

Background material by tony harrison



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Tony Harrison, the author and son, appears to have written this poem about his parents, and his relationship with them. This poem appears to be recalling moments of family unity-moments of both sadness and happiness. The son appears to be sat at a desk, perhaps at an office or study at their family home. A double frame sits on the desk, reminding him of good times. He looks at the two photo's, and thinks about them both carefully.

In my opinion, he wasn't as close to his parents as he would have wished, or perhaps he feels now he didn't know them as well as he thought. In the first stanza, he informs us of the two photographs on his desk-one of his mother, and one of his father. He intimates that their relationship as a married couple, which lasted for at least 40 years, was not as good as the longevity implies." Neither one a couple, and both bad.

" This tells me that these are individual photo's taken on shared occasions. This line suggests to me that the quality of the picture wasn't very good, and perhaps spoilt the photo's memories. I agree with your idea that their marriage wasn't all that was made out to be, and they weren't as happy as they would have liked to have been. This line gives me the impression that the two pictures hold bad memories for him, as well as good memories. Good memories as they're photo's of his parents, who I believe are both dead, but bad memories also as they were not together in the photo's.

This is a reasonable point to make, but returning to the idea of bad quality, this is backed up by the following line in the verse, " I make out what's behind them from the blur". The blur tells us that it was taken without care as it was badly focused. In the second verse, we're told in much greater

detail about each photo. The photo of his father is taken at their favourite pub.” Dads in our favourite pub, now gone for good.” Using the word ‘ our’ suggests to me that it was a place where they went quite often as a family- their family local we could say.

By saying ‘ now gone for good’ tells me that the pub could have been demolished, and no longer exists. It could also add to the idea that his father has passed away. The next line, “ My father and his background are both gone” fully backs up the idea that both his father and their favourite pub no longer exists. By using the word ‘ background’ gives me the impression that his father spent a lot of time at the pub, and held a lot of memories of him. As you read on, we find out that the photo of his mother was taken at a country Welsh cottage, that he now owns, either bought, but most probably passed on down to him.

The cottage seems to be located in a rural setting, and this second verse suggests that everything has changed in his life since that photo was taken 8 years ago, apart from the continuing greenness of the wood surrounding the cottage. He took the photo of his dad I believe, and is reflected in his fathers eyes. In his mothers photo, he suggests that there’s a “ shadow holding something to its eyes” which probably means that there is a hidden longing that hides the fact that although they were a couple in public, they weren’t in private. This adds to the bad memories of the two photo’s I feel.

We’re told one photo is in colour, and one’s not. This gives me the impression that one was taken full of life, and one was taken with the subject being not so full of life. If I were to make a decision on which was which, I

would say that the colourful, full of life photo is that of his mother. I feel that this poem is talking about the breakup of his parents marriage, and that the reason for this is because one fell for another person. I believe that it was his mother who fell in love with somebody else, referring back to the ' shadow holding something to its eyes'. This poem is clearly about family and memories and the façade of a seemingly happy marriage that wasn't really that happy.

All the while the author seems to want to deny this while admitting it at the same time. The atmosphere is sad and sombre. I feel that this poem is talking about the breakup of his parents. This explains why the two photo's are taken of them on their own as they perhaps may have disliked being together. I think Tony Harrison wrote this poem to let people know about real life issues. He is obviously very sad and depressed at the fact that his parents split up and have now gone, and memories of them seem to be slipping away, but at the same time he is also very angry because of how they split up.

The way the poem is set out-two large stanza's, followed by a slightly smaller verse, then finished off with two two lined verses, suggests to me the fading of memories over time. The verses get shorter in length as the memories he has of his parents being happy together get smaller and smaller, almost unimaginable. My response to this poem is sad, but I feel very confused at the same time. I feel the pain he may have gone through having to deal with such an event. I feel very confused however, as the poem isn't going into great deal about the true relationship between his

mother and father. This refers back to him being in denial about the way they felt about each other, and their relationship behind closed doors.