

Emily Bronte Love and Friendship



Love is like the wild rose-briar,
Friendship like the holly-tree—
The holly is dark when the rose-briar blooms
But which will bloom most constantly?

The wild rose-briar is sweet in spring,
Its summer blossoms scent the air;
Yet wait till winter comes again
And who will call the wild-briar fair?

Then scorn the silly rose-wreath now
And deck thee with the holly's sheen,
That when December blights thy brow
He still may leave thy garland green.

Coming from the writer of *Wuthering Heights*, this might seem an unlikely message. Friendship more important than Love? Firstly, you have to ask if this is the belief of the writer or is it simply a moral she liked the sound of and decided to turn into a poem? How might you tell? If we think it is her actual belief, why might this be the case?

Consider the rhyme and scansion. Compare the rhyme scheme in the first stanza with that of the second and third. Some commentators suggest that the poem becomes more settled, more constant, towards the end. Why might they think that. Do you agree?

Given that this is a short and fairly simple poem, it's an ideal one to use as an introduction to, or revision of, extended metaphors. Bronte states the metaphor nice and clearly at the beginning (in fact using similes to do so, but that isn't important). No hesitation, Love IS like the wild rose-briar! And Friendship IS like the holly-tree. She continues to explain why they are and what lesson should be learnt: holly will last, the rose won't. The other metaphorical consideration concerns the seasons and the weather. How do they emphasize the message? (It could be useful to refer to some other poems with extended metaphors at this stage – *The Poison Tree*, perhaps?)

You might also consider the fact that some poems are didactic. They can look that up. Emily Bronte is telling us what to think and do, much in the way a teacher (or preacher) might. She uses rhetorical questions (for which there are only one answer) to drive the lesson home. In this way the poem can be compared with fables, parables and other moralising texts.

In the last stanza, the writer refers to the holly as 'He' rather than 'It'. Is anything gained by this?