

How does the poet present her thoughts and feelings about moving home in 'Originally'?

In Carol Ann Duffy's autobiographical poem "Originally", she explores her confused thoughts and strong feelings as a child moving home. She accepts that one's identity is a very complex idea that depends on many other ones, as one is defined not only by their physical surroundings; due to the move, the speaker is unsure of where she originates. Throughout the poem, Duffy presents her feelings as she compares the geographical place where she originates and the culture that shapes her identity.

In the first stanza, Duffy recalls her half-faded and fragmented childhood memories of moving home and the emotions associated with doing so. Even though the poem is very personal, the speaker deliberately does not mention the names of any places to make sure the poem is universal and relatable to all. The poet uses intentionally childish language and simple phrasing to remind the reader that these are a child's memories and feelings. The use of the first person shows how the decision to relocate affected the entire family; the possessive pronoun "our" shows how the speaker feels that they belonged there. The response of Duffy and her siblings clearly contrast to those of her mother, whose "singing" shows her optimism and excitement about the move. On the other hand, the verb "bawling" communicates the amplified and overwhelming nature of their emotions, while "*Home, \ Home*" represents the children's monosyllabic shouts of horror and their desperation. The speaker's reaction, however, is different from her brothers' - the verb "stared" expresses Duffy's silent focus, transfixion and sense of disbelief as she seeks comfort in her toy. The adjective "red" suggests the anger in having no control and her internal conflict, further emphasised by the alliteration in the phrase "red room". The verb "fell" and the personification in the phrase "the miles rushed back" refer to something that is out of control, highlighted by the alliteration in the phrase "fell through the fields". In summary, this stanza's descriptions of the journey to her new home present the reader with the deep childish emotions experienced by Duffy and her siblings as they wish to return home.

Duffy's second stanza discusses her feelings as she arrives at the new city, starting with a definite and assertive short sentence: "All childhood is an emigration". The caesura makes it even more abrupt and emphasises its effect. The choice of the noun "emigration" rather than "migration" or "immigration" mirrors the act of moving *out of* one's comfort zone into the uncertain. Throughout childhood, one must leave behind things of all sorts behind, from hobbies to friends, and Duffy uses the adjective "resigned" to convey her pessimistic view of emigration. The change of emotion is also visible in the change from the hopefulness in "mother singing" in the previous stanza to the tension and the "parents' anxiety". Furthermore, the juxtaposition of a long, enjambed sentence with short and abrupt ones goes to focus attention onto the nature of changes that occur in childhood.

The poet describes how she feels she does not belong in this new area and its uninviting “pebble-dashed estates”. To further add to the sense of being unwelcome, “shouting” suggests anger or violence, “words you don’t understand” points to how foreign the speaker felt and the alliteration in “big boys” enhances their overwhelming nature. The phrase “big boys” and the reference to “a loose tooth” once again remind the reader that the feelings recounted in this poem are those of a child. The stanza ends with a reference back to the start of the poem, with the verb “want” accentuating the naïve desperation of the speaker. Overall, the second stanza in this poem explores the feelings associated with not fitting in to her new environment, be it her inner confusion or state of being unwelcome.

To end the poem, the final stanza details how Duffy is more reflective as time has elapsed. It switches to the second person, making these ideas more immediate and adds to the universality of the experience; the constant switching between persons throughout the poem indicates the poet’s confusion of identity. The conjunction “but” that starts this stanza immediately signals change in the speaker’s thoughts and feelings. The description of watching “your brother swallow a slug” presents the cultural assimilation that has occurred, as the brother, a much closer relative, is now fitting in with the “big boys \ eating worms” of the previous stanza. Unlike her siblings, the speaker’s previous life still troubles her, as shown in the usage of the word “skelf”, a Scottish word meaning a splinter or a small bit, suggesting that although she feels out of place, she does not feel much shame. The poet conveys her feelings of betrayal and self-disgust through the connotations of the word “snake” in the simile “my tongue \ shedding its skin like a snake” as she loses her accent and identity. The loss of individuality is further indicated by her voice “sounding just like the rest”, as she has slowly assimilated and become ‘normal’. The listing of things she lost emphasises how important these basic things are, as they are what gives each person a unique identity. This use of a rhetorical question adds to the sense of self-doubt and uncertainty. The last element of this list is the most important and has the most significance placed on it – the reader can assume that since Duffy believes she lost the “right place” she must consider herself to currently be in the wrong one. The fact that Duffy is asked the question suggests that she is not fully assimilated, and people still notice, as she struggles to define her identity. The noun “strangers” implies something still foreign and strange, while the hesitation at the end of the poem reveals how the speaker still has mixed feelings about her origin. In general, the last stanza is told by a much more reflective speaker, who acknowledges that she has changed since she was young and that one’s identity is made of many parts.

In conclusion, the poem “Originally” describes the speaker as they relocate from one town to another with them maturing as the poem moves on. The poem starts with a confused tone, shown by the lack of regular rhythm, and moves on to one of reflection by the last stanza. Throughout the poem, Duffy’s word choices and varying sentence lengths effectively reveal the confusion of identity brought about by her early childhood memories.