

In the earth, the earth
thou shalt be laid and
answer the following
questions

[Environment](#), [Earth](#)



- (a) What different arguments are presented through the poems two voices?
- (b) How do the poems language and structure contribute to its meaning?
- (c) Write about another of Brontë's poems that has a death or a farewell as its subject matter, making some comparisons with the poem above.

(a) In this poem " In the earth, the earth thou shalt be laid ..." two adverse voices dispute the nature of death. The first warns of the grim finality and isolation of death. The second voice welcomes death as the bringer of peace after a life of troubles, and opposes the argument of oblivion with the prospect of posthumous kind remembrance. The first voice returns in the last two stanzas insisting that death brings complete annihilation and observes that the first speaker will be mourned by only one faithful individual.

In the very first stanza, the first voice presents the second with the image of his grave: the laying of his body, the tombstone and the enfolding soil. The first voice talks of death as very final. It talks about the revoltingness of decomposition; warning of death's defiling bed:

" Black mould beneath thee spread

And black mould to cover thee".

The second voice welcomes the prospect of death. In stanza two, the second voice interrupts, creating a more sanguine tone. The voice seems to resign of death in " Well, there is rest there", and the welcoming of death is expressed in the second line. The images this voice uses are by no means morbid. The second voice makes the argument that life is not restful and

death is a time of great tranquillity and peace. It suggests death is a time when you and the environment come together as one. The twining of "sunny hair" with "grass-roots" suggests the intricate weaving of one life-form with another. The burial of fair hair takes down an implication of sunlight into the underlying darkness.

The first voice returns in stanza three. This voice objects that "the rest" which the second voice looks forward to is only the chill rest of nothingness:

"But cold, cold is that resting place

Shut out from Joy and Liberty"

There is no happiness of freedom in the oblivion and enclosure of the tomb. The first voice talks of the cold of the grave and that it is a place without any happiness or pleasure. It then counters the more positive attitude towards death of the second voice by expressing the fear and revulsion felt by the living towards the decaying of dead bodies and, therefore, the dead themselves:

"And all who loved thy living face

Shall shrink from its gloom and thee"

The second's voice gives an emphatic rejection to the first's ideas. It suggests that, far from cold being the characteristic of death, it characterises the falsehood of the world and human relationships:

"Not so, here the world is chill

And sworn friends fall from me"

This voice is very bitter about rejection. However, the rhythm the tone then lightens:

" But there, they'll own me still

And prize my memory"

In death, he will be remembered and his worth recognised. He believes that his old friends from life will think of him fondly even if they were indifferent to him when alive.

The first voice concludes the poems in the last two stanzas. In stanza five he seems almost contemptuous:

" Farewell, then, all that love

All that deep sympathy:"

It is almost as if the first voice is dismissing the second as dead already. The nothingness of death is affirmed in a declaration of the indifference of heaven to human fate that is matched only by the indifference of the living:

" Sleep on, heaven laughs above -

Earth never misses thee -"

In the final stanza the voice returns to the image of the grave with which the poem began, observing that the tomb irrevocably severs human relations.

The last two lines are ambiguous, but seem to imply that there is, however, one person who mourns, one who was always faithful:

" One heart broke, only"

In conclusion, the two voices propose two completely different arguments into the nature of death. The first voice thinks of the physicality of being dead, and sees it as a time of cold and revulsion. The second voice thinks more of the state of being dead, perceiving death as a release from the troubles of life and enjoys the thought of people looking back fondly on his memory.

(b) This poem, " In the earth, the earth" structure and language contribute a lot to the meaning of the poem. The six quatrains of this elegy are based on an iambic trimeter and tetrameter, but with at least one substitution in most of the lines. In particular, the frequent substitution of a spondee in the first foot of each line helps to create the stately solemn tone that suits the subject.

In the first stanza, the first voice presents the second with the image of his grace: the laying of the body, the tombstone and the enfolding soil. Key words in this image are emphasised by means of repetition, alliteration and word order. Thus the repetition of " the earth" in the first half of line 1 contributes to the setting of the melancholy, fatalistic tone. Alliteration in line 2 in " stone standing" builds on this. The repetition of " black mould" in lines 3 and 4 has a similar effect, but here the mould not only refers to the soil, but to the decay of the human body itself within the earth. " Black"

likewise refers not only to the colour of the soul, but traditionally, in such a context, signifies death and mourning. But the whole elegiac effect is largely achieved by the word order that creates the heavily spondaic rhythm.

In stanza 2, the second voice shows resignation in the " Well, there is rest there", and the welcoming of death expressed in the second line. Moreover, in contrast with the image of death in the first stanza of " black earth" the image in lines 3 and 4 is by no means morbid; the " sunny hair" recalls life which is nurtured by sun, and the grass-roots refer to the means of life in the soil. Thus the whole curious effect is the image of weaving them together of two forms of life. The rhythm is highly irregular, for example with the substitution of two dactyls. Again this is an important factor in achieving the different tone of the second voice. The only spondee in this stanza falls appropriately on " grass roots".

The first voice returns in stanza three. The repetition of " But cold, cold" echoes the opening of stanza 1 (" In the earth, the earth"), and recaptures the contrasting tone. The voice objects that " the rest" which the second voice looks forward to is only the chill rest of nothingness:

" But cold, cold is that resting place

Shut out from Joy and Liberty"

There is no happiness or freedom in the oblivion and enclosure of the tomb.

It then counters the more positive attitude towards death of the second voice by expressing the fear and revulsion left by the living towards the

evidence of decay (the grave, "that resting place") and by extension towards the dead themselves:

" And all who loved thy living face

Shall shrink from its gloom and thee"

Alliteration in "all", "loved", "living" and "Shall shrink" lend fluency to these lines, whose rhythm is more regular than the second stanza, thus giving this voice a more matter-of-fact tone and saving it from melodrama.

In stanza four, the second voice's emphatic rejection of the first is signalled by the opening negative "Not so", and by the italicised antithesis of "here" and "there" around which the stanza is built. The voice suggests that far from cold being the characteristic of death, it characterises the falsehood of the world and human relationships:

" Nor so, here the world is chill

And sworn friends fall from me"

Assonance and alliteration ("friends fall from") bind these lines and assist the emphasis. The rhythm also greatly contributes to this. The second foot of line 1 is a trochee, giving the italicised "here" appropriate stress. In line 2 three consecutive stressed syllables ("sworn friends fall") reinforce the bitterness of the reflection. But in the contrasting lines 3 and 4 the rhythm lightens into regular iambs:

" But there they'll own me still

And prize my memory"

The italicised " there" falls naturally on the stressed syllable of a regular iambic tetrameter. In death, he will be remembered and his worth recognised.

The first voice concludes the poem in these final two stanzas. Again the characteristic of the voice is repetition. In stanza 5 the tone appears almost contemptuous:

" Farewell, then, all that love

All that deep sympathy:"

It is almost as if the first voice dismisses the second as dead already. The nothingness of death is affirmed in a declaration of the indifference of heaven to human fate that is matched only by the indifference of the living:

" Sleep on, heaven laughs above -

Earth never misses thee -"

In the final stanza the voice returns to the image of the grave with which the poem began, observing that the tomb irrevocably severs human relations. The last two lines are ambiguous, but seem to imply that there is, however, one person who mourns, one who was always faithful. Repetition and italicisation (" One heart... That Heart") and the spondees falling at the beginning of lines give the ending of the poem a heightened dramatic tone.

(c) Another of Brontë's poems that has a death or a farewell as the subject matter is "Remembrance". Like "In the earth, the earth" this poem is an elegy: the speaker in the poem reflects on the loss of the beloved. It consists of eight quatrains, whereas "In the earth" has only six, but like the above poem it is rhymed abab.

This poem is written in the first person. There is only one voice in this poem. The poet appears to be contemplating the cold and isolated grave of her beloved and look back over the fifteen years since his death. The idea of the grave as "cold" and lonely reflects the ideas of the first voice in "In the earth". The poet asks the lover's forgiveness for having forgotten him "While the world's tide is bearing me along". But preoccupation with worldly matters has never distorted her love of him; she has loved none other. This sentiment of one person who faithfully mourns after death reflects the poem "In the earth" in the lines:

"On heart broke only, there

That heart was worthy thee! -"

The poet then goes on to say how after a period of utter despair she deliberately turned away from grieving for him, learning to continue her existence even while recognising that she had no hope of future happiness. In the last stanza she acknowledges the fragility of her efforts at stoical acceptance. She dare not let her thoughts dwell upon him for fear that life would thereafter be unendurable.

Like the first voice of the poem discussed earlier, this poem has a very slow rhythm and an intensely sorrowful tone. Also like the other poem, repetition of key words such as " far", " cold" and " severed" enforce their points. The imagery of snow and distant, wild landscapes conveys a bleak, chill atmosphere. Brontë also uses assonance in both poems, here on the different 'o' sounds in stanza two, building the atmosphere of sorrowful retrospection:

" Now, when alone, do my thoughts no longer hover

Over the mountains on that northern shore ..."

Another similar effect Brontë uses in both poems in repeating the opening of the poem. In " In the Earth", she uses repetition to reflect the opening and also returns to imagery of the cold, isolated grave. In this poem, the first half of stanza three repeats the actual opening of the poem " Cold in the earth". Ironically, this echoes the two uses of repetition used in the earlier poem: " In the earth, the earth" and " But cold, cold".

Also, this poem talks about two completely different feelings towards the death of her lover, just as the two voices in " In the earth" compare two completely different views towards death itself.