

ENGLISH

THE BALL POEM

~Summary~

-by John Berryman

Stanza- 1

What is the boy now, who has lost his ball,
What, what is he to do? I saw it go
Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then
Merrily over-there it is in the water!
No use to say "O there are other balls":

Explanation: The poem is about a little boy. For the first time in his young life, he is learning what it is like to experience grief at the loss of a much loved possession, that is, his ball. The ball is here symbolic of the sweet memories of his childhood. The boy loses his ball and watches it bouncing down the street into the water. To us, the loss of a ball is of minor consequence but to the little boy, it was a valued possession. The poet here, deters himself from saying that there are other balls because the boy wants the same ball. The ball had been with him for a long time and it was linked to the memories of the days when he played with it. The boy's ball personifies his young days and happy innocence.

Stanza- 2

An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy
As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down
All his young days into the harbour where
His ball went. I would not intrude on him;
A dime, another ball, is worthless.

Explanation: When the young boy loses his ball, it bounces away and lands in the harbour. The boy is very much troubled at the loss of his ball and plunges into grief. He stands stiff and trembling while staring at his ball. He is upset as he looks into the gloomy water because he cannot find the ball. The boy is deeply affected by the loss of his ball because it has been with him for a long time. When the ball bounces into the water all his memories of the childhood days flashes in front of him. This leads to a realisation that those poet doesn't offer him money to buy another ball because that would be worthless.

Stanza- 3

..... Now
He senses first responsibility
In a world of possessions. People will take
Balls, balls will be lost always, little boy.
And no one buys a ball back. Money is external.

Explanation: The boy is upset when he looks into the gloomy water because he cannot find the ball. This is when he gets his first sense of responsibility. The poet suggests that from the loss of the ball, the boy is learning what it means to lose something in a world of possessions where he will lose things, will buy some more to replace the ones lost, but would never be able to buy back the thing that he had lost. In this poem, the boy's ball personifies his young days and happy innocence. The poet, thus, makes the boy understand about his responsibility as the loss is immaterial. Money is external as it cannot buy memories, nor can it replace the things that we love, the things that really matter.

Stanza- 4

He is learning, well behind his desperate eyes,
This epistemology of loss, how to stand up
Knowing what every man must one day know
And most know many days, how to stand up.

Explanation: The poet suggests that from the loss of the ball the boy is learning how to stand up in a world of possessions. The boy is learning what it means to lose something. The poet says that knowing that every man has to stand up after such losses, the boy too will learn how to stand up and leave the losses behind as he would have understood the true meaning and nature of loss.

Conclusion of The Ball Poem

This poem successfully describes how we may feel to lose something that we love and grow up eventually without it.