

## ‘We are Seven’ by Wordsworth

### Analysis of "We Are Seven"

[the speaker](#) begins this poem by asking what a simple child who is full of life could know about death. He then meets "a little cottage Girl" who is eight years old and has thick curly hair. She is rustic and woodsy, but very beautiful, and she makes the speaker happy. He asks her how many siblings she has, to which she replies that there are seven including her:

--A simple child,  
That lightly draws its breath,  
And feels its life in every limb,  
What should it know of death?  
  
I met a little cottage girl:  
She was eight years old, she said;  
Her hair was thick with many a curl  
That clustered round her head.  
She had a rustic, woodland air,  
And she was wildly clad:  
Her eyes were fair, and very fair;  
--Her beauty made me glad.

"Sisters and brothers, little maid,  
How many may you be?"  
"How many? Seven in all," she said,  
And wondering looked at me.

The speaker then asks the child where her brothers and sisters are. She replies "Seven are we," and tells him that two are in a town called Conway, two are at sea, and two lie in the church-yard. She and her mother live near the graves:

"And where are they? I pray you tell."  
She answered, "Seven are we;  
And two of us at Conway dwell,  
And two are gone to sea.  
"Two of us in the churchyard lie,  
My sister and my brother;  
And, in the churchyard cottage, I  
Dwell near them with my mother."

The speaker is confused and asks her how they can be seven, if two are in Conway and two gone to sea. To this, the little girl simply replies, "Seven boys and girls are we; / Two of us in the churchyard lie, / Beneath the churchyard tree." The speaker says that if two are dead,

then there are only five left, but the little girl tells him that their green graves are nearby, and that she often goes to sew or eat supper there while singing to her deceased siblings:

"You say that two at Conway dwell,

And two are gone to sea,

Yet ye are seven! I pray you tell,

Sweet maid, how this may be."

Then did the little maid reply,

"Seven boys and girls are we;

Two of us in the churchyard lie,

Beneath the churchyard tree."

"You run about, my little maid,

Your limbs they are alive;

If two are in the churchyard laid,

Then ye are only five."

"Their graves are green, they may be seen,"

The little maid replied,

"Twelve steps or more from my mother's door,

And they are side by side.

"My stockings there I often knit,  
My kerchief there I hem;  
And there upon the ground I sit,  
And sing a song to them.  
"And often after sunset, sir,  
When it is light and fair,  
I take my little porringer,  
And eat my supper there.

The little girl then explains that first her sister Jane died from sickness. She and her brother John would play around her grave until he also died. Now he lies next to Jane:

"The first that died was sister Jane;  
In bed she moaning lay,  
Till God released her of her pain;  
And then she went away.  
"So in the churchyard she was laid;  
And, when the grass was dry,  
Together round her grave we played,  
My brother John and I.

"And when the ground was white with snow  
And I could run and slide,  
My brother John was forced to go,  
And he lies by her side."

The man again asks how many siblings she has now that two are dead. She replies quickly, "O Master! we are seven." The man tries to convince her saying, "But they are dead," but he realizes that his words are wasted. The poem ends with the little girl saying, "Nay, we are seven!"

"How many are you, then," said I,  
"If they two are in heaven?"  
Quick was the little maid's reply,  
"O master! we are seven."  
"But they are dead; those two are dead!  
Their spirits are in heaven!"  
'Twas throwing words away; for still  
The little maid would have her will,  
And said, "Nay, we are seven!"

Analysis

"We Are Seven" was written in 1798, when Wordsworth was 28 years old. The poem is composed of sixteen four-line stanzas, and ends with one five-line stanza. Each stanza has an abab rhyming pattern. Wordsworth has noted that he wrote the last line of this poem first, and that his good friend Samuel Coleridge wrote the first few stanzas.

The poem is an interesting conversation between a man and a young girl. It is especially intriguing because the conversation could have been less than five lines, and yet it is 69 lines long. The reason for this is that the man cannot accept that the young girl still feels she is one of seven siblings even after two of her siblings have died, and even though she now lives at home alone with her mother.

The speaker begins the poem with the question of what a child should know of death. Near the beginning it seems as if the little girl understands very little. She seems almost to be in denial about the deaths of her siblings, especially because she continues to spend time with them and sing to them. By the end of the poem, however, the reader is left with the feeling that perhaps the little girl understands more about life and death than the man to whom she is speaking. She refuses to become incapacitated by grief, or to cast the deceased out of her life. Instead she accepts that things change, and continues living as happily as she can.

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