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“Break Break Break”:

## Critical Detailed Analysis And Summary

### Summary

In ‘Break Break Break’ by poet Tennyson, the speaker commands the waves of the ocean to repeatedly crash on the rocky beach. The speaker observes this and longs for the power to convey unsettling ideas that won’t go away.

Looking out across the ocean, the speaker notices a young sailor singing as he navigates into the cove and a fisherman’s son shouting while playing with his sister.

The speaker imagines the magnificent ships floating through the harbour on their way to perfect, almost heavenly locations. However, observing these ships doesn’t take the speaker’s mind off of the memories of shaking hands with a friend whose voice has long since vanished and who is no longer present.

The speaker calls to the waves as they repeatedly crash against the rocks along the coastline, believing that the carefree bliss of earlier days will never return.

### Structure

The poem is written in four stanzas of four lines each. The first four and the last six lines are about the grief of the poet while the third stanza gives a brief description of a happy life around the poet. The rhyming scheme of the poem is ‘abcb’. The second-and fourth-line rhymes in every stanza.

### Poetic Technique

This was the first elegy (it is a sad poem, usually written to praise and express sorrow for someone who is dead) written by Tennyson and is written in blank verse (verse without rhyme). The poem is remarkable for its symbolism. The poem is set in a sad tone mixed with agony, nostalgia, and loss.

The colour of the rocks indicates Victorian connotations. The author uses visuals to communicate with the audience in this poetry. The “vanished hands” and the “voice that is still” allude to his friend’s passing. The idea of the “ship” moving ahead alludes to the fact that life does not wait for anybody.

Even the word “sea” is an image. Life is like an ever-expanding sea. The path of life is like the waves in the sea, which never stop.

Contrasts are used in “Break, Break, Break” to show the conflict between the speaker and the outside world. In the opening verse, for instance, the speaker is unable to “articulate” the unsettling ideas that keep “arising” because the speaker describes the stones on the coastline as “cold” and “grey,” respectively.

This makes the speaker’s discontent abundantly evident, but the second stanza departs from this melancholy mood when the speaker observes kids playing nearby and a sailor singing in the harbour.

The poem’s “cold” and “grey” landscape abruptly gives way to a happier, more carefree atmosphere where people go about their daily lives. This demonstrates how little the speaker’s sadness affects other people; in fact, the outside world is completely unaware of what the speaker perceives to be an irreparable loss.

## **Literary Devices**

In the poem ‘Break Break Break’, the speaker repeatedly addresses the sea which in reality cannot understand or respond to the complicated and sorrowful thoughts of the speaker.

The literary device Repetition is something one cannot miss in this particular poem. The word ‘Break’ is used six times. The poet has repeated the word ‘Break’ to emphasize the feeling of contrast between the sea waves that can express themselves by clashing with the rocks while the speaker is standing there, unable to put his feelings into words.

The literary device Metaphor can be seen when the poet refers to the sailing ships returning to the harbour just like the human soul goes to heaven and life completes a full circle. In metaphor, a non-living thing is described as a living thing.

## Detailed Analysis

The poem 'Break Break Break' conveys the poet's feelings about the loss of Arthur Henry Hallam. He was also an English poet and was very close to Alfred Tennyson. Arthur Henry died at the young age of twenty-two and his death left a scar on Tennyson's heart so deep that he even named his eldest son after him.

Alfred Tennyson was a British poet and was one of the most popular poets of the Victorian era and has been facilitated by Cambridge University for his work.

In the poem 'Break Break Break', the poet begins by talking to the waves in the first stanza. He speaks to them although doesn't receive any response from them. He asks the waves to continue breaking the 'cold, grey stones' while he was in such agony that he could not utter the thoughts that were roaming in his mind.

In the second stanza, he describes the things that are happening around him. He notices a fisherman's boy, his sister, and a sailor's lad. They all are doing their work where the fisherman's children are playing while the sailor's son is singing his heart out, expressing all the emotions that he is feeling. The poet finds all this very different from what he is feeling inside.

In the third stanza, the poet describes the movement which is going around him. The ships are sailing off the shore which is the opposite of what he wishes. The sight of the sailing ship is a very lovely one but that sight is unable to divert his mind for a long time. He then looks at his hand and is reminded of his dear friend whose hand has vanished from his hand as he is deceased now. He then gets lost in the reminiscence of his memories with his friend.

In the fourth and last stanza, he repeats his words, 'Break Break Break', asking the clashing sea with the stones, to break it. The poet then mentions that the sweet memories that he has made with his friend will never come back as the time once passed can never be gained back.

The poem, though very short, does not fail to paint a picture of the grief the poet is suffering with. The word 'break' has been repeated a lot of times and reflects different meanings. It reflects the breaking heart of the poet and the breaking of the sea waves against the rocks.

The poem is for the poet's lost friend in which he imagines standing near the seashore, in a church where his friend is buried. He addresses the poem to the sea waves which are clashing with the rocks on the shore repeatedly.

The poet sees the analogy between his grief and waves and addresses it indirectly. He compares his grief to the waves and wishes that he could also express his sorrow and agony in the same way the waves are doing it by repeatedly clashing with the rocks.

He addresses the sea waves to sympathize with him as he is unable to express his grief but the sea waves can. He emotionally commands the sea waves to break the cold-grey stones and the cliff. It is clear that by saying this to the waves, he is expressing his feelings of sorrow and agony.

Further, the poet mentions how life is full of joy for all the people around him but all this happiness could never bring his friend back to him. He's also regretful of the fact that he is unable to share this happiness. The others around him are living a normal life filled with happiness while the poet is experiencing immeasurable grief due to the loss of his dear friend.

The things that used to happen earlier, like the coming and going of the ships, are taking place as usual. He makes a comparison between this vision and life's path. Life goes from one place to another like a ship sailing.

Life goes on regardless of what happened, and we go on to the next stage. The consoling hand and the cheering voice of his friend are not there anymore. He misses the tender voice of his friend which has become still now. The majority of people are aware that nothing endures, yet not everyone considers this to be particularly unsettling. In the end, it is a reality of life that many people just accept.

The speaker, however, is particularly unnerved by this as a close acquaintance recently passed away, making it difficult for the speaker to stop thinking about the relentless passage of time. The speaker is greatly upset by this because he knows there is no way to go back in time to spend more time with this friend. In this sense, loss alters the speaker's perspective of the world and makes it more difficult for them to accept the fact that everything has an end.

Ironically, though, since nothing will undo this friend's passing, the only type of permanency in the speaker's life is loss itself. This individual "never comes back" to the speaker, no matter what. Loss then turns out to be the sole constant in life, even though it makes individuals like the speaker realize that everything else in life is transient.

## FAQs

### **What is the main theme of the poem '*Break Break Break*'?**

Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote the poem "Break, Break, Break" in the early months of 1835, and it was first published in 1842. In this elegy, Tennyson expresses his grief for Arthur Henry Hallam's passing as well as his loneliness at Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire.

### **Which type of meter is '*Break Break Break*'?**

Quatrains in irregular iambic tetrameter are merely a fancy way of explaining the rhythm that makes up a significant portion of the effect of this poem.

### **What is the tone and mood of the poem '*Break Break Break*'?**

The short poem "Break, Break, Break" has a distinctly depressing and nostalgic tone. Despite the poem's seaside setting, which includes a raging sea, amusing children, fishermen, and sailing boats, Tennyson subtly changes these aspects to reveal a poem on death and loss.

### **What does the sea symbolize in the poem '*Break Break Break*'?**

The sea serves as a helpful metaphor in the poem because it may be used to contrast the speaker's emotional brittleness and fragility with nature's immense strength. Thoughts swell within him like waves, yet they are unable to come into manifestation, much to the speaker's dismay.

### **What is the repetition of break symbolic of?**

Two distinct stanzas of the poem have three instances of the speaker repeating the word “break.” Tennyson is attempting to underline the relentless way the waves repeatedly smash on a coast by using repetition, which is a technique for emphasis.