

The symbolism of
children in "leaving
the motel" and "after
making love we heard
..."



"Leaving the Motel" and "After Making Love We Hear Footsteps" present exactly different intimate relationships; the former illustrates what happens to the lovers after they had a secret affair, while the latter portrays a married couple interrupted by their six-year-old son after they made love. Though it seems like the two poems have little in common besides the theme of sex and love, it is noted that the image of children appears in both of them. Despite the difference between the theme and tone, the children represent the same symbolism in the two poems.

First of all, the children represent the real world. In "Leaving the Motel", the motel room serves as an ideal space for the secret lovers to embrace their forbidden desire. There is no place for this relationship in their regular lives, thus the affair seems like a dreamy illusion, for they can instantly escape from reality. However, after the lovers had sex, they heard something which all of a sudden shattered the sweet atmosphere—the hollering of the kids. "Outside, the last kids holler / Near the pool: they'll stay the night." (1-2) The hollering is an alert, that someone is outside there, that they are still in the danger of being caught; the kids outside represent the real world, that the lovers would have to end their "world" within the motel room. This threw them back to the reality and the atmosphere immediately cools down. The poem starts right at this moment, thus gives itself a businesslike, emotionless tone.

As in "After Making Love We heard Footsteps", while the couple is "[lying] together, after making love, quiet, touching along the length of [their] bodies, familiar touch of the long-married" (9-11), their son ran in and squished between them. At that moment, the husband and wife's character

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transferred from lovers to parents. As parents, they have to take care of the child as well as deal with daily trifles; in other words, the child reminds the couple that after they enjoyed their sweet love-making, they still have to face the matters of the real world.

Secondly, the children represent the symbol of the intimate bond between lovers. In "leaving the Motel", the kids are hollering "outside", which reminds readers that the lovers cannot have children themselves, so their bond can remain as a "secret". It is revealed in the poem that the secret lovers do love each other instead of just being "friends with benefits". Their love is shown by their attempt to preserve the lilacs: Leave in their vase An aspirin to preserve Our lilacs, the wayside flowers We've gathered and must leave to serve A few more hours (23-27) The lilac flowers represent "first emotions of love", and by adding aspirin to the water, they wish they could extend and preserve their love and their time together. Ironically, though the lovers do love each other, they cannot, or must not, have children because their bond must remain a secret; and because of that, their relationship seems rather fragile and unsteady.

On the other hand, in "After Making Love We Heard footsteps", the child is the product of the parents' love and this poem is about the relationship between the parents and their most precious. After being interrupted by their son, the parents "look at each other and smile / and touch arms across this little, startlingly muscled body" (17-19), which shows the parents' affectionate toward their child. The child is "[the] blessing love gives again into [the parents'] arms" (23); he strengthens their marriage, and is the visible bond which connects them to each other.

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Thirdly, the children reflect the couples' state of mind. In "Leaving the Motel", the hollering kids and their noisiness aroused the lovers' anxiousness. Along with the anxiousness, is the guiltiness, the fear and the insecurity of being caught. Thus, the amorous feelings between the lovers soon disappear, which is replaced by tense and necessary indifference. The kids' hollering also ironically contrasts the lovers' sneaky rendezvous. The kids' careless, loud shouting clearly shows that they do not care if they bother others or not. In contrary, the secret lovers are doing everything extremely carefully to make sure that they won't arouse any doubt from their own partners: "Pick up the towels; fold your collar" (3-4), "Check: is the second bed / Unrumped, as agreed?" (5-6) "don't take [the] matches, the wrong keyrings" (9-10).

Contrarily, in "After Making Love We Hear Footsteps", the sleep of the innocent child reflects the tranquil and the tenderness within the couple after they made love. The lovers haven't tried to hide anything from their child, nor to find their son's sudden appearance annoying. The poet focuses on the affection between the long-married lovers and expresses it through words and expressions as "after making love, quiet, touching along the length of our bodies" (10-11), and the readers can feel the silence and the peace presence of that moment. The child, who is innocent and who has not yet learned the value of guilt, reflects that the content couple isn't guilty of their love-making, either.

To sum up, the children share three same symbolism in "Leaving the Motel" and "After Making Love We Hear Footsteps". They represent the real world, the intimate bond, and the reflection of the couples' state of mind. Though <https://assignbuster.com/the-symbolism-of-children-in-leaving-the-motel-and-after-making-love-we-heard-footsteps/>

the two poems carry out completely different models of intimate relationships, it is surprising that the children in them share the same qualities, and at the same time enrich the emotional and artistic conception of the two poems.