

The Bluebell Ann Bronte



A fine and subtle spirit dwells
In every little flower,
Each one its own sweet feeling breathes
With more or less of power.

There is a silent eloquence
In every wild bluebell
That fills my softened heart with bliss
That words could never tell.

Yet I recall not long ago
A bright and sunny day,
'Twas when I led a toilsome life
So many leagues away;

That day along a sunny road
All carelessly I strayed,
Between two banks where smiling flowers
Their varied hues displayed.

Before me rose a lofty hill,
Behind me lay the sea,
My heart was not so heavy then
As it was wont to be.

Less harassed than at other times
I saw the scene was fair,
And spoke and laughed to those around,
As if I knew no care.

But when I looked upon the bank
My wandering glances fell
Upon a little trembling flower,
A single sweet bluebell.

Whence came that rising in my throat,
That dimness in my eye?
Why did those burning drops distil —
Those bitter feelings rise?

O, that lone flower recalled to me
My happy childhood's hours
When bluebells seemed like fairy gifts
A prize among the flowers,

Those sunny days of merriment
When heart and soul were free,
And when I dwelt with kindred hearts
That loved and cared for me.

I had not then mid heartless crowds
To spend a thankless life
In seeking after others' weal
With anxious toil and strife.

'Sad wanderer, weep those blissful times
That never may return!'
The lovely floweret seemed to say,
And thus it made me mourn.

Ann Bronte's *The Bluebell* is full of contrasts and as a way of getting to know the poem, students could carry out some detective work, listing positives and negatives or perhaps colour coding them. It will become clear that there are far more positive words and images than negative (see below).

Why, then, does the poem produce such a downbeat effect?

- Because it ends on a melancholy note? 'Sad wanderer, weep those blissful times / That never may return!' / The lovely floweret seemed to say, / And thus it made me mourn.
- Because happy times are in the past and sad times are in the present (and, by implication, future)?
- The negative words and phrases seem more powerful (e.g. anxious toil and strife vs sunny days of merriment)?

Positive	negative
fine and subtle spirit sweet feeling softened heart bliss bright and sunny day sunny road carelessly smiling flowers the scene was fair laughed As if I knew no care happy childhood's hours fairy gifts a prize sunny days of merriment heart and soul were free kindred hearts loved and cared	rising in my throat, dimness in my eye burning drops bitter feelings heartless crowds thankless life anxious toil and strife toilsome life weep never may return mourn
	<p>Here positive and negative feelings are paired:</p> <p>My heart was not so heavy As it was wont to be</p> <p>Less harassed (She can only feel less harassed if she is used to being more harassed)</p>

Ask students to research the context for this poem. To what extent do they feel that it is autobiographical?

They might also research the meanings associated with bluebell flowers, e.g. gratitude, constancy, everlasting love and humility. There may be more! Which most suits Ann Brontë's poem? If none seem suitable, what quality would suit (a) the poem, (b) the poet?