

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

Valentines

Not a red rose or a satin heart.

I give you an onion.
It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.
It promises light
like the careful undressing of love.

Here.
It will blind you with tears
like a lover.
It will make your reflection
a wobbling photo of grief.

I am trying to be truthful.

It's not a cute card or a kissogram.

I give you an onion.
Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,
possessive and faithful
as we are,
for as long as we are.

Could you take it?
Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring,
if you like.
Lethal.
Its scent will cling to your fingers,
cling to your knife.

Summary of "Valentine"

In "Valentine," Carol Ann Duffy rejects traditional symbols of love, such as roses and hearts, in favor of a more unconventional gift: an onion. The onion symbolizes the complexity and honesty of love. Duffy explores the idea that love can be both beautiful and painful, joyful and tearful. The layers of the onion represent the layers of emotional depth in a relationship, while its ability to make one cry reflects the vulnerability and intensity of true love. The speaker presents love as something raw and real, rather than sentimental and idealized.

Poetic Devices and Techniques

1. **Symbolism:**

- The **onion** is the central symbol in the poem. It represents the raw, multifaceted nature of love, emphasizing honesty over romantic clichés.
 - The **layers of the onion** symbolize the complexity of love, and its strong scent is a metaphor for how love leaves a lasting mark.
2. **Metaphor:**
 - The onion is used as a metaphor for love throughout the poem. It replaces typical romantic symbols with something unexpected, representing truth, depth, and the realities of love, such as both joy and pain.
 - "It will blind you with tears" compares the emotional intensity of love to the tears an onion can cause.
 3. **Extended metaphor:**
 - The onion is described in various ways to build an extended metaphor for love: "a moon wrapped in brown paper," "a wobbling photo of grief," "its fierce kiss will stay on your lips," each image revealing different aspects of love (tenderness, pain, and permanence).
 4. **Repetition:**
 - The repetition of "I give you an onion" emphasizes the speaker's insistence on offering something honest and unconventional in contrast to traditional love tokens.
 - The phrases "I am trying to be truthful" and "Not a red rose or a satin heart" are repeated to reinforce the rejection of superficial romantic gestures in favor of authenticity.
 5. **Juxtaposition:**
 - The poem contrasts traditional romantic symbols (such as "a red rose or a satin heart") with the stark, unusual image of an onion. This juxtaposition highlights the poet's message about the realities of love.
 6. **Imagery:**
 - The vivid imagery in lines like "It will make your reflection a wobbling photo of grief" conjures powerful visual effects, suggesting that love can bring about moments of sadness and vulnerability.
 7. **Alliteration:**
 - In phrases like "fierce kiss," the repetition of the "k" sound mirrors the sharpness of both the taste of an onion and the emotional intensity of love.
 8. **Tone:**
 - The tone of the poem is direct and conversational, almost confrontational at times, as the speaker deliberately breaks away from romantic conventions. The tone shifts between tenderness and harshness, reflecting the dual nature of love.
 9. **Free verse:**
 - The poem is written in free verse, without a regular rhyme scheme or meter. This reflects the unpredictability and freedom like love itself.
 10. **Enjambment:**
 - Duffy uses enjambment (the continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line) to create a flowing, natural rhythm in the poem, mirroring the way love can sometimes flow uncontrollably.

Themes

1. **Love and Truth:**
 - Duffy presents love as something raw and honest, not hidden behind romantic ideals. The poem strips away the superficial to reveal the deeper, sometimes painful, truths of love.
2. **Pain and Intimacy:**
 - Love is shown as being both tender and painful. The onion symbolizes how love can make someone vulnerable and expose their deepest emotions, which can cause both joy and tears.
3. **Rejection of Stereotypes:**
 - The poem critiques traditional, clichéd symbols of love, like roses and hearts, in favour of a more realistic portrayal. Duffy's message is that love is complex and cannot be reduced to simple gestures or objects.

Comparison with Sonnet 23

Themes

- **Love as Idealized vs. Love as Realistic:**
 - In "**Sonnet 43**", Browning presents an idealized, almost spiritual love. She describes love as eternal and limitless, transcending earthly concerns and extending even "after death." The love in the poem is pure, selfless, and exalted, depicted as an ideal force.
 - In "**Valentine**", Duffy focuses on the **realistic and multifaceted nature of love**. Her poem explores both the beautiful and painful aspects of love, rejecting romanticized symbols such as "a red rose or a satin heart" in favour of an onion, which symbolizes the raw, emotional, and sometimes painful reality of love. Duffy's love is grounded, complex, and honest, showing both tenderness and harshness.
- **Enduring Love vs. Changing Love:**
 - Browning's "**Sonnet 43**" emphasizes the eternal nature of love, suggesting that her feelings will last "for the ends of Being and ideal Grace." Love is portrayed as a constant force that transcends time and even death.
 - In contrast, "**Valentine**" reflects love as something more fluid, layered, and ever-changing. The onion metaphor highlights how love can cause both joy and grief, evolving as the relationship deepens or faces challenges.

Tone

- **Idealistic vs. Realistic:**
 - Browning's tone in "**Sonnet 43**" is **reverent, passionate, and deeply idealistic**. She conveys admiration for the purity and depth of her love, elevating it to a spiritual and almost divine level.
 - Duffy's tone in "**Valentine**" is **direct, confrontational, and realistic**. She deliberately contrasts with traditional romantic expressions, using an onion to symbolize her belief that love is not always beautiful or easy, but it is authentic.
- **Optimistic vs. Complex:**

- Browning's poem maintains a consistently positive and optimistic tone, focusing on love as an all-encompassing, fulfilling force.
 - Duffy presents a more **complex and ambivalent** view of love, acknowledging that it can cause pain, vulnerability, and even possessiveness, as reflected in lines like "Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips."
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Structure and Form

- **Sonnet Form vs. Free Verse:**
 - "**Sonnet 43**" is a **Petrarchan sonnet**, with 14 lines in iambic pentameter and a structured rhyme scheme (ABBA ABBA CDC DCD). The form reflects the traditional and idealized approach to love.
 - "**Valentine**" is written in **free verse**, which reflects the unpredictable, non-traditional nature of the love Duffy describes. There is no set rhyme scheme or regular meter, which emphasizes the poem's break from conventional romantic poetry.
 - **Order vs. Freedom:**
 - The **sonnet structure** in "**Sonnet 43**" conveys a sense of order and control, suggesting that love can be understood and contained within the strict framework of the poem.
 - The **free verse** of "**Valentine**" mirrors the idea that love is uncontrollable, free-flowing, and not bound by conventional rules.
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Poetic Devices

- **Imagery:**
 - "**Sonnet 43**" uses **spiritual and abstract imagery** to convey love's power. Words like "Grace," "Being," "soul," and "faith" suggest a love that transcends the material world and is connected to a higher, spiritual realm.
 - "**Valentine**" uses **concrete and unconventional imagery**. The onion is a physical, everyday object, yet it is used to express the complexity of love. The imagery of an onion "blinding you with tears" contrasts sharply with Browning's heavenly and idealized images, showing love's emotional rawness.
- **Metaphor:**
 - Browning uses **abstract metaphors** to elevate love, such as "I love thee to the depth and breadth and height / My soul can reach," suggesting that her love is boundless and metaphysical.
 - Duffy's **extended metaphor of the onion** works to ground love in reality. She uses tangible, earthy metaphors to suggest that love is layered, sometimes pungent, and capable of causing tears, which reflects a more nuanced and grounded view of love.
- **Repetition:**
 - In "**Sonnet 43**", Browning uses the repetitive structure of the phrase "**I love thee**" to build an emotional crescendo, emphasizing the intensity and multiplicity of her love.

- In "**Valentine**", Duffy repeats "**I give you an onion**" to stress her rejection of traditional romantic symbols and emphasize her insistence on offering something truthful and unorthodox.
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Perspective on Love

- **Romantic Idealism vs. Modern Realism:**
 - Browning's "**Sonnet 43**" reflects the Victorian-era ideal of love as **sublime and eternal**, grounded in spiritual and religious devotion. Her love is portrayed as perfect, without any flaws or challenges.
 - Duffy's "**Valentine**" offers a more **modern and realistic view** of love, acknowledging its challenges, complexities, and imperfections. Her poem emphasizes that love can be difficult, emotional, and even painful, but still deeply meaningful.
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Conclusion

Both "**Sonnet 43**" and "**Valentine**" deal with love, but from dramatically different perspectives. Browning's poem is an expression of idealized, perfect love that transcends time and space, while Duffy's poem offers a more grounded and raw portrayal of love, highlighting both its beauty and its pain. Through contrasting poetic forms, tones, and imagery, the two poets present distinct yet complementary explorations of what it means to love.

This comparison showcases the **different literary approaches to love**, with Browning's sonnet serving as a classical portrayal of love's grandeur and Duffy's free verse challenging romantic conventions with honesty and realism.