In Your Mind

SUMMARY

The speaker, daydreaming about some other country, wonders if this is a place they're hoping to go one day or a place from their past that they're vaguely remembering. It's an autumn afternoon in England, and the endless rain makes it difficult to understand the words coming from this other place. Within the speaker's imagination, they're leaving work and going to the airport. They bring money and a thick jacket, which they won't need when they get off the plane. They describe the past slowly disappearing just as newspaper ink fades in the sunshine.

The speaker knows people in this other country but their faces are hard to make out, like pictures that aren't in front of their eyes but behind them. In the speaker's mind, a handsome young man is pouring them a drink at the bar by the water. The speaker's train of thought is suddenly interrupted by the question "what?"; this might be the speaker wondering what drink they'd ordered in this imagined/remembered scene or responding to the bartender, who has just asked if the speaker thinks human beings could ever really set foot on the moon (implying that this is a memory of a scene that took place sometime before the moon landing of 1969). The speaker reflects that the moon looks like a child's drawing of an orange and then insists that people could never land on it. The moon sets over the horizon like an orange unpeeling into the water.

The speaker imagines falling asleep and then getting woken up by the harsh sounds of someone woodworking. They spot a painting they haven't seen in thirty years hanging on the wall, which makes them realize that they're in their old bedroom. It all makes sense now to the speaker, who envisions heading out to a job that they love—turning right at the old inn, then left, and then left again. Sounds that feel appropriate to the setting signal the passage of time: the cry of seagulls, the ringing of bells, someone practicing their scales on the flute. The speaker buys a fish as they head home from work.

All of a sudden, the speaker feels both as if they've gotten off track and also as if they know exactly where they are. They linger on a blue bridge, looking down as six swans disappear below them. Knowing a place so well makes the whole town feel brighter and its smells more intense. Briefly, the speaker feels like they're actually in that other place, whose name they know. But, just like that, they're snapped back to their desk, their newspaper, and the English rain falling outside the window.

THEMES

THE POWER OF MEMORY AND IMAGINATION

"In Your Mind" explores the astonishing power of memory and imagination. Although the speaker is sitting at "a desk" on a dreary autumn afternoon in England, within their mind they're leaving behind their "work" and the drab "English rain" for "the other country": their own remembered past. The poem's vivid descriptions suggest that memory and imagination are mighty forces, able to transport people to lost places and times in the blink of an eye—and to offer both consolation and bittersweet regret.

Stuck at a desk on a drab fall day, the speaker escapes confinement by daydreaming that they're "head[ing] for the airport / with a credit card and a warm coat." They will "leave [the coat] on the plane," implying that they won't need it where they're going. In other words, as the "rain" comes down around them, they're dreaming of escaping to a sunnier climate—and, symbolically speaking, to happier times.

The speaker's imagined visit to this "other country" is more powerful than any normal vacation because it's not limited by time or space. In their imagination, the speaker can instantaneously travel to places that are both "anticipated" and "half-remembered"—places they want to go *and* places they've already been.

In this instance, it seems as if the speaker is visiting their own past: they remark that they "know people there" and see a "painting" in an imagined room that was "lost for thirty years," hinting at memories of youth. Mentioning the pleasure of "a beautiful boy" making them "a drink in the bar on the harbour" and the feeling of being "lost but not lost, dawdling / on the blue bridge," the speaker suggests that they're longing for a youthful romance and freedom missing from their current life, where they are now tied to their desk.

The speaker's journey to the past can't last: at the end of the poem, the speaker has to return to the reality of "a desk. A newspaper. A window. English rain," giving their journey to happier, younger days an edge of sorrow. That journey has been moving and absorbing, though, and while it lasts, it gives the speaker a real respite from the dullness of routine. Memory and imagination, the poem suggests, are astonishingly powerful forces, able to carry people across the boundaries of space and time and offering bittersweet pleasure.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-3

The other country, ...
... autumn in England,

"In Your Mind" begins with the speaker posing a question:

> The other country, is it anticipated or half-remembered?

This question, along with the title, frames the poem: the speaker's body is in one place, but their mind is somewhere else. The speaker isn't entirely sure if this "other country" they're thinking about is "anticipated," a place the speaker *wants* to go, or "half-remembered," a place they've already been and are recalling bits and pieces of.

What is clear is that this country is a *specific* place; not "an other country" but "the other country." The speaker isn't daydreaming about any old location, but one that's important to them. (The phrase "The other country" also just so happens to be the title of the collection in which this poem was published!)

Not incidentally, the caesura created by the comma after "country" forces the reader to pause ever so slightly after this opening phrase. While the sentence could have been arranged differently ("Is the other country anticipated or half-remembered?"), the choice of syntax places greater emphasis on the poem's *subject*.

And yet, the speaker also isn't sure if this place is entirely real or imagined! Perhaps this is the country of their youth, a place they left so long ago that they aren't even sure that it ever existed.

In any case, the speaker then says that the "language" of this "other country" is "muffled by the rain which falls all afternoon." Notice the use of /f/ and /l/ consonance here, which evokes the soft patter of rain outside the speaker's window. As a constant reminder of the speaker's present circumstances, this makes it more difficult for the speaker to "hear" the other country.

Line 2 is enjambed, propelling the reader into the next line where the poem's setting is revealed:

> Its language is muffled by the rain which falls all
> afternoon
> one autumn in England [...]

The speaker is thus daydreaming during a rainy fall afternoon in England (a famously rainy place).

Finally, notice how there's no set meter or rhyme scheme in these lines. The poem is written in free verse: it moves naturally, closely imitating the way people actually think—fitting for a poem that takes place in someone's mind!

LINES 3-6

and in your ...
... in the sun.

The speaker's body might be stuck in England on a rainy autumn afternoon, but their mind is somewhere else. They continue in line 3, "in your mind / you put aside your work and head for the airport." (Note that the second person "you" is the speaker talking to themselves.)

Mentally leaving behind the rainy afternoon and their "work," the speaker imagines they're getting on a plane "with a credit card and warm coat." Sharp alliteration makes this line rhythmic and memorable. The speaker then says that they'll leave their coat on the plane—not out of forgetfulness but rather because, wherever they're going, they won't need it. The rain, it seems, has them dreaming of sunnier locales.

Notice that after the poem's opening end-stopped line, there are five enjambed lines in a row:

> [...] all afternoon
> one autumn [...] your mind
> you put [...] the airport
> with a credit card [...] will leave
> on the plane [...]

The poem moves swiftly down the page. The building momentum suggests that, as the speaker begins to dream of this "other country," they get carried away by their imagination. All these enjambed lines signal the freedom the speaker feels in their imagination to transcend their present circumstances (being stuck at their desk on a rainy day).

The speaker continues, "The past fades like newsprint in the sun." This simile not only helps the reader visualize the lightness and freedom the speaker is experiencing within their mind, but it also drives home the idea that their imaginary destination is somewhere warm and removed from "work" and real life.

The "sun" seems to erase the evidence of ordinary life, represented here by that "newsprint." The plosive /p/ alliteration ("plane," "past," "newsprint") adds some musical intensity to the last line of the stanza, suggesting that something more exciting lies ahead.

LINES 7-12

You know people ...
... into the sea.

The speaker says that they "know people" in "the other

country" that they imagine visiting. This suggests that the speaker has been to this place before and perhaps even lived there.

They say that the "faces" of these people "are photographs / on the wrong side of your eyes." This metaphor implies that the speaker can picture these people quite clearly. They can see the vague outlines of these people but not the details; it's as though they're looking at a "photograph" *behind* their eyes rather than in front of them.

The poem then cuts to a specific scene that the speaker is reliving in their mind: "A beautiful boy" is pouring them a drink "in the bar on the harbour." Notice how alliteration, consonance, and assonance heighten the poem's language, making it more lyrical and lovely to convey the beauty and joy of this memory.

Take a look at the caesura at the end of line 9:

> in the bar on the harbour serves you a
> drink—what?—

The dashes on either side of the word "what" suggest that the speaker's daydream is being interrupted. It's not exactly clear what this "what?" refers to:

- The speaker might be wondering to themselves, in the present, what kind of drink they had in this memory.
- The speaker might be responding to some other sound in the present that momentarily snaps them out of their daydream.
- Or the speaker might be responding to the bartender *within* this remembered scene. After all, he's just asked her a question: whether it's possible to land men on the moon.

Apparently, the scene the speaker is reliving happened at some point before the historical moon landing of 1969. The speaker, then, is not only using their imagination to travel to another destination, but to another time as well!

This question about space travel prompts the speaker to reflect on the moon, which, in this memory, looks "like an orange drawn by a child." The speaker might be referring to the "harvest moon," the red moon that appears close to the autumnal equinox. Or perhaps the moon just looks orange over the horizon. This surreal simile also reflects the dreamy quality of the speaker's thoughts—they *are* daydreaming, after all!

In response to the bartender's question, the speaker then says (or thinks to themselves), "No. Never." The fact that they don't think people "could possibly land on the moon" again implies that this is a memory of a scene that took place sometime shortly before 1969 (and that the speaker has traveled back to their childhood or youth).

The speaker next describes "watch[ing the moon] peel itself into the sea." This strange image of the moon rising above the horizon builds the simile in the previous line. It also suggests a symbolic unraveling taking place within the speaker's mind as the present gives way to this scene from the past.

LINES 13-14

> *Sleep. The rasp ...*
> *... the room yours.*

After the stanza break, the time and location of the speaker's daydream shift. Suddenly the speaker is being woken up from "Sleep" by "The rasp of carpentry" (the sharp, grating sounds of woodworking).

Listen to how the poem uses alliteration and consonance to evoke the rough sounds of the scene at hand, especially through all those sharp /p/ sounds and growling/r/ sounds:

> Sleep. The rasp of carpentry wakes you. On the wall,
> a painting lost for thirty years renders the room
> yours.

The speaker seems confused and disoriented at first, groggy and unsure of where they are. The caesurae in these lines reflect that confusion, creating a halting, stop-start rhythm that conveys the jolt of suddenly being torn from sleep:

> Sleep. The rasp of carpentry wakes you. On the wall,

It's only once they see "a painting" on the wall that they're able to place themselves: they're in their old bedroom, apparently. That they haven't seen this painting in "thirty years" implies that they've been separated from their childhood home for a long time (or, perhaps, that the room still exists but no longer looks the way it did when the speaker was younger).

LINES 15-18

> *Of course. You ...*
> *... the way home.*

Seeing the painting seems like a relief of sorts: "Of course," the speaker says, indicating that they've finally oriented themselves in this memory and know precisely where they are—and how to get to their "job"!

It seems the speaker is remembering a time in their life when they worked at a job they actually enjoyed—a summer job from when they were young, perhaps. This contrasts with their "work" in the present, which they so readily left behind in the opening stanza.

Despite it having been "thirty years" since they've seen this place, they still know how to get this job:

> [...] right at the old hotel, left,
> then left again. [...]

The caesurae here evoke the speaker's movements as they stop and turn on the way to work.

Even the "sounds" of this route are familiar. The speaker can hear squawking "Seagulls," tolling "Bells" (perhaps from a local church), and someone "practicing scales" on their "flute."

Intense sibilance, consonance, and assonance heighten the poem's language and suggests the speaker's positive associations with this setting:

> [...] Apt sounds
> mark the passing of the hours. Seagulls. Bells. A flute
> practicing scales. You swap a coin for a fish [...]

It's becoming clear that this place is somewhere near the sea: "the bar on the harbour," "Seagulls," the speaker "swap[ping] a coin for a fish on the way home."

This last also again suggests another time period—when people still carried "coin[s]" and could buy a whole "fish" with single one of them.

LINES 19-22

Then suddenly you ...
... For a moment

All of a sudden, the speaker continues, "you lost but not lost dawdling / on the blue bridge." The speaker doesn't know exactly where they are, but they haven't lost their way; they don't have anywhere they're supposed to be, so they aren't truly "lost."

The speaker might also be using "lost" more metaphorically here to suggest that, in this imagined scene, the speaker has a clear sense of self and purpose. "Dawdling" means lingering, so this implies the speaker is wandering slowly and savoring this moment.

Even as the speaker isn't entirely sure where they are, the imagery is very specific: the speaker mentions "the blue bridge" and "six swans." The alliteration here ("blue bridge," "six swans") adds emphasis to these images, highlighting their importance to the speaker. As with the mention of the painting from the previous stanza, these phrases also illustrate how memories can be at once vague and specific, and how certain details of the past tend to stick out in people's minds.

They also suggest that isn't just *any* place the speaker is exploring; it's a place the speaker knows well, even if it's been a long time since they've been there. In fact, there's a "certainty" to this "place," the speaker continues, which "turns on the lights, / all over town, turns up the scent on the air." In other words, the speaker's daydream feels incredibly vivid because it's based in a place they once knew incredibly well.

Notice that lines 19-23 are all enjambed:

> [...] dawdling
> on the blue bridge, watching six swans vanish
> under your feet. The certainty of a place turns on the lights
> all over town, turns up the scent on the air. For a moment
> you are there [...]

The swift movement of these lines evokes the thrill of the speaker's daydream and the freedom with which they move around inside their own imagination. The line break after "moment" in line 22 is particularly evocative, the enjambment allowing that "moment" to linger for, well, a "moment" in the white space of the page.

LINES 23-24

you are there, ...
... window. English rain.

"For a moment," the speaker continues, "you are there, in the other country, knowing its name."

When the poem began, the speaker struggled to hear the "language" of this other country because they were distracted by the rain. That rain, representing the reality of the speaker's life in England, "muffled" the sounds from the speaker's past/imagination.

Now, however, it's as though any boundary between the present and past, between reality and imagination, has fallen. The speaker really is in this other country—albeit just "for a moment."

Soon enough, that moment ends, and the speaker returns to their drab reality:

> And then a desk. A newspaper. A window. English rain.

The short sentences, frequent caesura, and anaphora (the repetition of "A") in this line create a choppy rhythm that contrasts with the fluidity of the speaker's descriptions of "the other country." Reality seems marked by plodding drudgery.

Although the poem doesn't use rhyme in general, note that /ay/ assonance does create a single slant rhyme between the final lines:

> you are there, in the other country, knowing its name.
> And then a desk. A newspaper. A window. English rain.

This subtle couplet highlights the juxtaposition between the speaker's daydream and reality. "The other country" and its "name" are abstract, ambiguous, and hard to pin down, while the "desk," "newspaper," "window," and "rain" are all concrete, tangible things.

The rhyme and end-stopping here also make the poem feel more final; the daydream is truly over. However lovely this reverie might have been, it's unlikely the speaker will be getting back to "the other country" anytime soon. The overall feeling one is left with is that of bittersweet longing. It's as if something that has been "lost" to the speaker "for thirty years" was briefly found only to be lost again.

Moreover, none of it was real in the way the "desk" and "newspaper" are real. It may have felt so in the moment, but once the moment is over, nothing has really changed. The speaker is still sitting at their "desk," it is still "rain[ing]," and they still have "work" to do.

SYMBOLS

RAIN

The poem opens and closes with rain falling outside the speaker's window. This rain symbolizes the drab, inescapable reality of the speaker's life in the present.

In the poem's first stanza, the speaker says that the patter of "the rain which falls all afternoon" dulls the "language" of the "other country" they're trying to visit within their mind. The sound of the rain distracts the speaker, in other words; the rain is constant, and it makes it hard to think about anything else.

This rain is specifically linked with England in the poem, a place that's notoriously drizzly. Perhaps, then, the speaker is a foreigner—a person who grew up in a sunnier, dryer place, and for whom the rain is linked with the sense of loneliness and alienation they feel in their adopted homeland. Or, maybe, they're just recalling a trip or extended holiday that offered respite from the drizzle.

The phrase "English rain" then ends the entire poem. While the speaker was briefly able to escape the confines of their work and desk in England through their memory/imagination, they're pulled back to the rain—to their reality—in the poem's final moments.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 2-3:** "Its language is muffled by the rain which falls all afternoon / one autumn in England"
- **Line 24:** "And then a desk. A newspaper. A window. English rain."

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

Alliteration adds music and emphasis to the poem's language. In doing so, it highlights the bittersweet nature of the speaker's daydreams: these reveries are lovely and lyrical, yet also distant and fleeting.

Alliteration also makes certain moments and images feel more important. In lines 5-6, for example, sharp /c/ and /p/ alliteration make the image of the speaker flying away from England sound all the more exciting and intense:

> with a credit card and a warm coat you will leave
> on the plane. The past fades like newsprint in the sun.

Alliteration often works alongside the related devices consonance and assonance to make the poem's language even more powerful. Take lines 8-9:

> on the wrong side of your eyes. A beautiful boy
> in the bar on the harbour [...]

The intensity of the poem's language sticks out to the readers' ears, just as this image sticks out in the speaker's mind. The same thing happens with "blue bridge" and "six swans" in the poem's final stanza: alliteration calls attention to these very specific images, highlighting how clearly they appear in the speaker's imagination.

Elsewhere in the poem, sonic devices convey the actual sounds of the scene the speaker is imagining. Take lines 13-15, where growling /r/, popping /p/, and hissing /s/ sounds (in the form of both alliteration and internal consonance) evoke the "rasp of carpentry" that the speaker describes:

> Sleep. The rasp of carpentry wakes you. On the wall,
> a painting lost for thirty years renders the room
> yours.

Similarly, the poem essentially turns up the volume on its own language in lines 16-18 in order to convey the intensity of all the "sounds" the speaker hears on their imagined walk to and from their old job. There's alliteration ("passing"/ "practicing," "sounds"/Seagulls"/"scales"/"swap," "for a fish," etc.) plus plenty of consonance and assonance ("Apt"/"passing"/"practicing," "Seagulls"/"bells"/"flute," etc.). All these repetitive sounds make the passage more melodic, suggesting that the speaker finds all these familiar noises pleasant and comforting.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "credit," "card," "coat"
- **Line 6:** "plane," "past"
- **Line 7:** "people," "faces," "photographs"
- **Line 8:** "beautiful," "boy"
- **Line 9:** "bar"
- **Line 11:** "No"
- **Line 12:** "Never," "itself," "sea"

- **Line 13:** "Sleep," "rasp," "wakes," "wall"
- **Line 14:** "renders," "room"
- **Line 17:** "Seagulls"
- **Line 18:** "scales," "swap"
- **Line 20:** "blue," "bridge," "six," "swans"
- **Line 22:** "town," "turns"
- **Line 23:** "knowing," "name"

SIMILE

Similes help to bring the poem's imagery to life in surprising and meaningful ways.

The first simile appears at the end of the opening stanza. The speaker imagines getting on a "plane" in their mind before saying, "The past fades like newsprint in the sun." The speaker is comparing the way that memories fade to the way that newspaper ink (and the events that ink describes) disappear when left out in the sun. The simile suggests that the speaker's memories of "the other country" aren't as sharp as they once were; they're hazy and faded, "half-remembered." The mention of sunshine also suggests that the speaker is daydreaming of warmer, brighter locales.

There's another simile in line 11, when the speaker compares the "moon" to "an orange drawn by a child." This simile becomes a metaphor in the following line, as the speaker says, "You watch it [the moon] peel itself into the sea."

This simile does a few things:

- It might suggest that the speaker's memory of "the bar on the harbour" took place sometime around the harvest moon, the reddish moon that appears in the sky during the autumnal equinox. Alternatively, the speaker is just describing the vivid colors in the sky around sunset.
- The mention of a child's drawing might suggest that this memory is from the speaker's own childhood.
- The metaphor of the moon "peel[ing]" itself suggests the moon sinking beneath the horizon. It also suggests the "unpeeling" of the speaker's past.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "The past fades like newsprint in the sun."
- **Lines 11-12:** "A moon like an orange drawn by a child. No. / Never. You watch it peel itself into the sea."

REPETITION

"In Your Mind" contains frequent repetition, which makes sense for a poem about imagination and memory. The speaker is revisiting scenes from their past, and the use of repetitive language conveys both the speaker's familiarity with these images and the meandering, associative nature of memory (the way that one thought and image can suddenly summon another).

For example, take a look at lines 10-11, which use anadiplosis:

> asks you if men could possibly land on the **moon**.
> A **moon** like an orange drawn by a child. No.

The repetition shows how the bartender's question makes the speaker's mind jump; the thought of the moon landing makes the speaker consider the surreal orange moon before them at this moment. The way the poem's language seems to swerve around conveys the shifting nature of the speaker's thoughts.

Lines 15-16 then feature a whole bunch of repetition. There's anaphora ("You"), diacope ("left"), and epistrophe ("your job") :

> [...] **You** go to **your job**, right at the old hotel, **left**,
> then **left** again. **You** love **your job**. [...]

This repetitive language evokes the speaker's twisty path to their old job, and also implies just how valuable this job once was to the speaker (given that they mention it twice in as many lines).

In the next stanza, the diacope of "**lost** but not **lost**" reflects the double meaning of this word:

- The speaker is "lost" in the sense that they don't know exactly where they are;
- But they're "not lost" because they have nowhere that they're supposed to be.
- They also might not be "lost" in the sense that they're secure in their identity and sense of self.

The repetition of "turns" in later lines then adds energy, rhythm, and momentum to the poem. Readers can sense how thrilled the speaker feels at this moment of being completely immersed in their memory:

> [...] The certainty of a place **turns** on the lights
> all over town, **turns** up the scent on the air. [...]

By contrast, the anaphora of the poem's final moments ("A newspaper. A window.") suggests the drudgery and monotony of the speaker's life in the present.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 10:** "moon"
- **Line 11:** "moon"
- **Line 15:** "You," "your job," "left"
- **Line 16:** "left," "You," "your job"
- **Line 19:** "lost," "lost"
- **Line 21:** "turns"

- **Line 22:** "turns"
- **Line 24:** "A," "A"

PARATAXIS

The speaker favors short, sharp sentences and phrases throughout. This frequent parataxis creates a choppy rhythm that evokes the swiftness and confusion of memory. The poem's language comes at the reader in bits and pieces, much the images from the speaker's memories.

Listen to the halting rhythm of the third stanza for an example of parataxis in action:

> Sleep. The rasp of carpentry wakes you. On the wall,
> a painting lost for thirty years renders the room
> yours.
> Of course. [...]
> You love your job. Apt sounds
> mark the passing of the hours. Seagulls. Bells. A flute
> practicing scales. You swap a coin for a fish on the
> way home.

All that parataxis means that these lines are also filled with caesurae, as highlighted above. The frequent full stops contribute to the poem's sense of fragmentation; there's no real fluidity to these memories. Instead, they feel like a series of blurry impressions.

The poem also frequently uses asyndeton, which has an effect similar to parataxis (and the two devices often overlap). Listen to lines 15-16 and 19-20:

> You go to your job, right at the old hotel, left,
> then left again. [...]
> Then suddenly you are lost but not lost, dawdling
> on the blue bridge, watching six swans vanish

Again, the poem feels choppy, halting, and filled with swirling images that the speaker never explains.

The last line of the poem combines all these devices (plus anaphora):

> And then a desk. A newspaper. A window. English
> rain.

The stiff, plodding rhythm of the line evokes the disapointing monotony of the speaker's reality.

Where Parataxis appears in the poem:

- **Lines 7-12:** "You know people there. Their faces are photographs / on the wrong side of your eyes. A beautiful boy / in the bar on the harbour serves you a drink—what?— / asks you if men could possibly land on the moon. / A moon like an orange drawn by a child. No. / Never. You watch it peel itself into the sea."
- **Line 13:** "Sleep. The rasp of carpentry wakes you."
- **Lines 15-18:** "Of course. You go to your job, right at the old hotel, left, / then left again. You love your job. Apt sounds / mark the passing of the hours. Seagulls. Bells. A flute / practicing scales. You swap a coin for a fish on the way home."
- **Line 24:** "And then a desk. A newspaper. A window. English rain."

METAPHOR

In addition to the moon-as-an-orange simile/metaphor previously discussed in this guide, there's a second metaphor in lines 7-8:

> You know people there. Their faces are photographs
> on the wrong side of your eyes. [...]

The speaker isn't saying these people whose "faces" they recognize are *like* "photographs"—they *are* "photographs." This reflects the haziness of the speaker's memory; the people of this other country have ceased to be living, breathing human beings. They exist only as snapshots in the speaker's mind, frozen as they were when the speaker last saw them.

That these pictures are "on the wrong side" of the speaker's "eyes" also suggests that they're difficult to make out. They exist only within the speaker's mind, behind their eyes, rather than before them in the present.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 7-8:** "Their faces are photographs / on the wrong side of your eyes."
- **Line 12:** "You watch it peel itself into the sea."

VOCABULARY

Carpentry (Line 13) - Woodworking.

Rasp (Line 13) - A harsh, scraping sound.

Renders (Line 14) - Makes.

Apt sounds (Lines 16-17) - Appropriate or fitting noises.

Dawdling (Lines 19-20) - Lingering; wandering slowly.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"In Your Mind" consists of 24 lines of free verse, broken up into four sestets (six-line stanzas). Frequent enjambment, parataxis, and caesura create a poem that feels at once choppy and fluid; readers get the sense of the speaker's thoughts meandering from one remembered scene to the next, yet these scenes themselves are fragmented—filled with fleeting, disparate images. Together, all these images create the *impression* of a place, an outline rather than a detailed drawing.

METER

As a free verse poem, "In Your Mind" doesn't use a regular meter. This makes sense for a poem about the transportive powers of the imagination and the meandering nature of memory. The freedom of the poem's language conveys the freedom of the speaker's mind, which jumps between one image and the next without sticking to a prescribed rhythm.

RHYME SCHEME

As a free verse poem, "In Your Mind" doesn't use a rhyme scheme. As with the poem's lack of meter, this keeps the language feeling intimate and free, as though readers are getting a peek into the speaker's thoughts in real time.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "In Your Mind" is someone who currently lives and works in England. The poem implies that they're either not originally from England or that they spent a fair amount of time abroad in their younger years.

When the poem begins, the speaker is stuck at their desk on a rainy English afternoon, daydreaming about going on a trip where they can leave their "warm coat" behind. At first, it sounds like they might just be in need of a tropical getaway. But as the poem goes on, it becomes clear that the speaker is imagining going to a specific "country" and to a specific time in their own past.

They envision drinking at a "bar on the harbor" (served by a "beautiful boy," no less) and "dawdling" on a "blue bridge." Earlier in life, the poem goes on to reveal, the speaker had a job they truly enjoyed (as opposed to one they daydream through now). These details suggest that the speaker is nostalgic for romance and freedom, for a time when they could leisurely stroll around a coastal town and find pleasure in their work.

It's also possible that the speaker is mixing memory with fantasy here—that some of these details represent experiences the speaker actually had, while others are things the speaker longs for but hasn't actually known. Either way, the speaker is clearly not fulfilled by their current life in England.

At the poem's end, the speaker is pulled back into the present—to their "desk. A newspaper. A window. English rain." Their mental venture can only provide a brief escape.

SETTING

"In Your Mind" essentially has two different settings: the place where the speaker's physical body is, and the "other country" they travel to in their mind.

In the real world, the speaker is sitting at a desk by a window on a rainy autumn afternoon in England. But in their mind, they're boarding a plane to a sunnier, warmer locale. They don't name this "country" outright, but they do describe drinking at a "bar on the harbour" and watching the moon "peel itself" like "[an orange] into the sea."

A boy asks them about human beings reaching the moon, implying that this is a scene from the speaker's memory that occurred sometime shortly before the moon landing of 1969 (when space travel would certainly have been on people's minds).

The setting shifts again in the third stanza, when the speaker "Sleep[s]" and "wakes" in a familiar room (probably their childhood bedroom, given that on the wall hangs a painting they haven't seen in "thirty years").

At this point, they seem certain of where they are: they follow the familiar path to their old job (which they "love"), listening to the sounds of seagulls, church bells, and someone practicing the flute. They're clearly in some sort of sea-adjacent town or city.

In the final stanza, the speaker finds themselves "dawdling / on the blue bridge." The article "the" (as opposed to "a") suggests that this is a *specific* bridge, one the speaker knows well. They notice "six swans" disappearing under the bridge they're standing on. The number six is again painstakingly specific. The speaker "know[s] the name" of the place where they are, though they never reveal it to the reader.

In the final line, the speaker returns to the first setting established at the beginning of the poem: "And then a desk. A newspaper. A window. English rain." Physically, they have been at this desk staring out at the rain all along. It's only in their mind that they ever left.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"In Your Mind" appears in Carol Ann Duffy's third poetry collection, *The Other Country*. Published in 1990, *The Other Country* explores themes related to emigration, nostalgia, delusion, and the journey from childhood to adulthood.

"In Your Mind," with its wanderlust-ing speaker who's nostalgic for a time and place to which they no longer have access, fits right into this collection (and, in fact, includes the collection's title in its opening line!). Other poems from *The Other Country* such as "Originally," "In Mrs Tilscher's Class," and "The Darling Letters" feature similarly thoughtful, poignant musings on time, change, and longing.

Duffy has cited numerous poets as early influences for her own work, including canonical Irish and English poets like W.B. Yeats and John Keats, modernist poets including Aimé Césaire, and the groundbreaking American poet Sylvia Plath, whose influence Duffy has written about. A lesbian writer in an often conservative, male-dominated literary culture, Duffy herself has blazed trails in her exploration of women's and LGBTQ narratives in contemporary UK poetry.

In 2009 Duffy became the first woman, the first Scottish poet, and the first openly LGBTQ person to become Poet Laureate of the UK. Along with Seamus Heaney, she is now one of the most widely taught poets in UK schools and her work is renowned for its empathy and sharp-edged insights into contemporary life.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Carol Ann Duffy was born in Scotland and emigrated to England as a small child. Her own feelings of displacement and homesickness almost certainly informed the wistful tone of "In Your Mind."

The speaker's conversation with the bartender in which they speculate about the possibility of "men [landing] on the moon" further suggests that the speaker can remember a time before Neil Armstrong took that first historic step in 1969. Duffy herself was born in 1955 and would have been a teenager when this happened, so it's possible that some of the scenes in this poem were inspired by Duffy's own childhood in "[an]other country."

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- A Synopsis of The Other Country — Check out the publisher's synopsis of Duffy's third collection of poetry, in which "In Your Mind" first appeared. (https://www.panmacmillan.com/authors/carol-ann-duffy/the-other-country/9781509852932)
- The Poet's Life and Legacy — A biography of Duffy from the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/carol-ann-duffy)
- A Look at the Poet's Career — A Guardian article discussing Duffy's poetic projects, influences, and the central themes that run through her work. (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/aug/31/featuresreviews.guardianreview8)
- Duffy's Poet Laureate Acceptance Speech — An interview with Carol Ann Duffy where she talks about her role and responsibility as the UK's first female/LGBTQ poet laureate. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wnt5p1DGD9U&t=77s)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER CAROL ANN DUFFY POEMS

- A Child's Sleep
- Anne Hathaway
- Before You Were Mine
- Circe
- Death of a Teacher
- Demeter
- Education For Leisure
- Foreign
- Head of English
- In Mrs Tilscher's Class
- Little Red Cap
- Medusa
- Mrs Aesop
- Mrs Darwin
- Mrs Midas
- Mrs Sisyphus
- Originally
- Penelope
- Prayer
- Recognition
- Stealing
- The Darling Letters
- Valentine
- Warming Her Pearls
- War Photographer
- We Remember Your Childhood Well

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