



# **EMC POETRY PLAYLIST**

Contemporary voices for the classroom

Edited by Barbara Bleiman, Andrew McCallum, Kate Oliver and Lucy Webster

Classroom materials available on the English and Media Centre website ([www.englishandmedia.co.uk](http://www.englishandmedia.co.uk)) written and edited by Barbara Bleiman, Andrew McCallum, April McCarthy, Kate Oliver and Lucy Webster

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## **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction for Teachers

Poetry is like a huge, multicoloured marquee that has room for all kinds of forms and voices.

Vicki Feather

Welcome to the *EMC Poetry Playlist*, an anthology of contemporary poems to offer students Vicki Feavers' 'multicoloured marquee' of poetry and excite their interest in reading, writing and talking about poems. While there are some poets and poems you will recognise, we hope that there will be many that you will not have come across before. The aim is to refresh and re-invigorate the poetry curriculum.

At the heart of the anthology is diversity - a diversity of voices, identities and experiences but also of approaches, forms and styles of poetry. Alongside poems in traditional forms, students will encounter prose poems, performance poems, experimental poems - and in our 'poets' playlists', the odd 'classic'.

### How is the anthology organised?

In the main part of the anthology, poems which might illuminate each other are loosely clustered together. In general, the more challenging poems are found towards the end. From page 129, we have seven 'poets' playlists'. These are poems that have been chosen for the anthology by the poets Jacob Sam-La Rose, Hollie McNish, Peter Kahn, Daljit Nagra, Lucy Thynne, Christian 'Rich' Robinson and Moniza Alvi. Each poet has also written a short reflection on one of their choices - these are great examples of a personal response.

### Clusters of poems

To help you navigate the collection, and use it in multiple different ways, we have listed clusters of poems (pages 10-16). Many of these are thematic or topic-based (so love poems or poems about displacement), but there are also some related to form or approach (for example, poems that play with words, or written in a particular dialect). 'Pairings' puts together some of the poems we think 'speak' to each other in interesting ways.

We hope that you will also find these clusters useful when thinking about how you might link poetry to other aspects of your curriculum, a novel or non-fiction unit, for example. You and your students will undoubtedly come up with your own clusters but these are a starting-point for grouping poems as part of a sequence of lessons.



## Using the anthology with EMC's downloadable resources

To accompany the anthology, we have published several sequences of classroom resources, in PowerPoint format. These free downloadable materials, available from the English and Media Centre website, are ready to take into the classroom – but can also be adapted to suit your needs. We hope that as well as providing engaging lessons on particular clusters (and poetry as a form), they will also provide you with some ideas for ways into other poems – approaches you can draw on when creating your own materials.

### Some of our key principles

#### Time and independence

While some of the poems are immediately accessible to students, others are more challenging. We'd advocate encouraging students to 'live' with a complex poem, allowing them time to explore and wrestle with it in different ways – and letting them know that complexity, mystery and ambiguity are the very stuff of poetry, not something to shy away from.

#### Exploratory reading and writing

Reading and writing in exploratory ways, can help students engage with challenging poems and develop a personal response. This may provide the basis for a more formal piece of writing, though sometimes an exploratory response is enough.

#### Reading as a writer, writing as a reader

You'll see from the downloadable resources that we are convinced of the value of creative writing not only for its own sake, but also as a support for analytical reading and critical writing. Poetry is the perfect form for experimenting with this approach. Some ideas for creative writing are given in our introduction to students.

The EMC Team

### **Content warning**

There are references in some of the poems to sex, death, war, domestic violence and racism, with two instances of mild swearing. You can find a full content-warning list on the *EMC Poetry Playlist* page of the English and Media Centre website.

## Clusters (page numbers in brackets)

### Across the Generations

Instead (48)  
Shoulders (50)  
Reading for Pleasure (55)  
My Mother's Kitchen (57)  
Blackberries (58)  
Grandpa's Fancy Watch (60)  
blood, grandad (154)  
The Tooth Fairy (170)  
Tamales on Christmas (182)

### Ageing

Simple Tings (22)  
Evening (47)  
My Mother's Kitchen (57)  
Blackberries (58)  
Grandpa's Fancy Watch (60)  
Retirement (65)

### Buildings

Song for a Spent 100W Bulb  
(149)  
Ruins of a Great House (164)

### Birds

The Parakeets (36)  
Goldfinch (40)  
Kingfisher (41)  
The Falcon to the Falconer (72)  
Hawk and Shadow (73)  
Peregrine Falcon (74)  
Green Bee-Eater (135)  
Caged Bird (176)

### Characters

This is it (29)  
My Grandpa's Fancy Watch (60)  
Building My Grandfather (61)  
Friends (62)

Rookie (84)  
Ode to Gossips (89)  
On Ellington Road (132)

### Cities

To London (102)  
Ingredients and Properties of  
Concrete (119)  
On Ellington Road (132)  
Our Town With the Whole of India  
(158)

### Creatures

Carpe Diem (19)  
The Parakeets (36)  
That Dog (37)  
White-sided Dolphins (38)  
Goldfinch (40)  
Kingfisher (41)  
The Falcon to the Falconer (72)  
Hawk and Shadow (73)  
Peregrine Falcon (74)  
The Hinds (75)  
Green Bee-Eater (135)

### Discrimination

My poem sits next to fifteen  
poems at the workshop table (95)  
Ross: Children of the Ghetto (98)  
Thirteen (101)  
This is Not a Humanising Poem  
(107)  
Two Guns in the Sky for Daniel  
Harris (117)  
juxtaposing the black boy & the  
bullet (118)  
Sometimes in the Middle of the  
Story (126)  
dinosaurs in the hood (162)  
Ruins of a Great House (164)  
Self Portrait With & Without (178)

## **Displacement**

Old Tongue (92)  
Souvenir (96)  
My Father Carries Me Across a Field (97)  
Ross: Children of the Ghetto (98)  
Flight (110)

## **Dual Identity**

Two Languages (51)  
Old Tongue (92)  
Jamaican British (94)

## **Environment**

earth cries (21)  
Goldfinch (40)  
Ark (42)  
Love in a Time of Climate Change (79)  
Ode to Dirt (88)  
Green Bee-Eater (135)

## **Family**

Evening (47)  
Don't Tell Your Mother (52)  
Baby Sleep (54)  
Reading for Pleasure (55)  
The Talk (56)  
My Mother's Kitchen (57)  
Blackberries (58)  
Grandpa's Fancy Watch (60)  
Building My Grandfather (61)  
I Invite My Parents to a Dinner Party (120)  
My mother, swimming (140)  
blood, grandad (154)  
Making a Fist (169)  
The Tooth Fairy (170)  
My Papa's Walz (174)  
Dancing with my Father (180)  
Tamales on Christmas (182)

## **Food**

Blackberries (58)  
The Travelling Onion (69)  
Peaches (70)  
Bread Soup: An Old Icelandic Recipe (71)  
Tamales on Christmas (182)

## **Friendship**

Friends (62)  
Ross: Children of the Ghetto (98)  
Cento Between the Ending and the End (127)  
A Poem for S. (128)

## **Gender**

Ode to Gossips (89)  
the boy in the pearl earrings (111)  
Smile (153)  
blood, grandad (154)  
The Men Are Weeping in the Gym (155)  
Pain I Did Not (160)

## **Growing-up**

The Talk (56)  
Friends (62)  
Life and Times of the Bedroom Floor (64)  
Love Song for Ayumi (77)  
The Rider (85)  
Jamaican British (94)  
For the Young Men Popping Wheelies (100)  
The Game (116)  
Ingredients and Properties of Concrete (119)  
Making a Fist (169)  
The Tooth Fairy (170)  
Self-Portrait With & Without (178)

## Hope

Life Mask (23)  
Dew (24)  
Promise (28)  
This is it (29)  
The Conditional (44)  
Shoulders (50)  
So Much Happiness (115)  
A Poem for S. (128)  
A Portable Paradise (150)  
Making a Fist (169)  
Caged Bird (176)

## Identity

Two Languages (51)  
Resolution (63)  
Love Song for Ayumi (77)  
Rookie (84)  
Old Tongue (92)  
Jamaican British (94)  
the boy in the pearl earrings (111)  
Megan Married Herself (114)  
juxtaposing the black boy & the bullet (118)  
Centó Between the Ending and the End (127)  
I Would Like to Be a Dot in a Painting By Miro (130)  
Tú Que Sabes de Amor (152)

## Language and Writing

Carpe Diem (19)  
In the Summer (26)  
Two Languages (51)  
Resolution (63)  
The Cyclists (86)  
Old Tongue (92)  
Hand-me-down (93)  
My poem sits next to fifteen poems at the workshop table (95)  
This is Not a Humanising Poem (107)

## LGBTQ+

the boy in the pearl earrings (111)  
I Invite My Parents to a Dinner Party (120)  
Centó Between the Ending and the End (127)

## Looking at Things Differently

Ingredients and Properties of Concrete (119)  
A Jar of Honey (148)  
Ruins of a Great House (164)

## Love and Relationships

Wish you were here (20)  
Answers (32)  
The Falcon to the Falconer (72)  
The Fist (76)  
Love Song for Ayumi (77)  
One Hundred Love Sonnets; XVII (78)  
Love in a Time of Climate Change (79)  
Song (80)  
Summer Roof (82)  
MUD (112)  
Megan Married Herself (114)  
I Invite My Parents to a Dinner Party (120)  
One Art (138)  
Bright Star (142)  
The Pain I Did Not (160)  
The Tooth Fairy (170)  
First Kiss (172)

## **Memory**

Evening (47)  
Instead (48)  
Dustman (49)  
My Mother's Kitchen (57)  
Grandpa's Fancy Watch (60)  
Souvenir (96)  
My Father Carries Me Across a Field (97)  
Ross: Children of the Ghetto (98)  
All Over It (104)  
On Ellington Road (132)  
Making a Fist (169)  
The Tooth Fairy (170)  
Dancing with my Father (180)  
Tamales on Christmas (182)

## **Nature**

Carpe Diem (19)  
Wish you were here (20)  
Simple Tings (22)  
Life Mask (23)  
Dew (24)  
New Moon (25)  
In the Summer (26)  
Promise (28)  
Snow (30)  
Trees (33)  
Two Seasons (34)  
White-sided Dolphins (38)  
Goldfinch (40)  
Kingfisher (41)  
Blackberries (58)  
Hawk and Shadow (73)  
Peregrine Falcon (74)  
Ode to Dirt (88)  
Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening (131)  
Green Bee-Eater (135)  
Postscript (139)  
A Jar of Honey (148)  
A Portable Paradise (150)

## **Parents and Children**

Evening (47)  
Shoulders (50)  
Reading for Pleasure (55)  
The Talk (56)  
My Mother's Kitchen (57)  
My Father Carries Me Across a Field (97)  
My mother, swimming (140)  
Dubrovnik (141)  
What I Didn't Know Before (143)  
Making a Fist (169)  
The Tooth Fairy (170)  
My Papa's Walz (174)  
Self Portrait With & Without (178)  
Dancing with my Father (180)  
Tamales on Christmas (182)

## **Protest**

Jamaican British (94)  
Thirteen (101)  
This is Not a Humanising Poem (107)  
Two Guns in the Sky for Daniel Harris (117)  
juxtaposing the black boy & the bullet (118)  
Manifesto (122)  
Sometimes in the Middle of the Story (126)  
dinosaurs in the hood (162)  
Caged Bird (176)

## **Sea**

White-sided Dolphins (38)  
The Fish (39)  
My mother, swimming (140)  
Dubrovnik (141)

## Seasons

Life Mask (23)  
In the Summer (26)  
Promise (28)  
This is it (29)  
Snow (30)  
Two Seasons (34)

## Stereotypes

Life and Times of the Bedroom Floor (64)  
Thirteen (101)  
The boy in the pearl earrings (111)  
fairy tale (113)  
Megan Married Herself (114)  
Cento Between the Ending and the End (127)  
The Men Are Weeping in the Gym (155)  
dinosaurs in the hood (162)

## Teenagers

Friends (62)  
The Life and Times of the Bedroom Floor (64)  
For the Young Men Popping Wheelies (100)  
All Over It (104)

## Time

Evening (47)  
Blackberries (58)  
Time Machine (168)  
The Tooth Fairy (170)  
Dancing With My Father (180)

## War

Souvenir (96)  
My Father Carries Me Across a Field (97)  
Ross: Children of the Ghetto (98)  
Dulce et Decorum Est (156)

## Well-being

Simple Tings (22)  
Life Mask (23)  
Dew (24)  
That Dog (37)  
The Conditional (44)  
Shoulders (50)  
Life and Times of the Bedroom Floor (64)  
The Rider (85)  
The Door (134)  
A Portable Paradise (150)  
Smile (153)  
Dancing with my Father (180)

## Very Short Poems

Wish you were here (20)  
Dew (24)  
And the ghosts (99)

## Prose Poems

Love Song for Ayumi (77)  
MUD (112)  
Dream Opera in Kuching (147)

## Rhyme

Goldfinch (40)  
Hawk and Shadow (73)  
My Father Carries Me Across a Field (97)  
To London (102)  
A Powercut (105)  
Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening (131)  
Bright Star (142)  
A Blockhead (146)  
Dulce et Decorum Est (156)  
My Papa's Waltz (174)

## 2nd person

Rookie (84)  
So Much Happiness (115)

### **Repetition**

earth cries (21)  
Simple Things (22)  
Answers (32)  
Ark (42)  
Retirement (65)  
Intersection (68)  
The Falcon to the Falconer (72)  
One Hundred Love Sonnets: XVII (78)  
Endless Shedness (106)  
Reality Poem (124)  
The Door (134)  
One Art (138)  
blood, grandad (154)  
Caged Bird (176)

### **Personification**

earth cries (21)  
Souvenir (96)  
So Much Happiness (115)

### **Poems that Compare**

Carpe Diem (19)  
Life Mask (23)  
New Moon (25)  
In the Summer (26)  
The Conditional (44)  
Building My Grandfather (61)  
Friends (62)  
Resolution (63)  
Badger the Cadger (66)  
The Fist (76)  
Love in a Time of Climate Change (79)  
Equine (83)  
The Cyclists (86)  
Litany (90)  
A Powercut (105)  
MUD (112)  
juxtaposing the black boy & the bullet (118)

Ingredients and Properties of Concrete (119)  
I Would Like to Be a Dot in a Painting By Miro (130)  
A Jar of Honey (148)  
The Men Are Weeping in the Gym (155)  
Pain I Did Not (160)  
Ruins of a Great House (164)  
First Kiss (172)

### **Interesting Form/Structure**

Goldfinch (40)  
Kingfisher (41)  
Ark (42)  
Retirement (65)  
Intersection (68)  
Love Song for Ayumi (77)  
One Hundred Love Sonnets; XVII (78)  
Love in a Time of Climate Change (79)  
Black Bee (87)  
Flight (110)  
Ingredients and Properties of Concrete (119)  
Cento Between the Ending and the End (127)  
A Poem for S. (128)  
One Art (138)  
Self-Portrait With & Without (178)  
Tamales on Christmas (182)

### **Playing with Words**

New Moon (25)  
Goldfinch (40)  
Kingfisher (41)  
Badger the Cadger (66)  
Peaches (70)  
A Powercut (105)

## Stand-out Endings

This is it (29)  
Answers (32)  
The Fish (39)  
Evening (47)  
Reading for Pleasure (55)  
The Talk (56)  
The Life and Times of the  
Bedroom Floor (64)  
Love Song for Ayumi (77)  
Manifesto (122)

## Accent and Dialect

This is it (29)  
Two Seasons (34)  
Two Languages (51)  
Black Bee (87)  
Old Tongue (92)  
Reality Poem (124)  
Sometimes in the Middle of the  
Story (126)

## Pairings

Peaches (70) *and* Dew (24)  
Blackberries (58) *and* Evening (47)  
Jamaican British (94) *and* Love Song for Ayumi (77)  
Jamaican British (94) *and* Hand-me-down (93)  
Two Guns in the Sky for Daniel Harris (117) *and* Thirteen (101)  
Two Guns in the Sky for Daniel Harris (117) *and* juxtaposing the black boy  
& the bullet (118)  
Promise (28) *and* Two Seasons (34)  
Promise (28) *and* Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening (131)  
Badger the Cadger (66) *and* This is It (29)  
New Moon (25) *and* Bright Star (142)  
Instead (48) *and* IT & CO. (166)  
My mother, swimming (140) *and* Dubrovnik (141)  
Grandpa's Fancy Watch (60) *and* Building My Grandfather (61)  
One Hundred Love Sonnets: XVII (78) *and* Love in a Time of Climate  
Change (79)  
dinosaurs in the hood (162) *and* fairy tale (113)  
Dancing with my Father (180) *and* My Papa's Waltz (174)

## Poems With a Sense of Humour

Answers (32)  
The Parakeets (36)  
Two Languages (51)  
Don't Tell Your Mother (52)  
Building My Grandfather (61)  
Badger the Cadger (66)  
Rookie (84)  
To London (102)  
Endless Shedness (106)  
Megan Married Herself (114)



# Welcome to the *EMC Poetry Playlist!*

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In this anthology you will find a wide range of poems, most of them written in the 21st century, selected to open up the world of poetry to you, to get you reading, talking and writing about poems (and writing your own).

At the heart of the anthology is diversity - a diversity of voices, identities, experiences and approaches. There are poems which are funny and poems which raise really difficult issues (and feelings). There are poems about everyday experiences and poems with a political message. There are poems which will speak to you immediately and others which will need to be read a few times (and which may always remain a bit mysterious). There are poems which rhyme and poems which don't. There are poems which look like poems and those which look more like a story or novel - and some, at the cutting-edge of poetry, which look very strange indeed. There are poems written to be read aloud and those where the look on the page and arrangement of words and lines is most important. Some of them you will love immediately, some will grow on you, some may not be your sort of poem - finding out which is which is all part of the adventure.

Sometimes you will be asked to study a single poem, to analyse it in detail - to become something of an expert on it. At other times you might work on a cluster of poems. And sometimes you might just want to browse the anthology, stopping to read and explore those poems that catch your attention. (Or you might want to go straight to the back of the collection to see the poems selected for the anthology by poets such as Jacob Sam-La Rose, Hollie McNish, Daljit Nagra and Moniza Alvi.)

In preparing this anthology we have had a wonderful time reading lots and lots of amazing poems. We found it really tricky to decide which to include in the anthology - there were some heated arguments along the way! - but we're delighted with our final selection. We hope you enjoy reading and talking (and arguing) about them as much as we did.

The EMC Team



## Carpe Diem

Surprised by the underside of a snail –  
a beige highlight  
on an otherwise black window –  
I went to the next room for paper and a pen.

I would have sat for hours in the dark  
distilling words from it;  
studying the plasticine slur,  
the way it stuck there  
as though on purpose, to rescue  
the evening from monotony.

Before I got back  
the snail moved on  
leaving the window vacant,  
a frame to hang a poem on.

*Rebecca Watts*

## **Wish you were here**

I open the window to let you in,  
rain, and your forceful breath  
startles the curtain, smelling of moss,  
forming droplets on my lips.

*Julia Fiedorczuk*

## Snow

*‘Trzeba teraz w śnieg uwierzyć?’*

*– Bolesław Lesmian*

We wake, and pull the curtains back.  
Once more the world is black-and-white  
(or white-and-black).  
‘How can all change overnight?’  
(you ask me) ‘How?’  
I answer (and I fear I’m right):  
‘It’s snow we must believe in now.’  
A father and his son, we walk.  
You take my hand, warm in a glove.  
Our footsteps creak.  
How can they, on such soft stuff  
(you wonder) how?  
I wonder too and if, my love,  
it’s snow we must believe in now?  
Travelling at the speed of light,  
we make our way through galaxies;  
to left and right:  
stars a child could almost seize!  
Amazing how  
we navigate these cosmic seas  
(this snow we must believe in now)!  
Our skylight frames a silent film,  
an animated swirling show:  
white flecks of foam  
that fall and rise (now fast, now slow).  
Just look at how  
they change their minds – and how they glow!  
It’s snow we must believe in now.

## Goldfinch

God knows the world needs all  
the good it can get right now –

Out in the garden and fields,  
Goldfinches are gilding the land for free,

Leaving little gifts of light:  
a gleam for the teasel,  
a glint for the tree.

Did you hear their high scattered song,  
their bright wings' flutter,

Falling around you as flecks,  
as grains, as glitter?

Imagine the loss of their lustre,  
the lack of their sheen:

No more shimmer,  
a worrying absence of gilt.

Charm on, Goldfinch, charm on –

Heaven help us when  
all your gold is gone.

*Robert Macfarlane*

## Instead

Instead of an X-box  
please show me a pathway that stretches to the stars.

Instead of a mobile phone  
please teach me the language I need to help me speak with angels.

Instead of a computer  
please reveal to me the mathematics of meteors and motion.

Instead of the latest computer game  
please come with me on a search for dragons in the wood behind our house.

Instead of an e-reader  
please read to me from a book of ancient knowledge.

Instead of a digital camera  
please help me remember faces and places, mystery and moonbeams.

Instead of a 3D TV  
please take me to an empty world that I can people with my imagination.

Instead of electronic wizardry  
please show me how to navigate the wisdom inside of me.

*Brian Moses*

## Two Languages

Mum can speak two languages  
and sometimes mixes them up.  
She doesn't say, 'Don't moan!'  
She says, 'Don't kvetsh!'  
She doesn't say, 'Don't slurp your soup!'  
She says, 'Don't chup!'<sup>\*</sup>

She doesn't say, 'Don't burp!'  
She says, 'Don't graps!'  
She doesn't say, 'Don't fart!'  
She says, 'Don't fotz!'

When I have wrinkles in my socks  
she says it looks like I've put my feet  
through a pile of bagels,  
so, she says:  
'Take the bagels out of your socks!'

So I sing it all back to her:

*Don't kvetsh,  
Don't chup,  
Don't graps,  
Don't fotz.  
Take the bagels  
out of your socks.*

We all sing it:

*Don't kvetsh,  
Don't chup,  
Don't graps,  
Don't fotz.  
Take the bagels  
out of your socks.*

*Michael Rosen*

<sup>\*</sup>*You say 'chup' so it nearly rhymes with 'soup'.*

## Reading for Pleasure

*for Sam*

And what pleasure it brings me.  
When I tuck you in you say,  
*Leave the light on, Dad, I want to read!*

I forgot about you the other night.  
You came back down at half past ten  
with fizzy eyes: *I've finished it.*

Seconds, minutes, whole hours slip by  
now words can hold you, steady  
as a rock pool. The power of this,

of knowing you can exist within your solitude,  
rely on no one but yourself. As if you knew,  
that in the end, that's all you'll have.

I watch you turning pages, deaf to us,  
each one a cautious step away  
from me, leaning less and less,

and understand how one day  
you will walk away for good  
and know how beautiful that is.

*Luke Wright*



## Daljit Nagra's Poetry Playlist

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### Daljit Nagra

Our Town With the Whole of India!

### Sharon Olds

Pain I Did Not

### Danez Smith

dinosaurs in the hood

### Derek Walcott

Ruins of a Great House

### Tracy K. Smith

IT & CO.



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**Pain I Did Not**

When my husband left, there was pain I did not feel, which those who lose the one who loves them feel. I was not driven against the grate of mortal life, but just the slowly shut gate of preference. At times I envied them – what I saw as the honourable suffering of one who is thrown against that iron grille. I think he had come, in private, to feel he was dying, with me, and if he had what it took to rip his way out, with his teeth, then he could be born. And so he went into another world – this world, where I do not see or hear him – and my job is to eat the whole car of my anger, part by part, some parts ground down to steel-dust. I like best the cloth seats, blue-grey, first car we bought together, long since marked with the scrubbed stains – drool, tears, ice cream, no wounds, but only the month's blood of release, and the letting go when the water broke.

*Sharon Olds*

## Daljit Nagra on 'Pain I Did Not'

I find this poem very moving because it seems to be autobiographical yet it's artfully done. We start at a point of disappointment, of a failure in a relationship between a couple who grow apart. Then the poem seems to have a miraculous lift-off when mention of a car comes in; their first car together which becomes the setting for the poem, the car perhaps where they kissed, leads to the car where her waters would break and I assume it's where she knew her baby was on its way. It's as though the poem plays time backwards, from divorce to the birth of the baby. The metaphor of the car, 'to eat the whole car', the car of anger, transforms into the first car of romance and then of birth, so although they're divorced it's their child who will hold them together beyond their relationship.