

IDEAS: IDENTITY, TWO PLACES, SEPARATION, ISOLATION, ROOTS, MIXED FEELINGS, CHOICES.

SITUATION: A woman from the Caribbean, living in England, experiences a very rare hurricane and this shows her that you never really lose your original identity and roots. How does it do this?

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

Firstly, the wind of the hurricane is personified through “its gathering rage” and this makes it seem like an enemy – as does the word “fearful” (1.7) and the ghostly metaphor, “dark ancestral spectre”.

However, the word “ancestral” suggests that the hurricane is a friendly relative from the Caribbean – where hurricanes are a common feature.

The oxymoron, “fearful” and “reassuring” reveals the woman’s mixed feelings about the hurricane. Naturally, she is afraid but the wind reminds her of her own homeland and it is a good feeling to re-connect with her roots.

In the second stanza the poet uses the language of her country to help her experience her homeland, “Oya” and “Shango”. Again, the hurricane is personified but this time in a positive way as her “back-home cousin”. The unusual use of “back-home” as an adjective draws our attention to the effect the hurricane has in transporting her memory back to her homeland. “Cousin” makes the hurricane seem like a friend.

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The use of the metaphor “old tongues” personifies the voice of the wind and suggests ancient links with winds from the past. This gives a sense of mystery and beauty to the hurricane (compare “SFMT”).

The “blinding illumination” is another complex oxymoron which shows her mixed feelings towards the hurricane. In some ways the hurricane confuses her as she now lives in England but the hurricane reminds her that she is not English. So, in that sense, it is “blinding” and leaves her in “darkness” or confusion. However, just like its lightning, it is an “illumination” because it enlightens her about her homeland and opens her eyes to who she really is.

The fifth stanza contains some of the most interesting symbolism in the poem. The trees which are ripped up by the hurricane reveal their “crusted roots” and this reminds her of her own roots which have also been covered up in England, or hidden, until the winds shake “the foundations of the very trees within me” – by reminding her of her Caribbean roots. The simile describing the trees as “heavy as whales” is also intriguing. “Whales” are perhaps linked to the Caribbean and certainly to great ocean journeys to their breeding grounds – so this is perhaps why the poet connects them to the trees and their roots.

Certainly the hurricane makes her feel great joy and the poet uses the metaphor of her heart being “unchained” which suggests that she has felt emotionally trapped in England before the storm freed her. There is a sense of her being free in the metaphor of her “riding the mystery of your storm”. Also, the metaphor of the “frozen lake in me” being broken by the storm perhaps suggests that she is left emotionally cold by the English culture in contrast to the hot passion of her own country – as symbolised by the storm.

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The repetition in the final line of the poem emphasises the fact that the world is not really different from one place to another because your roots remain constant wherever you may be on the earth.

STRUCTURE:

The first stanza uses a third person narration: “half the night **she** lay awake”. This perhaps creates distance and disconnectedness between her and the wind – between her and the Caribbean.

The rest of the poem, however, is a monologue from her to the hurricane written in the first person (“I”). The switch to a first person narration perhaps symbolises her growing closeness to the hurricane as she re-discovers her inner self (“I”).

A series of rhetorical questions allow her to express her emotions more powerfully from a first person perspective and by speaking to the hurricane, this continues the personification of it as a friend to be confided in.

The unusual use of a single line stanza (six) helps to stress her feelings of joy and emphasise her freedom (see above).

A sense of her excitement is built up in the use of repetition and limited punctuation to speed up the rhythm at certain points: “Talk to me...”, (stanza 2) and “I am...”, (stanza 7). This conveys her positive feelings about re-discovering her roots.

The unusual line division which splits the hyphenated word “short-circuit” into two (lines 20-21) mirrors the way she felt disconnected from her roots prior to the storm. Although the word literally means that the storm has cut off the electricity, the way the word itself has been “short-circuited” across two lines draws attention to the metaphorical meaning of her being disconnected from her homeland – and from her true self.

Page 1 **Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan**

IDEAS: IDENTITY, TWO PLACES, SEPARATION, ISOLATION, ROOTS, MIXED FEELINGS, CHOICES.

SITUATION: A teenage girl who came from Pakistan as a baby/toddler to live in England receives some Asian clothes from her Aunts in Pakistan. Her attitudes to the clothes symbolise her mixed feelings about her birth country. She is torn between two cultures: she loves the Asian clothes because they represent her roots in Pakistan **but** she is English now and there are things about the clothes which she feels would not let her fit in with English society. There are also, perhaps, other things which she does not like about Pakistan.

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

The girl clearly likes the clothes in some ways as they are described with positive language such as “peacock-blue”. A peacock is a beautiful and exotic bird from the East – so the link with her homeland is made. “Apple-green sari”, “silver-bordered” and “satin-silken top” (the alliteration emphasises the phrase) are all positive terms for the clothes which she calls, “lovely”.

The clothes symbolise how she feels about her country as they are all part of the national costume in Pakistan – “salwar kameez”, “slippers” and “sari”.

However, there is also a lot of negative language linked with the clothes: the simile, “like an orange split open” and “the glass bangles/snapped, drew blood” both convey an idea of physical pain to mirror her emotional turmoil of loving the clothes but wanting to fit in with her western friends.

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She feels “alien” wearing the clothes and she describes them as a “costume” as though she is an actress and she is losing her (English) identity by wearing them.

The use of the alliterative hard “c” sound gives us a sense of the anxiety in her voice, “costume clung to me”. The same device is used with the same emotion conveyed later in the poem: “consider the cruelty” and “conflict in a fractured land” – all ideas linked to her place of birth.

“I was aflame” is a metaphor which gives a sense of the beauty of the (orange) clothes but also conveys her reddening embarrassment and emotional pain in wearing the clothes.

The clothes being “stiff” and “narrow” perhaps symbolises the way society for women in Pakistan is quite restricted: my aunts in shaded rooms/screened from male visitors”.

Or perhaps the words describe the way the clothes can be *tight-fitting* – just as she does not appear to *fit* easily into either society.

The girl wants to fit in with western society which is symbolised by the very western “denim and corduroy” but she is also haunted by memories of her birthplace. There are a lot of negative aspects in these memories of Pakistan: there is the “prickly heat”, poverty - “beggars” and war and suffering - “conflict...throbbing”.

The “camel-skin” lamp is used symbolically by the poet to represent the girl’s situation. The camel comes from an exotic land but its “transformation” into a western lamp parallels her switch from Eastern to Western culture.

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The older generation, however, seem to have less difficulty switching between two cultures. So, the girl describes herself as “half- English/unlike Aunt Jamila”. Her mother is proud of her Indian jewellery – unlike the girl’s embarrassment over the clothes. Ironically, the Aunts in Pakistan are quite happy to wear boring, western “cardigans” obtained from that great symbol of Englishness – “Marks and Spencers”!

The poem ends on an ambiguous note with the beauty of the exotically named “Shalimar Gardens”. Even so, the girl still feels “of no fixed nationality” and, symbolically she is still cut off from the Gardens by the “fretwork” which she is staring through – representing her feeling of distance from her original culture – although she says that, in her mind, “I was there”.

STRUCTURE:

A main point to note is the way the lines are randomly laid out and indented to differing degrees. The lines have a zigzag layout. Similarly, the line lengths vary and so do the stanza lengths (in fact it is quite difficult to see where one stanza ends and another begins).

This confusion perhaps mirrors the girl’s shifting and confused sense of identity – moving constantly, in her mind, between the two cultures.

There are also some unusual line divisions which confuse the reader’s understanding at times: “silver-bordered/for my teens” and “I longed/for denim and corduroy”. The unusual line divisions give a sense of her disconnectedness from her place of birth.

There is an interesting, and repeated use (7 times in the first two stanzas) of hyphenated words in this poem (compare with “short-circuit” in “HHE” and with the poem “Half-Caste”).

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Hyphenated words join two different words together to make a new word - but still a word with two halves – not quite a proper word in its own right. This is the girl’s situation. She is a combination of Pakistani and English but she has not quite accepted both aspects, together, as part of the one identity and so sees herself as “half-English” and “of no fixed identity”.

The repeated use of the dash for end of line pauses reflects the girl stopping to think about her situation and it adds to the deliberately disjointed rhythm of the poem- again mirroring her feeling of being disconnected and divided (examples in lines 10, 16, 19, 27, 34, etc.).

The poem is a first person narration with a heavy use of first person pronouns, “I”, “me”, “my” (about x30 in the poem) – this helps to reinforce the main theme of the poem which is the girl questioning her identity – who “me” really is – English or Pakistani.

IDEAS : IDENTITY, RACE + COLOUR, ACCENT AND DIALECT, SEPARATION.

SITUATION: A man born of a black and a white parent hates the term “half-caste” because he believes it suggests he is only half a person – that he is inferior. He **pretends** not to know what the word means and he asks his listener who uses the word (perhaps the reader of the poem?) to explain the terminology. He gives his own ridiculous ideas to **deliberately** mock the word while also making some serious points.

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

The words “half” or “half-caste” are repeated almost 20 times in the poem which emphasises how strongly he feels about those particular words being used about him.

The poem opens with some sarcastic politeness and a mock apology towards the person who labels him a “half-caste”:
“Excuse me...”

The most obvious language feature is the use of phonetic spelling to imitate the man’s (Jamaican?) accent – “yu” for “you” and “de” for “the”, for example. The man’s dialect is used and it is one that misses out words (the poet uses ELLIPSIS) – so, “wha you mean” instead of “what do you mean”. This is the poet’s way of asserting the man’s cultural identity by using his language to represent his culture. There is also some standard English mixed in to show that this man is also a part of English culture, “and when I’m introduced” – elsewhere in the poem “and” becomes “an”. Also, “consequently when I dream...” sounds quite formal and educated.

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In a similar way the poem deliberately ignores most “rules” of punctuation and capitalisation as a sort of rebellion against Standard English – as if to say he is proud to be different.

The poet mocks the word “half-caste” by applying the term to nature in a ludicrous way. It would be odd to call the weather “half-caste” just because it is a mix of light and dark – so why call him that? He was made from light and dark (skin) by *nature* – just like the weather. He then makes a joke about the miserable English weather and plays with the idea of “caste” with the word “overcast” (weather). He makes it sound more ridiculous by personifying the clouds and saying that they are “spiteful” for deliberately blocking the sun.

The speaker in the poem **pretends** to be slow-witted and rough with his language (“ah rass”) to fit in with the negative racial stereotype held by some people. In fact, he shows that he is an educated man by referring to “picasso” and “tchaikovsky” (both lower case). He word -plays again with the idea of “caste” and “cast” (a shadow). He is also cleverly cryptic when he mentions that the mixing of colours by Picasso would make a **better** painting – not **half** a painting. He mentions mixing the colours “red” and “green” which, significantly makes brown – the colour of his skin – which is therefore linked to a Picasso painting as something valuable, something to be proud of.

Likewise, he compares mixed race people to a beautiful piano symphony - which would be far inferior if only white or black keys had been played!

He then **pretends** that if he is half-caste, then he only has one eye, ear, etc. Each of these has a good and a bad half! He will use the “keen” half of his eye and his ear -implying that he is really very perceptive in seeing through the prejudice of those

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who label him “half-caste”. Because the listener is not a friend, he will only get the half-of-a-hand handshake that he deserves!

Ironically, the tables are turned at the end of the poem when we see that it is the prejudiced listener who is the inferior “half” a person. That type of person needs to come back with “de whole of your eye” (because he/she does not “see” the truth), “de whole of yu ear” (because he only hears what he wants to hear) and “de whole of yu mind” (because he is narrow-minded).

STRUCTURE:

The short, three line stanza to open the poem is abrupt and conversational in tone, “Excuse me...”. It grabs the reader’s attention and makes it seem like we are being spoken to directly and being accused of prejudice. The shortness of the stanza draws our attention to the sarcastic tone of what is being said – you call me a “half-caste” – so I must only have one leg to stand on!

The poem ends with a similarly punchy three line stanza – again with a note of sarcasm – saying that if you call me “half-caste” then I will only tell you half a story!

The three comparisons of art, nature and music which mock the “half-caste” idea are all punctuated with a forward slash at the end of each “section” (lines 9, 15, 22 and 30) – this is a very unusual piece of punctuation in a poem – especially given the almost complete lack of any other punctuation in the poem. The significance lies in the fact that the forward slash is used to join up two ideas e.g. she was a good mother/wife. But in this poem there is a complete blank after each forward slash. This is a clever way of symbolizing the “half” idea visually on the page.

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There is also an unusual use of hyphens (the only other punctuation in the whole poem): “half-a-hand”, “half-a-eye”, “half-a-dream”, etc.

He has used the hyphens to invent neologisms (new words) (compare/contrast the use of hyphens in “HHE” and “PFMAIP”). This may just be a way of drawing attention to the “half” idea again by placing it in an oddly created new word.

The poet also often divides the sentences into separate lines to give the poem a disjointed rhythm. Often we only read part of an idea in each line – perhaps reinforcing the theme of “halfness”. The final stanza provides a good example: “An I will tell you/de other half/of my story”.

The repetition in the poem gives us a sense of the speaker’s rising anger – especially near the end when the listener is being accused of narrow-mindedness: “an de whole...an de whole...an I will tell...”. The poet also shows his anger by repeating four times his demand to the listener, “Explain yusef/wha yu mean”. This is said in a challenging and accusatory tone.

Page 1 *from* **Search For My Tongue**

IDEAS: IDENTITY, TWO LANGUAGES, TWO COUNTRIES, ROOTS, SEPARATION.

SITUATION: A woman moves to another country and she is worried that she is forgetting the language of her birthplace and therefore her identity, as the language of her adopted country takes control. However, her original language returns to her in a dream showing her that her language is rooted deep inside and it will never die (compare “HHE” and, less so, “PFMAIP”).

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

A dialogue with the reader is quickly set up through the repetition of the pronouns “I” (and “my”) and “you”. Line 3 also includes a rhetorical question and so we feel like we are being spoken to directly (compare “Half-Caste”) – this brings us closer to the speaker and helps us to empathise with her problems.

The poet takes the metaphor “tongue” (meaning - a language) and interprets it literally so that we imagine a bi-lingual speaker having two physical tongues in her mouth (line 4). This is a horrible image especially when one of the tongues begins to “rot/rot and die in your mouth”.

Because she cannot use her original language in her new country, she feels she is losing part of her culture and identity.

She is also struggling with her new language, “and could not really know the other”. The word “really” suggests that no matter how good her new language becomes, she will never quite “know” it in the same way as the language she inherited as a child. The poet perhaps makes a deliberate mistake with Standard English to show that the woman is struggling with her

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English: “I thought I spit it out” (I thought I had spat it out).

However, the original language comes back to life when she dreams in that language. The poem ends with the strong metaphor of the language growing again like a beautiful flower emerging from her mouth. Positive natural images are used: “grows”, “bud” and “blossoms”. This extended nature metaphor is effective as it reminds us that her original language is part of *her* innermost nature. Her original language comes naturally to her as it is “rooted” inside of her – our original language ties us to our “roots” and where we first learned it which is why it is described as growing back like the root of a flower (compare “HHE”).

The poet deliberately includes some of the actual original (Gujarati) language in the middle of the poem. This shows us how important that language is to the woman. It also provides a stark contrast with the English in the poem when we see the different alphabet system. This visual difference emphasises how difficult it would be to learn such different languages. Also, for English-only speakers, the Gujarati will be impossible to read or understand. It will even be difficult to pronounce the words even though the poet gives a phonetic translation in brackets below each line of Gujarati.

This makes the English reader experience the problem which the woman feels she is having with the Gujarati.

Or else, it gives the English reader the same problem with a foreign language (Gujarati) as the woman is having with her foreign language (English).

STRUCTURE:

The most significant point is the use of the Gujarati language in the middle of the poem. It may symbolise that her original

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language is being “sandwiched” and controlled by the English which precedes and follows it. Or else it could signify that the language placed in the centre of the poem – Gujarati – is the language that is at the centre of her being – the centre of her cultural roots and identity.

Another point of interest is that the woman speaks in almost perfectly constructed English sentences with very accurate punctuation. The sentences are quite long and explanatory in tone, with very few missing words – unlike many poems which contain some use of ellipsis (words missed out). Even the interruption of the Gujarati text does not damage the speaker’s very correct and formal English syntax (word order). So, line 16 – “but overnight while I dream” runs fluently on to line 31 – “it grows back...” – and it makes perfect sense. This perfect, very formal English is all very ironic given her worry about **not** knowing the foreign tongue (English)!!

The use of repetition (“grows...grows...grows...grows” and “the bud opens, the bud opens”) in the final eight lines and the less formal and less “correct” use of punctuation, with commas instead of full stops in places (end of lines 32, 33 and 34) gives the poem a greater fluency and rhythm and this mirrors her more relaxed attitude after she realises the reality about her mother tongue from her dream.

The repetition also reflects her excitement and disbelief in what has happened. It is as if she has to repeat the phrases about the bud and the growing to convince herself that it has really happened.

The increased tempo also symbolises the speed with which she regains the language – “overnight”.

The greater fluency in these lines also links well with the fact that the woman’s Gujarati is now more fluent- a fact which she is describing within the final eight lines.

Page 1 *from* **Unrelated Incidents**

IDEAS: TWO LANGUAGES, ACCENT AND DIALECT, SOCIAL PREJUDICE, IDENTITY, POLITICS.

SITUATION: A man who is annoyed at prejudice against his Scottish accent, pretends to read a news item about prejudice – in his own Scottish accent. In the poem he describes his accent as the normal, proper accent and mocks Received Pronunciation accents and Standard English speakers as “scruffs” – this turns the stereotyping on its head.

Is he being serious or just ironic when he argues that regional accents should be heard from newscasters on the BBC?

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

The most obvious point is that the poem is written with a phonetic spelling to show the man’s Scottish accent, e.g. “toktaboot” – talked about. This stresses the importance of his accent to his cultural identity (compare with “SFMT” and “Half-Caste”). There are also some dialect features which are not Standard English, “wanna you scruff” – one of you scruffs.

There is also a clear lack of punctuation and capitalisation in the poem which is perhaps another sign of the man rebelling against the “rules” of Standard English (compare “H-C”). Only “BBC”, in the whole poem, has capital letters – perhaps to show that the BBC is the symbol of Standard English and Received Pronunciation (RP) accents. The man even cleverly varies his own accent with the same words, “yi” and “yoo” and “yooz” (all for “you”); “wanna” and “wonna”; “news” and “nyooz”. Perhaps this shows that even with his accent he is still an individual who pronounces the same words differently at different times – he is unpredictable and should not be stereotyped.

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The poet jokes ironically that the man is speaking with a BBC accent: “thi reason/a talk wia/BBC accent” – when clearly his accent is not “BBC” English!! He jokes that other accents would just be a “scruff tokn”. This reverses the stereotype of people with regional accents being “rough”. He jokes that other speakers “canny talk/right” – which is what many people might say about his accent!

There is also the stereotype of people with regional accents being untrustworthy and so he accuses other *posher* speakers of being liars; he says that if he spoke “like wanna yoo/scruff yi/widny think/it wuz troo”

Interestingly, he tells us that he is teaching us the right way to spell – ironically, his non-standard spelling is correct – because it perfectly spells his accented words. If he had used standard spelling, it would not have been right in showing his accent!

The final two words of the poem, “belt up” is again making fun of the people who might stereotype the Scottish people and their accents as aggressive. It does this by ending the mock news broadcast with an insult to the listeners instead of the normally polite, “Good-night” ending to the news. But this insult is fairly tame and humorous as opposed to aggressive.

The “belt up” could also be the poet playing with words. It could be a BBC *radio* newsreader’s friendly advice to car driver’s travelling home in the rush hour traffic! (although a radio broadcast would make the idea of the autocue (see “STRUCTURE”, below)fairly irrelevant).

By doing this, the poet could be testing whether we are prejudiced and immediately jump to the stereotypical idea that the Scottish man is using the aggressive meaning of “belt up” – or whether we are open-minded enough to see him as being friendly to his listeners.

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It is difficult to say whether the poet *really* believes that the news should be read by people with regional accents because the poem, ironically, **is** difficult to read and understand for those who do not know that particular accent. So, in some ways, the poem itself provides a good argument **against** having news broadcasters with an accent!!

Much of the poem is ironic in a light-hearted way - although it **does** raise some serious issues about stereotyping accents and stereotyping certain cultures because of their accents.

STRUCTURE:

The main feature is that the poem is set out in a single stanza, narrow strip – like an autocue which is read by a newsreader – so the structure of the poem matches what it is about – reading the news. Each line is mainly only two or three syllables and the lines often do not make sense on their own because sentences have been divided in unnatural places and you only get the full sense when you read the next line of the *autocue* e.g. “thirza right/way ti spell/ana right way/”.

The discourse structure of the poem copies the structure of the real news: it starts with announcing that it is the six o'clock news and it ends with the same comment but then it jokingly adds on the “Belt up”.

The use of repetition of “wanna yoo scruff” (x 3) *does* suggest that the poet is particularly annoyed by people who see others as inferior because of their accents.

IDEAS: SELFISHNESS, COMMUNITY SPIRIT, POLITICS, DIFFERENT CULTURE, CHOICES.

SITUATION: The narrator watches each night as people are mistreated – most probably by some government force – possibly the police or the army. He decides to do nothing to interfere or to help – as long as he is okay himself. But in the final stanza, the man himself receives a visit in the night. The story is most probably set in an African country.

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

We immediately see that it is not a western culture setting by the ethnic names of the characters – “Akanni”, “Danladi” and “Chinwe”.

The fact that people can be kidnapped and beaten (stanzas one and two) – or sacked from their job without reason (stanza three) – also shows a society where people lack the human rights which are present in most western democracies.

The repeated reference to “the yam” also indicates a non-western culture as well as emphasising the importance of basic food in a poorer culture.

The use of the strong verbs conveys the violence carried out in this society: “Beat”, “stuffed”, “Booted”, “dragged”. There is some evidence of the use of plosive sounds to create a violent tone in the poem: “**B**eat”, “**B**ooted”, “**b**usiness” and “**b**elly”.

The sinister mood is established by personifying the “jeep” to

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describe it *eating* Akanni, “the belly/of a jeep”. This makes the jeep – or the people in it – sound more frightening and it contrasts ironically with the food image of the man enjoying eating his yam. Mention of the “jeep” also has connotations of the police or the army which might therefore suggest some involvement of a corrupt government in these actions.

The fact that we don’t find out who “they” are adds more to the sinister atmosphere. At the end of the poem, the jeep is further personified as “waiting”. This word is repeated three times to create an air of suspense as to what will happen now to the narrator. The “silence” makes it all the more threatening.

The poem also uses pathetic fallacy when the lawn is personified as “bewildered” when it is really the narrator who ends up “bewildered”. It is as though nature itself is suffering with what is happening.

The writer’s list of three emphasises the injustice in stanza three: “no query, no warning, no probe”. There is also a bitter irony in the “neat” sack which **suits** the neatness of the sacked worker’s “stainless record” - but which is **not** “neat” really because it is **not** the **suitable** thing for such a loyal worker.

The repeated chorus mentioning the “yam” reinforces the idea that the most important thing in this society is your own physical survival – symbolised by the focus on a basic food.

STRUCTURE:

The most obvious point is that the first three stanzas each start with four lines (a quatrain), each ending with a full stop to mark off the description of a great injustice to each of the three different individuals.

This builds up a more shocking picture as we are given three examples of a corrupt culture – not just one or two. Also, the

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victims are both male (stanza one) and female (stanza three) – so no gender escapes this cruelty.

Each of the three stanzas then has a three line chorus which emphasises the narrator's selfishness: "What business is it of mine...". This rhetorical question is answered by the man's behaviour in abandoning his neighbours to their fates and by the title of the poem, "Not my Business".

Each chorus is indented to separate it from the opening, narrative quatrain and the chorus is more an echo of what the man used to think in such situations. Its repetition draws attention to the dangers of such thinking.

The poem is a first person narration ("I") and because the narrator tells the three stories in the past tense ("They picked...), it is clear that he already knows what eventually happened to himself – even at the start of the poem.

This is important because it means that the narrator is mocking his own selfish attitude in each chorus when he asks, ironically, "What business is it of mine...?" because he knows that by allowing the injustice to his neighbours he has laid himself open to the same treatment that he receives in stanza four.

The final stanza does not follow the 4/3 line structure pattern of the first three stanzas. This is because the pattern of his life is about to be broken. There is an ironic twist in this final stanza as now the jeep visits *him*! Ironically, the narrator sits to eat the yam of the first three stanzas – this links his concern for his own well-being (symbolised by his desire for food – the "yam") with his fate in the last stanza. His selfishness has caused his own downfall as he gets the dreaded "knock on the door". This, again, leaves us in suspense as to what will happen and who these men are who are never described in the poem. By allowing injustice in society, the man has contributed to his own fate and it has now become *his* business whether he wants it to be or not.

IDEAS: SELF-KNOWLEDGE, IDENTITY, TWO SIDES TO A PERSON, TRAPPED/FREEDOM, CHOICES OF LIVING.

SITUATION: The ideas in this poem are quite abstract but it seems from the title and the mention of “another” and “love-letters” that the person in the poem has just finished in a love relationship. The poem is about paying attention to thinking about yourself, who **you** are, etc. – after having been so busy thinking about another when in a relationship. (How is the poem linked to “Different Cultures”?)

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

There appear to be two *selves* in the poem and the person has “ignored” thinking about their *inner* self, stopped exploring what that self is like – because he/she has been too pre-occupied with love for “another”. This theme of the “self” is shown by writing “your self” not “yourself”. Also, the poet writes “you will greet yourself” which is quite puzzling until you realise that he is talking about introspection (looking into yourself).

So, the poet talks about the inner self as a metaphorical “stranger” arriving at your door, returning after a period of being shut out. “In your own mirror” supports this idea of looking into your own “heart”. If you look in a mirror you see your own physical image and the poem’s theme is about “looking” into yourself – to pay yourself some attention – to increase your self-knowledge.

The poet makes use of religious imagery to add to the spiritual tone of the poem because meditating about yourself involves looking into your own *soul*. So, the references to “wine” and “bread” (symbols of Jesus in the act of Holy Communion)

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could symbolize a sort of Holy Communion which you have with your inner self when you are alone and thinking about yourself.

Love of another person is a distraction from thinking about yourself, who you are, etc. So, symbolically, in the poem, the “love-letters”, “photographs” and the “desperate notes” are put away.

Then the person is told to “Peel your own images from the mirror”. This could *literally* mean remove photographs of him/herself which are stuck to the mirror.

However, *metaphorically*, the “mirror” (also mentioned in stanza one) could represent our own mind because they are both things which we can *look* into, *see* ourselves and *reflect upon* who we are. So, to “peel away you own images” might suggest the need to get rid of the false images we put up in public which we can strip away in our minds in order to face up to who/what we are really like – so our minds can *reflect upon* who we really are – rather like a mirror shows us who we are physically.

The writer regularly uses commands (imperatives) in the poem: “Eat”, “Give”, “Take”, “Peel”, “Sit” and “Feast”. These are all monosyllabic and their simple nature perhaps indicates how simple this process of introspection is. The repetition of “Give” in line 8 almost sounds like a religious commandment (from God?), adding further to the spiritual tones in the poem.

“Feast” is also an old word (perhaps with biblical connotations?) and it links to the earlier instruction to “Eat” and the mention of “bread”. This imagery is all linked to the idea of consuming the “bread” of life which, in “The Bible”, is a *spiritual* “bread” provided by the words and love of God/Jesus. In the same way the poet is urging us to re-connect with our inner *spirits* or *soul*.

The word “elation” also has a spiritual association as “elated” literally means “inspired”.

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The poem raises issues about “Different Cultures” in a subtle, way: the theme involves a choice of lifestyles or philosophies. One lifestyle would be where most of your life is occupied in relationships with others where you might ignore your own *growth* as a person because you neglect self-analysis.

A different philosophy on life would be to think often about your own *self* before you start trying to discover and relate to other people’s *selves*. This second lifestyle would lead you to, “Give back your heart/To itself”.

STRUCTURE:

The poem is written in *free verse*. This means that there are random line lengths, varied stanza lengths, deliberately inconsistent use of punctuation – or lack of it – and no rhyme pattern. Each final sentence in a stanza flows across to the next stanza in order to complete its meaning, e.g. “who has loved you/All your life” (stanzas 2-3). In addition, many lines in the poem use enjambement (no punctuation at the end of lines). All of this gives the poem a very loose and *free* structure which is very well-suited to the theme of the poem – the re-connection with the inner self and the sense of *freedom* to explore one’s inner self after becoming *free* from the distraction of a relationship with another.

Some minor sentences are used and these **do** make use of full stops – to draw attention to the important imagery and ideas (themes) within those sentences. So (as discussed above): “Eat.”, “Give wine.”, “Give bread.” and “Feast on your life.”

The use of lists of three gives more force to the theme of the poem – “Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart.” Similarly, the distracting life of “love-letters”, “photographs” and “desperate notes” is replaced by the positive, calm simplicity of the three instructions, “Peel”, “Sit” and “Feast”.

IDEAS: CULTURAL ROOTS, TWO SIDES TO A PERSON, CHOICES OF LIFESTYLE, FREEDOM/TRAPPED.

SITUATION:

The poem is, on a purely **literal** level, about a room *exploding* and breaking free from itself – which is a very surreal idea! It is, however, **really** about the choice to stay in the comfort zone of normal life, habits, place, etc. or to be adventurous and experience new lifestyles. The “room” is used to **symbolise** two lifestyle choices. (This abstract and philosophical style is similar to “Love After Love” in some ways).

LANGUAGE/POETIC TECHNIQUES:

The poem will not make much sense unless you interpret the key words in a symbolic way.

One way to understand the poem is to see the “room” as representing your own culture (it does not particularly matter which specific culture you are from for this poem).

A “**room**” gives us shelter and protection and makes us feel safe and secure. This is just like we feel safest within our own **culture** – using our own language, living in a familiar place, following our own laws, customs and norms.

However, living in one room (culture) would be very boring and it would restrict our life experiences. So, too, if we only ever stay within our own culture, we may be very *narrow* individuals.

So, on this interpretation, the poem is about the joy of breaking free from the *shackles* of your own cultural “room”: “This room is breaking out/of itself” and it is in search of “space, light/empty air” – in other words, freedom. “Empty” air represents the individual space needed to grow as an individual

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while the cluttered “furniture” of the room and the “crowd” of garlic, onions, etc. represents the distractions and restrictions of our own cultural interests which hinder us exploring new worlds (compare “LAL”).

The room is described as having “dark” corners which may be linked, symbolically, with the *darkness* of *ignorance* of different cultures – the idea of *being in the dark* over something – not knowing (compare “PFMAIP”, “in shaded rooms/screened from...”). “Nightmares” also links with this idea of *darkness* and not being fully *awake/alive* to the variety of life in the *outside* world.

These feelings of conflicting with the present way of life, and breaking out, are reinforced by the alliteration of the hard “c” (fricative) sounds in the poem, “cracking”, “corners”, “crash”, “clouds”, “clang”, “crowds”.

The third stanza makes clear references to the idea of being free from your culture. The new energy felt through suddenly breaking out of the *rut* of old habits and becoming “alive” (L.11) is conveyed through the dynamic, plosive sounds of the “**P**ots and **p**ans **b**ang together” and the onomatopoeic “clang” (which is also provides an internal rhyme with “bang” – to give a joyful, musical tone to suit the noise of the pans and to mirror the joy of the individual coming to life).

The pots and pans are personified, here, to link with the feelings of a person being liberated from a boring and claustrophobic life. The pans escape past the “crowd” (also personification) which gives us a sense of having been hemmed in and restricted in life by the “garlic, onions, spices” – which are clearly strong symbols of a particular culture which has been restricting the growth of the individual.

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It is as if the pans are free from only cooking the food of one culture!! Just like the person involved would be freed from *eating* the food of one culture – in other words free from following its laws, norms, traditions, etc.

It is clear from the rhyming triplet in lines 11-13 that these lines are very important to the theme of the poem. We are kept “alive” when we experience new things – especially unusual things outside our experience (“the improbable”) which challenge our beliefs and attitudes and enable us to *grow* as individuals. The daily “furniture” of our lives are those attitudes and norms which (like old furniture which we are used to) make us *comfortable* – but which will *stagnate* us if we remain in the *comfort zone* all our lives. We only come alive when the “furniture” of our lives “stirs” (L.13) and we, metaphorically speaking, try out new “furniture”.

“No one is looking for the door”, could suggest that not enough people are looking to leave the safety of their own “room” (culture”) – most people are conservative and prefer to remain in the comfort zone of their own culture – their daily habits and customs.

The narrator, in contrast to such people, has broken free and so feels “excitement” (compare “LAL”) but he wonders where he has left his feet.

Your feet are what keep you anchored to the ground and could be seen as symbols of your cultural *roots*. So, the narrator may be saying that he has left his roots behind so that he is free to move on to new cultural experiences. This separation symbolises the way he now feels that he has become a new person – separate from his old self (compare “LAL”).

In contrast, his “hands” – which are used to *do* things – to be creative – are free on the “outside” (L.22). They are “clapping”

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to celebrate the freedom to *do* different things. This symbolises *his* freedom to do new things.

Interestingly, as the poem itself is written in such an unusual, “improbable” way it is a challenge to what we are normally used to when we read a poem. So, the poem itself does what it is talking about – it provides us with a challenge to our normal, *comfortable* ways of thinking about things (in this case, language) – which is the main theme of the poem.

STRUCTURE:

The poem is mainly written in free verse (see notes on “LAL”) which is suitable for the theme of becoming a *free spirit*.

However, the similar line lengths in lines 12 and 13 and the use of rhyme (“lives”/“arrives”) starts to give a little more order and shape to the poem which perhaps mirrors the person finding a new direction at this point in the poem.

Line 11, in particular, is emphasised because it is very short and unusual in that it is only half a sentence. Also, it is end-stopped to make the reader dwell on the phrase, “to be alive.”. This is the main theme of the poem – being *really* alive in life - not boring and *dead*! It is perhaps significant that this central idea in this poem is positioned in the centre of the (22 line) poem.

The unusual one line final stanza, “my hands are outside, clapping” is to emphasise that this is a joyful freedom as the hands are “clapping” – like at the end of a good dramatic performance. By placing the line to stand on its own as a stanza, *separate* from the rest of the poem, the poet is perhaps trying to symbolise that the hands are *disconnected* from the room. The man’s hands symbolise what he is going to *do* (hands are for *doing*) with the rest of his life now that they (and presumably he) are “outside” (L.22) – liberated from the old way of life.