

Poetic voice starts by dismissing stereotypical valentine gifts - doesn't think they hold much worth.

Title suggests poem will deal with conventional notions of love - proved wrong in first line.

Metaphor - "moon" has connotations of romance but "brown paper" gives the impression of being everyday or nothing special - ties in with the poet's idea of real love - real gifts don't need embellishment.

Speaker is addressing a romantic partner but gives something unexpected.

Valentine

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.

"Careful" suggests tenderness, affection to allow barriers to come down and expose themselves.

"Light" has positive connotations. Reflects optimism at the start of relationships. Simile compares the shedding of onion layers to delving deeper into a relationship. Love requires a careful hand. "careful undressing" creates image of undressing a partner.

Simile - accepts the truth about love - it isn't all perfect and happy - onion's scent compared to hurting the one you love.

One word sentence suggests simplicity/straight forward - something is being given - forceful presentation.

Metaphor - referring to the person's reflection when one's eyes are full of tears - love can distress - destructive.

Single sentence stanza reflects person's desire to remain honest and keep things simple and realistic.

Here.

It will blind you with tears like a lover.

It will make your reflection a wobbling photo of grief.

Tone change from gentle/honest to threatening.

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.

Another reminder of their desire to give meaningful gifts.

Cynical about love - instead of promising to last forever, the relationship will only last for as long as they work at it.

Even when love is true, there can be hard times or danger. Suggests passion can get out of control - darker associations.

Link back to the start of the poem - another reminder that the speaker disapproves of cliché gifts. Alliteration of "cute card" and "red rose" could suggest Duffy's belief that it's overused in love poems.

Word choice - connotations of jealousy, distrust and insecurity.

Short sentence hints that speaker has become a bit desperate and worries the gift will not be accepted and neither will she.

Take it.

Its platinum loops shrink to a wedding-ring, if you like.

Marriage might restrict a person. Idea of being constricted.

Lethal.

Its scent will cling to your fingers, cling to your knife.

The further you get into a relationship the more serious it gets - ending in marriage.

Another reminder that love can be dangerous and violent at times. The knife can destroy the onion.

Suggests the possessive side of love and how it can lead to tension.

Casual offer reinforces the idea that a more honest type of love is more important and true.

Carol Ann Duffy

Themes

- * Love
- * Relationships
- * Violence

Poem is written in free-verse. The form echoes that of an onion and the layers that make it up - rejects tradition.

Negative aspects of conventional relationships can be restrictive to the individual - but a love that is true is worth pursuing.