

Climbing My Grandfather

Andrew Waterhouse

OVERALL SUMMARY

"Climbing My Grandfather" is a poem which uses an **extended metaphor** of the speaker climbing his grandfather like he would a mountain in order to **represent him exploring his relationship with his grandfather** as a child and interacting with him in his formative years.

LINE SUMMARY

- 1-4. The speaker talks of **free climbing** (climbing without ropes) and gathering all the equipment he needs. We learn it is his grandfather that he is climbing, we can assume metaphorically. He recounts climbing up his trousers.
- 5-10. He changes direction when he reaches the shirt choosing to take a route up his muddy hands. His arm is **weathered** (wrinkled) as an old man's would be. He compares his skin to hot ice.
- 10-17. He discovers a scar on the arm and is gentle in climbing past it. He rests on the shoulder and avoids looking down and then proceeds to climb up the neck to his mouth.
- 18-20. he drinks from his grandfather's metaphorical mouth (the mouth is supposed to symbolise a stream of a river you might see on a mountain) and then crosses over the cheek to his eye and watches his pupils.
- 20-27. he climbs his wrinkles up to his hair and reaches the summit, lying down to watch the clouds feeling the pulse of his **"good"** heart.

CONTEXT

- Andrew Waterhouse is a keen **environmentalist** who worked on a farm in his youth and studied environmental science at university.
- **His immense appreciation and passion for nature** is reflected in his writing.
- The poem is **semi-autobiographical** meaning that it can be linked to his own relationship with his grandfather.
- Waterhouse took his own life at the age of 42.

Key Themes & Analysis

THE COMPLEX NATURE OF HUMAN INTERACTION

- Waterhouse uses **the conceit** (extended metaphor) of climbing a mountain to show the speaker becoming **acquainted** with his grandfather and thus the complex nature of social interaction.
- The speaker's language has strong undertones of anticipation. He starts his **metaphorical climb** **"without a rope or a net"** which evokes themes of danger and **peril** as though speaker is anxious and uncertain to get to know his grandfather. This may be due to the large **generational gap**.
- Both a **"rope"** and **"net"** are **tangible** forms of safety, yet he finds emotional safety within his grandfather
- When he reaches his shirt, he **"change[s] direction"**, the **enjambement** mirroring the language with a syntactical change of direction, showing the nuanced (multifaceted) **nature** of social interaction.
- He speaks of finding a scar on his grandfather's arm and he **"place[s his] feet gently I the old stitches and move on"**. The metaphor of climbing his grandfathers past wounds carefully, reflects the speaker's **empathetic nature** in regard to him. It is as though the speaker is **learning empathy through interacting with his grandfather**, which demonstrates **the value of healthy familial relationships**.
- The speaker stops **"to drink among teeth"** at the grandfather's mouth. The **metaphor** makes it seem as though their relationship is **replenishing** for him, and the presence of teeth **symbolises wisdom and age**- he is almost drinking from **a metaphorical fountain of knowledge**. The grandfather has a profound impact on the speaker.
- When the speaker reaches **the summit of his metaphorical mountain**, he recounts that he can feel the **"slow pulse of his good heart"**. The **monosyllabic** language of this final line **mimics the described heartbeat** and the poem has a sense of finality at its end. It leaves a final emphasises that every inch of his grandfather is encompassed with love and goodness coming from his **"heart"**
- A **"slow pulse"** is normally **synonymous with good health**; thus, the speaker dismisses the physical signs of aging for his grandfather and places emphasis on his health in a hope that it signifies his long life.
- Through his poem, Waterhouse demonstrates the **complex nature of human relationships**, but shows healthy familial role models to be important.
- He demonstrates the **immense impact positive familial relationships have on children**.

NATURE

- Waterhouse demonstrates an **immense appreciation of nature** in his poem and shows how that love can be passed down through generations.
- Waterhouse uses **climbing imagery**, showing he has an appreciation for nature, but where this stems from we can only deduce from the rest of the poem.
- The speaker mentions his grandfather's ***"earth-stained hand"***, giving the **impression** that the grandfather is quite involved in nature and outdoorsy, and this love for nature is passed down to the speaker.
- The natural imagery that **pervades** the poem also places emphasis on the need for these **naturally untainted** and pure familial relationships. Nature is **a trope** used commonly in Waterhouse's poetry.
- The speaker rests in the ***"shade, not looking down"***. Despite the fact Waterhouse is **gloomier** with his semantic field of nature here, it still permeates the language of the speaker. He uses it in every context and thus it is shown to be **ingrained** in him, a trait that can only be taught.
- When he reaches the summit, he ***"watch[es] the clouds and birds circle"***, using **language of nature** again. It is significant that he sees this from the top of his grandfather's head, as though he has a direct view into his grandfather's brain, again reminding us that his grandfather is where his appreciation of nature comes from.
- The **cyclical image of nature** is created through ***"circle"***, representing the circle of life and nature, physically shown in nature through the birds and clouds, but also through the relationship of the speaker and their grandfather- the **adoration** for nature has been passed down the generations, almost creating a never-ending cycle

Form

STANZAS

- The poem is written as one continuous stanza meaning it reads almost like **prose**.
- The poem, therefore, sound like a **stream of consciousness** and replicates the disorganised thoughts of a child, speaking as they observe, with little thought about the execution of their words.
- The one continuous stanza might also reflect metaphorical mountain **the speaker is climbing**. **The stanza is large like the mountain** and the feeling of reaching the end is mirrors the feeling the speaker experiences of summiting the mountain. The grandfather therefore representing a **colossal piece of nature** that the speaker needs to summit.

RHYME

- There is an absence of any form of rhyme in the poem
- This is demonstrative of the speakers childish perspective as they're unable to use **sophistic linguistic techniques** to express these memories
- It might also represent the magnitude of the mountain that the speaker describes, as though all **rhyme dissolves in the presence of such immenseness**.

Structure

EJAMBEMENT

- The poet makes use of enjambement and extends sentences, making them complex.
- The enjambement, in the context of the poem, might represent the speaker long and **arduous journey** up their metaphorical mountain: structurally, it's as if the poem represents the mountain that it's speaker describes.
- It could also represent a spilling of emotions, almost an overwhelming feeling of **admiration and being in awe**. The physical mountainous presentation of the grandfather denoting the high status and value he has in the speakers eyes.

PUNCTUATION

- The punctuation and structure often represent the things that are described.
- For example, the poet writes "**dusty and cracked;**" and the semi colon visually represents the crack because of how it looks.
- He writes "**change / direction**", using enjambement to **syntactically** show a change in direction or he writes "forehead the wrinkles well-spaced", the dash creating space that the phrase references.
- This makes the lines look how they read/ represent, compounding that child-like depiction.

Comparisons

Follower	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
Similar	<p>Childlike awe of paternal figures</p> <p>Both speakers write about the idolised way in which they saw their paternal figures (Heaney's is his actual father and Waterhouse's is his Grandfather) when they were children. They highlight the way in which children see adult figures in their lives as role models and aspire to be like them. They show the influence paternal figures can have in a person's formative years.</p>	<p>Rhyme</p> <p>Both poems lack a regular rhyme scheme, with Heaney's having occasional rhymed and half rhymed couplets scattered throughout and Waterhouse's having none at all. This gives both poems a sense decohesion (disjointedness). The rhyme scheme is flawed like their reductionist childhood view of their paternal figures.</p> <p>First person</p> <p>Both speakers speak in the first person which means we see their paternal figures exclusively through their eyes. We thus get a distorted view of them and reminds of the distorted, biased view most children have of their paternal figures.</p>	<p>First line</p> <p>Both poems begin with personal pronouns which makes them sound confessional in nature. Heaney's begins with "my" and Waterhouse's, "I". It also makes the reader feel as though they are on more intimate terms with the speaker which makes them more involved in the world of the poem.</p>	<p>Autobiography</p> <p>Both poets write semi-autobiographically, showing that poetry, by nature, is often best written when it stems from personal experience. It makes both poems seem more authentic.</p>
Different	<p>Reality</p> <p>Heaney ends his poem speaking in the present tense with him as an adult and shows him and his father to have switched roles and the childlike awe he had for him has dissipated (gone) and has been replaced with frustration as his father is now a burden to him. Waterhouse's speaker remains a child and thus retains (keeps) the awe he has and. His poem is far more optimistic.</p>	<p>Stanzas</p> <p>Heaney's poem is broken into five quatrains which gives it an organised feel, reminding us of the speakers age despite him thinking back to his childhood in the first person. Waterhouse's poem, on the other hand is one continuous stanza which makes the speaker age less discernible. It makes us more absorbed in the events of the poem and less focused on the speaker.</p>	<p>Cyclical structure</p> <p>Heaney's poem has a cyclical structure in that it returns to the present at the end of the poem after looking back at his childhood. Waterhouse's, however, remains in childhood. The poems thus have very differing tones. Waterhouse's has an optimism that is reminiscent of childhood and Heaney's has the cynicism of an adult.</p> <p>Enjambement</p> <p>Waterhouse's poem has far more enjambement which makes the poem more representative of a stream of consciousness, which it very much sounds like. Heaney's poem sounds more structures and organised in comparison.</p>	<p>Patriarchs</p> <p>The men that appear as patriarchs (father figure) in both poems differ in relation to the speaker and by extension (because of the point above) the poet. In Heaney's poem he writes about his father but in Waterhouse's patriarch is the grandfather.</p>

Eden Rock	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
Similar	<p>Nature</p> <p>Both poems use language of nature and show it to have a supernatural quality.</p> <p>Retrospect</p> <p>Both poems speak retrospectively and vividly about childhood memories. They also both speak very metaphorically, using semantic fields of nature in their metaphors.</p>	<p>First person</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>The poems are structurally very different</p>	<p>Autobiographically</p> <p>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.</p>
Different	<p>Metaphor's</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Idolisation</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Stanzas</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Enjambement</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Family</p> <p>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.</p>