

Eden Rock

Charles Causley

OVERALL SUMMARY

"Eden Rock" is a poem that recounts a picnic held by the speakers deceased parents on the opposite side of a bank from where he stands. The poem is **partially metaphorical** and as he describes his mother and father in vivid detail, we are not sure, as readers, if the speaker is **retrospectively recalling a memory from childhood**, or having a hallucination because the speaker is, himself, close to his own death. Regardless the poem has an **immensely eerie** feel.

STANZA SUMMARY

- The speaker tells, in a vague manner, of his parents who are waiting for him around Eden rock which is fictional location somewhere in Cornwall. His describes his father in a tweed suit and his terrier jack at his heels.
- He then describes his mother in a white dress with her blonde hair, sat on the grass.
- His mother pours tea in three cups, implying that one is for him.
- The speaker describes the immense brightness of the sky and his mother shielding her eyes as she looks at him, while his father skims stones.
- They call over to him, telling him to cross and that the crossing won't be as difficult as it looks.
- The poem has a final standalone line where the speaker says he had not thought it would be like this.

CONTEXT

- The poem was written after Causley's parents had both previously died so we can assume the poem must be at least **semi-autobiographical**.
- Causley lived in Cornwall for the majority of his life, so we can assume the poem must be set there.
- His father died in action in the first world war and Causley served in the second with the memory of his father's death at the forefront of his mind.
- He was a Christian and we can see an **abundance of religious imagery** in his poem.

Key Themes & Analysis

DEATH

- The theme of death is extremely **prevalent** (used often) and **pervades** (permeates) the language of Causley's poem. Thus, we can imply the speaker's parents are dead and deduce that he might be joining them.
- The language which the speaker uses when he says ***"they are waiting for me somewhere beyond Eden Rock"***, is **vague and non-specific**. The **plural pronoun "they"** makes it sound as though they could be many people waiting for him, evoking the first ideas of the **afterlife** we see in the poem.
- Furthermore ***"Eden"*** is a **biblical reference** to the **garden of Eden**, and it **connotes paradise**, again **conjuring** ideas of the afterlife and perhaps his wanted to be united with them
- He describes the dog ***"trembling at his father's feet"***. It is often rumoured that dogs have a **hypersensitivity** to the supernatural, which could explain the trembling, if his parents are interpreted by the reader as ghosts
- Furthermore, his father's ***"tweed"*** suit and his mother's ***"white cloth"*** dress makes them seem even more ghostly, as though they are stuck in their **outdated** clothing for eternity.
- It compounds how **has preserved and immortalised** them in their youth in an attempt to mask their loss in their older years.
- ***"Crossing is not as hard as you might think"***, his mother calls to him from the other side of the river. The river is reminiscent of the **river Styx**, the **Greek mythological** river that they believed one must cross to reach the afterlife.
- Again, the **theme of death** is brought about, this raising a **key motif of life vs death** in the poem as he is uncertain whether to embark on this journey (by crossing the river) from life to death.
- The poem's final line is separate from the rest of the stanzas, he says ***"I had not thought it would be like this"***. If we read the poem as a metaphor for the speaker joining his parents in death, it shows death to be **baffling** to him, or at least not how he imagined.
- Alternatively, the **final ambiguous line** could represent the confusions around the transitions between life and death, death and the afterlife
- The poem is an ambiguous one and there are many ways to interpret it, but the poem as a **metaphor** for the speaker's death is one and the language of death and heaven provides evidence for this.

MEMORY

- Another way to interpret the poem is as a **memory** from the speaker of his childhood.
- The **semi colon** at the end of the first line: ***"Eden Rock:"***, gives the poem a retrospective feel.
- He speaks of his mother who was ***"twenty-three"***, reminding us that that the speaker is **not speaking in the present**.
- It is interesting he decides to pick such a young age, it is almost as if the speaker cannot bare to face the reality that his parents are aged and not in the present. **By rooting this fantasy of them in the past, it makes the reality of the present less crippling.**
- He describes her hair as the ***"the colour of wheat"***, using a childish, **simple metaphor**, reminding us of his age and how he longs to be preserved in this **infantile state**, alike how he tries to preserve his parents in this youthful one.
- ***"wheat"*** also creates an **image of harvest and growth**, reinforcing how the speaker will not let his memories of his parents die, instead tends to them to ensure they continue to grow and keep their value
- He speaks of his mother pouring teas using ***"the same three plates"***, the adjective ***"same"*** showing the **crockery** to be familiar, this element of nostalgia is amalgamated with this bitter sweetness- although he is reminiscent, we are aware this is a memory rooted in fantasy and not in the present
- He describes the ***"drifted stream"***, making his memory seem **fragmented**, implying that a lot of time has passed since.
- His memory seems to be distorted by time and also the **bias of childhood**.
- The poem's final line ***"I had not thought it would be like this"***, could be interpreted as a line representing merely the **bafflement** that comes with being a child rather than an **existential comment on death**.
- One might interpret the poem as a memory from the speaker's childhood and through this lens, we might view it as a comment on the **idolised** almost **ethereal** nature of childhood memories.

RELIGION

- The **"white"** of his mother makes her seem spirit like, but also **connotes innocence and purity**, making her seem **heavenly**. He describes how her hair **"takes on the light"** which shows his acceptance that she is no longer present, yet wants to remind himself of her purity and untainted nature.
- He speaks of how his mother **"sets out three plates"**, the number three adds to the **semantic field of religion** because it can be linked to the **holy trinity (the father, the son and the holy spirit)**. It also shows that he views his parents as pure and untainted, hence a biblical tone is fitting to speak of them.
- The allusion to the holy trinity could be implying that his parents, devout Christians, are **extensions of God** in that they are a **form of guidance**, symbolically shown through them guiding him to cross to the other side of the river.
- The **number three is evoked** again with the line **"three suns"** and this furthers the **light imagery**, linking to heaven. The **celestial and untainted** image also creates an image of hope, the hope he can preserve their once youthful depiction.

Form

STANZAS

- The poem is split into **four quatrains** and in the last stanza the last line that should be in the quatrain is separated and stands alone.
- The regularity of the quatrains mirroring the **flow of constant memories** about his parents, with the last isolated line representing his **isolation** in coming to terms with the idea of death, particularly their death.
- The structure is fairly regular until the end, and the separation of the final line might represent visually the river the speaker must cross.

HALF RHYME

- Causley makes use of half rhyme which the poem a sense of incompleteness.
- It is as though the rhyme scheme how the speaker feels incomplete or lacking in the absence of his parents
- The reader is awaiting for the full-rhyme, akin to how he longs and awaits the day his parents will return, despite him knowing this is not reality. The **childlike lens** that is portrayed throughout the poem compounds this sense of the speaker waiting in hope.

Structure

ENJAMBEMENT

- The poem uses enjambement frequently.
- This might reflect the amount of time that has passed since the memory the speaker is recalling.
- It could also reflect the seemingly **arduous** river crossing that he must complete to be with his parents.
- Yet, as each line fades into the next, this represents the **fading of the speaker into death and thus the afterlife with his parents.**

SEMICOLON

- After the first line, the poem begins with a semi colon which makes the poem seem retrospective, as though the speaker is telling a story from his childhood.
- It also gives the feeling that the first line of the poem is a subtitle, making the speaker thus seem older.

Comparisons

Climbing My Grandfather	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
Similar	Nature Both poems use language of nature and show it to have a supernatural quality. Retrospect Both poems speak retrospectively and vividly about childhood memories. They also both speak very metaphorically, using semantic fields of nature in their metaphors.	First person Both speakers speak in the first person which gives us a unique insight into their minds. It means we view the people the speaker's speak of through their eyes. The poems are biased and thus we get a biased view of the subjects of the poem.	The poems are structurally very different	Autobiographically Both poems write semi-autobiographically which makes their poems feel more authentic and real. It allows readers to engage in the world of the poem more because of their authenticity.
Different	Metaphor's Waterhouse's poem is far more obviously metaphorical than Causley's which is a bit more ambiguous as to whether it is literal or whether the speaker is speaking metaphorically about their parents. Idolisation Waterhouse seems to speak with a far more idolising tone about his grandfather, whereas Causley seems to speak more honestly, describing his parents as they are and not attributing any emotions to them that are not directly obvious from their stance.	Stanzas Waterhouse's poem is written as one continuous stanza , which emphasises his age and yet Causley uses even length stanzas and also writes from the perspective of a child. His stanzas, however, represent the landscape of the poem, physically. Waterhouse's poem represents the speakers disposition and Causley's, the landscape he describes.	Enjambement Waterhouse uses enjambement to portray the vast nature if the metaphorical mountain he is climbing. While Causley uses complex sentences his poems is more written in cohesive sentences which makes him sound mature, reminding us that he is writing retrospectively as an adult.	Family Both poets show an interest in familial relations and the way that children interact and view their parents or parental figures, but Causley does so much more ambiguously, sounding detached from his parents, syntactically and emotionally.

Follower	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
Similar	<p>Complex relationships with parents</p> <p>Both poems explore complex and nuanced parent child relationships and both speakers portray a sense of alienation towards their parents, or at least a sense of separation.</p> <p>Childhood</p> <p>Both speakers speak about their childhood in an ethereal way. Heaney with a sense of intense awe and Causley in a spiritual way.</p>	<p>Stanzas</p> <p>Both poems are divided into stanzas with quatrains (four lines per stanza). This makes them both feel even and regular in their nature. Both poems have a sense of direction which the even stanzas fuel, as though they are going to amount to a striking final line, which they both do.</p> <p>Rhyme</p> <p>Both poems make use of half rhyme which counteracts the sense of direction created by the even stanzas. It gives the feeling that despite the fact that the poem feels like it has direction, that direction may not be toward anywhere good. The half rhyme creates a sense of foreboding.</p>	<p>Ode's</p> <p>Both poems read like an Ode to the speakers parents. They are devotional, Heaney's towards his father and Causley's towards both of his parents.</p>	<p>Both poets choose to write semi-autobiographically about their parents, making them sound genuine and authentic.</p>
Different	<p>Time shift</p> <p>Heaney tracks a shift in time from the past to the present in his poem, whereas in Causley's poem the time is ambiguous. Heaney's poem, as a result sounds far more objective than Causley's which has an otherworldly, delirious feel.</p>	<p>Final line</p> <p>Causley's poem has a standalone final line, in contrast to Heaney's which retains its structure throughout the whole poem. The final line of Causley's poem evokes themes of death because it creates a sense of crossing, syntactically and physically, to the other side. Heaney's poem, by comparison, is full of life, thematically.</p>	<p>Sentences</p> <p>Heaney's poem contains far more simple sentences in comparison to Causley who tends to use long complex sentence structures. As a result, Heaney's poem sounds far simpler which might reflect the nature of the work his father does. Causley's complex sentences might reflect the delirious nature of the speaker.</p>	<p>Family</p> <p>Causley writes much more ambiguously about his parents, going into less detail and more using them to communicate a plot rather than Heaney who does a deep dive into his fathers ageing.</p>