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### **“I Am Not Yours” by Sara Teasdale**

The typical little girl grows up thinking about one day being in love with a boy. Not just a boy, but *the* boy. The boy of her dreams. These girls write his name over and over again in notebooks, daydreaming about the future. Sara Teasdale was once a young girl like all of us, and may have been one of those typical girls, daydreaming about that perfect love. Her poem “I Am Not Yours” (see appendix) portrays this mindset of hope--hope that she too will one day find that love she can be lost in. In the poem, Teasdale describes being in a relationship with a man. However, this relationship is not what she had been hoping for during her childhood. She does not feel that deep love and longing like she believes should be the case with love.

For the purposes of this explication, I will assume the gender of the speaker to be female. The title of the poem insinuates the speaker does not believe she is truly in love with the man. Based on the title, the poem seems to take on a more possessive tone. The speaker seems to be an independent woman, not wanting to be ‘owned’ by just any man. The poem lays out the criteria which must be true for her to let her heart be owned by a man.

Teasdale often refers to being ‘lost’ in something throughout her poem. Many times she does this through the use similes, such as “Lost as a candle lit at noon” (3), which means the light the candle would give off would not be noticeable unless one is

specifically looking for it, in the light of day. Perhaps this is how Teasdale wants her love to be: so lost that no one can find the reasons behind the love. It may be this simile has no direct purpose. What would the point of lighting a candle at noon be? The only reason would be the scent it gives off when lit. This refers to Teasdale noting love also has no direct purpose other than emitting happiness when in love. "Lost as a snowflake in the sea" (4) refers to when a snowflake hits the surface of the sea, it will melt. Teasdale wishes for her heart to melt, as the snowflake did, into another person. When the snowflake melts, it becomes a part of the sea, as the speaker wishes to become part of her lover's life. This same line, "Lost as a snowflake in the sea" (4), contains alliteration with the soft "s" sound. Alliteration creates a sense of beat in this poem. The alliteration becomes more sharp, crisper sounding as the poem goes on. "Lost as a light is lost in light" (8) shows alliteration with the "l" sound. This sound is much shorter and distinct than the alliteration discussed in previous lines. This increased sharpness as the poem continues shows the reader the change in confidence of the speaker.

Teasdale uses a very distinguished diction throughout the poem. Essentially, the speaker is telling someone she does not love them like she wants to feel love. It would be easy to be blunt about it, but the speaker does it in a roundabout way. The diction could also be taken as mysterious because one must decipher the similes in order to understand what the poem is about. The speaker does not come out and tell you what she means and what she wants to feel; there is a sense of mystery behind each of the words.

Being lost in love can mean many things, including being so in love you cannot find your way out, as described in the first stanza of the poem in lines three and four.

However, being lost in love can also mean being lost in the *thought* of love that one cannot truly discern its validity. This concept is shown in the first two lines of the poem: “I am not yours, not lost in you,/Not lost, although I long to be” (1-2). The speaker in the poem wishes she were truly in love with the person she is referring to. Judging by the tone, she has known the man she is speaking of for a while. I infer this because of lines 5 and 6. “You love me, and I find you still/A spirit beautiful and bright” (5-6). The man to whom the speaker refers may have even said something to make the speaker upset, such as referring to her as ‘his’ or ‘his love’. This may have prompted the speaker to realize she is not truly in love with this person, though she “long[s] to be” (2).

Longing is the main mood of this poem. There is a sadness to the poem that is only detectable in certain places, such as lines one and two. The second stanza of the poem describes a longing the speaker feels. The poem no longer feels sad at this point, but slightly hopeful in the fact that this love is still out there for her. She recognizes he is not the one for her, and seems to move on. The third stanza moves to a more confident tone—she knows what she wants and is not afraid to proclaim it. Both the diction and the tone of the poem also help Teasdale to sway the audience to feel a certain way—the tone moves the reader on an emotional roller-coaster ride, while the diction allows the speaker to remain a distinguished woman speaking of love.

The third stanza reflects the fact the speaker is afraid to not be with the man she is in love with. She wants him to sweep her off her feet. She wants *this* man. The sad part about this poem, however, is it seems as though she knows deep down this is not the man for her. While Teasdale is not necessarily the speaker, this idea could be seen in Teasdale’s own history. She got divorced in 1929 after being married for 15 years,

and the rest of her life consisted of being a lonely semi-invalid (Academy of American Poets 1). Like the woman in the poem, Teasdale could have been lying to herself for the duration of her marriage about being truly in love with her husband, when she knew all along he was not the one she could truly become lost in. This huge ordeal in her life could have prompted her to write this poem about the love she longs for—the love she never had.

Items being compared in this poem are mostly related to light: candle, daylight, and even simply the word light. This could mean the speaker is longing to see the light ahead in the dreary life she is living without this love. It is typical for light to be coupled with stories of near death experiences, such as when people say they “saw the light”. In the poem, this is taken to mean the speaker’s life would be complete with the love she is describing, and she no longer needs any more fulfillment.

The third stanza begins with a metaphor: “Oh plunge me deep in love -- put out/my senses, leave me deaf and blind” (9-10). Teasdale does not literally mean the speaker wants her true love to gouge her eyes out, cut off her ears, or plug her nose. The speaker means make her so in love, nothing else matters except what her heart feels—she does not need her outward senses to love her true love.

The rhyme creates a solid backbone for the reader—even though the rhyme is very under-the-radar in most places, especially seen in lines 10 and 12. “Senses” and “tempest” are great examples of words with slant rhyme. There is the slightest sound that is similar in these words, but definitely similar enough to constitute rhyme and the structure it brings to the poem as a whole.

The end of the third stanza contains heavy symbolism, especially seen in the final lines: "Swept by the tempest of your love/A taper in the a rushing wind" (11-12). A taper is a thin wick, and would be carried away immediately by the wind. This reflects the speaker wanting to be carried away immediately by love and to be swept off her feet.

What can be taken away from this poem is to not settle for a love that does not blind you, does not make you deaf, does not make you speechless, or in other words does not put out your senses as Teasdale refers to it. Multiple truths surface in this poem as well, including the existence of true love and how many struggle to find it and let it envelop them. This poem portrays the mindset of many young women. The author is saying these women have blinders on when it comes to love. Once they open themselves up, they can find what they are really looking for in love: a love that sweeps them off their feet and carries them away in a rushing wind.