

Parade's End

Daljit Nagra



Apple Inc.

1st Edition

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Context

Daljit Nagra



Daljit Nagra is a British poet and an English teacher in a London school. Nagra was born in Yiewsley, West London, to a Sikh family of Punjabi origin. Growing up in the 1970s he was one of only a few British Asian children in his school, and tried - mostly successfully - to fit in with his white friends by “acting white.”

When he was a teenager in the 1980s, his family moved from London to Sheffield, where his parents owned a shop. The shop did fairly well and the family made decent money from it, but in a context where lots of people in Sheffield were out of work, Indian families such as Nagra’s

became targets for racists. The shop was robbed so often that it was cheaper not to get insurance as the premiums were so high. At one point, his dad's "champagne-Gold Granada" was also attacked by racists. The poem "Parade's End" is about this period in Nagra's life.

Nagra says about the poem: "people just didn't have jobs. It was Thatcher's era, the early 80s. The shop did OK because people lived hand to mouth. I guess in the poem I didn't want to say, 'Oh, the whites are terrible, they are attacking us' because we were doing quite well. We lived in the nearest area that felt safe."

The poem "Parade's End" is taken from Nagra's first collection of poems, "Look We Have Coming to Dover," which was published in 2007.

Want to know more?

Read more about Daljit Nagra here: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2007/jan/18/poetry.race> (NB - There is a section that talks specifically about the poem "Parade's End.")

Wider Context - Immigration and Aspiration

In the period after 1945, immigration to the UK from countries of the former British Empire increased dramatically. Britain needed more workers, and the British Nationality Act of 1948 gave free and unrestricted entry to the UK to all citizens of the British Empire or British Commonwealth (this included the newly independent countries of India and Pakistan).



Student nurses in London, 1954

Between 1945 and the early 1970s - when immigration laws were changed - hundreds of thousands of people moved to Britain from

across the Commonwealth, which large numbers of people coming from the Caribbean, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Many people of Indian origin also came to Britain from Uganda in 1972 after the dictator Idi Amin expelled all 50,000 Ugandan Asians from the country.



Ugandan Asians arriving in Britain, 1972.

People moving to Britain had diverse experiences, but racism against non-white people was a serious problem for some immigrants. In a famous right-wing speech of 1968, the conservative politician Enoch Powell called for immigrants to be sent back to their countries of origin, and said “We must be mad, literally mad, as a nation to be permitting the annual inflow of some 50,000 dependants, who are for the most part the material of the future growth of the immigrant descended population.”

Although many British people condemned Powell's speech, others agreed with him, and some immigrants faced racism within their communities. The comedian Sanjeev Bhaskar, who grew up in London in the 1970s, remembers that when he was about seven, he, his sister and his mother were surrounded by a group of kids on bikes who called them names, and that the National Front - a racist group who were the forerunners of groups like the EDL and the BNP - would paint the letters "NF" on the family's door. He says: "it was unpredictable – you didn't know if someone was going to lob a brick through the window."

Against this background of racism, many immigrants to the UK worked hard to secure a better future for their families. Many British Asians started their own businesses or went to university, and some became "upwardly mobile," moving into the British middle class.



Want to Know More?

“Moving Here” - Fantastic site in which British people tell their stories of how they or their families came to the UK - <http://www.movinghere.org.uk/stories/stories.asp?PageNo=29>

Comedian Sanjeev Bhaskar talks about growing up as a British Asian in the 1970s - <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2010/dec/04/sanjeev-bhaskar-childhood-channel-4>

The 1980s

In Britain, the 1980s was a time of considerable political turmoil. British manufacturing, which had previously employed millions of people, was in decline, and there were continual conflicts between the government and the trade unions. Whilst the politics of all this is still hotly debated, one result of the decline of manufacturing was that unemployment rose to over 3 million.

Industrial cities like Sheffield were very badly affected by the decline of manufacturing. Sheffield had been the centre of the UK steel industry, but as factories closed, over 90% the steelworkers found themselves with no job.

In such a context, crime rates in cities like Sheffield rose dramatically. Some British Asians found that they became scapegoats - in a situation where millions of people were out of work, some people began to blame immigrants and their descendants, particularly those who appeared to be doing quite well in the UK.

To think about:

If your parents lived in the UK then, they are likely to remember Britain in the 1980s. Ask them - what was Britain like then? What were their experiences of living in Britain at this time?

Nagra's family were victims of racial discrimination as their shop was targeted. Why then, do you think Nagra says about the poem "I guess in the poem I didn't want to say, 'Oh, the whites are terrible, they are attacking us'" because we were doing quite well." How might he feel about the white people around his family in Sheffield?

Poem

A Ford "Granada" was a large and relatively expensive car that was made in the 1970s and 1980s. "Champagne-gold" refers to the colour of their car.



Dad parked our Granada, champagne-gold
by our superstore on Blackstock Road,
my brother's eyes scanning the men
who scraped the pavement frost to the dole,
one "got on his bike" over the hill
or the few who warmed us a thumbs-up
for the polished recovery of our new-sprayed car.

"got on his bike" - this is a reference to the 1980s conservative politician Norman Tebbit, who responded to the high levels of unemployment by implying those out of work should follow the example of his own father in the 1930s who "got on his bike" and found work. Many people argued that Tebbit's attitude showed that he did not understand the issues facing the unemployed.



“Council” - probably implies that these mums live on a council estate. Why might this be important?

Council mums at our meat display
nestled against a pane with white trays
swilling kidneys, liver and a sandy block
of corned beef, loud enough about the way
darkies from down south *Come op to*
Yorksha, mekkin claaims on aut theh can
befor buggrin off theh flash caahs!

“kidneys, liver and a sandy block of corned beef” - these are cheap cuts of meat. What might this tell us about the area?

“darkies” - a derogatory term for South Asian people that was used by some in the 1980s.

At nine, we left the emptied till open,
clicked the dials of the safe. Bolted
two metal bars across the back door
(with a new lock). Spread trolleys
at the ends of the darkened aisles. Then we pressed
the code for the caged alarm and rushed
the precinct to check it was throbbing red.

Thundering down our graffiti of shutters
against the valley of high-rise flats.

Ready for the getaway to our cul-de-sac'd
semi-detached, until we stood stock-still:

watching the car skin pucker, bubbling smarts
of acid. In the unstoppable pub roar
from the John O'Gaunt across the forecourt.

We returned up to the shop, lifted a shutter,
queued at the sink, walked down again.
Three of us, each carrying pans of cold water.
Then we swept away the bonnet-leaves
from gold to the brown of our former colour.

Daljit Nagra



“The men who scraped the pavement frost to the dole.”



“Thundering down our graffiti of shutters
Against the valley of high rise flats”

Initial Activity

What happens in the poem?

What impression do you get of the area of Sheffield where the Nagras' shop is? Can you outline three key words / phrases that give you this impression?

What is the relationship between Nagra's family and the people who live near Blackstock Road?

Why might the local community have specifically chosen to attack the gold car?

What connotations (e.g. feelings, meanings) do you think the following colours have?

<i>Gold</i>	<i>Brown</i>

S.M.I.L.E. Analysis

Remember, to analyse a poem we need to look at:

-Structure

-Meaning

-Imagery (similes, metaphors, personification)

-Language

-Effect on the reader



Meaning

“Meaning” is a good place to start when thinking about a poem, as here you can discuss the principal theme(s) of the poem and what you think the poet is trying to do.

Meaning - Key points:

- “Parade’s End” is about Nagra’s family’s experience of racism when their newly-sprayed “champagne-gold” car was attacked with acid near to the family’s superstore in a poor area of Sheffield.
- The poem deals with some quite complex issues that involve both class and race - the aspirational Asian family who live in a “cul de sac semi-detached” are contrasted with the poor and unemployed of the “high rise flats.”
- Throughout the poem, Nagra uses some quite threatening imagery to convey how his family felt very wary amongst the community near Blackstock Road. We will explore this further when we look at “imagery” and “language.”
- The car is highly symbolic in the poem - we will explore this further in the section on “imagery.”

Exploration - Meaning

What emotions do you think are present in the poem?

How do you think Nagra feels about his time in Sheffield?



“From gold to the brown of our former colour”

Structure

Structure refers to the way a poem is set out and organised. Here, you write about things like rhyme scheme, length, repetition and the flow of ideas throughout the poem.

Key Points - Structure

- There is no fixed rhyme scheme in the poem, although there is considerable use of **half-rhymes** e.g.

“Dad parked our Granada, champagne-**gold**
By our superstore on Blackstock **Road**”

“of acid. In the unstoppable pub **roar**
from the John O’Gaunt across the **forecourt.**”

There are many more examples of this technique in the poem.

- This is another poem that uses **enjambment** (breaking a thought across two lines e.g.

“clicked the dials of the safe. **Bolted**
two metal bars across the back door
(with a new lock). **Spread trolleys**
at the ends of the darkened aisles.”

- Punctuation is used for effect in the poem e.g.
 - Brackets “(with a new lock)” - these brackets resemble the “two metal bars” that Nagra has just mentioned. They reinforce the idea that the shop - and the family - is locked, closed off, secure.
 - The colon after “stood stock still:” - this creates suspense, a ‘dramatic pause’ before the reader finds out what has happened to the car.

Exploration - Structure

What is the overall sequence of events in the poem? Hint - why does it start with the car and end with the car?

Why might Nagra choose to use half-rhymes? What could this signify about how he felt in Sheffield?

What is the significance of punctuation within the poem?

Imagery

Key Points - Imagery



- The car is a central image within the poem. The main “event” of the poem is that the Nagra’s newly-sprayed “champagne-gold” car is burned with acid. This causes the gold paint to pucker, and the family wipe off the acid, turning the car “from gold to the brown of our former colour.”
- Explicit links are made between the car’s gold skin and the family’s skin e.g. “**watch the car skin pucker**” and “from gold to the brown of **our** former colour.”
- Possible meanings of the “**champagne-gold**” car include:
 - Gold is symbolic of wealth and aspiration - represents the family’s desire to build a life for themselves in Sheffield.
 - The spraying of the car from brown to gold could represent the family’s attempts to integrate in Sheffield and “hide” the colour of their brown skin by trying to fit in with the community.
 - The gold spray could be seen as “flash” and an attempt to show off their wealth by those nearby - for example the “council mums” accuse “darkies” like the Nagras of “buggrin off the flash caahs.”
- The burning with acid of the car could represent:
 - The destruction of the Nagras’ dreams in Sheffield - the “bonnet leaves” they swept away could represent dreams and ambitions.
 - The community’s attempt to ‘reduce’ the Nagras “**from gold to the brown of our former colour**” - the Nagras are made to feel unwelcome and attacked because they are still seen as “brown” and identified by this.

Exploration - Imagery

What do you think is the metaphorical meaning of the car within the poem? Which interpretation or interpretations appeal to you?

Can you find any other metaphors, similes or personification within the poem?

Language

Key Points - Language

- There are many examples of language choices that show that the Nagra family felt threatened and unsafe:
 - “brother’s eyes **scanning** the men” - looking at people in the dole queue to see if they intended any harm.
 - “**Bolted.**”
 - “spread trolleys at the ends of darkened aisles” - they felt they had to create barriers to stop intruders.
 - “**caged** alarm”
 - “**rushed** the precinct”
 - “**throbbing red**”
 - “thundering down our graffiti of shutters”
 - “**getaway** to our cul-de-sac”
 - “**car skin pucker, bubbling smarts of acid**”
 - “**unstoppable pub roar**”

- Nagra’s description of the community makes it very apparent that they are poor and have few opportunities:
 - Out of work - the “**men who scraped the pavement frost to the dole**” - almost a sympathetic image here of the cold and unemployed.
 - “**Council** mums”
 - They buy cheap cuts of meat - “kidneys, liver”
 - “Valley of **high rise flats**”

- However, he also makes clear that many of these people were unwelcoming to his family and that the attack was not a one-off:
 - Only a “few **warmed** them a thumbs-up” at the new car colour (a minority were welcoming).
 - Refer to the family as “darkies” and complain about them moving to Yorkshire.

Exploration - Language

Choose two examples of words that suggest danger and threat. Analyse in detail how these particular words affect the mood of the poem.

Why do you think Nagra puts a portion of the poem into phonetic Yorkshire speech (“*Come op to / Yorksha, mekkín claaíms on aut theh can / befor buggrin off theh flash caahs!*”). What is the effect of this?

Effect on the Reader

Exploration - Effect on the Reader

How do you feel after reading this poem?

How do you feel towards the community in Sheffield that victimised the Nagra family? How do you think Nagra wants you to feel about them?

Sample Exam Question Part A

3. a) “Explore how the writer presents his ideas about conflict between different groups of people in “Parade’s End.”

Use examples of the language from the poem to support your answer. (15 marks).

NB - In the exam, you would have about 30 minutes to complete this question.

Write an answer to this question and email it to me.

Comparison

There are various poems to which you could compare “Parade’s End.” You could choose “Half-Caste” or “The Class Game,” as these poems deal with race / class tensions between different groups. Alternatively, either “Belfast Confetti” or “Invasion” might work - although these are both about war, they share with “Parade’s End” the theme of security, danger and threat. Which poem you chose might depend on the question.

Sample Exam Question - Part B

Answer EITHER 3(b)i OR 3(b)ii

3 b) (i) Compare how the writers of “Parade’s End” and “Half-Caste” present their views about conflicts due to race. (15 marks)

3 b) (ii) Compare how the writers of “Parade’s End” and one other poem of your choice from the Clashes and Collisions collection present their views about conflict in any setting. (15 marks)

Use examples from the language of **both** poems to support your answer.

NB - In the exam, you would have about 30 minutes to complete this question.

Write an answer to this question and email it to me.