence and denial.

In line 8, the parents offer pictures as evidence of their child's enthusiasm for the day in question, saying "look at you. Look at us all." The parallelism here underlines the logic of the parents, who are looking not only at their child in the photograph to see if she was happy, but also at past versions of themselves. This seems to suggest that the parents are recalling their own happiness, or are even just attached to the image of themselves as a happy family.

Later in the poem, the parents claim that their child wasn't sent away, but was rather enjoying "an extra holiday" with people they describe as "firm." In lines 14-15 they claim that "there was nothing to fear. / There was none but yourself to blame if it ended in tears." The parallel grammatical structures between "there was nothing to fear" and "There was none but yourself"

implies that as far as the parents are concerned, at least in regard to this particular memory, the child is the architect of her own suffering.

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Nobody hurt you. Nobody turned off the light"
- **Line 3:** "Nobody locked the door."
- **Line 7:** "Nobody forced you"
- **Line 8:** "look at you. Look at us all"
- **Line 10:** "we have the facts. We called the tune."
- **Lines 11-12:** "wiser than you, bigger / than you"
- **Line 13:** "Nobody sent you away."
- **Lines 14-15:** "there was nothing to fear. / There was none but yourself"

EPIZEUXIS

At the end of the fourth stanza, the speaker tells the child to "Call back the sound of [the parents'] voices." This imperative statement is followed by an instant of epizeuxis, in this case the word "Boom" repeated three times in succession.

The reader imagines the child summoning her parents' voices with these three loud booms, which reflects the notion that the child thinks of her parents as "the secret police of [her] childhood." The booming is not only repetitious, either: the word "boom" is an example of onomatopoeia, meaning that the word evokes the very sound it describes. This seems to point to the child's perception of her parents as authoritative—it calls to mind an image of someone banging on a door, or shots being fired.

It is also vague, however; the reader may have a visceral reaction to the epizeuxis and the onomatopoeia, but it happens at a subconscious level—it's difficult to say exactly what the speaker intends to convey. There is even some ambiguity as to who the speaker is in this moment. While the poem is told from the parents' perspective, lines 11-12 ("The secret police [...] Boom. Boom. Boom.") are somewhat odd syntactically, and could be interpreted as the child's own voice interrupting the parental monologue.

There's another brief moment of epizeuxis in line 16, with the repetition of "No, no." Here this draws attention to the parents' negation of their child's memories.

Where Epizeuxis appears in the poem:

- **Line 12:** "Boom. Boom. Boom."
- **Line 16:** "No, no"

ALLITERATION

Alliteration is a subtle presence in the poem. The brief moments of alliteration draw readers' attention to certain words and phrases and also help to emphasize the parents' emphatic, dismissive tone.

In the first stanza, for example, note how the alliterative /m/ sounds of "man on the moors" and "movie." This connects the words, emphasizing that parents' insistence that the child's fear is something irrational, a mere memory from a film.

In the second stanza, a handful of sharp /k/ sounds suggests the parents' prickliness. This sound appears in "questions," "couldn't," "cared," and "coal." There's alliteration on the /f/ sound here as well, which combines with broader consonance in "Film Fun / laughing itself to death in the coal fire." The poem is pretty straightforward in its language, and this sudden surge of elevated, poetic sound pulls readers' attention to this sinister phrase.

In the final stanza, alliteration of the /n/ sound adds insistence to the parents' negation of their child's memories: "[...] now? No, no, nobody," the speaker says. Finally, the hissing sibilance of "skidmarks," "sin," and "soul" makes the phrase itself feel sinister, perhaps pushing readers to consider what might be implied by the child's accusation.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "man," "moors"
- **Line 3:** "movie"
- **Line 4:** "questions," "fully"
- **Line 5:** "couldn't," "cared," "Film Fun"
- **Line 6:** "coal," "fire"
- **Line 12:** "back," "Boom. Boom. Boom."
- **Line 14:** "firm," "fear"
- **Line 16:** "now," "No, no, nobody," "skidmarks," "sin"
- **Line 17:** "soul"
- **Line 18:** "We," "what was," "We," "well"

ASSONANCE

Assonance imbues the poem with a sing-song, almost mocking sense of melody. The poem's subject is serious, at least to the child, but all this assonance makes things feel mocking and light-hearted—suggesting that the parents are exasperated and don't take their child's complaints seriously.

Examples of assonance include "hurt" and "turned" in line 1, "less [...] itself to death [...] guess" in lines 5-6, "thing is inside" in line 9, "have the facts" in line 10, and "secret police" in line 11. Such moments create the sensation that the parents have heard these complaints before, and are rehashing old arguments.

Assonance also draws attention to specific phrases in the poem, such as "skidmarks of sin." Here, assonance and sibilance make this sinister phrase stand out for the reader, pushing them to question what, exactly, the child is accusing the speaker of here.

Finally, assonance also combines with consonance in the poem to create many internal rhymes, furthering the poem's mocking

tone. For example, pairs of words such as "light" and "night" in the first stanza use combinations of assonant and consonant sounds—the long /i/ and /t/ sounds, respectively—to achieve rhyme. And in the final stanza, the short /eh/ sound repeats in "Hell," "best," "remember," and "well"—with "Hell" and "well" creating another moment of rhyme that suggests a disturbing contrast between the parents' memory and the "Hell" that their child remembers having experienced.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "hurt," "turned," "light"
- **Line 2:** "night," "moors"
- **Line 3:** "door"
- **Line 4:** "occur"
- **Line 5:** "less," "blur"
- **Line 6:** "itself," "death," "guess"
- **Line 7:** "Begged"
- **Line 8:** "dress"
- **Line 9:** "thing is inside"
- **Line 10:** "have," "facts"
- **Line 11:** "secret police"
- **Line 13:** "away," "holiday," "people"
- **Line 14:** "seemed," "fear"
- **Line 15:** "tears"
- **Line 16:** "No," "no," "nobody," "skidmarks," "sin"
- **Line 17:** "soul," "open," "Hell"
- **Line 18:** "best," "remember," "well"

METAPHOR

In the second stanza, the speaker denies that something ever happened, saying it "didn't occur." Soon afterward, they describe the moment in question as "a blur, a Film Fun / laughing itself to death in the coal fire." While it is somewhat ambiguous whether the image of the burning comic book is meant to be a literal description of something that happened or a metaphorical way of describing the inaccessibility of this particular memory, it's worth thinking about how it might function as a metaphor.

The image of a book disintegrating amidst flames seems to suggest that there's no real way for the parents or the child to know for certain what it is they're looking at—or trying to remember—because it is out of reach, blurry, the specifics curling into ash. The phrase "laughing itself to death" is also a kind of oxymoron—that is, it's composed of two contradictory ideas. It suggests that things might appear one way while the effect is quite the opposite.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker refers to "the secret police of [the child's] childhood." This seems to be a comparison that the child has made, illuminating her perception of the parents as authoritative and secretive. The parents defend themselves against this accusation with the assertion that they had their child's best interests in mind; as adults, they were "older and wiser," not to mention "bigger."

In the final stanza, the parents deny another claim made by the child, this one being that someone "left the skidmarks of sin / on [her] soul and left [her] wide open for Hell." This language is very clearly metaphorical; the reader doesn't know what the specific "skidmarks of sin" are, but they understand that the child feels whatever happened made her feel soiled, impure, and open to "Hell" (i.e., to pain, punishment, or feeling cast out). Of course, keeping in mind the poem's attachment to ambiguity, the heightened language of this particular metaphor could also be read as hyperbolic—the parents are perhaps exaggerating whatever the child said in an effort to emphasize the outrageous nature of her accusation.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** "The moment's a blur, a Film Fun / laughing itself to death in the coal fire."
- **Line 11:** "The secret police of your childhood"
- **Lines 16-17:** "nobody left the skidmarks of sin / on your soul and laid you wide open for Hell."

IMAGERY

Part of what makes the poem so ambiguous is a lack of clear imagery; there are very few moments that actually appeal to the reader's senses. And the imagery in the first stanza of the poem is tricky because it's *negative* imagery—that is, the parents are describing something which they claim never happened. Yet because they describe it, the reader has access to what the child claims to remember. So even though the speaker claims that "Nobody turned off the light and argued / with somebody else all night," the reader sees and hears just that—a light switching off and the sound of people arguing—even if they don't have someone to whom they can attribute these actions. Likewise, the parents claim that "Nobody locked the door," but the reader is likely to hear the sound of a door locking in response to this description.

In lines 5-6, the speaker describes the moment in question as "a blur, a Film Fun / laughing itself to death in the coal fire." This is another example of ambiguous imagery, this time because it's not clear whether the burning Film Fun is the subject of this particular memory (i.e., the thing the child is still upset about), or if it is meant to be a metaphorical description of the moment (i.e., the moment is akin to this image of a comic book "laughing itself to death"). In other words, is this a literal memory, or is the imagery meant to describe the feeling of something the reader can't see, the blurry moment in question?

In the third stanza, the reader is given the most straightforward imagery in the poem: photographs that the parents offer as evidence of the child's eagerness to "go that day." They describe the picture, saying: "Look at us all, / smiling and waving, younger." The description is detailed enough for the reader to

see some version of what the parents want the child to see, but vague enough that they can't know for sure that what they're seeing is evidence of what it's supposed to be evidence of: the family's happiness, and in particular, the happiness of this particular childhood.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "Nobody turned off the light and argued / with somebody else all night."
- **Line 3:** "Nobody locked the door."
- **Lines 5-6:** " The moment's a blur, a Film Fun / laughing itself to death in the coal fire. "
- **Lines 8-9:** "Here are the pictures, look at you. Look at us all, / smiling and waving, younger. "
- **Line 12:** "the sound of their voices. Boom. Boom. Boom."

ENJAMBMENT

Only about a third of the lines in this poem are enjambed; the rest are end-stopped.

The first stanza is the only one which contains more than one enjambed line. In this case, the first two lines are enjambed while the third is end-stopped:

> [...] Nobody turned off the light and argued
> with somebody else all night. The bad man on the moors
> was only a movie you saw [...] door.

The effect of enjambment in these lines is that emphasis falls on the words "argued" and "moors" even as the syntax, or arrangement of words, pushes the reader to keep going beyond the end of the line. Enjambment also determines the placement of rhyme; in this stanza, there is both internal and end rhyme due to the placement of line breaks. Because the rhyme between "light" and "night" occurs within the middle of lines rather than at the ends, it is more subtle; the end-rhyme between "moors" and "doors" is more emphasized because of its placement.

This poem is mostly composed of short, declarative sentences, but the lines themselves are long lines—meaning lines often contain *multiple* sentences. The poet is strategic about not letting too many end-stopped sentences pile up, as this would have a flattening effect on the language.

Consider, for example, if line 11 ("The secret police of your childhood were older and wiser than you, bigger") was end-stopped rather than enjambed. The poet's choice to enjamb line 11 so that it ends on the word "bigger" not only emphasizes the differences between the parents and the child.

This being said, the majority of the poem *is* end-stopped, which contributes to the parents' authoritative tone: as far as they're concerned, their version of events is the only version.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "argued / with"
- **Lines 2-3:** "moors / was"
- **Lines 5-6:** "Fun / laughing"
- **Lines 7-8:** "chose / the "
- **Lines 11-12:** "bigger / than"
- **Lines 13-14:** "people / you"
- **Lines 16-17:** "sin / on"

RHETORICAL QUESTION

After a series of denials and vague explanations, the speaker begins the final stanza of the poem with a rhetorical question: "What does it matter now?"

This move is notable because of the lack of *genuine* questions leading up to it. While a genuine question—one meant to elicit an answer, one coming from a place of curiosity or a desire to reach a mutual understanding—might have steered this poem in the direction of connection and communication, the use of a rhetorical question here at nearly the end of the poem has a disconnecting effect. It feels like the speaker is throwing their hands in the air; the phrase "what does it matter now" is the equivalent of a shrug. It is meant to absolve the parents from responsibility, and undermine the child's desire to know more. The speaker of the poem uses this device to discourage the child's search for answers, the implication being that nothing they say now can change what happened. Its answer is implied: it doesn't matter now.

While it is true that nothing the parents say can change what happened, the use of this rhetorical question deflects from the fact that they could at least come to a mutual understanding of what happened and why the child feels the way that she does. The past can't be changed, but people's perspectives and feelings about it can. More than any of their answers or explanations, the parents' unwillingness to have a real conversation about what happened is the true source of damage in this poem.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- **Line 16:** "What does it matter now?"

VOCABULARY

The bad man on the moors (Lines 2-3) - A reference to a famous set of murders that occurred in England between 1963-1965. The murderers, Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, were known as the "Moors Murderers," and their trial and arrest took place in 1965-1966. The trial was widely televised.

Film Fun (Lines 5-6) - A British comic book series featuring people from film, which ran from 1920-1962.

Secret police (Line 11) - *Secret police* operate clandestinely to silence political opponents of authoritarian and totalitarian governments (for example the Gestapo in Nazi Germany and German-occupied countries during WWII, or the KGB in the former Soviet Union).

Skidmarks (Lines 16-17) - Tire marks left on a road from where a car has skidded. May also refer to feces stains in underwear.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"We Remember Your Childhood Well" is written in the form of a dramatic monologue, meaning that it is delivered by the speaker and intended for an audience other than the reader—in this case, the parents' child. It has 18 lines broken up into six tercets (three-line stanzas).

These tercets provide a sense of structure and rigidity even while the lines themselves are rather long. The length of the lines is in tension with the length of the poem's sentences themselves, most of which are quite short; the shortness of the sentences lends itself to the terse tone of the speaker, a tone meant to discourage communication rather than foster it.

Each stanza is related to the next and yet there is also a sense that each stanza is making its own self-contained argument; while the poem could be referencing a single set of events, it's equally possible that each stanza refers to a different contested memory from the childhood in question. In this way, the discrete stanzas help to create some of the poem's ambiguity.

METER

The poem is written in free verse and doesn't utilize meter of any kind. The poem's lines themselves are quite long, and any sense of rhythm in the poem comes from the presence of anaphora and rhyme rather than meter. This poem resists the steady flow that regular meter would provide, instead keeping things feeling like regular speech. This makes sense, given that the poem is meant to feel like an actual (if entirely one-sided) conversation.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem is written in free verse and does not follow a set rhyme scheme. It does have plenty of internal and end rhymes, but these don't follow a steady pattern. The lack of a set rhyme *scheme* adds to the poem's conversational tone, while the presence of various standalone rhymes creates a mocking, dismissive feel, reflective of the fact that the parents' don't take their child's accusations seriously.

Take the first stanza:

> [...] Nobody turned off the light and argued
> with somebody else all night. The bad man on the
> moors
> [...] Nobody locked the door.

The internal rhyme between "light" and "night" draws attention to these specific words, and is suggestive of the extreme contrast between the parents' recollection and the child's. Similarly, the end rhyme between "moors" and "door" seem to point in two different directions: the child's real or perceived sense of danger, and the safety insisted upon by the parents.

Moreover, the placement of the rhymes within the *sentences* (as opposed to the placement within the poem's *lines*) has a kind of closing-in effect—the rhyme seems to tie the sentence into a neat knot, making it feel rather impenetrable. This points to the way the parents use their authority to end the conversation at hand rather than continue it.

Other internal rhymes include "occur" and "blur" and "less" and "guess" in stanza 2; "away" and "holiday" in stanza 5; and "Hell" and "well" in stanza 6. The only other end rhyme is "fear" and "tears" in stanza 5. Stanzas 3 and 4 don't contain any real rhymes, though stanza four does contain assonance (the repetition of /oo/ sounds in "tune," "you," and "Boom").

SPEAKER

The speaker of "We Remember Your Childhood Well" is either one or both parents of the person whose childhood is in question. The pronoun "we" indicates more than one parent, but it's possible that this is one parent who is speaking on account of both parents, as parents sometimes do in order to present a united front. This would echo the other ways the speaker of the poem attempts to position themselves as an authority. Regardless of whether it is both parents or one parent speaking for both, the use of the plural has the effect of outnumbering the child, rendering her even less of an authority. (Note that the child herself is likely a daughter, given the reference to wearing a "dress" in line 8; this is why we've used female pronouns for the child throughout the poem).

The parents—regardless of whether they are lying or telling the truth (or think they are telling the truth) about events that occurred while their child was young—maintain a tone of secrecy throughout the poem, cutting off their child's attempts at communication rather than encouraging them. Despite claiming to have "the facts," they never actually fully explain anything—their answers are mostly defensive rather than expansive.

For example, they say in lines 16-17 that "nobody left the skidmarks of sin / on [the child's] soul and laid [her] wide open for Hell," but they also don't unpack this accusation. They don't ask what prompted the child to feel this way, or if perhaps something happened once they left, something of which they

weren't made aware at the time. Instead, they just insist that if anything did happen to make the child cry, it was her own fault. This closes off any further attempt at communication, which is precisely the point. The parents, for whatever reason, don't want to get into the specifics of their child's accusations.

SETTING

The poem doesn't have an explicit setting. It's clear that a set of parents and their child are having an unpleasant exchange, but it's not clear where the exchange is taking place.

The setting(s) for the events in question are also rather vague. In the first stanza, the family is presumably recalling their home. This seems to have been located on or near "the moors" (tracts of uncultivated land), as the child evidently thought she was in danger of being kidnapped and killed by "the bad man on the moors."

Later, the parents claim the child "wanted to go that day," but the destination in question is left unnamed. Similarly, the reader is aware that the child feels like she was "sent away," while the parents insist this was only "an extra holiday." However, because no specifics are offered, the reader can only guess at whose recollection is correct. The lack of specifics regarding setting echo the overall ambiguity and sense of secrecy in the poem.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

This poem was published in Carol Ann Duffy's 1990 collection *The Other Country*. Duffy's work is characterized by a working class, queer, feminist perspective as well as a penchant for simple and colloquial language. She is known in particular for her love poems. Her work is praised for being accessible to people who don't necessarily read poetry while also exhibiting complexity and nuance. Duffy was named poet laureate of the United Kingdom in 2009, a position she held until 2019.

"We Remember Your Childhood Well" is a dramatic monologue, a form famously used by Victorian poets including Matthew Arnold, Robert Browning ("My Last Duchess"), and Christina Rossetti. More recent examples of dramatic monologues in poetry include "Eurydice" by Hilda Doolittle and T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." Many of Duffy's other poems are also written as dramatic monologues, including her poem "Medusa."

Dramatic monologue falls under the umbrella of persona poetry—poetry that is written from the point of view of a persona created by the poet, and who is distinct from the poet. In this way, persona poetry is related to fiction; a persona poem is as revealing of the character narrating the poem as it is of the events or observations detailed by said character.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although this poem was published in Duffy 1990, the historical event it references—the Moors Murders—occurred in 1965-1966. Duffy herself was around ten years old when Ian Brady and Myra Hindley were arrested for raping and murdering several children and burying them in the moors around Manchester, England.

Though the poet's family lived in Stafford, which is more than an hour away from the scene of Brady and Hindley's crimes, young Duffy was undoubtedly impacted by the news. This is especially evident when one considers the fact that Brady and Hindley are referenced in another of Duffy's poems, "In Mrs. Tilcher's Class."

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Carol Ann Duffy's Biography — Learn more about Carol Ann Duffy's life and work courtesy of the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/carol-ann-duffy)
- A Profile of the Poet — Take a look at Carol Ann Duffy and her work in this profile by The Guardian. (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/aug/31/featuresreviews.guardianreview8)
- The Dramatic Monologue — A collection of other poems that, like "We Remember Your Childhood Well," utilize the form of the dramatic monologue. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/browse#page=1&sort_by=recently_added&forms=253)
- The Bad Man on the Moors — A biography of Ian Brady, the "bad man on the moors." (https://www.biography.com/crime-figure/ian-brady)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER CAROL ANN DUFFY POEMS

- Education For Leisure
- In Mrs Tilscher's Class
- Little Red Cap
- Mrs Midas
- Prayer
- Valentine
- Warming Her Pearls
- War Photographer

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