

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

BEFORE U WERE MINE _____ CAROL AND DUFFY.

Before You Were Mine

by *Carol Ann Duffy*

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

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

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

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

In this poem, Duffy reflects on her mother's life before she was born, imagining her as a lively, carefree woman full of youthful energy. The speaker looks back with admiration, imagining her mother in her heyday, while also acknowledging that motherhood changed her. There's a sense of nostalgia for a time the daughter never knew but feels a strong connection to. The poem speaks to the inevitable shift in identity that comes with becoming a parent, blending affection and a sense of longing for the youthful, independent version of the mother.

Structure and Form of "Before You Were Mine"

1. Structure:

- **Stanzas:** The poem consists of four stanzas of varying lengths, not adhering to a fixed pattern. This free verse structure allows the poem to flow naturally and reflect the conversational tone of the speaker's reflections.
- **Lines:** The lines vary in length and are often enjambed, which means sentences and thoughts spill over from one line to the next without a pause. This contributes to the fluid and introspective quality of the poem.
- **Rhyme Scheme:** The poem does not follow a traditional rhyme scheme. The lack of a consistent rhyme pattern mirrors the unpredictability of memory and the fluidity of the speaker's reflections on her mother's past.

2. Language and Imagery:

- **Imagery:** The poem is rich with vivid imagery that evokes the youthful, glamorous life of the speaker's mother. Descriptions of her dancing, her dress, and the bustling social scene create a lively, sensory experience.
- **Metaphor and Symbolism:** The poem uses metaphors and symbols to convey its themes. For example, Marilyn Monroe represents youthful glamour and independence. The high-heeled red shoes symbolize the mother's lost youth and freedom.
- **Tone:** The tone is reflective and nostalgic, with an underlying sense of admiration and melancholy. The speaker's tone shifts between reverence for her mother's past and a bittersweet acknowledgement of the changes that motherhood brought.

Analysis of "Before You Were Mine"

1. Reflection on Identity: The poem explores the transformation of the speaker's mother from a vibrant, independent young woman to a mother. The speaker imagines her mother's life before she became a parent, capturing her youthful energy and freedom. This reflection highlights the contrast between the mother's past and her current role, illustrating how identity shifts with major life changes.

2. Nostalgia and Regret: The speaker's nostalgia for her mother's pre-motherhood life is palpable. There's a sense of regret for the lost youth and independence of the mother. The speaker admires the carefree, glamorous persona of her mother, which is juxtaposed with the responsibilities and sacrifices of motherhood. This nostalgia is tinged with an understanding of the inevitable changes that come with growing up and becoming a parent.

3. Contrast Between Past and Present: The poem contrasts the mother's past with her present reality. The lively, social scenes of her youth, filled with laughter and dance, are set against the backdrop of the responsibilities that came with motherhood. This contrast underscores the theme of sacrifice and the loss of freedom that often accompanies becoming a parent.

4. Personal Connection: The speaker's personal connection to the mother's past is emphasized through the use of direct address and intimate details. The poem's conversational tone suggests that the speaker is reflecting on her mother's life with a deep emotional investment, as if trying to reclaim or understand a part of her mother's identity that she never experienced firsthand.

Themes in "Before You Were Mine"

****1. Identity and Transformation:** The central theme of the poem is the transformation of identity that occurs with major life changes. The speaker reflects on how her mother's identity shifted from a youthful, carefree individual to a mother. This transformation is portrayed with a mixture of admiration for the mother's past and an acknowledgment of the sacrifices made for motherhood.

****2. Nostalgia and Loss:** The poem conveys a strong sense of nostalgia for the mother's lost youth and independence. The speaker's imagination of her mother's life before she became a parent highlights the emotional impact of growing up and the sacrifices that come with it. There is a feeling of loss for the life the mother left behind, as well as a recognition of the new identity she assumed.

****3. Youth and Freedom:** The imagery of dancing, glamorous attire, and social gatherings symbolizes the mother's youthful freedom and vitality. The poem contrasts this with the more restrained and responsibility-laden role of motherhood, emphasizing how these aspects of identity are lost or transformed over time.

****4. Family and Sacrifice:** The theme of family is explored through the lens of sacrifice. The speaker recognizes that her mother's life changed significantly with parenthood, and there is an underlying acknowledgement of the personal sacrifices made. The poem reflects on how family roles and responsibilities shape and redefine individual identities.

****5. Generational Connection:** The poem also touches on the connection between generations. By reflecting on her mother's past, the speaker seeks to understand her own place within the family's narrative. This connection between past and present highlights the continuity of family experiences and the impact of one generation's choices on the next.

Conclusion:

“**Before You Were Mine**” by Carol Ann Duffy is a poignant exploration of the shifts in identity that come with significant life changes, particularly the transition to motherhood. Through vivid imagery and reflective language, the poem captures the contrast between a mother's youthful independence and her responsibilities as a parent. Themes of nostalgia, loss, and sacrifice are central to the poem, as the speaker admires her mother's past while acknowledging the inevitable changes that shaped her present identity. The free verse structure and conversational tone enhance the poem's intimate and reflective quality, making it a powerful meditation on family and personal transformation.

COMPARISON WITH EDEN ROCK AND MOTHER

Carol Ann Duffy's “**Before You Were Mine**” and Charles Causley's “**Eden Rock**” both explore themes related to family relationships and the passage of time, but they approach these themes from different perspectives and use distinct styles. Here's a detailed comparison of the two poems, highlighting their similarities and differences:

Themes

1. Parent-Child Relationships:

- **“Before You Were Mine”:**
 - Focuses on the daughter’s reflection on her mother’s life before she became a parent. The speaker admires her mother’s youthful freedom and energy, contrasting it with the responsibilities of motherhood.
 - Explores the theme of transformation and the personal sacrifices that come with becoming a parent. The poem underscores how identity shifts with major life changes.
- **“Eden Rock”:**
 - Centres on the speaker’s reunion with deceased parents in an idyllic, otherworldly setting. The parents are portrayed as youthful and serene, awaiting the speaker in the afterlife.
 - Highlights themes of enduring love and the peaceful continuation of familial bonds beyond death. The poem suggests that family connections persist even after physical separation.

2. Nostalgia and Memory:

- **“Before You Were Mine”:**
 - Nostalgic for the mother’s lost youth and independence. The speaker imagines her mother’s vibrant life before the constraints of parenthood, creating a bittersweet reflection on what was sacrificed.
 - The poem is driven by a sense of loss and longing for a past that is not directly experienced but is deeply felt through imagination.
- **“Eden Rock”:**
 - Nostalgic in a different sense, as it recalls a peaceful and idealized vision of the afterlife. The speaker reminisces about a timeless, eternal moment with their parents, creating a sense of comfort rather than loss.
 - The poem portrays a memory of reunion that is tranquil and eternal, free from the pain of separation or the passage of time.

Tone and Mood

1. Reflective and Melancholic vs. Serene and Comforting:

- **“Before You Were Mine”:**
 - The tone is reflective and melancholic, with an underlying sense of regret and admiration. The speaker’s contemplation of her mother’s past life is tinged with a sense of what could have been and the sacrifices made.
 - The mood is one of bittersweet nostalgia, highlighting the emotional complexity of reconciling admiration for the mother’s past with the reality of her current role.
- **“Eden Rock”:**
 - The tone is serene and comforting. The portrayal of the afterlife as a peaceful and eternal setting creates a mood of tranquillity and reassurance.
 - The poem evokes a sense of gentle nostalgia and a calming acceptance of death, offering a vision of familial love that transcends mortality.

Imagery and Symbolism

1. Earthly vs. Otherworldly Imagery:

- **“Before You Were Mine”:**
 - Uses vibrant, urban imagery to depict the mother’s youthful freedom, such as dancing on the pavement and glamorous attire. These symbols represent the lost vitality and independence of the mother.
 - The imagery evokes a vivid sense of the mother’s past life and contrasts it with the more restrained present.
- **“Eden Rock”:**
 - Employs ethereal and spiritual imagery, depicting an idyllic, timeless setting in the afterlife. The imagery of the riverbank and the serene environment symbolizes peace and eternal connection.
 - The use of light and heavenly symbols creates a sense of a perfect, unchanging realm where familial bonds are preserved.

Structure and Form

1. Free Verse vs. Traditional Structure:

- **“Before You Were Mine”:**
 - Written in free verse, with varying line lengths and no fixed rhyme scheme. The conversational and fluid-structure reflects the speaker’s personal and introspective reflections.
 - The free verse form allows for a natural flow of thoughts and emotions, mirroring the fluidity of memory and nostalgia.
- **“Eden Rock”:**
 - Also written in free verse, with a conversational tone that reflects the personal nature of the speaker’s reflections. The poem’s structure is less rigid, allowing for a more organic expression of the speaker’s emotions and imagery.
 - The lack of a strict rhyme scheme and the flowing structure contribute to the sense of timelessness and peace in the afterlife.

Conclusion:

“Before You Were Mine” and “Eden Rock” both explore deep themes related to family and time, but they do so through different lenses. “Before You Were Mine” focuses on the transformation of identity and the sacrifices associated with motherhood, using vivid imagery and a reflective tone to convey a sense of loss and nostalgia. “Eden Rock,” on the other hand, depicts a serene and eternal reunion with deceased parents, using ethereal imagery and a comforting tone to present a vision of unbroken familial bonds beyond death. While both poems are reflective and nostalgic, “Before You Were Mine” emphasizes the impact of time on identity and personal sacrifice, whereas “Eden Rock” offers a vision of peaceful continuity and enduring love.