

Letting Go

In her poem, "Passed On," Carole Satymurti utilizes suggestive diction, visual imagery, and a transitioning structure to create a narrative poem through the peaceful and straightforward tone of one who has come to terms with her/his mother's death.

Diction helps to clarify this idea of letting go. The narrator's mother, with "squirrel concentration" (4), "drains" (5) her last strengths to undermine the "string" (6) of difficult times lying ahead for the narrator. Anathimeria, the substitution of one part of speech (squirrel, a noun) for another (an adjective) emphasizes the hurried onset of death, as well as the unselfish, wise, and deliberate sacrifice of strength a mother undergoes for her child, who, in this case, seems to be in denial in the first stanza. Syllepsis of the word "drainage," which refers to ink as well as strength, underlines the state of urgency in which a paralyzed child (figuratively speaking), whether from fright, naivety, or the like, is unable to act, and his mother, even though she is dying, knows exactly what she is doing and is able to react to the situation immediately. The string which the narrator mentions concerns the series of difficult times, specifically "winters," the narrator will face when his mother is no longer there to provide him with guidance, but it also functions, figuratively, as the string that ties the narrator to his mother, who is represented by the index cards throughout stanzas two and three. In the end, he finally lets go of this string. The effect of the first stanza, then, is to create the impression of an archetypal mother, level-headed and active on the part of her young, preparing him for and teaching about hibernation or simply surviving in the winter, as a squirrel who buries nuts so she and her young will not starve (in the winter). Only after his mother's death does the narrator begin to see how his mother "rendered" (9) herself for him; by the end of the narrative, a more mature narrator has "tipped" (32) the cards into the fire and watched as the smoke "rose" (33), and he has let go. In the second stanza,

with a mounting tone of maturity about the death and respect for his mother's sacrifice, the narrator realizes how his mother has yielded herself to his every need – on paper. In the last stanza, a more self-sufficient and independent narrator is able to tip the cards into the fire; denotatively, this means that the narrator pushes the cards lightly into the fire, but, connotatively, it implies a final salute. The smoke then blooms, as might a rose, reflecting the narrator's psychological growth, which is why his mother's actions and his life become more "clear" to him and he is able to remember his mother through his own writings, such as the diary. Thus, diction mirrors the author's growing maturity throughout the poem. Things are no longer done for "me" (10, 15); rather it is the acting "I" who takes over (in stanzas four and five).

Visual and aural imagery reflect the different stages of the narrator's growth. The cards "looked after" (15) the narrator, assuming the role of his mother, whose voice was enclosed in their "shuffle" (15) and whose answers lay in their "box-shaped" (17) world. The cards, personified in the third stanza, act as the narrator's guide, leading him by the hand through everyday events and concerns. The onomatopoeia of the word "shuffle" emphasizes the narrator's dependence on the cards; he hears his mother's voice in what they have written on them. Thus, he lives in a seemingly blind, dependent, inexperienced, box-shaped world. Perhaps this is a pun on how people used to think the world was flat until they explored for themselves, and found it was round. In the fourth stanza, the cards are not personified, but the "language that pointed to what wasn't said" (25) is, until in the last stanza, "The smoke rose thin and clear" (33), and the narrator is no longer as confused about how to lead his life. When he starts to break free from reliance on his mother to his own resources, his own knowledge and experience, the narrator simultaneously begins the transition of filling in the blanks on the cards his mom has left him. Whereas before the narrator depended on the concrete, the cards, by the end he is more

acquainted with the abstract insight and ideas on life he gains himself; consequently, he burns the cards when he no longer even needs to write on them. The final effect, then, is to create a type of purging with the smoke of letting go because the narrator knows how to live his own life. Here is the birth, as may be represented by the fire, of a newly self-sufficient human being who no longer just “sees [saw]” (4, 8), or who is looked after by cards, or who needs language to point him in the right direction, but one who acts on his own initiative, feels, understands, and creates his own form of remembering and living, such as the diaries.

As already mentioned, the structure of the poem reflects the seemingly smooth transition of the narrator from dependence to independence. In the first stanza, consonance of harsh sounds, such as the “s” in line three, reflects the hurried tone of the stanza, the lack of control the narrator has about what is happening; he is a spectator in his own life. Furthermore, the sentences are fragmented, interrupted by commas. The second and third stanzas are about the same length and convey the same tone of dependency. By the fourth stanza, there is a shift in tone. The narrator begins to learn to think on his own. An isocolon helps to indicate a more significant transition in the narrator’s growth with the phrase “her urgent dogmatism, loosening grip” (27). The cacophonous sounds of the “t,” “s,” and “d” in the first part of the phrase contrast with the softer-sounding “l” of the second half. This parallelism occurs in the shorter and easier-to-read final stanza as well. The effect is to create rhythm and unity and reflect the calmness of the self-supporting narrator, who states in a short, declarative sentence, “Then I let her go” (32). The consonance of soft-sounding “l’s” at the end of line 33 reflects this as well. Thus, the structure of the poem underlines the growth of the narrator and the acceptance of letting go of his mother.

Diction, visual and aural imagery, onomatopoeia, consonance, and repetition reinforce the structure of the poem "Passed On," which molds to a maturing narrator who finds acceptance, some sense of inner peace, and independence after his mother's death.