



The Unquiet Grave

Anonymous

This ballad appeared in Volume II of The English and Scottish Popular Ballads, edited by Francis James Child. A dead woman expresses, from the grave, a distaste for mourning that disturbs her eternal rest.

- ‘The wind doth blow today, my love,
And a few small drops of rain;
I never had but one true-love,
In cold grave she was lain¹.
- 5 ‘I’ll do as much for my true-love
As any young man may;
I’ll sit and mourn all at her grave
For a twelvemonth and a day².’
- 10 The twelvemonth and a day being up,
The dead began to speak:
‘Oh who sits weeping on my grave,
And will not let me sleep?’
- ‘Tis I, my love, sits on your grave,
And will not let you sleep;
15 For I crave³ one kiss of your clay-cold lips⁴,
And that is all I seek.’
- ‘You crave one kiss of my clay-cold lips;
But my breath smells earthly strong;
If you have one kiss of my clay-cold lips,
20 Your time will not be long.
- ’Tis down in yonder garden green,
Love, where we used to walk,
The finest flower that ere was seen
Is withered to a stalk⁵.
- 25 ‘The stalk is withered dry, my love,
So will our hearts decay;
So make yourself content, my love,
Till God calls you away.’

- 1 she was lain. Giaceva.
2 For a twelvemonth and a day. Per un anno e un giorno.
3 crave. Desidero.
4 your clay-cold lips. Le tue fredde labbra di creta.
5 Is withered to a stalk. È appassito fino allo stelo.

READING COMPETENCE

1 READ the text and find the words which mean the following.

- 1 does
- 2 move the air
- 3 small amounts of liquid
- 4 burial place
- 5 express sadness over the death of someone
- 6 ending
- 7 a person no longer living
- 8 crying
- 9 try to discover
- 10 before
- 11 decompose
- 12 satisfied with

2 READ the text again and do the following activities.

1 Identify

- 1 the setting in time and place;
- 2 the characters involved.

**2** Complete the summary with the words from the box.

to mourn	weeping	dead	grave	should accept
means	cold	ghost	could kiss	takes place

The ballad probably **(1)** in autumn (lines 1-2 and 23-24). The young man's true-love is **(2)** and is in a **(3)** He decides **(4)** for a year and a day (line 8). After this time of mourning the young woman's **(5)** appears from her grave. The ghost asks who the person **(6)** on her grave is (line 11). The young man answers telling her he wishes his beloved **(7)** him just one more time even if her lips are **(8)** However kissing the cold lips of a dead person **(9)** dying (line 20). Thus the ghost of his lost love suggests that the young man **(10)** his destiny and get on with his life till God calls him (lines 27-28).

3 Focus on the features of this ballad and complete the table below.

Layout	
Rhyme scheme	
Alliteration	
Repetition	
Language used	

4 List words and phrases referring to nature. Then tick what nature connotes.

- ☐ It stands for magic arts.
- ☐ It connotes sadness and death.
- ☐ It connotes an impending violence.
- ☐ It stands for re-birth.

5 Focus on the other semantic area of the passage, death. Square words and phrases referring to it. What is it like? What is the relationship between nature and death?**6** 'The finest flower' (line 23) is

- A a personification.
- B a simile.
- C a metaphor.
- D a symbol.

7 State what the general atmosphere of the ballad is like.

- A Violent.
- B Tragic.
- C Magic.
- D Melancholic.

8 The theme of the ballad is

- A a dramatic story.
- B magic love.
- C death.
- D war.