**Valentine – Carol Ann Duffy**

Not a red rose or a satin heart.

I give you an onion.

It is a moon wrapped in brown paper.

It promises light

like the careful undressing of love.

Here.

It will blind you with tears

like a lover.

It will make your reflection

a wobbling photo of grief.

I am trying to be truthful.

Not a cute card or a kissogram.

I give you an onion.

Its fierce kiss will stay on your lips,

possessive and faithful

as we are,

for as long as we are.

Take it.

Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding ring,

if you like.

Lethal.

Its scent will cling to your fingers,

cling to your knife.

In ‘Valentine’, Duffy chooses to **challenge the conventional symbols of love**, namely the**‘red rose’** and the **‘satin heart’**. This rejection of classic love tokens is indicated through the **negative ‘not’** in the first stanza. Instead Duffy introduces the reader to her own **symbol of love, the onion**, which is unusual because the onion is a very unflattering, smelly, acidic and unromantic object. Duffy spends the rest of the poem proving to us how **the onion is more faithful and reflects the true nature of love**.

The poem itself is an extended [metaphor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphor) about how the unromantic properties of the onion fits the notion of love. Each stanza also shows the different phases of love, how it begins with all the best intentions yet gradually deteriorates into misunderstandings and violence.

**STANZA 1:**Negative adverb ‘not’ indicates rejection of traditional symbols of love.

**STANZA 2:** Duffy introduces alternative symbol of love; the onion. An unusual comparison, however Duffy begins to make valid connections by comparing the shape and colour of it to the moon.

Metaphor – **‘a moon wrapped in brown paper’** refers to the romantic connotations that the moon carries. The moon influences the tides and all water on earth. Since 75% of the earth is water and our own bodies also contain the same amount, it means it also has an effect on our emotions too. In ancient mythology the moon was ruled by Diana, a goddess worshipped by the Roman women. She had two sides to her personality; the pure maiden and the huntress. She was believed to help pregnant women through labour, yet had a violent side to her. Duffy makes use of this in stanza 6 and 7, where love becomes a desperate hunt with violent imagery. However at this point, the image of moon/onion takes on a sensual image, and we have a hint of love-making as the beginning of the relationship.

Direct address – ‘**I give you…**‘, Duffy addresses the reader directly, giving the poem a personal tone.

**STANZA 3:**Beginning to explore the negative sides of love through similes and metaphors.  
Direct address: ‘**Here.**‘ An offering of the onion to the reader. Very intimate, confident and bold.  
  
Simile/ personification: ‘…**blind you with tears like a lover**‘. The onion is compared to a lover and the way love often leaves us in tears. A large part of being in love is also the risk of being left heart-broken. This connection is explored in the way an onion stings our eyes when we try to get to the ‘heart’ of it (cut it), the same way we may be stung by another person’s heartlessness.  
Metaphor: ‘…make your reflection a wobbling photo of grief’. Imagery where we are looking ‘through’ the eyes of the upset lover who may be gazing at a their own reflection in the mirror and crying at the same time.

**STANZA 4:** A single sentence stanza that stands on its own. Duffy underlines how she is trying telling the bitter truth half-way through the poem. A line conveying honesty.

**STANZA 5**: Can be seen as the ‘second half’ of the poem and refers back to the first stanza.  
Repetition: Both stanzas have the same syllable count (9), similar wording **‘Not’** and a rejection of two typical symbols of love ‘**cute card**‘ and ‘**kissogram**‘.

NOTE: Kissograms are not used now, but during the 70’s were popular. Kissograms were people who were hired on special days/ occasions like valentine’s day to go round and kiss the sweetheart on behalf of their lover with a special message.

**STANZA 6**: Images of jealousy and violence begin to creep into the notion of romantic love.  
Repetition:  Mirrors the first line of stanza 2, carrying on with the pattern of repetition established in stanza 5.

Metaphor/ Personification: The onion is compared to a jealous lover and the way their kiss at this point in the relationship would be a mixture of passion and punishment. This is further illustrated through the way an onion’s smell clings stubbornly to our fingers when we cut it. The key word here is ‘possessive’, and this hints at obsessive love and how this is turning into an unhealthy relationship. One of the partners is evidently suffering from this claustrophobic relationship.

**STANZA 7**: Images of married life flash are introduced as Duffy implies that marriage kills romance and makes romantic love a chore or a punishment.

Direct Address: ‘**Take it**‘. Duffy is still addressing her readership in a bold and confident tone.

Metaphor: The loops of the onion are compared to a wedding ring that ‘shrink’ which implies being trapped. The loops are ‘platinum’, meaning a very precious metal, which is ironic because the onion is not at all precious or desirable. The words ‘if you like’ are added to show that the relationship could go in this direction, but it is not necessary for the things that will inevitably follow. The word ‘lethal’ is on it’s own, showing what the relationship has turned into and drawing attention to it.

The last two lines again imply the smell of the onion and introduces the knife. This is violent imagery which implies that the two lovers have become enemies. This is when the image of the moon (Diana) as huntress becomes relevant, as the dark side of romantic love (or the moon) reveals itself in the later stages of the relationship.