Eden Rock

SUMMARY

My parents are waiting for me somewhere just past Eden Rock. My father is twenty-five years old, wearing the patterned suit he always wore made from fabric from Ireland, with his little dog Jack, two years old again, shivering by his feet.

My twenty-three-year-old mother is wearing a floral dress that's cinched in at the waist, and she has a ribbon in her straw hat. She has laid out a stiff, white picnic blanket for us on the grass. The sunlight bounces off her hair, which is the same yellow color as wheat.

My mother pours tea for us from a Thermos container. She has also brought milk for the tea in an old condiment bottle, which once held British brown sauce, and has used a twist of paper as a bottle stopper. She slowly lays out our usual three plates, and the blue-painted cups we always use.

Suddenly the sky is filled with a dazzling white light, so bright it's like there are three suns shining at once. My mother places her hand above her eyes to shade them from the light, and looks at me from beyond a stream. My father is skimming a stone on the water's surface.

My parents calmly call me to from the other side of the stream. They gesture towards a path, and tell me that getting across the stream will be easier than I think it is.

This isn't how I thought it would be.

THEMES

FAMILY TIES

"Eden Rock" describes an encounter between a speaker and his parents, who are implied to be dead, as the latter prepare a picnic. The scene unfolds through a dream-like combination of memory and imagination, suggesting that the speaker is recalling a scene from his childhood while also seeing a vision of his dead parents in the present. By the end of the poem, it's implied that the speaker *himself* is close to death, and is about to rejoin his parents in some kind of afterlife. Indeed, the parents seem to have arrived in order to *aid* the speaker's "crossing" to the other side. Accordingly, family ties are presented here as something strong and everlasting; though the speaker most likely hasn't seen his parents in years, he turns to them as his own life comes to an end.

The poem opens by describing the speaker's parents, who he says are waiting for him somewhere beyond the rock mentioned in the title. Once the speaker starts describing his parents, however, it's clear that they aren't *literally* waiting for him in the real, earthly world.

First off, both parents are still really young—25 and 23—as if they have been preserved in time. The speaker would be far too young to be writing a poem were his parents actually this age! Instead, the description of the father as wearing the "same" suit indicates that the speaker is reliving a childhood memory or imagining his parents as they were in their prime (perhaps in a moment from the speaker's youth that left a lasting impression).

The father's dog is there too, "still" just "two years old." This small word—"still"—reinforces the idea that what's happening is outside of the usual logic of space and time. Again, the implication is that this is either a memory, an imagined encounter, or some sort of supernatural vision.

Regardless of the reality of this moment (or lack thereof!), the speaker describes his parents in tender detail. Even as there is something ghostly and unreal about this picnic scene, it's also touchingly familiar and intimate. For example, the speaker describes the idiosyncratic way in which his mother handles a bottle of sauce, and the meticulous care with which she lays out the meal for him and his father. These details are so specific and particular that they could only be drawn from real experience, and the fact that they survive in the speaker's memory is testament to the powerful effect they had on him at the time.

The final two stanzas then suggest the reason behind the parents' presence. With the sky whitening in an unnatural way, perhaps hinting at the speaker's approaching death, his parents casually beckon him across a small river. They stand on one side of the river—implied to be the side of the afterlife—and are calling the speaker to leave behind the earthly world and join them.

Even in this moment, in which the speaker is presumably far older than his parents appear to be, the dynamics between them remain steadfastly those of a child with his mother and father. They are advising him on how to proceed, offering him guidance and love. Though death is something many people fear, the speaker's parents are there to tell him not to be worried.

The loving call from across the stream demonstrates the deeply held bond between the speaker and his parents. When the speaker says in the last line that he never thought "it" would be like this, this "it" most likely refers to his own approaching death—and accordingly, this makes sense of the parents' central role in the poem. Put simply, thoughts of his parents comfort the speaker, and he feels that in some way his own transition into death will mean reunion with his loved ones. The poem, then, talks of the enduring strength of family bonds,

demonstrating their deep-rooted place in the human psyche—for the speaker, at least.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-12
- Lines 14-19

DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE

Though the poem never spells it out explicitly, there are a number of moments that suggest that the speaker is close to the end of his life—and that the poem is a meditation on mortality. The speaker finds some comfort in the idea that he may be reunited with his loved ones in the afterlife, but it ultimately ends ambiguously: the speaker says that he never thought "it" (implied to be death) would be "like this," but his feelings toward whatever "this" remain unclear. Accordingly, though the speaker does project a calm and accepting attitude towards death, the poem evokes the unsettling mystery that surrounds death too.

There is something ethereal about the poem from start to finish, with a few key moments making it seems clear that this is no literal picnic. For one thing, the poem is vague about its setting. Eden Rock isn't an actual place—though of course the name contains a Biblical allusion to the Garden of Eden. This vagueness subtly suggests the mystery of death, the way in which the only way to know death is to actually die. And the speaker's parents, presented as enjoying a leisurely picnic as though they have all the time in the world (which, being dead, perhaps they do!), seem more like apparitions than real people. They are both preserved in—or restored to—their youth, and perhaps this was a time in which they seemed particularly full of life. The youthful vitality and caring attitude of the parents offer a somewhat comforting vision of the afterlife.

But there is still something ghostly about the way this scene is described. For example, the way that the light shines on the speaker's mother suggests both a sense of angelic purity and a gently unsettling hint that what the speaker is experiencing is not real. This is heightened by the surreal turn that the poem takes in line 13, when the "sky whitens as if lit by three suns." The "three suns" is likely an allusion to the Christian holy trinity of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost—reinforcing the Biblical reference in the poem's title. On that level, then, the three suns can be seen as a comforting sign, evoking the promise of an afterlife—and also a kind of mirror of the three people within this particular family unit. But the way in which this bleached light suffuses the poem also heightens the image's unreal atmosphere, gently reminding the reader of the way in which what happens when people die remains a mystery.

Soon after this it becomes clear that the speaker's parents are there to guide him across a stream. They tell him "Crossing is not as hard as you might think." "Crossing" is often used as a way of referring to the transition people make between life and death, and the stream is a likely allusion to Greek mythology—in which a boatman would transport the souls of the newly deceased across a river and into the underworld. The speaker's parents are there to reassure him that death need not be something to fear. Their presence also suggests a general sense of acceptance—the speaker has lived has life, has loved and been loved, and accordingly can be more at peace with the idea of dying.

The speaker ends the poem by declaring that he "had not thought it would be like this." The word "it" is deliberately vague, though, in all likelihood, it refers to dying. Perhaps the speaker's inability to actually *say* the word "death" indicates that the speaker still feels tentative about dying. Even the thought of being reunited with his parents in the afterlife can't entirely assuage anxiety about the end of life. Ultimately, then, the poem presents the way in which someone might be comforted by memories and emotions as they approach death, but offers no false sense of knowledge or understanding. Death remains a mystery; though, for the speaker at least, it does not necessarily have to be feared.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Lines 2-8
- Line 12
- Line 13
- Lines 13-20

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

They are waiting ...
... at his feet.

The poem opens on a deliberately ambiguous note: people described only as "they" await the speaker "somewhere beyond Eden Rock." Eden Rock isn't a real place, but it gently sets up the dreamlike quality of what is to follow, drawing in the reader's curiosity. "Eden" alludes to the biblical Garden of Eden, subtly suggesting that whoever "they" are, they aren't in this mortal world anymore.

The colon at the end of the line indicates that what follows will to some degree be about clarifying exactly *who* "they" are. Lines 2 to 4 are then devoted to the speaker's father. More specifically, they are devoted to reconstructing what looks be some kind of memory about him. These lines utilize many caesuras to add detail to this description, evoking a sense of care and attentiveness as the speaker goes about building an image of his father.

The father is presented as relatively young (he is 25). The

specific age is a strong clue that this is not a real encounter, but some kind of dream, memory, or combination of the two. It means that there is a tension between the measured, adult-sounding tone of the speaker and the age of his father, introducing a note of mystery to the poem (because if the speaker's father were really this young, the speaker wouldn't be old enough to be reciting this poem!).

Indeed, the details about the father support the idea that he is somehow preserved in a particular moment in time. He is wearing the "same suit"—perhaps the "same" one as in the speaker's childhood memories—and his little dog is "still two years old." This "still" suggests that normally this would not be the case—probably because both the father and his dog are long dead.

The "Genuine Irish Tweed" is a very specific type of material as well, adding further nuance to this image of the speaker's father. There's a subtle sense of pride in the fact that the suit is made from a "Genuine" material, perhaps suggesting that this family is of only modest means.

In the stanza's second two lines, gentle /t/ consonance evokes the trembling movement of the dog, but also the way that the image itself is built on the shaky foundations of the imagination:

> Of Genuine Irish Tweed, his terrier Jack
> Still two years old and trembling at his feet.

LINES 5-8

My mother, twenty-three, ...
... on the light.

The second stanza is a kind of mirror of the first. If the first was about drawing a picture of the speaker's *father*, preserved in youth, then the second does the same for the speaker's *mother*. She is wearing a floral dress and a straw hat; in other words, she is appropriately dressed for the picnic scene that is about to unfold. Like in lines 2-4, this stanza uses caesura to make it feel as though the speaker constructs his mother with delicate care, out of very particular details. Like the father, she too is young—just 23, which is definitely too young for this to be the speaker's present-day reality.

Though lines 5 and 6 do not use consonance exactly, the sounds of the consonants do seem meticulously selected (in keeping with the idea that is a kind of imaginative reconstruction). Note the double /gg/ of "sprigged," the /bb/ of "ribbon," the /ff/ of "stiff," and the gentle assonant chiming of "Drawn" with "straw."

It's in line 7 that the poem's setting starts to become clearer: the speaker's parents are setting up a picnic. Maybe the poem is based on an early childhood memory of the speaker, though it's never stated explicitly. And in line 8, the unusual description of the mother's hair—and the light that falls on it—gently reinforces the poem's mysterious otherworldly quality.

The mother is subtly connected to the natural world through her floral dress, straw hat, and wheat-colored hair; she seems to fit right in with her surroundings. The soft alliteration of "Her hair" also has a windy, breathy quality, further evoking the outdoor setting. Given that the poem will later imply that the speaker's parents are dead, this descriptions seems especially evocative, presenting a calm and reassuring picture of the afterlife as something natural and filled with peace and harmony.

LINES 9-12

She pours tea ...
... cups painted blue.

The third stanza describes the poem's picnic scene, and of all the stanzas it is perhaps the one that on the surface seems the most literal and down-to-earth. It creates a touchingly intimate and domestic atmosphere, with the speaker's mother pouring tea from a "Thermos." The milk for the tea comes not from a milk carton but from an old sauce bottle (H.P. Sauce is a popular brand of brown sauce, a traditional British condiment), indicating both resourcefulness and that in all likelihood this is not a family with much money (especially as the cork she uses is just some scrunched-up paper).

As with the other stanzas, the speaker breaks up his lines via caesura and enjambment as he adds detail to the scene—allowing his phrases to unfold naturally, conversationally, without having to adhere to any strict requirement to finish by the end of each line. This, in a way, shows that the imagination and memory of the speaker are the most important part of the poem, and that the poem's *form* must bend to fit *them*—not the other way around. It's also significant that the family is setting up for a meal. This suggests a nurturing and loving environment, which perhaps explains why this particular scene comes so vividly to the speaker's mind.

Lines 11 and 12 use gentle consonance to depict the area with which the mother arranges the food and drinks on the "stiff white cloth." The sibilance specifically slow the poem's pace, while the /t/ consonance is delicate and meticulous:

> ... slowly sets out
> The same three plates, the tin cups painted blue.

The number three is significant here, anticipating the three suns in line 13 (which in turn may be an allusion to Christianity, explored in the next line-by-line section). This is a unit of three, a family of three. Or, at least, it *was*—and perhaps the poem's main message is that, though the speaker's parents are probably long dead, he still feels deeply that he is part of this three. Finally, the painting of the cups is another signal that this is a resourceful family—one that doesn't have a lot of money, but makes the best of what they *do* have.

LINES 13-16

The sky whitens ...
... the water. Leisurely,

The fourth stanza marks a significant shift in the poem, taking a mysteriously psychedelic but revealing turn. Line 13 picks up on the mention of the number three in line 12, offering up a strange and disquieting description of the sky. The reader must consider what the difference between a sky brightened by *three* suns looks and feels like compared to just the usual one sun. The triple-sun conveys an extra intensity of brightness, but also a heightened sense of unreality. Indeed, the reader would be forgiven for taking the poem literally up to this point (though there are clues that it shouldn't be along the way). But this moment is inescapably strange, and suffused with a kind of heavenly light.

It's quite possible that the "three suns" is a specific allusion to Christianity (which was also alluded to by the "Eden" of the poem's title). While the number three represents the family itself (mother, father, and son), it also might be a reference to the Christian Holy Trinity. This idea, put crudely, is that God is manifested in the world through three forms: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three entities are a part of *God*, but they are not exactly a part of one another. In the same way, this family is made up of three separate individuals, but together they are just that: a *family*. And indeed, perhaps this is the point that the poem is driving at—that no matter the decades that go by, these family ties remain indivisible. The end-stop at the end of line 13 gives the peculiar image more time to settle in the reader's mind.

The speaker's mother responds to the light by shading her eyes and looking at the speaker. But the surreality of the moment is heightened by the fact that speaker suddenly seems further away from her—he is not close to the picnic, but looking at his parents from across a "drifted stream." Here begins another allusion, this time not to Christian tradition but to the classical mythologies of Ancient Greece and Rome. Both have myths relating to the afterlife in which a boatman must help the souls of the newly deceased across a river into the underworld. The caesura in line 15—a full stop—allows for a moment of pause, of reflection, on this revelation that the speaker's parents are probably dead and in the afterlife.

After line 15's caesura, the father "spins" a stone along the stream (with the poem employing another nice moment of alliteration through the two /s/ sounds). This action indicates that the speaker's father feels at home where he is, that he isn't frightened by the afterlife. Consonance is used to great effect here, mimicking the way that the stone skims along the surface of the river:

> Over the drifted stream. My father spins
> A stone along the water.

The stanza then ends on a kind of cliffhanger with the arguably enjambed word "Leisurely," setting up the unnerving and mysterious concluding lines.

LINES 17-20

They beckon to ...
... be like this.

Technically speaking, stanza five should be the last stanza of the poem, which so far has been entirely made up of regular quatrains. Instead, though, this stanza is deliberately split up—creating a three-line stanza and then a final, single-line stanza to conclude the poem.

Lines 17-19 seem like the beating heart of the poem, revealing the purpose of the encounter between the speaker and his parents. They are there to help him and offer reassurance that "crossing"—most likely, dying—is "not as hard as [he] might think." Note the way that this moment seems to convey emotional closeness—the love and care of the speaker's parents—despite the fact that they are clearly separated from the speaker. In a few short lines, the poem has travelled a long way from the intimate picnic setting of the third stanza. Now, the parents are very much on the other side of a divide: the stream (most likely an allusion to the river Styx in classical mythology, which formed the border between Earth and the underworld). Line 17 uses two alliterative /b/ and consonantal /k/ sounds in "beckon" and "bank," which seem literally to call out to one another from either end of the line, mimicking the distance between the speaker and his parents:

> They beckon to me from the other bank.

The end-stop here also creates a small moment of silence after this "beckon[ing]."

The content of the parents' call is, of course, highly significant. They seek to calm the speaker's fears, and it's at this moment that the poem reveals its reasonable interpretation: the speaker is approaching death, and is being comforted by a memory or vision of his parents, sensing the enduring bond of familial love. The word "crossing" is important, relating both to the literal act of crossing the stream but also the transition between life and death—a transition that they promise is "not as hard as you might think." The end-stop at the end of line 19 creates a moment's dramatic pause before the speaker offers the reader his own thoughts on what is happening.

And as if to underline the importance of the final line, the speaker opts to create a space around it by breaking it from the rest of the stanza. This forms a visual divide on the page that mimics the way that the stream divides the speaker from his parents—and, of course, the way that being alive separates him from the afterlife in which they exist (or are thought, by the speaker, to exist). Here, the speaker explains that he "had not thought that it would be like this." Metrically speaking, this is

the poem's most regular line, the steady iambs giving it a sense of quiet confidence and finality:

> I had not thought that it would be like this.

Like the poem's beginning, this line is intentionally vague and ambiguous. What exactly, asks the reader, did the speaker think would not be like this? The most likely answer here is death itself. The clear allusion to a passage to the underworld, and the poem's generally surreal setting, have made it clear that this scene is not literal; it is probably located somewhere in the speaker's mind. Accordingly, it's fair to assume that the "it" refers to the transition between life and death—and that the parents are present in order to comfort the speaker. The poem's ending would be considerably different (and inferior) if the "it" was replaced with "death:"

> I had not thought that death would be like this.

This would seem falsely assured and confident. Instead, the euphemistic "it" conveys the way in which the speaker—for all the comfort of the memories of familial love—is still somewhat frightened. The imprecision of "it" also evokes the mystery of death, the way in which no one can really know what it's like until it actually comes.

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

Gentle alliteration is used throughout "Eden Rock." For example, note in the /t/ sounds of lines 3 and 4 (the same sound is used as consonance here too). They seem to serve two functions. The first of these is to make the lines sound carefully constructed, as though the speaker is making a deliberate and concerted effort to create a faithful image of his father. As a delicate sound too, the /t/ alliteration also seems to bring the image of the small "trembling" dog to life:

> ... Tweed, his terrier Jack
> Still two years old and trembling ...

The speaker uses alliteration when describing his mother as well, the repeated /d/ and /r/ sounds in "dress," "drawn," "ribbon," and "straw" again making the description sound careful and precise.

Another evocative moment of alliteration occurs in line 8:

> Her hair, the colour of wheat ...

These two /h/ sounds demand an exhalation of breath when read aloud, which conjures up the sound of wind to emphasize the outdoor setting described in this stanza.

There is also alliteration across lines 11 and 12 through the repeated /p/ and /s/ sounds in "paper," "slowly," "sets," "same," "plates," and "painted." Aside from having a similar effect to some of the earlier alliteration—the sound of careful poetic construction conveying the way that the speaker's memory/vision of his parents is carefully put together—it's particularly notable that there are *three* words that begin with /p/ sounds. This subtly supports the image of the family unit—the trio of son, mother and father—and anticipates the "three suns" of line 13.

Line 17's use of alliteration is again highly significant. The speaker describes his parents "beckon[ing]" to him "from the other bank," seemingly reassuring him that they will be there to meet him when he dies ("crosses"). The two /b/ sounds chime with one another from either end of the line, representing the physical and metaphorical divide between the speaker and his parents, and between life and death.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "s," "s"
- **Line 3:** "G," "T," "t," "J"
- **Line 4:** "t," "t"
- **Line 5:** "dr"
- **Line 6:** "Dr," "r," "st," "r"
- **Line 7:** "s," "r," "st"
- **Line 8:** "H," "h"
- **Line 9:** "Th," "th"
- **Line 11:** "p," "s," "s"
- **Line 12:** "s," "p," "p"
- **Line 14:** "M," "m"
- **Line 15:** "s," "s"
- **Line 16:** "s"
- **Line 17:** "b," "b"

ALLUSION

The poem makes an allusion even before it has fully begun, with the "Eden" of the title. This, of course, is an allusion to the Garden of Eden, found in the Biblical book of Genesis. According to the Bible, Eden was the paradise in which the first humans—Adam and Eve—were created. But it's notable that, though the poem initially alludes to this idealistic setting, it doesn't seem to refer to it again. Causley himself commented on the allusion, saying: "Somebody asked me the other day where Eden Rock is - I mean, I have no idea, I made it up!" This is perhaps more revealing than it first appears. The allusion is *deliberately* vague because the poem is in ambiguous territory, an enticing but unsettling combination of memory and the imagination.

In line 13, the poem appears to make its other specifically Christian allusion. The "three suns" quite possibly refers to the

Holy Trinity, the idea that God is manifested in the world as the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. The number three is important here, mirroring the family unit discussed in the poem of son, mother, and father. But it's also interesting to consider one of the fundamental aspects of the Holy Trinity—that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are *all* God, but they are *not* one another. Just like the family, then, they are both a single entity (a family) *and* a collective of three individuals.

From line 15 onwards, the poem seems to shift into a more mythological world. The stream crossing alludes the ancient Greek belief that newly deceased souls had to cross the rivers Styx and Acheron to gain access to their afterlife in the underworld. These crossings were aided by a boatman called Charon. It seems here as if the parents are talking to the speaker from this underworld, trying to reassure him that he need not be afraid of dying.

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Eden Rock"
- **Line 13:** "three suns."
- **Lines 14-19:** "My mother shades her eyes and looks my way / Over the drifted stream. My father spins / A stone along the water. Leisurely, / They beckon to me from the other bank. / I hear them call, 'See where the stream-path is! / Crossing is not as hard as you might think.'"

CAESURA

Caesura is a subtle but consistent presence throughout "Eden Rock." Though the poem is formally tight, using quatrains right up until the last line, caesuras work together with enjambment to create phrases that work against the four-line stanza shape. In other words, the poem's sentences don't always match up with its format, with many sentences spilling across the line break and coming to an end in the middle of the following line. This allows phrase lengths to be dictated not by the poem's shape itself, but by the speaker's meticulous and caring attention to detail as he conjures a surreal vision of his parents. To that end, the caesuras also often bracket moments in which the speaker is adding detail to his descriptions, making them all the more specific and vivid.

The two caesuras throughout lines 2-4, for example, help build a believable picture of the speaker's father. The lines are unhurried, allowing for this image to come to life through the addition of small details:

> My father, twenty-five, in the same suit
> Of Genuine Irish Tweed, his terrier Jack

And in a way that is so subtle it is easy to miss, the poem mirrors the use of caesura and enjambment in lines 2-4 in lines 5-7 as well. The first section is a description of the father, and the second set of lines depicts the mother. The construction of each section is parallel in both content and form: there are two caesuras in lines 2 and 5, and one in lines 3 and 6 (and towards the middle of their respective lines). This creates a subtle sense of harmony and togetherness between the father and the mother:

> My mother, twenty-three, in a sprigged dress
> Drawn at the waist, ribbon in her straw hat,

The caesuras in the third stanza function a little differently ("She pours tea ... the tin cups painted blue"). Here, the deliberate placement of the caesuras conveys the loving and attentive way that the mother prepares the tea and lays out the plates. Each pause allows the speaker to add more detail to the scene, which unfolds slowly and thoughtfully for the reader.

The caesuras in lines 15 and 16 are also significant. These are full stops, as opposed to the earlier commas or semi-colons.

> ... the drifted stream. My father spins
> A stone along the water. Leisurely,

In this section, the poem steps up its surreal atmosphere, with the parents seeming to move further away from the speaker in a way that does not seem realistic. The caesuras aid the unfolding of these moments, creating small silences that help build a sense of mystery.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "father, twenty-five, in the same"
- **Line 3:** "Tweed, his terrier"
- **Line 5:** "mother, twenty-three, in a sprigged"
- **Line 6:** "waist, ribbon"
- **Line 8:** "wheat, takes"
- **Line 9:** "Thermos, the milk"
- **Line 10:** "bottle, a screw"
- **Line 11:** "cork; slowly"
- **Line 12:** "plates, the tin"
- **Line 15:** "stream. My"
- **Line 16:** "water. Leisurely"
- **Line 18:** " call, 'See"

CONSONANCE

Consonance is a subtle presence in "Eden Rock" that works quite similarly to the poem's alliteration. Note, for example, the many repeated /t/ sounds of the lines 3 to 4 (some of which also constitute alliteration):

> ... Tweed, his terrier Jack
> Still two years old and trembling at his feet.

It's a delicate sound that seems to relate to the way in which

the speaker is carefully constructing a vision and/or memory of his parents through the precise use of language. As mentioned in our discussion of alliteration, the /t/ sound also captures the trembling movement of the small dog.

The second stanza, which in many ways mirrors the first, describes the speaker's mother. It uses caesura and enjambment in a way that is in harmony with the first stanza, and the gentle presence of /t/ sounds is not surprisingly present here too (along with many soft /s/ sounds):

> ... twenty-three, in a sprigged dress
> Drawn at the waist ... straw hat,
> Has spread the stiff white ... grass.
> ... wheat, takes on the light.

The third stanza also employs some alliteration, covered in that specific poetic device entry. The /t/ and /s/ sounds are still there too, with an additional and similarly gentle /p/ sound present. This seems to evoke the small and deliberate movements of the mother as she sets out the picnic meal:

> Of paper for a cork; slowly sets out
> The same three plates, the tin cups painted blue.

Another prominent example of consonance appears in the phrase that runs from the end of line 15 and near to the end of line 16: "My father spins / A stone ..." The father skims a stone along the river that appears to separate the land of the living from the dead. These double /n/ sounds subtly suggest the way that a stone might bounce along the surface of the water before coming to rest.

Finally, "beckon" and "bank" in line 17 share not just assonant /b/ sounds, but also consonance with their hard /k/ sounds. This bolsters the sensation that these two words are calling to each other from either end of the line, just as the speaker's parents are calling to him from across the stream.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "t," "t," "s," "s," "t"
- **Line 3:** "T," "t"
- **Line 4:** "t," "t," "t," "t," "t"
- **Line 5:** "t," "t," "s," "r," "dr," "ss"
- **Line 6:** "Dr," "t," "t," "r," "r," "s," "tr," "t"
- **Line 7:** "s," "st," "t," "ss"
- **Line 8:** "H," "h," "t," "t," "t"
- **Line 9:** "Th," "th"
- **Line 10:** "S," "c," "s," "cr"
- **Line 11:** "p," "p," "r," "r," "c," "r," "k," "s," "s," "t," "s," "t"
- **Line 12:** "s," "p," "t," "s," "t," "p," "s," "p," "t"
- **Line 14:** "M," "m"
- **Line 15:** "s," "s," "n"
- **Line 16:** "s," "n"
- **Line 17:** "b," "ck," "b," "k"

ENJAMBMENT

Enjambment is used regularly throughout "Eden Rock." Though the poem is formally organized into quatrains (apart from the ending), enjambment and caesura work together to allow the phrase lengths to be longer or shorter than a single line. This is an important effect, because it means that the poem feels like it is driven by the speaker's desire to carefully and meticulously constructed a memory and/or vision of his parents, rather than fit the images of them into an overly rigid form. Enjambment also creates a relatively conversational tone, suggesting that this is a subject that evokes a sense of calm for the speaker (though this shifts a little towards the end).

The third stanza employs enjambment slightly differently from the first two, still working with the caesura. Here it helps create evoke the precision and care with which the mother prepares the family picnic. The details spill across the lines and down the stanza, allowing the speaker to leisurely yet thoughtfully convey the image before him.

The enjambment in lines 14 and 15 is even more different ("... and looks my way / Over the drifted stream."). Here, the enjambment combines with the more disruptive use of the full-stop caesura in the middle of the line. This happens at a moment when the poem is intensifying its mysterious and unsettling atmosphere, and the enjambment has the effect of making the phrases fall a little awkwardly. This helps conjure the surreal sense that the speaker's parents are moving further away from him in a way that is unnatural, gesturing towards the idea that they are beckoning to the speaker from the land of the dead.

Finally, the end of the fourth stanza is best thought of as enjambed despite its closing comma. The enjambement here seems to echo the parents' actions—reaching across the stanza break just as the speaker's parents call to him from across the stream.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "suit / Of"
- **Lines 3-4:** "Jack / Still"
- **Lines 5-6:** "dress / Drawn"
- **Lines 9-10:** "straight / From"
- **Lines 10-11:** "screw / Of"
- **Lines 11-12:** "out / The"
- **Lines 14-15:** "way / Over"
- **Lines 15-16:** "spins / A"
- **Lines 16-17:** "Leisurely, / They"

END-STOPPED LINE

"Eden Rock" makes use of end-stopped lines relatively frequently. The first line is end-stopped, with the colon indicating that what follows will start to clarify who "They" actually are. The full-stop at the end of the stanza signals that, for now, the constructed memory and/or vision of the speaker's father is complete, allowing the second stanza to turn the poem's attention towards the mother.

Later, the end-stops in the second stanza give the poem a calm and reassuring pace, as though it is no hurry (line 6 isn't super strongly end-stopped, and might even feel more like it's enjambed to the reader—given that the phrase "My mother ... Has" ultimately extends over the line break. The specific classification isn't as important as the overall feel of the poem, however, which throughout feels steady and measured.) Indeed, the scene that described—a picnic on a summer's day—is a leisurely one, and so it makes sense that the poem uses end-stops in this way. But the end-stops take on a slightly different quality from line 12 onwards. The end-stop in line 12 sets up a similar moment's rest to those at the ends of the preceding stanzas, but this time it sets the reader up for a surprise: the surreal and unsettling simile of line 13. Indeed, such is the power of this strange simile—that the sky "whitens as if lit by three suns"—that it *too* is end-stopped, giving it time and space to sit with the reader.

The final quatrain—or tercet and single line—is all end-stopped. This shows that the comfort and reassurance that has come earlier in the poem is no longer certain, the lines unfolding in a more uncertain and cumbersome way.

Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Rock:"
- **Line 4:** "feet."
- **Line 6:** "hat,"
- **Line 7:** "grass."
- **Line 8:** "light."
- **Line 12:** "blue."
- **Line 13:** "suns."
- **Line 17:** "bank."
- **Line 18:** "is!"
- **Line 19:** "think.'"
- **Line 20:** "this."

SIMILE

Simile is used just once in "Eden Rock" and is found in line 13: "the sky whitens as if lit by three suns." It's a significant moment, because up until this point, the poem has used quite natural-sounding language in a way that is precise and deliberate. This helps the poem build a convincing reconstruction of the speaker's parents, whether it is a memory, the imagination, or a combination of both.

With that in mind, the use of simile in line 13 draws attention to itself loudly. It is the poem's single overt moment of figurative language, and introduces a surreal and unsettling comparison. How exactly, the reader must ask, does a sky "whiten" in a way that is specifically like *three* suns, as opposed to just the one? In part, this comparison appears to be an allusion to the Christian Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost). But it also relates to the make-up of this particular family unit, which is also a group of three: son, mother, and father. The simile suggests an unnatural intensity to the light, reminding the reader that the poem is probably not describing a real scene, but something that is literally colored by the speaker's imagination.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 13:** "The sky whitens as if lit by three suns."

VOCABULARY

Irish Tweed (Line 3) - Irish tweed is a type of wool-based patterned cloth which, as the name suggests, comes from Ireland.

Terrier (Line 3) - A terrier is a small breed of dog.

Sprigged (Line 5) - Decorated with plants or flowers.

Thermos (Line 9) - A container designed to keep warm drinks warm (and cold drinks cool).

H.P. Sauce (Line 10) - A popular brand of brown sauce, a type of condiment made with tomatoes, vinegar, dates, and tamarind (among other ingredients). It's especially popular in the United Kingdom.

Cork (Line 11) - A cork is a type of bottle-stopper. The mother in the poem has improvised, using scrunched-up paper instead.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Eden Rock" is a formally regular poem, employing quatrain stanzas all the way through apart from one instance at the end. The final two stanzas are broken up into three lines and one line, respectively. Each stanza has a clear purpose in the poem's trajectory too. Stanzas 1 and 2 are meticulous descriptions of the speaker's parents, who are depicted in their younger days. Stanza 3 describes a vivid picnic scene, probably based on or inspired by the speaker's memory, given just how specific some of the details are. In the fourth stanza, though, things take a turn for the strange, with the sky becoming intensely white and the speaker's parents seeming to suddenly be further away from him. From here until the poem's end, it becomes apparent the poem is just as much about the speaker's own death as it his

parents.

The quatrain form works well for the measured way in which the poem unfolds. As described above, each stanza has a clear and distinct function in the poem. That said, most of the phrases are either longer or shorter than a single line (leading to many moments of caesura and enjambment). This works in tension with the quatrain form, and increases the sense that the speaker's attention is solely on his parents (at least initially) rather than making his lines exactly match the poetic form he's created.

As mentioned, there is one significant disruption to the quatrain form. This occurs in the last line, which is given a stanza break, creating one three-line and one single line stanza. The final line occupies in its own space entirely, suggesting two important points. Firstly, there is the simple fact that line is in itself an important one; its isolation shows the reader that it is an extremely significant moment in the poem. It also creates a divide in what should be the fourth quatrain, mirroring the way in which the speaker sees himself as divided from his parents—they on the river bank in the land of the dead, and he on the side of the living.

METER

"Eden Rock" is an unusual poem in terms of its meter. Overall, the lines are too varied to say that the poem adheres to a specific metrical scheme. The lines *tend* to have five stresses and approximately ten syllables, but this is not rigid. The poem prefers to strike a more "leisurely" tone, supporting the way in which the speaker is—for the most part—reassured by the presence of his parents.

With the above in mind, it's important to note that there are moments in which certain lines conform to iambic pentameter (five iambs—metrical feet with an unstressed-stressed pattern—per line). Line 4 does so, for example:

> Still two years old and trembling at his feet.

Because the poem is not dominated by iambic pentameter, lines like this just feel like part of its overall casual tone. The last line, however, is different. This, too, is distinctly iambic:

> I had not thought that it would be like this.

This has a stately, even elegiac, sound to it. And given that the line is isolated by itself, it leaves the poem on a note of doubt and uncertainty. The iambic pentameter feels formal and stiff in a way that is almost alien to the rest of the poem, reinforcing the idea that this line is a break with the rest.

RHYME SCHEME

"Eden Rock" has a regular rhyme scheme, following an ABAB pattern throughout each stanza. Most of the rhymes, however, are not perfect rhymes. Instead, the poem uses slant rhymes for most of the rhyming pairs: Rock/Jack, suit/feet, dress/grass, hat/light, and so on. The rhymes are mostly linked through consonant sounds. This has an interesting effect on the poem. On the one hand it suggests precision, which supports the idea that the speaker is meticulously reconstructing a memory and/or vision of his parents. On the other, the fact that the rhymes *don't* conform to the usual expectations also suggests that there is something unreliable about the poem's exploration of the imagination and memory—that it's hard to know what is real and what is not.

SPEAKER

Though it's never specified who the speaker is exactly, by the end of the poem it is strongly suggested that this is a person who is close to death. (Note that there is no gender in the poem; we've used the male pronoun in this guide only to avoid a confusing over-reliance on "they," and because the poem has often been interpreted as being about the poet's own parents.)

Whoever the speaker is, it's clear that he feels a strong and enduring bond with his parents. Indeed, the first three stanzas are preoccupied with constructing a faithful memory and/or vision his parents in their younger years. The speaker builds an image of them through lovingly and carefully selected details. These details, in turn, further suggest the speaker comes from a modest economic British background, given the reference to his father's pride in his Irish Tweed suit and his mother's resourceful use of an H.P. Sauce bottle and paper to carry milk.

Despite his parents' youth, the poem is not written from a child's perspective. The speaker sounds like someone older, who has known life. This becomes especially clear by the end of the poem, when the speaker's parents appear to be calling to him from the land of the dead (the poem heavily alludes to classical mythology through its reference to crossing a stream). In part, then, the parents' role is to reassure the speaker that dying—the "it" of line 20—is nothing to fear, and that they are waiting for him on the other side of the life/death divide.

SETTING

The poem starts off by being intentionally vague about where exactly it takes place: "somewhere beyond Eden Rock." Eden Rock is not based on a real location, though the word "Eden" probably makes readers think of the biblical Garden of Eden—the first hint that what's happening here isn't necessarily happening in the real world. The vagueness of the "somewhere" also suggests that, though what follows feels very specific, there remains something unreliable about the world that the poem conjures (most likely because it is in the speaker's imagination and/or memory).

More specifically, the poem takes place, at least at first, outside during a picnic. The weather is warm and sunny (the speaker's mother wears a dress), and there is a sense that the speaker's family is in no rush at all. Readers might get the sense that what the speaker is describing is actually based on some sort of happy childhood memory (especially since his parents appear to be so young).

The third stanza describes this picnic in more detail, before the setting takes a surreal turn in the fourth. Suddenly, things don't seem as real as they initially did—the sky now grows so bright it seems "lit by three suns." This is disorientating and at odds with the calm and reassuring description of the picnic in the preceding stanza. It also suddenly is revealed that the speaker's parents are on the other side of a stream. The poem clearly plays with an allusion to ancient mythology here, suggesting that the parent have "crossed" over to the afterlife or underworld, while the speaker is still in the land of the living. The parents' role becomes clear: to help get the speaker across on to their side.

The setting, then, might also be thought of as taking place in the speaker's mind or imagination in the moments before he dies.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Charles Causley was an important figure in British poetry of the 20th century. He was born at the tail-end of World War I in 1917 and lived until 2003. Over the course of his career, Causley produced a lot of writing—and this varied between poems, short stories, plays, and works for children. His poems are often noted for their straightforward and direct language Causley was never an especially fashionable poet, but the number of significant 20th century poets that have paid tribute to him speaks volumes. Ted Hughes ("Hawk Roosting"), who served as England's Poet Laureate, thought Causley would be perfect for the role: "this marvelously resourceful, original poet, yet among all known poets the only one who could be called a man of the people, in the old, best sense." Philip Larkin ("An Arundel Tomb"), Seamus Heaney ("Mid-Term Break"), and W.H. Auden (among many others) also thought very highly of Causley.

Causley was a fairly reserved man, rarely traveling beyond his native Cornwall. In fact, the mythology and folklore of Cornwall (in the south-west of England) play a significant role throughout his works. His poems are especially popular in that part of the country. He was a man with a deep love for literature, especially fond of poets like John Keats ("Bright Star," "Ode on a Grecian Urn"), John Clare ("Autumn"), and Federico Garcia Lorca ("Romance Sonámbulo"). And perhaps this poem in particular shows the influence of the 13th century Italian poet, Dante Alighieri. Lines 14 to 20 seem to allude to newly deceased souls crossing a river into the afterlife, a prominent idea in Classical Greek and Roman mythology that features in Dante's *Inferno*. Indeed, though the "three suns" allusion of line 13 seems to refer to the Christian idea of the Holy Trinity (the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit), perhaps the classical allusion marks the speaker out as a literary-minded person.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Though he lived until 2003, Causley is very much a 20th century poet. Indeed, his life was touched by both of the two most significant events of the century: the World Wars. His father died from ill health problems he developed serving in the First World War, and perhaps this informs Causley's choice in this poem to portray the father-figure in his youth. Causley himself served in the Navy during World War II, writing prolifically throughout and seemingly working well under the pressure.

Growing up in early 20th century Cornwall, Causley had a Christian upbringing, which seems to gently inform "Eden Rock" (in the title not least). However, he was not an especially religious man, though he continued to pray throughout his life. Despite being a fairly reclusive man, Causley's poetry was celebrated by the official society of his day. He was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 1967, and in 1986 was made a Commander of the British Empire (a symbolic honor rather than an actual duty!).

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- "The Most Unfashionable Poet Alive" — An excellent and insightful essay by the literary critic Dana Gioia about Causley and his work. (http://danagioia.com/essays/reviews-and-authors-notes/the-most-unfashionable-poet-alive-charles-causley/)
- A Documentary on "Cornwall's Native Poet" — An interesting documentary about Causley, featuring commentary by poets including Simon Ari. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNLBU9QoCOM)
- Get to Know Cornwall — The official tourism site for England's southwestern-most county, Cornwall. (https://www.visitcornwall.com)
- Further Poems and Readings — A number of other Causley poems, with readings by the poet himself. (https://www.poetryarchive.org/poet/charles-causley)
- Causley in Song — A musical setting of a poem by Causley about his beloved Cornwall. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nj_nt1PfIZ4)

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