

Once Upon a Time
by GABRIEL OKARA

Once upon a time, son,
they used to laugh with their hearts
and laugh with their eyes;
but now they only laugh with their teeth,
while their ice-block-cold eyes
search behind my shadow.

There was a time indeed
they used to shake hands with their hearts;
but that's gone, son.
Now they shake hands without hearts:
while their left hands search
my empty pockets.

'Feel at home!' 'Come again':
they say, and when I come
again and feel
at home, once, twice,
there will be no thrice –
for then I find doors shut on me.

So I have learned many things, son.
I have learned to wear many faces
like dresses – homeface,
officeface, streetface, hostface,
cocktailface, with all their conforming smiles
like a fixed portrait smile.
And I have learned too
to laugh with only my teeth
and shake hands without my heart.
I have also learned to say, 'Goodbye',
when I mean 'Good-riddance';
to say 'Glad to meet you',
without being glad; and to say 'It's been
nice talking to you', after being bored.

But believe me, son.
I want to be what I used to be
when I was like you. I want
to unlearn all these muting things.
Most of all, I want to relearn
how to laugh, for my laugh in the mirror
shows only my teeth like a snake's bare fangs!

So show me, son,
how to laugh; show me how
I used to laugh and smile
once upon a time when I was like you.

Comment [C1]: Connotations of a fairytale, Possibly such a long time ago that it seems as if it almost never happened.

Comment [C2]: Family member talking to another family member, Most likely father-son.

Comment [C3]: Plural, small groups perhaps, a group of others. It's vague – as if they are all the same.

Comment [C4]: Past tense, to show this has happened but doesn't anymore.

Comment [C5]: A joyful word, connotations of happy.

Comment [C6]: Connotations of love, this shows that when they laugh it is meaningful.

Comment [C7]: You use your eyes to see, so to laugh with their eyes relates to the visibility to see that it is meaningful.

Comment [C8]: The words 'but' and 'only' represent a presence of disappointment, it's not good enough, been let down. Sinister.

Comment [C9]: Shows it is fake and emotionless. Has connotations of eating and tearing apart. They're solid, cold, hard, sharp and vicious. The 'T' is a harsh consonant.

Comment [C11]: Represents lost.

Comment [C12]: Connotations of hiding and perhaps sneaking around.

Comment [C13]: Blank, no characteristics. Looks like every other shadow. Probe for weakness.

Comment [C10]: Opposite of personification, use adjectives which are opposite to warm, unwelcoming and unfeeling. Harsh consonants present to create a sinister atmosphere.

Comment [C14]: Sure of it. A fact.

Comment [C15]: No names used, cold, no characteristics.

Comment [C16]: Repetitive.

Comment [C17]: Connotations of vanishing, has no explanation.

Comment [C18]: A big use of time words to show the contrast between now and then.

Comment [C19]: In-human, can't breathe. Therefore it contrasts with live. Perhaps fake and unreal.

Comment [C21]: To steal? Connotations of being poor and having nothing, suggests lonely, emotionally bankrupt.

Comment [C20]: Again repetitive, emphasizes the connotations of being lost.

Comment [C22]: Recognizable, fake, clichéd.

Comment [C24]: Imagery.

Comment [C23]: Foreshadowing, assertive and perhaps represents anger within him.

Comment [C25]: Rhythmic, being same as everybody else. Rules to fit in- like masks with dresses, like a costume or an outfit.

Comment [C26]: Fake, 'fixed' connotations of unchangeable, painted on smile.

Comment [C27]: False, he's learned to do it, to fit in.

Comment [C28]: Even though he doesn't like it he still takes part in it. He turned himself into one of them.

Comment [C29]: This is a big 'but'. has a great importance.

Comment [C30]: A lot of 'I' like he's broken away from everybody else, a plea to change. Repetitive- loses its meaning --> dull emphasizes what he wants to get back.

Comment [C31]: Opposites. Desperate to go back and undo things.

Comment [C32]: Fricative sound to highlight the connotations of evil. Vampiric.

Comment [C33]: Society destroys you. 'snake' connotations of evil, poisoness, sinister, dehumanising, lost natural human traits.

Comment [C34]: It's now the son's turn.

Comment [C35]: Only at beginning and end, this helps create the atmosphere of a story and highlights the connotations of a fairytale.

Comment [C36]: Ends with the word 'you', a reversal of what's usual. Remind son of individuality, now it's up to him.