

Notes from the Poet

by Marvin Thompson



Hi, I'm Marvin. I was born in Tottenham, north London to Jamaican parents. I now live in mountainous south Wales. I hope these reading notes help you to enjoy my poem, **'The one in which I drive through Crumlin wondering where the cigarette-raised crisp factory used to be'**.

An overview of the poem

'The one in which... Crumlin...' is part two of a sequence of four poems. The sequence depicts a Black father taking his Mixed Race children to watch the *Lego Batman Movie* in Blackwood, south Wales.

Along the journey, the father grapples with the challenges of parenting his Mixed race children in predominantly White south Wales.

In the sequence, the narrator is a fictionalised version of me. Derys and Hayden are fictionalised versions of my own children. Focusing on these real life people made the writing process very emotional. Hopefully, this comes across in the poem.

Translation or Jazz?

When I listened to the Welsh translation of my poem by my friend, Grug Muse, I was shocked. It sounded more emotional than my English original!

This reminded me of two things:

- With poetry, the sound (or music) of the language is vital. This is because the music of the words deepens the meaning and impact of the poem.
- When reading poems, I often forget to visualise. Turning the words into pictures in my mind helps me to engage with the language. Also, it makes reading the poem even more pleasurable.

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Read on your own then discuss with a friend!

To enjoy a poem, I like to read it a few times. On my first read, I try to listen to the music of the language. Then I read the poem again, focusing on the title and SMILE. “What does that mean?” Well...

The Title

- ‘The one in which...’ is a reference to the 1990s TV comedy, *Friends*. Set in New York, *Friends* was a global sensation! However, it was also famous for the lack of diversity in its main cast and in the extras used for crowd scenes. This lack of diversity did not seem to reflect the reality of New York.
- How might the theme of diversity be relevant to the story of a Black father taking his Mixed Race children to watch the *Lego Batman Movie* in Blackwood?

Structure

- Which elements of the poem make it feel like a story?
- Do these story elements make the poem more or less engaging?

Meaning

- The Grenfell disaster highlighted the negative treatment often experienced by minority groups and poorer people in Britain. How does this link to the title of the poem?

Imagery

- The poem contains lots of industrial imagery (‘TV’, ‘colliery’, ‘Grenfell’). However, there are few images of the natural world (‘willows’). Why do you think this is?

Language

- A lot of the poem’s language is linked to death. As a reader, how does this make you feel?

Effect on the reader

- What is the impact of having young children as key characters in the poem?