No Coward Soul is Mine

POEM TEXT

No coward soul is mine
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere
I see Heaven's glories shine
And Faith shines equal arming me from Fear

O God within my breast
Almighty ever-present Deity
Life, that in me hast rest,
As I Undying Life, have power in Thee

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,
Worthless as withered weeds
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thy infinity,
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of Immortality.

With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears

Though earth and moon were gone
And suns and universes ceased to be
And Thou wert left alone
Every Existence would exist in thee

There is not room for Death
Nor atom that his might could render void
Since thou art Being and Breath
And what thou art may never be destroyed.

SUMMARY

My soul is no coward. It doesn't quiver with fear in the face of all the stormy troubles of world. My faith glows just as brightly as the wonders of Heaven and shields me against fear.

Oh, God, who is inside my heart: you are a supreme, all-powerful being who is always there. The life you created is welcomed in me, and I have immortality through you.

The countless religions that drive other people are completely, utterly ineffective, worth no more than dried-up weeds or the most frivolous seafoam in the middle of the vast, open ocean.

Those other beliefs have no power to whip up doubt in someone with such steady faith in your endless existence, who is so tightly fastened to your unmoving stone of everlasting life.

With all-encompassing love, your essence is what fills everything with endless life. It feels the sky above and hangs over the world, shaping, destroying, and nurturing everything below.

Even if the earth and the moon were to disappear, and all the stars and galaxies were to blink out of existence, and you were left by yourself: even then, everything that has ever existed would continue to live within you.

There is no space for death, no particle that death's strength could dissolve, because you are the vital force of life, and what you are can never be destroyed.

THEMES

THE POWER OF FAITH

The speaker of "No Coward Soul Is Mine" expresses an unshakeable belief in the strength and goodness of God, that "ever-present Deity." Despite living in a world of suffering and loss, the speaker sees no reason to despair: a deep faith in God assures the speaker that all life is everlasting and that death has no real power. Holding this kind of rock-solid faith, this poem suggests, allows one to have courage in the face of even the most terrible trials.

The speaker sees God as both all-powerful and always around. The speaker says that God "animates eternal years" (that is, gives life to eternity) and is "the steadfast rock of immortality." In other words, God will never ever die, and thus will always be creating things and imbuing them with strength and power.

Not only is God all-powerful, this speaker argues: God, in fact, lives *within* the speaker—right within the speaker's "breast" (or heart). God's boundless power is thus always *accessible* to the speaker. And because of this, the speaker feels that they, too, are a form of "Undying life," and that they "have power in [God]." In other words, God's constant presence means that the speaker is never alone nor vulnerable.

Unshakably convinced that this almighty God is always there for guidance and protection, the speaker feels safe from all the dangers of the world. The speaker isn't worried about any of the world's many "creeds" (or systems of belief) "waken[ing]

doubt" in God. The speaker is simply too convinced of God's "wide-embracing love" to be shaken by merely human ideas about what God might be like: the speaker's relationship with God is too personal for that!

That confidence isn't just about the speaker's own relationship with God, but about God's relationship with *everything*. In fact, the speaker says, even if the "earth and moon were gone / And suns and universes ceased to be," all of these things would somehow continue to exist as part of God's very being. And since God "may never be destroyed," death cannot "render void" (or annihilate) anything. Basically, the speaker sees God as a giant, protective bubble inside of which everything, including the speaker, is safe from lasting harm.

A faith like this, the speaker suggests, keeps one from being a "coward": belief in God lends the speaker a kind of holy courage. Despite the "storm-troubled" world that the speaker lives in, the speaker is "No trembler." In other words, the speaker isn't afraid even in difficult times; faith in God "arm[s]" (or steels and fortifies) the speaker against fear. Feeling "God within [their] breast" gives the speaker a sense of power. Knowing that God made the speaker, and that the speaker is therefore *part* of God, assures the speaker that they, too, are a part of "Undying life." The speaker's unshakeable faith thus means that not even death seems frightening.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-28

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

No coward soul is mine
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere
I see Heaven's glories shine
And Faith shines equal arming me from Fear

The speaker opens the poem with a strong, insistent statement:

No coward soul is mine
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere

By beginning with anaphora (in bold above), the poem draws attention to the speaker's defiance. No matter how stormy the world's woes, the speaker feels confident that they aren't going to be caught quivering in fear. That's because the speaker's eyes are fixed on "Heaven's glories": the wonder, majesty, and power of God.

In fact, the speaker's own "Faith shines" just as brightly as those heavenly "glories," and in shining so brightly this faith becomes a kind of shield or weapon that the speaker can use to fight off earthly troubles (it "arm[s]" the speaker against "Fear").

The diacope in lines 3-4 emphasizes just how strong the speaker's faith is:

I see Heaven's glories shine
And Faith shines equal arming me from Fear

The repetition of "shine"/"shines" (as well as the use of the word "equal") creates a kind of reciprocal relationship between "Heaven's glories" and the speaker's own "Faith"; looking upon Heaven fills the speaker with a sense of power.

Notice how alliteration pumps up the intensity of these opening lines. The /s/ and /t/ sounds of line 2 ("trembler," "storm-troubled," "sphere") elevates the speaker's language and, in doing so, emphasizes just how "troubled" the earthly world can be. Then, in line 4, the shared /f/ sounds of "Faith" and "Fear" underscores the thematic relationship between these words—the idea that "Faith" is a kind of armor against "Fear."

LINES 5-8

O God within my breast
Almighty ever-present Deity
Life, that in me hast rest,
As I Undying Life, have power in Thee

The second stanza begins with the speaker addressing directly God, an example of apostrophe. To this speaker, God doesn't exist only far away, up in the sky; instead, God is an "ever-present Deity" within the speaker's own heart (or "breast"). In other words, God is always around because God exists inside the speaker themselves.

These lines imply that, for the speaker, the line between God and God's *creation*—be it the world or the speaker—is hazy and even porous; if God exists in everything that God creates, then everything that God creates is also a part of God.

The speaker goes on to say that because God has "rest" (or placed) life in the speaker, the speaker becomes eternal in their own right. Note the use of diacope in lines 7-8:

Life, that in me hast rest,
As I Undying Life, have power in Thee

The repetition of "Life," which is also capitalized both times, draws attention to the significance of this word. As with the repetition of "shine[s]" in the prior stanza, the repetition here suggests a kind of reciprocal relationship between the speaker and God. The speaker doesn't need to beg God for protection; instead, they already have access to God's infinite power.

LINES 9-12

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,

Worthless as withered weeds
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main

The speaker goes on to critique organized religion, saying that "the thousand creeds" (or doctrines) that people put their faith in are "vain [...] unutterably vain." The repetition of the word "vain"—which in this context might mean *both* self-absorbed *and* useless—suggests a weariness, frustration, or even contempt. To the speaker, it seems so obvious that one doesn't need an intermediary to communicate with God, since God lives within people. (Recall how in the previous stanza the speaker called out to God "within my breast.")

The speaker therefore all these various "creeds" to be "Worthless as withered weeds," a scathing simile that compares various religious doctrines to dead, dried-up plants growing where they're not wanted. The insistent /w/ alliteration here further brings out the speaker's witty, sneering tone.

In fact, as if this first simile weren't clear enough, the speaker follows it up with a second, comparing these "vain" systems of belief to "idlest froth amid the boundless main." In other words, religion is to God what sea-foam is to the vast, open sea. Where the sea is powerful and mysterious and without limit, seafoam is completely devoid of substance, just sitting pointlessly atop the sea's surface.

LINES 13-16

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thy infinity,
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of Immortality.

These "vain" religions, the speaker continues, are powerless "To waken doubt in one / Holding so fast" (fast means "securely" here) "by [God's] infinity." That is to say, the speaker feels so secure in their faith in God that no religious doctrine could ever make them doubt that God is everything, everywhere, all of the time. (Keep in mind that this poem was written during the Victorian era, a time of stringent religious beliefs throughout British society. This very individual form of spirituality may not seem like a big deal today, but at the time Bronte was writing, it was quite bold!)

The speaker is much more interested in God's limitless nature than in doctrines that try to narrow divinity down to a handful of rules. The speaker says they are "anchored on" to God's "infinit[e]" being, which is "The steadfast rock of Immortality." This metaphor compares God's endlessness to a sturdy stone—something secure and unchanging that the speaker is able to hang on to. As long as the speaker hangs onto divinity itself—and not peoples' various interpretations of it—the speaker knows they will be okay.

Once again, the speaker uses repetition to highlight the close relationship between humanity and God. Notice the use of polyptoton in lines 14 and 16, both of which contain the root word "fast":

> Holding so **fast** by thy infinity,
> [...]
> The **steadfast** rock of Immortality.

Just as the speaker's faith in the first stanza "shines" as bright as "Heaven's glories," the speaker's faith is unwavering because God is endlessly dependable.

LINES 17-20

With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears

In stanza 5, the speaker says that God "animates" (or gives life to) "eternal years," and that this is done with "wide-embracing love." In other words, God's love, which reaches far and wide, is what creates endless life. The speaker goes on to say that God "Pervades," implying that God permeates, or exists within, everything. God also "broods above," a phrase that evokes an image of God in Heaven looking down with concern over all of creation.

But God doesn't just sit up in the sky, looking down and judging people. Instead, God remains active in the world; God "Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears," the speaker says.

On one hand, this line implies that God doesn't *just* "Pervade[] and brood above," but also participates in shaping and nurturing all of creation. On the other hand, the line can be understood to mean that God *is* all of creation—and therefore, because life is always "chang[ing], sustain[ing], [dissolv[ing], creat[ing] and rear[ing]," God is doing these things as well. In other words, God is everything, everywhere, all of the time because God and God's creations aren't separate—they are a unified whole.

Note the assonance in line 20, with its repetition of long /ay/ sounds:

> Ch**a**nges, sust**ai**ns, dissolves, cre**a**tes and rears

This assonance creates a sense of rhythm and momentum that subtly evokes the change and movement being described.

LINES 21-24

Though earth and moon were gone
And suns and universes ceased to be
And Thou wert left alone
Every Existence would exist in thee

The speaker goes on to imagine a future in which the "earth and moon [are] gone / And suns and universes cease[] to be." This is a bleak future, but the speaker feels remarkably contemporary

pondering the demise of life as they know it. Yet the speaker believes that even if such utter destruction were to occur, even if God was "left alone," that everything that's ever existed would *continue* to exist through God. To put it simply: God contains countless universes.

The muted /n/ consonance and whispery sibilance in these lines give them a hushed, reverential tone. Take a look at line 22, for example:

> And suns and universes ceased to be

This line *sounds* quiet, evoking the lack of life that the speaker is describing. Yet this quietness gives way to subtle, open /eh/ alliteration in line 24:

> Every existence would exist in thee

The rhythmic vowel sounds seem to suggest something continuing to breathe in the darkness despite everything having supposedly ended. And the use of polyptoton ("Existence" and "exist") once again shows the way that God and God's creations mirror each other. The speaker has faith that as long as God continues to exist, this dark vision is nothing to fear—where God is, there will always be life.

LINES 25-28

> *There is not room for Death*
> *Nor atom that his might could render void*
> *Since thou art Being and Breath*
> *And what thou art may never be destroyed.*

In the final stanza, the speaker says simply that "There is not room for Death." The speaker personifies "Death" as a male figure who has no power to permanently destroy anything. There isn't a single "atom" (that is, even the tiniest bit of matter) "that his might could render void."

Notice the way /m/ consonance ("room," "atom," "might") lends a softness to the sound of this statement. The speaker sounds gently, calmly assured. The speaker is are secure in their faith that God is "Being and Breath"—that God is life itself. And since God can't be "destroyed," life itself must always go on in some form or another.

The poem once again uses alliteration and capitalization to draw the reader's eye to two important words ("Being" and "Breath") and the relationship between them—namely that they are both manifestations of God. Even if nothing else existed, the speaker is saying, *God* would exist—and if God is life, then life will carry on.

Notice the use of diacope in lines 27-28:

> Since thou art Being and Breath
> And what thou art may never be destroyed

Diacope gives the last two lines a structure that *feels* logical. One might even say they read a bit like a mathematical equation. God is life, and since God can't be destroyed, neither can life itself.

POETIC DEVICES

ANAPHORA

Anaphora appears in the first two lines of the poem, where the speaker repeats the word "No":

> No coward soul is mine
> No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere

This anaphora kickstarts the poem, making its opening sound all the more insistent and defiant. Repeating that "no" up top underscores the idea that the speaker's faith helps them stare down every obstacle that life might throw their way. Consider how different these lines would feel if the poet had written:

> My soul is no coward
> I am no trembler [...]

The poem would lose some of its emphatic urgency by moving that "no" later in the lines. As it stands, the poem starts off on a bold note that reflects the speaker's refusal to give in to fear.

The poem also uses anaphora in lines 22-23, with the repetition of the word "And." Once again, anaphora creates a sense of steady, building rhythm and momentum as the speaker imagines the end of all "universes."

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "No"
- **Line 2:** "No"
- **Line 22:** "And"
- **Line 23:** "And"

REPETITION

In addition to anaphora, the poem uses a couple of other specific kinds of repetition to add emphasis to certain ideas throughout.

In lines 3-4, for example, the poem turns to diacope, repeating "shine"/"shines" in quick succession:

> I see Heaven's glories shine
> And faith shines equal arming me from Fear

This repetition adds a sense of building rhythm to these lines and also creates a parallel between the "glories" of Heaven and the speaker's own faith; both, the speaker says, shine equally

brightly. The repetition here suggests that, through the speaker's faith, the speaker takes on the very qualities that *inspire* that faith in the first place. The speaker's faith in "Heaven's glories" makes the speaker "shine" just as those glories do. In a way, then, the speaker's faith in "Heaven" makes the speaker "Heavenly."

Diacope appears again in the second stanza, with the repetition of the word "Life" in lines 7-8. Once again, this repetition emphasizes the reciprocal or mirror-like relationship between the speaker and God. God has granted the speaker life, which "hast rest" inside her; she then finds "Undying Life" in God.

The repetition of the word "vain" in the next stanza, meanwhile, simply emphasizes just how unimpressed the speaker is with all the "creeds" (or systems of belief) that motivate people.

Line 24 then uses polyptoton to similarly hammer home the connection between humanity and God:

> Every **Existence** would **exist** in thee

This repetition, which two words built from the same root, reflects the idea that all life is inseparable from (and, in fact, is a part of) God.

Finally, the speaker repeats the phrase "thou art" in the last two lines of the poem in order to build an argument. The speaker is basically saying, *"Because **you are** life itself, what **you are (i.e., life)** can't be destroyed."*

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "shine"
- **Line 4:** "shines"
- **Line 7:** "Life"
- **Line 8:** "Life"
- **Line 9:** "Vain"
- **Line 10:** "vain"
- **Line 14:** "fast"
- **Line 16:** "steadfast"
- **Line 24:** "Existence," "exist"
- **Line 27:** "thou art"
- **Line 28:** "thou art"

SIMILE

The speaker uses a pair of similes when declaring that the "thousand creeds," or religions, that people put their faith in are:

> Worthless as withered weeds
> Or idlest froth amid the boundless main.

Both of these similes compare other "creeds" to something useless. The word "withered" specifically implies that these systems of belief are dried-up or dead, while the word "weeds" suggests that even when these creeds were at their peak, they were without any true value. In fact, they were akin to growth that chokes out other life (perhaps in the sense that these creeds prevented people from learning the "truth," as the speaker sees it). The /w/ alliteration present in line 11 ("**W**orthless as **w**ithered **w**eeds") evokes the speaker's scathing contempt regarding these supposedly "vain" dogmas.

The second part of this simile suggests that to put faith in one of these creeds would be like putting one's faith in the "idle[] froth," or foam, that floats on the top of the ocean and can be blown away by the breeze. The speaker seems to be saying: *the "boundless main"—or the vast, open sea—is the true source of power, so why waste one's time with the little bit of fluff floating on top of it?*

These similes both suggest that people are missing the real deal—the power and glory of God—by putting their faith in human constructs that shrink this divine vastness into something marked by endless rules and regulations. Far better, the poem implies, to be perplexed by the ocean's depths and overwhelming beauty and mystery than to hold on to the easier-to-grasp but insubstantial foam.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 9-10:** "Vain are the thousand creeds / That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,"
- **Lines 11-12:** "Worthless as withered weeds / Or idlest froth amid the boundless main"

METAPHOR

The speaker uses a metaphor to describe the impossibility of "waken[ing] doubt in one" who is:

> So surely anchored on
> The steadfast rock of Immortality

This metaphor compares God's eternal nature to a "steadfast"—or dependable, steady—"rock." A large rock is sturdy and immovable; were the speaker to fasten themselves to a rock surrounded by rushing wind or water, the speaker would feel secure.

Likewise, a person whose faith is firmly attached to God doesn't need to worry about being swayed by doubt. Like the heavy "anchor[s]" sailors use to keep their ships from drifting in a heavy wind or current, the speaker trusts that God's presence will keep them resolute. By "Holding so fast," or tightly, to God's "infinity" (that is, to the idea that God is everything, everywhere, all the time), the speaker is guaranteeing that they will not be distracted by other peoples' flimsy ideas about the nature of God and faith.

While the "worthless" doctrines that people use to try to understand God may "wither[]" and give way to uncertainty,

staying focused on the vast, constant nature of God—a nature that the speaker characterizes as a "wide-embracing love" as well as "Being and Breath" itself—leaves no room for such confusion. The speaker is unafraid of change, death, or even the end of the universe because God has no end—and therefore everything God has created is "Immortal[]" too.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 13-14:** "To waken doubt in one / Holding so fast by thy infinity,"
- **Lines 15-16:** "So surely anchored on / The steadfast rock of Immortality."

ALLITERATION

Alliteration adds music to the poem and calls readers' attention to certain words and phrases. Take a look at line 2, for example, with its many /t/ and /s/ sounds:

> No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere

Alliteration heightens the speaker's language at this moment, making it feel sharp and intense. This sharpness and intensity, in turn, reflect the intensity of the worldly difficulties that the speaker faces.

Alliteration can also simply make important words stand out in the poem. In line 4, for example, "Faith" and "Fear" are not only alliterative; they are also both capitalized. This alliteration and capitalization suggest a relationship between the words: that one cannot succumb to Fear if one is "armed" by Faith. This same combination of alliteration and capitalization occurs in line 27, with "Being and Breath." Here, the alliteration calls attention to the fact both of these things *are* God.

Another striking moment of alliteration appears in line 11, with the insistent /w/ sounds of "Worthless as withered weeds." Again, alliteration heightens the speaker's language, making this dismissal of other "creeds" sound all the more emphatic. The sounds of the poem's this help to evoke the extent to which the speaker despises the "vain" dogmas people place their faith in.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "trembler," "storm," "troubled," "sphere"
- **Line 4:** "Faith," "from," "Fear"
- **Line 10:** "move," "men's"
- **Line 11:** "Worthless," "withered," "weeds"
- **Line 13:** "waken," "one"
- **Line 19:** "broods above"
- **Line 24:** "Every," "Existence," "exist"
- **Line 27:** "Being," "Breath"

CONSONANCE

In addition to alliteration, the poem uses consonance to create musicality and rhythm and to generally elevate the speaker's language. Take line 2, which, in addition to the previously mentioned alliteration, features broader consonance of /m/, /r/, /l/, and /b/ sounds:

> No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere

All these sounds come together to create an intensely musical passage that evokes the immensity of the world's troubles.

Consonance works similarly throughout the poem, as in lines 25-26:

> There is not room for Death
> Nor atom that his might could render void

Note how the humming /m/ and /n/ sounds echo through the lines and make the speaker's declaration of God's power all the more resonant.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "trembler," "world's storm-troubled sphere"
- **Line 4:** "Faith," "arming me from Fear"
- **Line 5:** "breast"
- **Line 6:** "Almighty," "present Deity"
- **Line 7:** "hast rest"
- **Line 9:** "the thousand creeds"
- **Line 10:** "That move men's hearts"
- **Line 11:** "Worthless," "withered weeds"
- **Line 12:** "amid," "boundless main"
- **Line 17:** "With wide"
- **Line 18:** "spirit animates eternal"
- **Line 19:** "Pervades and broods above"
- **Line 20:** "Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates," "rears"
- **Line 22:** "And suns and universes ceased"
- **Line 24:** "Every Existence," "exist"
- **Line 25:** "not room," "Death"
- **Line 26:** "Nor atom," "might"
- **Line 27:** "Being," "Breath"

ASSONANCE

Just like alliteration and consonance, assonance adds musicality and emphasis to the poem. This is clear from the very first line, where the long /oh/ sounds in "No coward soul" start the poem off with some sonic oomph. The same could be said for the long /ay/ sounds that fill line 20:

> Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears

As well as the long /ee/ sounds of line 22:

And suns and universes ceased to be

And finally the short /eh/ sounds of line 24:

Every Existence would exist in the

In each of these moments, the speaker uses sound to intensity the poem's language, making it feel more epic and emphatic.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "No," "soul"
- **Line 5:** "breast"
- **Line 6:** "ever," "present"
- **Line 8:** "I Undying Life"
- **Line 20:** "Changes," "sustains," "creates"
- **Line 22:** "ceased," "be"
- **Line 24:** "Every Existence," "exist"

VOCABULARY

Deity (Line 6) - God.

Hast (Line 7) - Archaic form of the word "has."

Thee (Line 8) - Archaic form of the word "you."

Thee (Line 8) - Archaic form of the word "you."

Vain (Line 9, Line 10) - Useless, shallow, meaningless.

Creeds (Line 9) - Religions.

Unutterably (Line 10) - Too great, awful, or intense to describe.

Idlest (Line 12) - The most idle; without purpose, frivolous.

Froth (Line 12) - Foam or lather.

Boundless main (Line 12) - The endless open sea.

Thy (Line 14) - Archaic form of "your."

Animates (Line 18) - Brings to life.

Pervades (Line 19) - Spreads through, exists in every part of.

Broods (Line 19) - Thinks deeply or worries about something.

Thou (Line 23) - Archaic form of "you."

Wert (Line 23) - Were.

Render (Line 26) - Cause to be or become.

Void (Line 26) - Empty or vacant.

Art (Line 27, Line 28) - Are.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

The poem is made up of seven quatrains, or four-line stanzas. This steadiness of these stanzas, with their regular meter and rhyme, makes the poem feel predictable, confident, and sure-footed. The poem's form thus reflects the speaker's steadfast faith: the poem's form is as constant and unshakable as the speaker's belief in a vast, all-knowing, and "ever-present Deity."

It's also worth noting that the poem is quite sparing in its use of punctuation. Many lines are enjambed, which allows the poem to flow smoothly down the page even as its form remains quite strict.

METER

The poem is written in alternating lines of iambic trimeter and pentameter. Odd-numbered lines contain three iambs, poetic feet that follow a da-DUM syllable pattern. Take line 21, for example:

Though earth | and moon | were gone

Even-numbered lines, meanwhile, have five iambs. That means they have the same da-DUM rhythm as the odd-numbered lines, but four more syllables (remember that each iamb consists of two syllables, and there are two more iambs here). As an example, here's line 22:

And suns | and u- | nivers- | es ceased | to be

There are many moments in the poem when the speaker diverges from this pattern for emphasis, however. Take line 2, which might be scanned as follows:

No tremb- | ler in | the world's | storm-troub- | led sphere

The fourth foot here is a spondee, meaning there are two strong beats in a row ("storm troub-"). Combined with the iamb before it, there are actually three stressed beats in a row! As a result, the troubles of the world stand out to the reader's ear. The forcefulness of the phrase reflects the power of those troubles. (Some readers might heat a stressed beat on that initial "No" as well!)

The speaker also often starts lines with stressed beats, adding a bit of oomph to the verse. Take line 7:

Life, that | in me | hast rest

And line 9:

Vain are | the thou- | sand creeds

Both lines begin with trochees, feet that go DA-dum, before falling back into steady iambs. Such moments add interest and intensity to the poem without totally diverging from its steady beat.

The poem's meter defies expectations in a more subtle way as well. While common meter was often used for hymns and ballads, and would perhaps have been an obvious choice for a poem about God, the meter here is almost the *opposite* of common meter: common meter uses longer lines of tetrameter (lines with four feet) followed by shorter lines of trimeter (again, lines with three feet), but this poem *starts* with shorter trimeter lines and follows them up with longer ones (in this case pentameter).

The effect is striking: short, declarative lines, such as line 1 ("No coward soul is mine") are followed by longer, more expansive lines that seem to explain or build on the preceding statements ("No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere"). By *starting* with more declarative lines and then extrapolating, the poem takes on an assured, confident tone—fitting for a poem about the power of unshakeable faith.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem follows a strict ABAB rhyme scheme in each stanza. That means that the first and third lines of each stanza rhyme with each other, as do the second and fourth.

On one level, the steady rhyme scheme simply adds to the poem's confident, assured tone: the predictable pattern of rhyme reflects the speaker's unwavering faith in God.

More subtly, the back-and-forth nature of the rhyme scheme might evoke the speaker's relationship to God; God doesn't just exist above or around the speaker, but *inside of* and *through* the speaker as well. In other words, the line between God and God's creations isn't hard and defined, but instead is porous, a kind of exchange between creator and created.

And although Brontë chose *not* to use common meter (which was used for church hymns and a lot of religious poems), it's worth noting that the rhyme scheme is the one generally associated with church music. So even though the poem defies some expectations that Victorian readers might have had, the rhyme scheme still evokes the sense of reverence that a hymn might. This may not be a conventional Victorian poem about God, but it is still a poem about God written during Victorian times.

SPEAKER

It's possible to read the poem's speaker as being Emily Brontë herself, and the poem as thus expressing her personal beliefs about God. That said, the speaker remains anonymous throughout the poem; there are no indications of this person's age, gender, occupation, etc. The poem focuses entirely on the speaker's faith rather than their identity. This makes sense, given that the speaker believes that "Every Existence" exists within God—that everything that ever was is a part of God. God, in other words, is who matters here.

SETTING

The poem doesn't have a specific setting. It's about the speaker's faith, which isn't tied to a certain time or place. The closest thing to a physical setting in this poem is the speaker's description of the "storm-troubled sphere" on which they live (i.e., the earth). In other words, the world is a difficult place.

The lack of setting here reflects the speaker's belief that God encompasses the entire world; that God's "wide-embracing love" permeates everything that is or ever was. The speaker is so certain of God's infinitude that they go so far as to imagine a future in which the "earth and moon [are] gone" and "suns and universes cease[] to be." Even in this difficult-to-imagine future where everything the speaker has ever known is utterly unrecognizable, the speaker is certain that none of these things would *really* be gone—they would continue to "exist in [God]." In other words, God contains everything that's ever been or ever will be.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Emily Brontë published "No Coward Soul Is Mine" in 1846. The poem appeared in *Poems of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*, these names being male pseudonyms for Emily and her sisters Charlotte and Anne.

The collection was assembled after Charlotte Brontë discovered a manuscript of poems Emily had been working on in secret. Emily eventually agreed to release the poems in the hope that their publication would earn the sisters some much-needed money. Unfortunately, the original edition only sold two copies, and despite sending it out to prominent poets of the time, the sisters failed to drum up much interest. The little commentary it did obtain, however, was particularly favorable towards the poems written by "Ellis"—a.k.a. Emily. These were the only poems she published before her death (although nearly 200 other poems would be later discovered).

Only a year after the disappointing reception to *Poems*, Brontë went on to publish her now-acclaimed novel *Wuthering Heights*. Both her poetry and her novel stood out amidst the prim, proper, and pious attitudes of Victorian society. The intense emotiveness of her work, as well as her preoccupations with love, nature, the imagination, and death, linked Brontë more to the earlier Romantic poets (such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge) and to Gothic writers.

Her other poems touch on themes similar to those found here: in "A Day Dream," for example, a dejected speaker is comforted by joyous spirits of nature who argue that life is only a kind of prelude to death, and that death is therefore not something to be feared. "A Day Dream," like "No Coward Soul Is Mine," also

speaks to the "perva[sive]" nature of God as the speaker says, "Methought, the very breath I breathed / Was full of sparks divine."

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Brontë was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1818. Her father, Patrick, was an ordained priest for the Church of England, and both her parents were writers. Brontë admired her diligent and pious father even while developing a rather nonconformist and individual relationship to God. Like the speaker of this poem, who can be read as a representation of Brontë herself, she was uninterested in the "creeds," or religious doctrines, that dominated much of Victorian life, and rarely attended church services.

The world in which Brontë lived and wrote could easily be described as the "storm-troubled sphere" that the speaker references in this poem. Queen Victoria came to power in England in 1837, right around the time that Brontë's earliest poems are dated. The Victorian era was a time of intense transformation in British life, thanks in large part to the industrialization of society and the subsequent growth of the middle class. For someone who found solace, inspiration, and a relationship to God through nature, the massive shift from country to city life likely represented an unwelcome and uncertain future, perhaps prompting Brontë to consider a time when "suns and universes" would "cease[] to be."

The Victorian era was also a time of religious upheaval, with various forms of Christianity battling amongst each other and against a rise in secularism. This poem's focus on the speaker's individual, unshakable faith can be read as a response to the many swirling "creeds" of Brontë's day.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Emily Brontë's Life and Work — Learn more about the poet via the Poetry Foundation. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/emily-bronte)
- The Poem Out Loud — Listen to the poem read aloud and accompanied by music. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qM-5B62fqvQ)
- Handwritten Poems — Browse the British Library's archives of Brontë's poetry notebook. (https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/emily-bronts-poetry-notebook)
- Victorian Poetry — A look at the era in which Brontë wrote. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/153447/an-introduction-to-the-victorian-era)
- "A fierce, elemental lyric" — Read a discussion of "No Coward Soul is Mine" written for The Guardian's Poem of the Week series, which deems the poet "a very un-Victorian Victorian." (https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/aug/17/poem-of-the-week-emily-bronte)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER EMILY BRONTE POEMS

- Remembrance (Cold in the earth)

HOW TO CITE

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