



Paul Durcan poetry

Theme #1: start of relationships

Poem 1: The Girl with the Keys to Pearse's Cottage

This is a good poem to begin focusing on the theme; Durcan admits this is when he was at his youngest and considering the theme, "When I was sixteen I met a dark girl".

The poem is noteworthy for Durcan's age, as this introduces his youthful approach to relationships and later realization when writing the poem that his desired relationship was never a realistic possibility. Exploring the poem shows Durcan representing this through stylistic measures:

Verse 1

- Durcan, as said, is reflecting on past events as an adult when writing this poem. He now realizes the relationship was never meant to form or be long-lasting, and thus from the offset realizes his intended relationship with Cait will never have the constancy required for permanence: this is represented through the changing use of repetition, which by its very nature is a technique dependent on monotony. He uses repotia, a form of the technique, where a phrase changes form: "When I was sixteen I met a dark girl;/ Her dark hair was darker because her smile was so bright".

Verse 2

- The intense description of the titular cottage is not mere technique, but representative of the poet's mindset when he was sixteen. He wishes to not just communicate events of the past but also reflect a childish desire to connect with the girl. This is represented by intense description, conveying an intent to retain memories of the past which are naturally irreconcilably linked to an unrequited love: "I recall two windows and cosmic peace/ Of bare brown rooms and on whitewashed walls/ Photographs of the Passionate pale Pearse".

- However, at the same time it is important to note there is no sense of physical location; we do not hear of where the cottage is, and while the reference to Pearse may be highly symbolic this might also be Durcan's attempt to give the reader some sense of place, as well as a metaphorical admittance that there is no need to focus in on such specificities as the central topic (a relationship) never even comes to pass.

Verse 2/ 3:

- Throughout the poem Durcan may make mention of his romantic interest but they are constantly distanced; there is no communication and are always in different places. This symbolically reminds us of the above, that despite obstacles the youthful Durcan still held hope for a relationship with Cait, but also his adult self's knowledge that this would not come about: "I recall wet thatch and peeling jambs/ and how all was best seen from below in the field... I used to sit in the rushes with ledger-book and pencil/ Compiling poems of passion for Cait Killann."

Verse 4:

- Throughout the poem the titular refrain barely changes. This represents both the childish Durcan's hope for some relationship to form but also the adult version's knowledge that this will not occur. The poet hence controls and limits such alteration: "She was the girl with the keys to Pearse's cottage... The girl with the keys to Pearse's Cottage."

Verse 5:

- Durcan's use of synecdoche can be seen to have a double function; it represents the youth's intense focus on his romantic interest, while also conveying the adult's knowledge that she is not a potential partner, nor ever will be. This is the reason why she is rarely shown in her entirety, realistically reminding us and the poet himself that his youthful version knows little about her, and hence can only focus on physical elements viewed from afar: "your Connemara postman's daughter's proudly mortal face."

Poem 2:

This is an effective poem to now build on the theme (the start of relationships); it focuses on a different relationship, Durcan's future wife Nessa, and thus allows exploration and identification of contrasting techniques to represent different forms of the theme.

Durcan is older, an adult, and the poem represents a more mature approach to relationships as well as knowledge and appreciation that this relationship will be long-lasting and meaningful.

Title:

- Note how Durcan refers to his future wife by name here, **as opposed to how he refers to Cait indirectly in the previous poem's title** ('The Girl with the Keys to Pearse's Cottage'): such an approach represents the poet's authentic relationship with his wife, as well as appreciation of his partner.

Verse 1:

- Note how Durcan focuses on specific locations from the offset, such as "Shangri-La Hotel": **this can be seen to contrast with Poem 1** as Durcan here realises his relationship will transform into a marriage, and hence the need to chronicle each moment of progression, so as to cherish this.
- Such a focus also represents a more mature approach to relationships, and thus the older age of Durcan as he enters into a new romantic partnership at a later stage of his life. This is reinforced by the use of capitalization when mentioning the date of their first meeting, representing more of the same importance: "I met her on the First of August."

Verse 2:

- **Whereas Durcan was shown as distanced from Cait in Poem 1, suggesting a realisation that a relationship would never form, this poem shows he and Nessa interacting.** While this may appear insignificant it is rather important when considering the previous poem, where the youthful version of the poet was shown as a suitor from afar, pining for a relationship with Cait, thus representing their irreconcilable divide. Now Durcan is shown fully interacting with Nessa from the off, the poet showing knowledge that this would lead to a romantic relationship and later marriage: "Would you care to swim? She said to me".

Verse 3:

- The refrain changes in this section; in the first stanza we were told "And that was a whirlpool, that was a whirlpool,/ And I very nearly drowned", whereas here we hear "She was a whirlpool, she was a whirlpool,/ And I very nearly drowned." **The change in itself contrasts from the near static refrain in Poem 1 which represented the inability for romantic connection to**

transform into a relationship; this alteration thus conveys the poet's knowledge and indication that a marriage will later form with Nessa.

- **Even more telling is the change in both refrains**; in Poem 1 the direct reference to Cait is removed, implying the poet's realisation now that the possibility of a relationship slowly declined with the passing of time due to her inevitable departure at the end of the summer: "She was the girl with the keys to Pearse's cottage... The girl with the keys to Pearse's Cottage."
- **Here however the refrain changes so as to include direct reference to Nessa**, highlighting Durcan's knowledge (and perhaps even hope, if one considers the poem focuses on the start of the relationship) that Nessa will become a permanent fixture in his life: "And that was a whirlpool... She was a whirlpool, she was a whirlpool,/ And I very nearly drowned."

Verse 4:

- The refrain changes and increases in intensity, which may be seen as Durcan conveying his growing realisation and/ or hope during the early stages of his relationship that Nessa was the one for him: "Oh you are a whirlpool, you are a whirlpool,/ And I am very nearly drowned."

