

## QUESTION 1: POETRY

The poem titled “To the still born” composed by Simonne Stellenboom, is a sombre message to a child that has passed away at birth. We will closely analyse what, why and how the poet (Stellenboom) has used poetic devices and linguistic techniques to communicate the theme as well as the core concern.

“To the still born” is a free range poem, with the absence of a rhyme scheme or regular rhythm. We are able to identify, early in our reading of the poem, the central theme of grief and loss. The free range style correlates with the theme as it illustrates the extent of the parent’s grief.

The poet uses several poetic devices to communicate the theme in the poem. Firstly, we are able to identify the use of repetition in stanza one, two and three. In stanza one, line two “*What a beautiful flower you are*” has been repeated again in lines 6, 17 and 29 as “*Oh what a beautiful flower you are*”. The term beautiful is generally associated with things that we have affection for thus by repeating “*Oh what a beautiful flower you are*” the speaker is emphasising the extent to which they love the child. Secondly, we are able to identify the use of alliteration in each stanza. The letters ‘B’ and ‘P’ have been alliterated in the first stanza: “*big and bold*” as well as “*Proudly pastel and pink*”. In stanza two the letter ‘D’ has been alliterated in the words “*divas do*” while in the last stanza the letters ‘B’ and ‘G’ have been alliterated: “*bud so brazen and brave*” and “*grew and gave and graced*”. The alliteration of the above letters creates a hard sound, demonstrating their anger and extreme grief due to the loss of their child. In the third stanza the poet alliterates the letter ‘W’ with the words “*with wings...*”, “*words we...*” and “*we will...*” this creates a weeping sound. Effectively both the use of repetition and alliteration emphasises their grief over the loss of their child.

Various figures of speech have been utilized in conveying meaning to the poem. Firstly, a metaphor has been used in stanza one where the poet compares the still born child as a flower that has just opened. The words “*pastel and pink*” indicate to us that the child was a baby girl. In the final stanza the mother’s pregnancy as well as the baby’s development in the womb is also compared to a budding flower. Just as the flower bud develops slowly on the stem, similarly the baby developed in the womb of the mother. We can see this in lines 19 and 20 when the speaker says, “*From a tall and elegant stem*”. This is referring to the mother that carried the child. While line 20 “*And inside, as you grew and gave and graced*” is referring to the growth and development of the child in the mother’s womb. Secondly, the use of hyperbole can be identified in two places. In stanza three, line 16 the speaker says, “*It is all we will ever do*”. This emphasises that although the parents have lost their baby and the child is no longer with them, they will continue to love it without end. Additionally in stanza four, line 27 the poem reads “*That saves us, now forever and a day*”. This emphasises that knowing that the baby is in heaven will always grant them consolation and peace, and prevents them from being overtaken by grief for their loss.

Throughout the poem we are provided with imagery which also contributes to the central theme of loss. Each stanza presents to us a different image. In stanza one, we are provided with an image of a fresh “*pink*” flower that has just bloomed. It is an image of purity and new beginnings. Stanza two presents us with an image of a baptism that has transformed into a burial. The words “*Ribbons and*

lace” depicts the soft and delicate attire worn by Christian babies for the baptism. However the line “As you embark on your heavenly grace” indicates to us that this is not the baptism of the baby but rather the baby’s funeral. Here we are able to re-identify the theme of loss. The third stanza provides an image of a cherub in the sky, reinforcing that the child’s life has been lost by showing that it has moved on to the afterlife. The last stanza brings us back to the image of the flower blooming as well as the image of an empty cave. Line 24 “That makes us cave” depicts the empty womb of the mother, conveying the feeling of emptiness. Once more the theme of loss is reinforced.

There are various aspects that contribute to the syntax of the poem. Firstly, the poem begins with an oxymoron. The words “still born” are two contradictory terms used together. While the word “born” usually symbolises life and movement, it is placed after the word still, which is the complete opposite. This sets the mood for the whole poem and conveys the first feelings of loss and grief to the reader. Secondly, as we read the poem, we easily notice that there is an absence of punctuation, except for a few commas and inverted commas in certain lines. This increases the pace of the poem, indicating how quickly the child’s life was lost. Moreover, it shows us that the speaker is so overwhelmed with grief that he or she is unable to remember to use accurate punctuation. When the poet does use punctuation, it shows to us that they are slowly coming to terms with the death of their child and they are not completely hopeless.

The poet switches between the present and past tense several times in the poem. We understand that due to the sudden loss, they are caught between the past and present as they come to grips with reality. Each stanza has two parts to it. The first half of each stanza describes the child, while the second half speaks of their feelings regarding the loss.

We are able to identify the use of words with both positive and negative connotations. Words such as “hope love and time” hold positive connotations and imply the parents are still hopeful and have not completely succumbed to their grief. The words “lost hereafters” hold negative connotations showing their grief over their loss. The poet also makes use of both personal pronouns such as “I” “we” and “our” which makes the reader relate to the speaker more closely.

The poem has been composed in order for the speaker to express his or her grief and loss of the child. Additionally, the concerns of the poet are also communicated through the poem. There are three core concerns that the speaker communicates to the readers. In line five, “And even though we never saw you blossom and unfold”, the speaker is concerned that they will not have the chance to see the child grow up. Lines 15 and 16 indicate that the speaker is concerned that they will not have the opportunity to give or do anything for the child, as normal parents would. Thus all they are able to give the child are the words in this poem. Moreover, from line 23: “It’s the lost hereafters and tomorrows” we can see that the speaker is concerned that they will be unable to enjoy the future with the child.

As seen from the above analysis, the poem “To the still born” is embedded with a deep sense of loss and grief. The poet has used various poetic devices, imagery and a range of language techniques to communicate theme as well as core concerns in the poem.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

Levey, D. Ndlangamandla, C, Donaldson, E, Makoe, P, Van Niekerk, M, Dambe, S, Kreuter, A, Zindela, N. 2013. *Only study guide for ENG2602*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.

University of South Africa. Tutorial letter ENG2602/101/3/2017. Pretoria.

Goatly, A. 2000. *Critical Reading and Writing- An Introductory Coursebook*. New York: Routledge.

14

<http://www.poetrypotion.com/to-the-still-born-by-simonne-stellenboom> 

# RESULTS

100 = 80

-----

Total = 80 / 100 (80%)

# COMMENTS

1	Thank you for your assignment. A very good effort overall, with the theme of loss referred to as instructed throughout. Please do, however, make an effort to write fuller introductions and conclusions for your essays. Refer to comments below and feedback Tutorial Letter 202 for further minor points that you can improve upon. Marked by I MEYER
2	Your introduction is somewhat too brief. Expand these questions to tell the reader of your essay in more detail how you will be analysing the poem, i.e. what you will be looking at
3	of the poem.
4	free verse
5	Elaborate
6	Quoted text should only be placed in quotation marks, not also italicised
7	Arg, not a very strong assertion
8	s
9	in
10	This is an extended metaphor throughout the poem, wouldn't you agree?
11	to
12	How so?
13	Conclusion somewhat too brief
14	This is not the correct, full way to list an online source. Please look up the Harvard Referencing Method for sources accessed via the Internet