

## A Critical appreciation of David Malouf's *Revolving Days*

Within '*Revolving Days*' Malouf explores themes of relationships, the past, and memory. His speaker addresses his ex-lover, expressing his lasting emotions and depicting the revolving days of his life and role as "lover". The mood is resigned and contemplative as he considers who he was, who he is, and the person his ex-lover is now.

In the first part of this poem, the speaker remembers when he fell in love, how it was a "mistake," but that it's also been long-lasting. As the poem progresses, it becomes clear that the speaker and this person he loves are no longer together. But, despite the things that have changed, he has remained the same. He still loves the person to whom he's been speaking.

In '*Revolving Days*' Malouf engages with themes that include love, memory, and transformation (or lack thereof). The speaker spends the bulk of this poem describing a love he used to have and the way that that love changed him. But since, he hasn't changed at all. He's still the person he used to be when he was with his ex-lover, for better or for worse. But, he knows that she has changed. She's somewhere else, (where exactly he doesn't know) and he figures that she's moved on to be with someone else. His memories of the past are quite strong, so much so that he's able to depict moments from his love affair with clarity and poignant (if someone reserved) emotion.

'*Revolving Days*' by David Malouf is a three-stanza poem that's divided into uneven sets of lines. The first stanza contains ten, the second: seven, and the third: six. Malouf did not give this poem a specific rhyme scheme or metrical pattern. Rather, the lines vary in the number of syllables and the number of words.

Although there is not a structured rhyme scheme there are moments of rhyme within the poem. These are seen through repetition such as with “lasted” and “lasted” in line two of the first stanza, as well as through half-rhyme. Also known as slant or partial rhyme, half-rhyme is seen through the repetition of assonance or consonance. This means that either a vowel or consonant sound is reused within one line or multiple lines of verse. For example, “green” and “League” in lines eight and nine of the first stanza. Or, another example, “seeing” and “be” in six and seven of the same stanza.

Malouf makes use of several poetic techniques in ‘*Revolving Days*’. These include alliteration, anaphora, enjambment, and caesura. The latter, caesura, occurs when a line is split in half, sometimes with punctuation, sometimes not. The use of punctuation in these moments creates a very intentional pause in the text.

A reader should consider how the pause influences the rhythm of one’s reading and how it might proceed an important turn or transition in the text. For instance, line one of the third stanza. It reads: “Revolving days. My heart”. Or, as another example, a reader can look to line three of the second stanza which reads: “steps into the room. In the next room you”.

Alliteration occurs when words are used in succession, or at least appear close together, and begin with the same letter. For example, “life as lover” in line eight of the first stanza and “writing” and “wherever” in line two of stanza three.

Malouf also makes use of anaphora, or the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of multiple lines, usually in succession. This technique is often used to create emphasis. A list of phrases, items, or actions may be created through its implementation.

Another important technique commonly used in poetry is enjambment. It occurs when a line is cut off before its natural stopping point. Enjambment

forces a reader down to the next line, and the next, quickly. One has to move forward in order to comfortably resolve a phrase or sentence.

### Analysis of *Revolving Days*

#### Stanza One

In the first stanza of '*Revolving Days*,' the speaker looks back on his life and remembers the year that he "fell in love". He explains it simply, it happened because he had nowhere to go. This frivolous start dissolves as he adds that it "lasted and has lasted".

The next lines use imagery as a way of painting a picture of the past, as well as evoking in the reader an emotional response to the speaker's personal life. He recalls what it felt like to be falling in love. Specifically, the "boom under the pocket of a shirt" urging him on and the "old tug at the heart".

In an original depiction of a lover's mind, he describes buying shirts and using them as a way to understand himself as "lover". These ranged in color and one was his "first button-down collar".

#### Stanza Two

As the poem progresses it becomes clear that the love the speaker experienced is a little more complicated than it seemed. It "lasted" but not in the way one might immediately expect. He looks to the past, while also considering the future, in this stanza.

The past comes back to greet him while he's in the bathroom looking in the mirror and he recalls the time they spent together and the promises they made. These have fallen to the wayside as has the relationship.

### Stanza Three

In the final stanza of '*Revolving Days*,' the speaker makes use of the phrase "Revolving days" to depict the nature of his heart and memory. He is writing "this for" his ex-lover. They are no longer together. In fact, he doesn't know where they are. They could be with someone new. Despite the changes that have happened he's the same.

Before the intended listener/the speaker's ex-lover starts to worry, he says he's not going to pop up from the past "to discomfort" them. They are at a distance and he knows there is very little chance he'll be getting a reply to this letter in poem form.

In this poem, the speaker reflects on a time in his past when he fell in love. He calls it a "mistake / of course," but it seems as though the feeling has stayed with him nonetheless. He recalls the feelings he felt but also the colors of the shirts he purchased then, for his new life as a lover. He and his lover do not stay in touch. However, sometimes he feels like he tried to feel then, like one of the new selves in the new shirts, and he feels as though he is right back there in the relationship again. The time passes and days go by, but the speaker still feels that his "heart / [is] in [his] mouth again." His feelings remain unchanged, then, and he considers who she might be involved with now. In the end, however, he assures her that he will not reappear in her life and doesn't mean to cause her any discomfort; he expects nothing from her and does not expect to hear from her.

"Revolving Days" uses apostrophe and symbolism to convey the idea that moving on from lost love can be incredibly difficult and even impossible. Apostrophe is when the speaker addresses someone absent or dead as though they were there and could respond. Here, the poet's use of apostrophe helps to convey the speaker's sense of longing, of yearning, for the lover who has left him. Further, the color of the shirts he purchased during this relationship—"mint green, one / pink, the third, called Ivy League, tan / with darker stripes . . ."—seem to symbolize the new life he hoped he'd have as a lover. They are bright and clean and new, probably starched and crisp, one his "first button-down collar." The colorful brightness of those shirts, as well as the "blue eyes" of his lost love, are the only colors in the poem. Life seems as though it is, perhaps, figuratively colorless now for him. Symbolically, then, life is duller, less exciting, in the wake of this love.