

Richard Blanco: Looking for The Gulf Motel (2012)

Marco Island, Florida

There should be nothing here I don't remember . . .

The Gulf Motel with mermaid* lampposts
and ship's wheel in the lobby should still be
5 rising out of the sand like a cake decoration.
My brother and I should still be pretending
we don't know our parents, embarrassing us
as they roll the luggage cart* past the front desk*
loaded with our scruffy* suitcases, two-dozen
10 loaves* of Cuban bread, brown bags bulging*
with enough mangos to last the entire week,
our espresso pot, the pressure cooker*—and
a pork roast reeking* garlic through the lobby.
All because we can't afford to eat out, not even
15 on vacation, only two hours from our home
in Miami, but far enough away to be thrilled*
by whiter sands on the west coast of Florida,
where I should still be for the first time watching
the sun set instead of rise over the ocean.

There should be nothing here I don't remember . . .

My mother should still be in the kitchenette*
of The Gulf Motel, her daisy* sandals from Kmart*
squeaking across the linoleum, still gorgeous
in her teal* swimsuit and amber earrings
25 stirring a pot of arroz-con-pollo*, adding sprinkles*
of onion powder and dollops* of tomato sauce.
My father should still be in a terrycloth* jacket
smoking, clinking a glass of amber whiskey
in the sunset at the Gulf Motel, watching us
30 dive into the pool, two boys he'll never see
grow into men who will be proud of him.

There should be nothing here I don't remember . . .

mermaid havfrue • cart rullevoan • front desk reception • scruffy beskidt, slidt • loaf brød • bulge bule
ud • pressure cooker trykkoger • reek stinke • thrilled begejstret • kitchenette lille køkken • daisy
marguerit (blomst) • Kmart amerikansk stormagasin • teal mørk grøn-blå farve • arroz-con-pollo
cubansk ret med kylling • sprinkle drys • dollop stor mængde (som man ikke måler) • terrycloth frotté

My brother and I should still be playing Parcheesi*,
my father should still be alive, slow dancing
with my mother on the sliding-glass* balcony
of The Gulf Motel. No music, only the waves
5 keeping time*, a song only their minds hear
ten-thousand nights back to their life in Cuba.
My mother's face should still be resting against
his bare chest like the moon resting on the sea,
the stars should still be turning around them.
10 *There should be nothing here I don't remember . . .*
My brother should still be thirteen, sneaking
rum in the bathroom, sculpting* naked women
from sand. I should still be eight years old
dazzled* by seashells and how many seconds
15 I hold my breath underwater—but I'm not.
I am thirty-eight, driving up Collier Boulevard,
looking for The Gulf Motel, for everything
that should still be, but isn't. I want to blame
the condos*, their shadows for ruining the beach
20 and my past, I want to chase the snowbirds* away
with their tacky* mansions* and yachts, I want
to turn the golf courses back into mangroves*,
I want to find The Gulf Motel exactly as it was
and pretend for a moment, nothing lost is lost.

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parcheesi et brætspil • sliding-glass skydedør af glas • keep time holde rytmen • sculpt lave skulptu-
rer • dazzle forblinde • condo hus med ejerlejligheder • snowbird pensionist fra det nordlige USA på ferie
i Syden • tacky smagløs • mansion stor ejendom • mangroves lund med mangrovetræer

2.3.4 COMPREHENSION: CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Where are we at the beginning of the poem?
2. What are the persona and his family doing there?
3. Where does the persona's family originally come from?
4. Where do they live now?
5. How old were the persona and his brother at the time?
6. Which social class do they belong to?
7. What have they packed for their holiday and why?
8. How does this make the persona feel?
9. What do the parents do on the vacation?
10. What do the persona and his brother do?
11. Where is the persona when telling the story?
12. How old is he now?
13. What is he looking for?
14. What does he find instead?

2.3.5 COMPREHENSION: AN UNFORGETTABLE HOLIDAY

1. Make a list of the things you did on your last holiday.
2. Compare your list with that of a classmate and discuss what makes a great holiday.
3. Together, make a list of the things the persona did on his holiday.
4. To which extent do the things match your idea of a wonderful holiday?
5. What did the persona think of his holiday at the time? What did the persona think looking back?
6. What did he like/dislike and for what reasons?

2.3.6 ANALYSIS: SOUND AND RHYTHM

1. Discuss how you would read the poem aloud. Consider, for instance, your tone of voice, which words or parts to emphasise, and whether to read it fast or slowly.
2. Now find Richard Blanco's own recitation of the poem on Vimeo. Start from 01:27.
3. Was his reading of the poem significantly different to yours? If so, how? What difference did it make?

2.3.7 ANALYSIS: SETTING

1. What do we learn about the family's holiday destination? Find key facts and make a drawing the size of a postcard of the place as you imagine it.
2. Find the simile used in the first stanza. Discuss if it is positive or negative.
3. Compare how the persona feels about the hotel and how he feels about the area's natural surroundings? Find examples to support your analysis.

2.3.8 ANALYSIS: THE PERSONA AND HIS BROTHER

1. Characterise the persona and his brother as children. What do they do and feel and what does that tell us about them?
2. Are the brothers different in any way? If so, how? If not, why not?
3. How does the persona's social background influence his perception of the holiday and the place they go to?

2.3.9 ANALYSIS: THE MOTHER AND THE FATHER

1. Characterise the mother. What does she look like, what does she do and what does this suggest about her?
2. Characterise the father. What does he look like, what does he do and what does this suggest about him?
3. How are the gender roles described?
4. How is the relationship between the parents?
5. Note how the word "amber" is used in connection with the persona's mother as well as his father. What exactly is it used to describe, respectively? What is achieved by using the same word in both descriptions?
6. How is the parents' past described and why is this piece of information important?

2.3.10 ANALYSIS: THE PLACE AND THE PEOPLE

What makes a holiday great is usually the people you go on the trip with. It might also be the destination itself. Or it could be the interplay between you and the people you travel with and the place you are at.

1. Find examples in the text where the characters and the place are connected in the description.
2. Explain how they are inseparable.

2.3.11 ANALYSIS: POETIC DEVICES

1. Find examples of the following poetic devices.
2. Consider the effect of each one in Blanco's poem by finishing the sentences below:
 - a. The use of enjambment puts focus on ...
 - b. The alliteration shows us how ...
 - c. Repetition is used because the speaker is ...
 - d. The use of personification adds a feeling of ...

OVERVIEW: POETIC DEVICES

Poetic device	Definition	Example
Enjambment	A run-on line. A continuation of one line of verse into the next line instead of ending with a full stop.	<p>“ Relent, sweet Hermia: and Lysander, yield</p> <p>Thy crazéd title to my certain right.</p> <p><i>William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, 1600, Gutenberg</i></p>
Repetition	When the same word, line or idea appears several times.	<p>“ Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,</p> <p>I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,</p> <p>I will make divine magnetic lands,</p> <p>With the love of comrades,</p> <p>With the life-long love of comrades.</p> <p><i>Walt Whitman: For You O Democracy, 1893, Gutenberg</i></p>
Alliteration	Words beginning with the same consonant sound.	<p>“ Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!</p> <p><i>Walt Whitman: Beat! Beat! Drums!, 1861, Gutenberg</i></p>
Personification	Giving human attributes to an animal, object or idea.	<p>“ No! those days are gone away</p> <p>And their hours are old and gray,</p> <p>And their minutes buried all</p> <p><i>John Keats: John Keats 1805-1820, Gutenberg</i></p>

2.3.12 ANALYSIS: USING GRAMMAR AS PART OF THE ANALYSIS

Modal verbs:

1. Find examples of how Blanco uses the modal verb "should" in the poem. "Should" might express something you desire or the likelihood of something. How is it used in the poem?
2. What is the effect of using the modal verb "should" throughout the poem? What does it tell us about the persona's attitude to the things remembered?

The progressive tense:

3. Find examples of Blanco's use of the progressive tense.
4. What is the effect of using the progressive tense rather than the simple tense?

2.3.13 ANALYSIS: STYLE

1. Which of the words below might be used to describe the writing style of the poem?
 - conversational
 - rambling
 - crisp
 - eloquent
 - diffuse
 - picturesque
 - flowery
 - formal
 - economical
 - informal
2. Choose two-three adjectives and find examples in the text to prove that you are right.
3. Look up words you are not familiar with.

2.3.14 POST-READING: TWO TRIPS

The poem deals with two trips: the persona's childhood vacation and his current journey back to the area.

1. What has happened in between, in the persona's life and in Florida? Find evidence in the text.
2. Do the changes have anything in common?
3. Discuss how the changes make him see his childhood vacation in a different light.

2.3.15 POST-READING: DEVELOP A CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

In April 2017, Richard Blanco was invited to recite his poem at the Maine Coast Heritage Trust. See the video mentioned in 2.3.6 (see side 89). Look up the trust and find out what they believe and what they are trying to change.

Imagine you work for the Maine Coast Heritage Trust. Somebody suggests that you use Richard Blanco and his poem *Looking for The Gulf Motel* in your campaign. Use the MCHT homepage and your understanding of the poem and discuss how the poem might be used to promote your work.

Develop and write down a campaign strategy including the following points:

1. Briefly outline your values and goals.
2. How does *Looking for The Gulf Motel* fit your values?
3. Who are the people, organisations and bodies of government that you want to reach out to? Give reasons for your choice.
4. Considering the target group, what might the poem be used for?
5. How would the poem be used? E.g. on the homepage in writing, getting Blanco to appear in public, using a recording as part of a campaign video, using quotes from the poem.
6. How might the picture of Collier Boulevard be used in your campaign?
7. After using the poem and the picture, what will your next step be?
8. Any other ideas?

2.3.16 WRITTEN WORK: WRITE A POSTCARD

Imagine you are the speaker's mother or father.

1. Write a postcard from your holiday in which you write about some of the same events seen from your point of view.
2. Use the back of your postcard from 2.3.7 (se side 89).
3. "Send" the postcard to a classmate, who will comment on it.

2.3.17 WRITTEN WORK: MAKE A HOLIDAY ADVERTISEMENT

1. Make a holiday advertisement called "You do not have to go far to get somewhere."
2. The target group is people who live close to the place you advertise.
3. The ad must include a picture and a brief text (100-200 words).
4. It must include 1-2 short quotes from the poem.
5. The ad must focus on the holiday being budget- as well as eco-friendly.