IN OUR TENTH YEAR

This book, this page, this harebell laid to rest
Between these sheets, these leaves, if pressed
still bleeds
a watercolour of the way we were.

Those years: the fuss of such and such a day,
that disagreement and its final word,
your inventory of names and dates and times,
my infantries of tall, dark, handsome lies.

A decade on, now we astound ourselves;
still two, still twinned but doubled now with love
and for a single night apart, alone,
how sure we are, each of the other half.

This harebell holds its own. Let's give it now
in air, with light, the chance to fade, to fold.
Here, take it from my hand. Now, let it go.

Simon Armitage

BACKGROUND

Simon Armitage, born in West Yorkshire in 1963, is a poet, novelist and playwright. He has received many awards for his poetry which is included in anthologies for schoolchildren; he was awarded the CBE for his services to poetry.
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THE POEM?

The poem is about the growth and development of a relationship of a couple over 10 years. It could be an anniversary, celebration or a reflection on their relationship. The relationship is compared to a pressed harebell (bluebell), a flower of spring pressed in a book as a memory. The harebell gives a picture of and a fixed reference point to their relationship.

In the first stanza, the writer is reminiscing on their relationship and he acknowledges that things have changed. The mention of "harebell laid to rest" and "if pressed/ still bleeds" suggests death or pain. He reminisces again with the words "a watercolour of the way we were". Watercolour implies something watered down or a pale reflection of how things used to be, which could imply that there was something magical/spontaneous in the relationship which perhaps is no longer there.

In the second stanza, he remembers the past 10 years, their disagreements and their differences: ‘your inventory’ and ‘my infantries’.

In the third stanza, he thinks of them apart for a ‘single night’ but still ‘twinned and doubled now with love’. The relationship has been strengthened over time and has ability to survive years to come. Over the years they have developed a trust and love for each other. They are now at the stage where they both are secure enough to allow the relationship to develop as an organic thing rather keeping it imprisoned like a harebell pressed in a book.

In the final stanza, instead of laying the harebell to rest between the pages of a book he sets it free and gives it to her as a sign and image of their love.

Regardless of all the challenges, they have lasted 10 years. It even surprises the writer. "A decade on, now we astound ourselves" They are still together, still bonded and more in love. Even when not together, they have developed trust. The writer suggests that the relationship should be allowed to take its natural course "Let's give it now/ in air, with light, the chance to fade, to fold" He concludes by suggesting that they should let go of the past as they are both responsible for the future of their relationship.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN IDEAS AND THEMES?

- Love and how love changes and endures over time
- Time e.g. ‘this book, this page’, ‘those years’, ‘a decade on’
- Trust and withstanding the test of time e.g. ‘a decade on, now we astound ourselves’
- Challenges and trials in relationships e.g. ‘that disagreement’, ‘handsome lies’

**WHAT ARE THE ASPECTS OF STYLE WHICH ARE EFFECTIVE?**

- The central metaphors are the harebell, a beautiful blue spring flower and a book which can contain faded memories. Essentially the pressed flower in the book is dead.

- The middle stanzas focus on the good and bad times of their relationship. The second stanza has balanced lines to suggest the arguments and differences whereas the third stanza has more commas and surprisingly is more united.

- The final stanza returns to the metaphor of the harebell and there is a contrast of setting it free and giving it as a gift. It has ‘air with light’ rather than being ‘pressed/still bleeds’