When I Try to Say Goodbye to Our Life Before Quarantine

As soon as one reads “When I Try to Say Sorry to Those That Are Suffering” by Trish Lindsey Jaggers, they are gripped by the vivid emotions of the poem. The writer makes comparisons that draw personal memories from the reader, making it possible for them to see their own experiences reflected in the poem. Today, one of the most universally relevant experiences has been the covid-19 pandemic and the period of worldwide quarantine it caused. Many of the devices used and comparisons made in Jaggers’ poem can relate to the challenging time of quarantine, specifically to how the pandemic was suddenly introduced, the way it changed typical lifestyle, and how it affected the way life is viewed.

To begin with, the author uses figurative language to make comparisons that relate to how abruptly covid-19 came about. In the second verse of the poem, the author connects the experience of saying sorry to sudden thunder: “rather, more like a clap of thunder / against a cloudless sky” (Jaggers, 7-8). Similarly to this onomatopoeia, the spread of the coronavirus was as rapid and unexpected as hearing thunder on a sunny day. One day was ordinary and the next people around the country were locking themselves in their houses. There was warning before these events, of course, but many people didn’t pay attention to or doubted the news, the same way the author did: “I question whether I heard / it at all, but still, I go in, close the windows / and wait for the opening up” (9-11). And that’s what people did: they went inside, closed their windows, and waited. That wait turned from a week to a year as covid-19 only grew more severe. Many lived a lifestyle of uncertainty. This, too, the author shared in “When I Try...”
Throughout the poem, Jaggers said “no,” before changing the direction of her train of thought, reflecting the confusion, denial, and insecurity of the situation in her repetition. In the same way, those in quarantine had no idea what to believe or expect. Many were left in a state of precariousness similar to the author’s experience. The known lifestyle was gone, though everyone had hoped to preserve it just as the author hoped to preserve “the oak tree, old as Egypt” (13). In its absence, the old lifestyle, or the simile of the oak tree, was being mourned.

The same feelings experienced by those in quarantine are reflected in the author’s final sentences: “it should have bled / it should have bled” (27-28). The author is overwhelmed with how life “should have” gone, the same way many miss the way their lifestyle used to be. However, eventually, it is necessary to adapt and grow. Sometimes, you must move on, similarly to how the author describes in a simile: “I once fell / no / like a bird, I let go” (19-21). Instead of clinging to the past, one must let go of their branch and fall into their new life. However, the pandemic changed not only life, but also how life is viewed. The pandemic was like the imagery of “a silver slice through / the clean, blue air” (4-5), dividing life into “before covid” and “after covid.” Many things are different in the “after covid” period, from masks to vaccination cards.

Even casual vocabulary has changed. The words “pandemic” and “quarantine” have attained the same effect as the word “sorry,” as the author details in her first sentence: “the word has a certain ring to it / like bells in the distance, like church / getting ready to start” (1-3). In other words, it is familiar and yet unfamiliar, musical but also out of place. People have been through many hardships, but yet they still have the same trouble saying goodbye to their lives before covid as Jaggers has trouble saying sorry to those that are suffering.

Throughout the verses and comparisons of “When I Try to Say Sorry to Those That Are Suffering,” the personal experiences of the pandemic are reflected, from how the pandemic was
suddenly introduced to the way it changed typical lifestyle and how it affected the way life is viewed. The poem shares the emotions of thoughtfulness, confusion, and nostalgia with the pandemic crisis and the many mental and physical tolls it took. Overall, Jaggers’ poem gives readers peace, acknowledging their traumatic experiences, recognizing their position is understood, and encouraging them to grow beyond their past.