

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

A CHILD TO HIS SICK GRANDFATHER

A Child to His Sick Grandfather

by Joanna Baillie

Grand-dad, they say you're old and frail,
Your stocked legs begin to fail:
Your knobbed stick (that was my horse)
Can scarcely support your bent cores,
While back to the wall you lean so sad,
I'm vexed to see you, Dad.

You used to smile and stroke my head,
And tell me how good children did;
But now, I wot not how it be,
You take me seldom on your knee,
Yet nevertheless, I am right glad
To sit beside you, Dad.

How lank and thin your beard hangs down!
Scant are the white hairs on your crown:
How wan and hollow are your cheeks!
Your brow is rough with crossing breaks;
But yet, for all his strength be fled,
I love my own old dad.

The housewives round their potions brew,
And gossips come to ask for you;
And for your weal each neighbour cares,
And good men kneel, and say their prayers:
And everybody looks so sad,
When you are ailing, dad.

You will not die and leave us then?
Rouse up and be our dad again.
And yet you will,—nay, nay, you must,
The doctor says that die you must;
And both prepare and be right glad,
To go and meet your dad.

You've taught me well to know my God,
And how to act through life's short road;
Now I shall never fear to die,
You leave me what is more than I—
Your good name and your virtue clad—
I'm proud to call you dad.

Summary of "A Child to His Sick Grandfather"

In "A Child to His Sick Grandfather," a young child addresses their ailing grandfather with a mixture of sadness, affection, and confusion. The child reflects on how the grandfather, once strong and kind, is now frail and near death. The poem captures the child's innocence and love, as well as the sense of loss they are beginning to feel as they watch their grandfather fade away. The child recalls how the grandfather used to play with them and offer wisdom, but now he rarely engages in these acts, likely due to his illness.

The child expresses hope that the grandfather will recover and be "their dad again," but also acknowledges the inevitability of death. The poem reflects the child's gradual realization that their beloved grandfather will not recover, but despite this sadness, they find solace in the legacy of goodness and virtue the grandfather will leave behind.

Analysis of "A Child to His Sick Grandfather"

1. **Generational Bond:**

- The poem highlights the **strong emotional bond** between the child and their grandfather. The child's love and admiration for the grandfather are evident throughout the poem, as they fondly recall moments from the past, such as being lifted onto the grandfather's knee and hearing stories about how "good children did." This bond reflects the way children often look up to their elders as figures of protection, wisdom, and love.
- The child refers to the grandfather affectionately as "dad," which in this context suggests a deep familial connection that goes beyond generational boundaries. The child sees the grandfather not only as an elder but as a primary caregiver and role model.

2. **Innocence and Sorrow:**

- The speaker's voice is that of a **young child**, which brings an air of innocence and unfiltered emotion to the poem. The child speaks directly to the grandfather with affection but also with confusion as they try to understand the grandfather's illness. The line "You will not die and leave us then?" reveals the child's desperate hope that the grandfather will recover, even though they have begun to grasp the reality of the situation.
- The child is also beginning to experience **grief**, although they do not fully comprehend the finality of death. Their tone shifts between hope and resignation as they struggle to come to terms with the inevitability of the grandfather's passing.

3. **Mortality and Legacy:**

- The poem addresses the theme of **mortality** as the child confronts the fact that their grandfather is dying. This is most evident in the lines where the child says, "The doctor says that die you must." While the child still hopes for a recovery, they are also being introduced to the concept of death and its inevitability.
- Despite the sadness, the poem also emphasizes the idea of **legacy**. The child is comforted by the knowledge that the grandfather will leave behind more than just memories—he will leave a "good name" and "virtue" that the child can

carry forward. This legacy of moral teaching and example is something the child will cherish even after the grandfather is gone.

4. **Helplessness:**

- Throughout the poem, there is a sense of **helplessness**. The child is watching the once-strong grandfather become weak and frail, and despite their hope, they can do nothing to stop the inevitable. The child describes how the grandfather's body is breaking down, using images such as "wan and hollow" cheeks and a beard that is now "lank and thin." These descriptions emphasize the physical deterioration of the grandfather and the sense of powerlessness the child feels in the face of illness and death.

Poetic Devices in "A Child to His Sick Grandfather"

1. **Tone and Voice:**

- The poem is written from the perspective of a child, and the **tone** is both tender and sorrowful. The voice is simple and direct, reflecting the child's innocence and confusion about death. The combination of affection and sadness helps convey the emotional weight of the poem while maintaining the child's sense of hope and love.

2. **Imagery:**

- Baillie uses vivid **imagery** to describe the physical decline of the grandfather. Lines such as "How wan and hollow are your cheeks!" and "Your brow is rough with crossing breaks" provide detailed descriptions of the grandfather's frailty and deteriorating health. These images evoke sympathy for the grandfather while also helping the reader understand the child's perspective of witnessing a loved one's decline.
- The contrast between the child's memories of the grandfather's strength ("Your knobbed stick (that was my horse)") and his current weakness adds to the emotional impact of the poem.

3. **Repetition:**

- The word "dad" is repeated throughout the poem, underscoring the deep affection the child feels for the grandfather. This repetition creates a rhythm of familiarity and emotional closeness. It also emphasizes that the grandfather holds a fatherly role in the child's life, perhaps suggesting that he is a key figure in their upbringing.

4. **Rhyme Scheme and Structure:**

- The poem is structured in **quatrains** (four-line stanzas) with a regular rhyme scheme (AABB). This traditional structure creates a steady, rhythmic flow, reflecting the child's simple yet profound reflections on their grandfather's illness. The regularity of the rhyme scheme contrasts with the unpredictability of life and death, highlighting the emotional tension between the child's desire for stability and the impending loss.

5. **Metaphor:**

- The grandfather is metaphorically compared to a **warrior** whose strength has left him, and now he is like a general without an army or a sword. This metaphor reflects the child's perception of the grandfather's decline from a position of strength to one of frailty.

6. **Pathos:**

- Baillie's use of **pathos** throughout the poem evokes deep feelings of pity and sadness. The child's emotional vulnerability, along with the helplessness of the grandfather, taps into universal emotions surrounding loss, aging, and the bond between generations.
7. **Juxtaposition:**
- The poem contrasts the grandfather's **past vitality** with his current **frailty**. In the first stanza, the child recalls how the grandfather once supported them on his "knobbed stick," which they pretended was a horse. Now, however, the stick can "scarce support" the grandfather's own body, highlighting the contrast between the vitality of youth and the weakness of old age.
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Themes in "A Child to His Sick Grandfather"

1. **Innocence in the Face of Mortality:**
 - The poem is a reflection of **childhood innocence** encountering the reality of **death**. The child's mixture of confusion, hope, and sorrow captures the emotions many children feel when faced with the decline of a loved one. The child's struggle to understand the inevitability of death reflects a universal experience of confronting mortality for the first time.
 2. **Generational Legacy:**
 - The poem emphasizes the importance of **legacy**. The grandfather's strength may be fading, but he leaves behind a legacy of moral teaching and wisdom for the child to carry forward. The child feels proud of the grandfather's "good name" and "virtue," and this gives them a sense of continuity, even in the face of death.
 3. **Love and Admiration:**
 - The deep **love and admiration** the child feels for the grandfather is central to the poem. Despite the grandfather's declining health, the child's respect and affection remain unwavering. The child remembers the grandfather as a figure of kindness, strength, and wisdom, and this love is undiminished by the grandfather's frailty.
 4. **Inevitability of Death:**
 - The poem addresses the **inevitability of death**. The child hopes the grandfather will recover but eventually comes to terms with the fact that the grandfather "must die." This acknowledgement of death's inevitability is both heartbreaking and an important step in the child's emotional growth and understanding of life.
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Conclusion

"A Child to His Sick Grandfather" by Joanna Baillie is a touching reflection on the bond between a child and their grandfather, capturing the emotional complexity of witnessing the decline of a loved one. Through vivid imagery, a tender tone, and simple yet effective language, Baillie explores themes of innocence, mortality, and the enduring nature of love. The poem highlights the child's mixture of hope and sorrow, as well as the profound legacy that family members leave behind.

COMPARISON WITH, ONE FLESH

Themes

1. **Aging and Frailty:**
 - "A Child to His Sick Grandfather" presents ageing as a process of **physical deterioration and decline**. The child observes the grandfather's frailty with a mixture of sorrow and confusion, noting how his "beard hangs down" and how "wan and hollow" his cheeks have become. The child reflects on the visible signs of ageing and associates them with the nearing of death.
 - In "One Flesh," the theme of **ageing** is more subtle but no less poignant. The poem describes the emotional distance between two aging parents, whose physical intimacy has faded with time. The speaker notices how her parents now live in separate worlds, "lying apart" in their bedroom, suggesting that ageing brings not only physical changes but also emotional isolation.
2. **Generational Love and Legacy:**
 - In "A Child to His Sick Grandfather," there is a clear sense of **admiration and affection** between the child and the grandfather. The child looks up to the grandfather as a figure of strength, love, and wisdom, even as he becomes frail. The theme of **legacy** is strong, with the child expressing pride in the moral values and "virtue" the grandfather has passed on, which will endure after his death.
 - "One Flesh" explores a different kind of **legacy**, focusing on the long-standing relationship between the parents. The poem shows how their emotional connection has evolved over time, becoming less about physical intimacy and more about a shared history and companionship. The **legacy** in this poem is the endurance of their bond, even as passion fades.
3. **Emotional Distance:**
 - In "One Flesh," the speaker reflects on the **emotional distance** between her parents. Although they are still physically present in the same room, there is a noticeable gap between them as they "lie apart" in silence. This emotional distance is a natural consequence of aging, and the poem emphasizes the quietness and solitude that often accompanies long-term relationships in old age.
 - In contrast, "A Child to His Sick Grandfather" is filled with a sense of **emotional closeness**. The child is deeply connected to the grandfather, expressing sorrow and tenderness as they watch him grow weaker. The child's affection is unbroken by the grandfather's frailty, and there is no emotional distance between them, only the impending physical separation caused by death.
4. **The Inevitable Approach of Death:**
 - Both poems confront the **inevitability of death**, though in different ways. In "A Child to His Sick Grandfather," the child is beginning to understand that death is approaching for the grandfather, and this realization is painful. The line "The doctor says that die you must" marks the child's acceptance of the inevitable, though they still struggle to fully grasp the concept of loss.

- In "**One Flesh**," death is not directly mentioned, but the sense of time passing and the parents' separation in bed implies that they are nearing the final stage of their lives. The phrase "Do they know they're old?" suggests that the parents are perhaps not fully conscious of the extent to which time has changed them, but the speaker recognizes that their relationship, like their lives, is slowly fading.
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Tone

1. Tender vs. Reflective:

- The tone of "**A Child to His Sick Grandfather**" is deeply **tender** and filled with innocent love. The child's voice reflects both sadness and a desire to comfort the grandfather, even though the child is not fully equipped to understand the finality of death. There is also a sense of helplessness in the tone, as the child cannot do anything to reverse the grandfather's physical decline.
- In "**One Flesh**," the tone is more **reflective** and contemplative. The speaker observes the distance between her parents with a mix of curiosity, sadness, and perhaps acceptance. The poem does not express overt sorrow but rather a quiet recognition of how time has changed their relationship. The tone reflects a kind of resignation, as the speaker notes how their intimacy has been replaced by a different, quieter form of companionship.

2. Hope vs. Resignation:

- In "**A Child to His Sick Grandfather**," the child still holds on to some **hope** that the grandfather might recover ("You will not die and leave us then?"). However, as the poem progresses, the child begins to accept that death is inevitable, creating a gradual shift toward resignation by the end.
 - The tone of "**One Flesh**" is more **resigned** from the beginning. There is no sense of hope that the parents will return to their earlier intimacy. Instead, the speaker reflects on the changes that have occurred in their relationship, acknowledging the separation that time has brought while also understanding that this distance is a natural part of aging.
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Structure and Form

1. Quatrains vs. Sestets:

- "**A Child to His Sick Grandfather**" is structured in **quatrains** (four-line stanzas) with a regular rhyme scheme (AABB). This traditional structure reflects the simplicity and innocence of the child's voice. The steady rhythm of the quatrains contrasts with the emotional complexity of the child's experience, as they try to reconcile their love for the grandfather with the inevitability of his death.
- "**One Flesh**" is written in **sestets** (six-line stanzas) with a looser rhyme scheme. The structure of three six-line stanzas mirrors the reflective tone of the poem, allowing for a more contemplative pace. The rhyme scheme is not

rigid, reflecting the unpredictability and subtle emotional shifts in the relationship between the parents.

2. Use of Time:

- "**A Child to His Sick Grandfather**" moves through a linear narrative, focusing on the present moment and the child's interaction with their ailing grandfather. The poem's structure supports this focus on the immediate, emotional connection between the child and the grandfather as they confront his impending death.
- In "**One Flesh**," time is a more abstract presence. The poem captures a single moment in the parents' lives but also reflects on the passage of time and how it has changed their relationship. The speaker reflects on their parents' past intimacy and contrasts it with their current emotional and physical separation, creating a meditation on the effects of time on love and connection.

Poetic Devices

1. Imagery:

- "**A Child to His Sick Grandfather**" uses vivid **physical imagery** to describe the grandfather's frailty: "How lank and thin your beard hangs down!" and "Your brow is rough with crossing breaks." These images emphasize the grandfather's physical decline, which the child finds both alarming and saddening.
- In "**One Flesh**," the imagery is more focused on the **emotional distance** between the parents. The phrase "silence between them like a thread" conveys the delicate and almost invisible bond that still connects them, even though they no longer communicate or interact in the same way. The "tossed-up covers" also symbolize the separation, while their "books beside each other" suggest a shared history and companionship despite their distance.

2. Metaphor:

- In "**A Child to His Sick Grandfather**," the grandfather is metaphorically compared to a once-strong figure who is now physically diminished. The child refers to the grandfather's "knobbed stick" that was once a symbol of strength and play (when the child used it as a horse), but is now barely able to support the grandfather's "bended corse."
- "**One Flesh**" employs a more abstract **metaphor** in describing the emotional connection between the parents. The "thread" that links them is a metaphor for their enduring bond, even though their physical closeness has disappeared. This metaphor highlights how relationships evolve over time, becoming less about physical intimacy and more about shared history.

3. Repetition:

- In "**A Child to His Sick Grandfather**," the repeated use of the word "dad" throughout the poem reinforces the child's deep affection for the grandfather and emphasizes the emotional connection between them. This repetition also conveys the child's desire to comfort the grandfather in his time of need.
- In "**One Flesh**," there is no direct repetition of words or phrases, but the poem's structure, with its three stanzas that each focus on the parents' physical and emotional distance, creates a sense of repetition in the themes of separation and quiet companionship.

Perspective on Relationships

1. Generational vs. Marital Love:

- **"A Child to His Sick Grandfather"** explores the love between **grandchild and grandparent**, highlighting the innocence of childhood and the pain of watching an elder decline. The child's love is based on admiration, dependence, and the grandfather's role as a moral and familial guide.
- **"One Flesh"** deals with **marital love** over time, focusing on how a once-passionate relationship has evolved into something quieter and more detached. The parents' relationship is defined by history and shared experiences, rather than the physical or emotional intimacy that might have existed earlier in their marriage.

Conclusion

When comparing **"A Child to His Sick Grandfather"** and **"One Flesh,"** we see two different explorations of familial relationships and the passage of time. **Baillie's poem** focuses on the physical and emotional decline of a beloved grandfather, highlighting the child's love and the grandfather's legacy. **Jennings' poem**, on the other hand, reflects on the emotional distance that can arise between long-married partners in old age, emphasizing how relationships evolve and endure in different ways. Both poems confront the inevitability of ageing and death, though from different generational perspectives, and both evoke feelings of love, loss, and resignation.