The Flowers

POEM TEXT

When Love arose in heart and deed
To wake the world to greater joy,
"What can she give me now?" said Greed,
Who thought to win some costly toy.

He rose, he ran, he stoop'd, he clutch'd;
And soon the Flowers, that Love let fall,
In Greed's hot grasp were fray'd and smutch'd,
And Greed said, "Flowers! Can this be all?"

He flung them down and went his way,
He cared no jot for thyme or rose;
But boys and girls came out to play,
And some took these and some took those—

Red, blue, and white, and green and gold;
And at their touch the dew return'd,
And all the bloom a thousandfold—
So red, so ripe, the roses burn'd!

SUMMARY

One day Love got up and decided to make the world even happier. Greed, meanwhile, wondered what Love could do for *him* in particular, figuring he could get some expensive plaything out of Love.

So Greed got up, ran, bent down, and snatched up the flowers that Love had kindly given away. He gripped the flowers so tightly that they became raggedy and ruined. Greed looked at the flowers and said, "Is this it!?"

Greed, unimpressed, tossed the flowers to the ground and left; he'd never cared at all about herbs or plants. But then some children, who'd gone outside to play, picked up the various flowers.

The flowers were all different colors, and the children's touch rejuvenated them. Thousands more flowers bloomed. The roses were so full of life and color that they seemed to be on fire!

THEMES

LOVE VS. GREED

William Brighty Rand's "The Flowers" implicitly urges its readers to be generous and open-hearted. The poem depicts love as a wonderful, life-affirming force for good for the world who freely spreads her beautiful "Flowers." Greed, by contrast, crushes those same flowers in his "hot grasp" before huffily asking, "Can this be all?" The implication is that love cannot flourish in the face of selfishness. Love, the poem suggests, is more precious than any "costly toy," and it deserves to be both shared and handled with tenderness.

The speaker personifies capital-L Love as a female figure who wants to make the world a better place. Love's mission is to "wake the world to greater joy" in both "heart and deed" (or emotion and action). This "joy," readers can assume, is the joy of falling and being in love. As part of this mission, Love "let[s] fall" a bunch of flowers, readily sharing her beauty with humanity. Love doesn't try to keep things for herself; she spreads the love around.

A personified Greed, meanwhile, lurks in the wings, waiting to see what he can "gain" from Love. Greed only looks out for number one, apparently, and can't appreciate the simple joy of feeling deep affection for someone else. Instead, Greed hopes to gain a "costly toy," suggesting how the selfish desire for more can blind people to the bounty in front of them (and also perhaps speaking to the way material desires get in the way of love).

Greed wants to *take* something from Love, rather than follow her generous example. He hastily steals the flowers that Love "lets fall." Unable to handle love delicately or appreciate this gift, Greed crushes the flowers in his "hot grasp" and then carelessly throws them away, having decided that they're worthless.

And yet, Love isn't so easily defeated. The discarded flowers find their way into the hands of children, whose gentle interest encourages the flowers to "bloom a thousandfold." The children's enjoyment of the flowers brings back the "dew," in turn transforming the flowers into a colorful, abundant sight. The "roses burn'd," the speaker declares, their intense ripeness and redness representing how quickly a spark can burst into a flame of passion—when treated properly, that is. Love begets love, the poem suggests, spreading beauty, joy, and, ultimately, *more love* throughout the world.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-16

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

When Love arose in heart and deed
To wake the world to greater joy,
"What can she give me now?" said Greed,
Who thought to win some costly toy.

The poem begins by personifying Love as a female figure who decides "in heart and deed" to fill the world with "greater joy." Right away, Love comes across as generous and open-hearted. It sounds as though Love is someone working behind the scenes to create a happier life for all humanity.

The phrase "arose in heart and deed" is a bit of a play on words. On the one hand, it describes the personified "Love" figure waking up, but it also suggests *love*, the emotion, blooming in humanity's hearts and actions. It suggests the warmth and tenderness that "arise" when you have feelings for someone. Falling in love, this line suggests, is like discovering a joy "greater" than you ever knew existed. The phrase "wake the world" likewise presents love as an eye-opening force, one that shakes people out of their everyday stupor.

Next, the poem personifies "Greed" as a male figure who, unlike Love, is only looking out for himself. Sensing that Love has some kind of plan to spread joy, Greed wonders how he, personally, can benefit. He thinks he might be able to "win some costly toy" from Love, a phrase that trivializes love as nothing but a plaything. The need to "win" is totally at odds with the way Love works, while the word "costly" might make readers think of people whose only motivation in life is to accumulate wealth.

In four lines, then, the poem has created a stark juxtaposition. Love is generous and selfless, readily hoping to spread joy through the world. Greed is *selfish*, seeking material gain and a desire to beat out others.

This stanza also establishes the poem's form. Each stanza is a quatrain, meaning it has four lines. Those lines follow an alternating rhyme scheme (ABAB) and iambic tetrameter (meaning each line contains four iambs, poetic feet with an unstressed-stressed syllable pattern):

When Love | arose | in heart | and deed
To wake | the world | to great- | er joy,
"What can | she give | me now?" | said Greed,
Who thought | to win | some cost- | ly toy.

Do note, that it's possible to scan the "What" in line 3 as a stressed beat, making the first foot a trochee. This slight blip in the poem's rhythm conveys Greed's desperation to take something for himself.

In any case, the poem sounds simple and straightforward. This, along with the personification of the abstract concepts of love and greed, makes the poem easily accessible to children. The poem's formal directness keeps its moral message front and center (and, perhaps, also makes the poem itself easier to commit to memory).

LINES 5-8

He rose, he ran, he stoop'd, he clutch'd;
And soon the Flowers, that Love let fall,
In Greed's hot grasp were fray'd and smutch'd,
And Greed said, "Flowers! Can this be all?"

In the second stanza, Greed intercepts Love's generous gift to humanity. An opportunistic thief, Greed wants Love's gifts all for himself. Notice the anaphora of line 5:

He rose, he ran, he stoop'd, he clutch'd;

These short, sharp clauses are also an example of parataxis. Together, these devices help to convey Greed's frantic, almost manic behavior.

Love has let flowers "fall." Those flowers symbolize love itself (as well as love's generosity and selflessness), which capital-L Love has offered freely for people to enjoy. But Greed swoops in to take them for himself before anyone else can.

Contrast the manic pacing of line 5 with the line that follows and reveals Love's generous gift:

And soon the Flowers, that Love let fall,

This line feels much gentler, slower, and more tender. That's thanks to the caesura after "Flowers," as well as delicate /l/ and /f/ alliteration ("Flowers," "fall"/"Love let") and consonance (highlighted above). Love comes across as patient and graceful; Greed, by contrast, is in a rush, unable to stop and, literally in this case, smell the roses.

He also can't handle the flowers with the careful touch they deserve. Indeed, Greed is so hasty, so eager to scoop up all the flowers for himself, that he crushes them in his "hot grasp":

In Greed's hot grasp were fray'd and smutch'd,

The growling /gr/ alliteration evokes Greed's aggressive grip, further painting a picture of Greed as a rough fool. The flowers become "fray'd and smutch'd": damaged and stained from Greed's uncaring clumsiness.

Greed doesn't even appreciate the flowers that he's stolen, perhaps because they don't have much material worth (they're not "costly"). He ends the stanza in a huff, wondering if "Flowers"—beautiful but delicate, fleeting, and naturally

abundant—are really all that Love has to offer.

LINES 9-12

He flung them down and went his way,
He cared no jot for thyme or rose;
But boys and girls came out to play,
And some took these and some took those—

Dissatisfied with Love's flowers, Greed departs the scene in a huff. He carelessly tosses the flowers "down." Notice how the anaphora of "He" portrays Greed as self-entered—it's all about him:

> He flung them down and went his way,
> He cared no jot for thyme or rose;

"Thyme" is a kind of fragrant herb, while a "rose," of course, is a common symbol of love itself. Greed doesn't care a whit for either, however; to him, the flowers are all the same, and they're all worthless. He goes on "his way," the implication being that he continues to live a greedy, selfish life—one in which Love is notably absent.

This is the last the reader hears from Greed, who, in his fluster of hurried selfishness, doesn't get to witness the magic of the flowers in bloom nor the happiness of the children as they play. He *misses* out; the poem thus suggests Greed is a lonely figure, and that *being* greedy leads to misery and isolation.

Though Greed has tossed the flowers aside, all is not lost. Suddenly children come outside "to play," and they spot Love's fallen gift. The use of "but" in line 11 signals that the children's innocence represents a kind of metaphorical antidote to Greed's unhealthy ways:

> But boys and girls came out to play,

These "boys and girls" have a natural, instinctive curiosity about the world. They pick up the flowers, but they don't carelessly try to collect them all for themselves. "Some took these and some took those," the speaker says, the parallelism here suggesting balance and harmony, a sense of things being done how they ought to be done. The children don't fight over or snatch at the flowers; it seems more like they *share* them, in the same spirit that Love first let the flowers "fall" to the world.

LINES 13-16

Red, blue, and white, and green and gold;
And at their touch the dew return'd,
And all the bloom a thousandfold—
So red, so ripe, the roses burn'd!

Thanks to the children's interest and affection, the flowers become rejuvenated. Though Greed had almost destroyed them, the last stanza shows them coming back to glorious life. They bloom in a brilliant multitude of colors: "Red, blue, and white, and green and gold." The polysyndeton here suggests abundance, while the monosyllabic words convey a startling and simple beauty.

While "Greed's hot grasp" threatened to destroy the flowers, the children's "touch" brings back "the dew"; they're beaded with moisture, as in the early morning, and they begin to multiply. They grow a "thousandfold," in fact. Love begets more and more love.

The anaphora of lines 14 and 15—both start with "And"—sounds a bit biblical, lending the moral lesson greater authority:

> And at their touch the dew return'd,
> And all the bloom a thousandfold—

Love and selflessness are a force for good for the world, the poem thus suggests, and they fill it with beauty. Greed, by contrast, is a destructive force, interested only in consumption for its own benefit.

The last line gleefully celebrates the beauty of the flowers. Note how the anaphora here echoes the rhythm line 5 ("He rose, he ran")—but with much more positive connotations:

> So red, so ripe, the roses burn'd!

The repetition of "so" conveys the children's utter delight at the vibrancy and vivacity of those roses. The alliteration between "red," "ripe," and "roses" adds to the line's happy sound and helps to convey the flowers' startling beauty.

Again, roses are a traditional symbol of love and romance. Love, too, is often described in fiery terms—feeling sparks, flames of passion, burning desire, and so forth. The poem thus ends with an image of love in full bloom, bursting into life.

SYMBOLS

THE FLOWERS

The flowers in this poem symbolize love itself.

When the personified Love lets flowers "fall," this action represents spreading love around the earth. Anyone can scoop up a little love and awaken to "greater joy." Yet Greed, who is the first to get his hands on the flowers, nearly ruins them completely. Love, the poem's symbolism suggests, is something beautiful yet delicate and easily damaged. It's not something that you can hoard for yourself.

Note, too, that Greed is unimpressed by the flowers because they don't hold much monetary value; they're not some "costly toy." The flowers thus reflect the idea that love and the happiness it brings are things money can't buy.

The flower symbolism conveys that love is something that must be appreciated and tenderly cared for. At the poem's end, the children's gentle attention brings the flowers back to vivid life, and soon enough they bloom in the thousands; love makes the world a more beautiful place. Love also begets more love, the poem's symbolism implies, and thus is something that should be celebrated and shared.

Finally, the image of "red," "ripe" roses at the poem's end suggest how intense love can feel when finally allowed to flourish. Love is often described in fiery terms (as in feeling flames or sparks). Those "burning" roses suggest immense passion.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- Lines 6-16

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

Alliteration makes "The Flowers" more musical and memorable.

Take line 2. Love is positive and selfless, looking for ways to "wake the world to greater joy." This /w/ alliteration is gently musical, perhaps suggesting Love's tender touch. The alliteration in line 6 is similarly soft, helping to convey the sweetness with which Love spreads joy in the world:

> And soon the Flowers, that Love let fall,

Consonance of those same /f/ and /l/ sounds adds to the effect:

> And soon the Flowers, that Love let fall,

All those delicate, lilting sounds help to convey Love as a tender, graceful figure.

Contrast these sounds with those used in relation to Greed. The growing /gr/ of "Greed's hot grasp"
evokes Greed crudely crushing Love's flowers in his grip. In this way, alliteration helps to emphasize the juxtaposition between Love and Greed.

In the final stanza, alliteration suggests the vibrancy of Love's flowers. There's the sharp /g/ of "green" and "gold" in line 13 and the triple /r/ alliteration of "So red, so ripe, the roses" in the last line. These repetitive sounds turn up the volume on the poem, conveying a sense of the flowers' beauty and joyful abundance.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "wake," "world"
- **Line 5:** "rose," "ran"
- **Line 6:** "Love let"
- **Line 7:** "Greed's," "grasp"
- **Line 11:** "But boys"
- **Line 13:** "green," "gold"
- **Line 16:** "red," "ripe," "roses"

JUXTAPOSITION

"The Flowers" pits the personified forces of "Love" and "Greed" against each other. By contrasting these two figures, the poem implies that they're incompatible; Love can't flourish in the face of Greed, which crushes Love's delicate beauty.

The poem builds up the juxtaposition between Love and Greed by presenting these figures are different in pretty much every way:

- Love is female, while Greed is male.
- Love is selfless, wanting to "wake the world to greater joy." In both thought and action ("heart and deed"), she focuses on spreading happiness. Greed, by contrast, just wonders what's in it for him ("What can she give me now?"). He wants "to win some costly toy," more concerned with material gain than simple pleasures.
- Love is patient, while Greed runs around in a frantic rush. His frenzied movements damage the flowers—Love's gift—which he's too impatient to appreciate.
- Ultimately, Greed flees the scene having gained nothing at all. He misses out on the beauty of the flowers and on the happiness of the children when they in turn discover the flowers. Love's gentle strategy to create "greater joy" proves victorious over Greed's wicked ways.

The poem also juxtaposes Greed's haste and selfishness with the children's curiosity and willingness to share. While Greed hurries to take all of Love's flowers for himself, the children only gather a few: "some took these and some took those," the speaker says. While Greed's grip smothered Love's flowers, the children's gentle appreciation allows the flowers to bloom anew.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-16

PARATAXIS

Parataxis appears in line 5, as the speaker describes Greed's actions when he learns that Love has let some Flowers "fall" into the world in order to spread "greater joy." Greed, the poem makes clear, is eager to see what he can get for himself:

He rose, he ran, he stoop'd, he clutch'd;

These short, sharp statements help to convey Greed's personality. He's jumpy and hurried, always looking for a quick opportunity to take whatever he can for himself. He has a kind of manic energy that comes with always prioritizing number one! Like a thief, he grabs the flowers as quickly as he can. The anaphora of the word "he" adds to the effect, making the line sound clipped and choppy.

The poem's final line also features parataxis (note that the first half of this line is more accurately characterized as asyndeton):

So red, so ripe, the roses burn'd!

The quick language here fills the poem's final moments with a sense of building excitement.

Where Parataxis appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "He rose, he ran, he stoop'd, he clutch'd;"
- **Line 16:** "So red, so ripe, the roses burn'd!"

PERSONIFICATION

"The Flowers" personifies "Love" and "Greed," treating them as figures with will and agency. This personification brings the poem's argument to life, dramatizing a conflict between these two abstract concepts and making the poem's lesson—to act lovingly rather than selfishly—more digestible for the reader.

The poem conceives of Love as a female figure who couldn't be more different from Greed, a male figure. In the opening lines, Love seems to wake up and think: how can I make the world a happier place? Greed, meanwhile, is only interested in what Love can give *him* rather than what he can give to the world.

Love freely shares her "flowers" with humanity, while Greed rushes about trying to take all those flowers for himself. Love is delicate and invigorating, while Greed is oafish and destructive.

Again, love and greed are really just abstract concepts. But by treating them like people, the poem is able to emphasize the juxtaposition between these concepts and illustrate how they affect each other.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-10

REPETITION

"The Flowers" uses various kinds of repetition throughout, which add rhythm and emphasis to important moments in the poem.

First, note the anaphora (and parataxis) in line 5:

He rose, he ran, he stoop'd, he clutch'd;

The relentless repetition of the word "he" keeps the focus squarely on Greed, a figure who's only thinking about himself at any given time. These short, clipped phrases (that's where parataxis comes in) also make Greed's actions feel frantic. Greed he wants to rush in, take what he can, and then get the heck out of there.

The anaphora of lines 9-10 again calls attention to Greed's actions, and it makes the "But" of line 11 stand out all the more strongly to readers' ears. That is, readers might expect another "He" to appear, yet a "But" does; the poem takes a sudden turn, as the children enter the scene and treat Love's flowers with respect and tenderness.

The parallelism of line 12 then emphasizes the children's patient, thoughtful treatment of the flowers:

And some took these and some took those—

The repetition of "some took" adds a sense of balance and harmony to the line, calling attention to the fact that the children, unlike Greed, don't hastily scoop everything up for themselves; they recognize that there are enough flowers to go around.

Indeed, the polysyndeton of the next line emphasizes just how many flowers there are:

Red, blue, and white, and green and gold;

All those "and"s capture the numerousness of the flowers, portraying their colors as brilliant and various.

Finally, anaphora returns in the poem's final line:

So red, so ripe, the roses burn'd!

That repeated "so" makes the line sound all the more ecstatic, hammering home just how vibrant these roses are.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "He," "he," "he," "he"
- **Line 9:** "He"
- **Line 10:** "He"
- **Line 12:** "And some took," "and some took"
- **Line 13:** "and," "and," "and"
- **Line 14:** "And"
- **Line 15:** "And"
- **Line 16:** "So," "so"

VOCABULARY

Arose (Line 1) - Got up/resolved.

Deed (Line 1) - Action.

Stoop'd (Line 5) - Stooped, as in bent over.

Clutch'd (Line 5) - Grabbed.

Grasp (Line 7) - Hold/grip.

Fray'd and Smutch'd (Line 7) - Damaged and stained.

Jot (Line 10) - A miniscule amount.

Thyme (Line 10) - A fragrant herb.

Thousandfold (Line 15) - In great number (by the thousands).

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The Flowers" has a simple form consisting of four quatrains (four-line stanzas). Quatrains are common in Victorian poetry. Together with the poem's straightforward meter and rhyme scheme (more on those in the next sections of this guide), this stanza shape makes this an easily digestible and memorable poem. A simple form makes sense for a poem with a *moral* lesson (that is, to choose love over greed!). It's almost like a parable: a narrative with a clear ethical or spiritual message at its heart.

METER

"The Flowers" uses iambic tetrameter. A line of iambic tetrameter consists of four iambs, metrical feet with an unstressed-STRESSED syllable pattern (da-DUM). This meter lends the poem a simple, straightforward momentum, as readers can hear in the first two lines:

> When Love | arose | in heart | and deed
> To wake | the world | to great- | er joy,

This bouncy rhythm is remarkably consistent throughout, resulting in a poem that's easy to read and remember. This simple meter suits a parable-like poem that was originally written for children.

The poem rarely varies this meter, though there are a few moments that are open to interpretation. For example, line 7's "hot grasp" might be read as a spondee (two stressed beats in a row: "in Greed's | hot grasp"), which makes Greed come across as clumsy and selfish.

There's also an extra unstressed syllable in line 8:

> And Greed said, "Flowers! Can this be all?"

It's possible to scan the word "Flowers" as a single syllable (i.e., "Flow'rs"), but this subtle disruption to the poem's meter evokes Greed's destructive ways: he even upsets the poem's rhythm!

RHYME SCHEME

"The Flowers" uses alternating rhyme throughout, with new rhyme sounds introduced in each stanza. This results in a rhyme scheme of:

ABAB CDCD EFEF

...and so on.

This straightforward pattern adds bouncy music to the poem. Along with its clear meter and quatrain stanza form, the rhyme scheme makes the poem feel simple, musical, and memorable. Many of the rhymes are also quite playful ("clutch'd/smutched," anyone?), which helps brings the poem's narrative to life on the page.

SPEAKER

"The Flowers" has an omniscient narrator. The speaker has no clear identity and is simply there to relay the story (like the voice in a fairy tale). This gives the poem the gentle authority of a parable: a narrative with a moral lesson at its heart.

SETTING

"The Flowers" has a fairy-tale-like setting. Personified "Love" wakes up one day and scatters flowers over the earth, which personified Greed hurriedly scoops up all for himself. Greed squishes the flowers and then tosses them back down, unimpressed, before walking away in a huff. When some children later come outside to play, they find the flowers and, through their tender touch, bring them back to vivid life.

The story reads almost like a dream. The *lack* of any specific time/place makes the story feel more universal, giving its moral lesson greater authority.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Victorian writer William Brighty Rands (1823-1882) was best known for his poems and essays for children. Rands published many of his poems in journals and magazines, often using pseudonyms (such as Matthew Browne or Henry Holbeach).

"The Flowers" was included in Rands's collection *Lilliput Lyrics*, published posthumously in 1899. This illustrated volume of children's verse includes one of Rands's most famous poems: "The Race of the Flowers." Most of the poems in the collection

have a similar tone, featuring an omniscient narrator telling stories that have a clear moral or spiritual lesson.

The steady meters and rhyme schemes of Rands's poetry were typical for the Victorian era. This period was also a veritable golden age for children's literature, with a rapidly expanding market for books aimed at youngsters. Poets like Rand and his contemporaries Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll found inspiration in the English nursery rhymes of the 17th century. While works like Lear's *A Book of Nonsense* and Lewis Carroll's poem "Jabberwocky" have endured in popularity, Rands's verse is no longer as widely read.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

William Brighty Rands wrote during the reign of Queen Victoria (who ruled England from 1831 to 1901), a time of massive scientific, societal, and religious upheavals. The Victorian era saw writers grappling with vast shifts in the religious, moral, and class structures of their world.

This was a time of rapidly accumulating wealth and economic progress, both a result of the British Empire's colonial expansion and the Industrial Revolution. The population increased almost everywhere, save for Ireland during the Great Famine, and London became a booming metropolis. Conditions for the working class, however, remained extremely poor. Many people, including children, worked long hours in unsanitary factories and mines, which were often the breeding grounds for infectious diseases.

The 19th century in England was also a time of significant changes in the way humankind saw itself. For example, Charles Lyell's innovations in the study of geology suddenly cast doubt over the alleged timescales of the world's creation as described by the Bible, and advances in evolutionary biology unsettled the idea of man as the center of a universe created by God. That said, religion and morality remained at the heart of society. Rands, for his part, often served as a preacher at a church in London, and he sometimes wrote words for hymns.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- William Brighty Rands and the Victorian Era — Read more about the poet's life and the era in which he lived. (https://victorian-era.org/william-brighty-rands-biography.html)
- Lilliput Lyrics — Check out William Brighty Rands's collection of children's verse, complete with illustrations. (https://www.gutenberg.org/files/53030/53030-h/53030-h.htm#THE_RACE_OF_THE_FLOWERS)
- William Brighty Rands Website — A website devote to Rands, deemed the "Laureate of the Nursery." (https://www.wbrands.com/index.php?page=the-ship-that-sailed-into-the-sun)
- The Victorian Era — Dive deeper into the time period in which Rand wrote, which was marked by sweeping changes across Britain. (https://www.history.com/topics/19th-century/victorian-era-timeline)

HOW TO CITE

MLA

Howard, James. "*The Flowers*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 26 Jul 2022. Web. 1 Aug 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Howard, James. "*The Flowers*." LitCharts LLC, July 26, 2022. Retrieved August 1, 2022. https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/william-brighty-rands/the-flowers.