Father to Son

Elizabeth Jennings

I do not understand this child
Though we have lived together now
In the same house for years. I know
Nothing of him, so try to build
Up a relationship from how
He was when small. Yet have I killed

The seed I spent or sown it where
The land is his and none of mine?
We speak like strangers, there's no sign
Of understanding in the air.
This child is built to my design
Yet what he loves I cannot share.

Silence surrounds us. I would have
Him prodigal, returning to
His father's house, the home he knew,
Rather than see him make and move
His world. I would forgive him too,
Shaping from sorrow a new love.

Father and son, we both must live
On the same globe and the same land,
He speaks: I cannot understand
Myself, why anger grows from grief.
We each put out an empty hand,
Longing for something to forgive.

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Think it out

1. Does the poem talk of an exclusively personal experience or is it fairly universal?
2. How is the father's helplessness brought out in the poem?
3. Identify the phrases and lines that indicate distance between father and son.
4. Does the poem have a consistent rhyme scheme?

Notes

The poem is autobiographical in nature and describes the relationship between a father and his son.

Understanding the poem

Questions are based on

- the universality of the experience described
- phrases in the poem
- rhyme scheme in the poem

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