The Hour Is Come

POEM TEXT

1 How did she fight? She fought well.
2 How did she light? Ah, she fell.
3 Why did she fall? God, who knows all,
4 Only can tell.

5 Those she was fighting for—they
6 Surely would go to her? Nay!
7 What of her pain! Theirs is the gain.
8 Ever the way.

9 Will they not help her to rise
10 If there is death in her eyes?
11 Can you not see? She made them free.
12 What if she dies?

13 Can we not help her? Oh, no!
14 In her good fight it is so
15 That all who work never must shirk
16 Suff'ring and woe.

17 But she'll not ever lie down—
18 On her head, in the dust, is a crown
19 Jewelled and bright, under whose light
20 She'll rise alone.

SUMMARY

How did this woman fight for her cause? She fought bravely. How did it turn out for her? She fell in battle. What caused her to fall? God only knows.

The people she was fighting for must be helping her, right? No! So what if she suffers, as long as they benefit? That's the way things always are.

Won't they help her to her feet if she seems to be dying? No. Don't you see? She already liberated them, so why should they care if she dies?

Can't *we* come to her aid? Of course not! That's the nature of her struggle: anyone who participates has to expect pain and sorrow.

But even though she's fallen, she'll never rest. As she lies there in the dust, she wears a shining, gem-studded crown, which she'll still be wearing when she rises by herself, without anyone's help.

THEMES

STRUGGLE, SACRIFICE, AND REDEMPTION

Louisa Lawson's "The Hour Is Come" describes a bitter but ultimately redemptive struggle. The unnamed heroine of this struggle selflessly fights for others' freedom yet receives no help and sees no "gain" herself. She dies in the end, yet she has not been a failure: her work "made" others "free," and the speaker imagines the woman rising "alone" after death with a Christ-like "crown" on her head. Struggles for justice demand lonely self-sacrifice, the poem implies, but those who pursue this difficult path will be rewarded with a moral victory in the end.

The speaker, who seems to speak for a community observing the poem's heroine, acknowledges that she "fought well" for her cause even though she ultimately "fall[s]." The speaker also makes it clear that she is alone in the end: "Those she was fighting for" don't go to her aid nor "help her to rise" back up. They don't care if "she dies," the speaker says, as long as they have their freedom. The speaker claims that *they* can't help the woman, either, because her "good fight" is solitary and thankless by nature. It's "Ever the way," the speaker laments, that most people who benefit from activism do nothing to help the activists. Someone has to sacrifice themselves to get the "work" of liberation done, and no one who performs this "work" can escape "Suff'ring and woe." Even if the speaker is conveniently excusing themselves, the poem implies that there's some truth to their statement. The woman's fight was altruistic, and her willingness to suffer for it was part of what made it both noble and effective.

Moreover, the woman's sacrifice is redemptive: it leads to a final victory, which the poem imagines as a glorious resurrection of the woman herself. The speaker claims that, even in death, this tireless woman will "[n]ever lie down." Instead, she will "rise alone" as if raised from the dead, wearing a jeweled "crown." This is a symbolic image of redemptive triumph: even in death, the woman cannot be defeated. Her death helped free others, so she fulfilled her larger goal. There's the implication that she'll receive a heavenly reward as well. In fact, the poem's title alludes to several of Jesus's sayings in the Gospels, so it positions the woman as a Christ-like martyr.

Overall, despite its moments of bitter irony, the poem celebrates the "good fight." It promises that those who sacrifice

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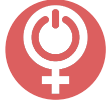
for others will be vindicated at last, no matter how much they suffer or how little support they receive.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20



FEMINISM AND LIBERATION

"The Hour Is Come" first appeared in Louisa Lawson's self-published feminist magazine, *The Dawn*, and it's inseparable from her feminist activism. Its hero is pointedly female, a "she" who struggles to liberate others. It reflects on the costs of "her good fight" and implies that wider society—including most of those who benefit from the fight—can't be trusted to show support. Yet its overall spirit is one of proud persistence. The poem can be read as both a realistic portrait of feminist struggle and an idealistic statement of defiance: women *will* be free, it seems to declare, no matter how much pain and death the fight requires.

Though the poem never specifies who or what its heroine fought for, it strongly implies that she was working for the liberation of women. She is identified only by gender and characterized only by her indomitable will to fight. As a result, the poem seems to elevate her to a symbol of women activists or feminists in general. She has "made" others "free," even though they never acknowledged her sacrifice or eased her "Suff'ring." It's implied, then, that she was involved in some large-scale struggle for justice, some cause that went far beyond herself.

The poem at first seems to mourn a defeat, yet ultimately guarantees a victory—and in doing so, warns anyone who might stand in the way of feminist progress. The statement "she'll not ever lie down" implies that this crusader will never give up, and in a symbolic sense, cannot be killed. Her struggle transcends, and will continue in spite of, any temporary setback. Even the poem's title alludes to several relevant passages in the Bible. It echoes Christ's lament that he has been betrayed, but also his promise of glorious resurrection—which he compares to a woman's joy after the agony of birth. In the same spirit, the poem hints that, no matter how many people betray the cause—and no matter how much sacrifice the cause requires—women's liberation will win the day.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-20

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

How did she fight? She fought well.
How did she light? Ah, she fell.
Why did she fall? God, who knows all,
Only can tell.

The poem begins with a series of rhetorical questions, which the speaker poses and then promptly answers:

> How did she fight? She fought well.
> How did she light? Ah, she fell.
> Why did she fall? God, who knows all,
> Only can tell.

To "light," in this context, means to *alight* (settle or land, as after flying or falling). So these initial questions and answers establish a few pieces of information:

- The poem is about an unnamed woman ("she"), who "fought well" in a battle or on behalf of a cause.
- She ended up "fall[ing]" in the line of duty, whether literally or metaphorically. (Perhaps she was literally killed or gravely injured; perhaps she was simply defeated. Later stanzas will suggest the first reading, but metaphorical possibilities remain open.)
- And the speaker claims not to know "Why" she fell, waving the issue off with the equivalent of "God only knows."

Of course, this first stanza leaves a lot unclear as well. The reader doesn't yet know who the woman is, what she was fighting for, why she "fell," or even the exact nature of her defeat. Nor is it yet clear who the speaker is, though they seem to admire the woman's fighting spirit and sympathize with her cause, at least to some extent. (That "Ah, she fell" sounds like a sigh.)

It's also ambiguous, at first, as to whether there are multiple voices here or one voice asking and answering their own rhetorical questions. However, the lack of dialogue markers (e.g., quotation marks) favors the second reading. Later, in line 13, the speaker is identified as plural ("we"), but they appear to be a kind of collective or communal voice standing by and discussing the fallen woman. Whatever the nature of her "fight" (and more clues will come soon), it's as if they're conducting a post-fight analysis.

The title, "The Hour Is Come," is a small clue in its own right. It echoes several passages from the Gospels in which Jesus anticipates his martyrdom and resurrection. (See the Allusions entry under the Literary Devices section of this guide.) This biblical allusion hints that the fallen woman here may also be a

martyr-figure: someone who "fought well" and sacrificed herself on behalf of a noble cause.

LINES 5-8

Those she was fighting for—they
Surely would go to her? Nay!
What of her pain! Theirs is the gain.
Ever the way.

The speaker's rhetorical questions (and answers) continue in the second stanza. Here, the language takes on a tone of verbal irony or sarcasm:

> Those she was fighting for—they
> Surely would go to her? Nay!
> What of her pain! Theirs is the gain.

The reader learns two main things here:

- First, the woman who "fell" was "fighting for" others, not simply for herself.
- Second, the people she was fighting for are callously indifferent to her sacrifice.

Dripping with sarcasm, the speaker asks, *surely* these people would help her—"go to her" in her time of need—after all she's done for them? Answer: a resounding "Nay!" The speaker mocks the selfish attitude of these passive beneficiaries, ironically exclaiming that "Theirs is the gain," so "her pain" doesn't matter. (Notice how the exclamation point after "What of her pain," which both takes the place of a question mark and creates a line-interrupting caesura, adds extra emphasis to the speaker's scornful sarcasm.)

The speaker then adds, "Ever the way," as in, "That's the way it always is." It's unclear whether the speaker is still mimicking the others here (as if callously saying, "Hey, that's life"), or dropping the sarcasm and saying this line in their normal tone. In the second case, they would be making a straightforward, non-ironic point: people who selflessly fight for others are always ("Ever") ignored or betrayed by at least some of the people they're fighting for.

It's still not clear who this *particular* woman was fighting for. But since the poet was a noted feminist—one of the leading lights of the Australian women's suffrage movement around the turn of the 20th century—the poem's sympathetic portrayal of a "she" fighting for others is a major clue. Generally, "The Hour Is Come" is read as a commentary on the feminist struggles of the time.

LINES 9-12

Will they not help her to rise
If there is death in her eyes?
Can you not see? She made them free.
What if she dies?

In lines 9-12, the speaker continues asking pointed rhetorical questions about the people the woman "was fighting for." Again, the speaker's tone combines indignation (on the woman's behalf) and sarcasm(directed at the ungrateful people she's helped):

> Will they not help her to rise
> If there is death in her eyes?
> Can you not see? She made them free.
> What if she dies?

This last question means, *So what if she dies?* (not *What if she were to die?*). In other words, the speaker is again mocking the callous attitude of the people "She made [...] free." Though the poem never says outright who these people are, "She made them free" offers the biggest clue yet. The fallen woman was clearly involved in some sort of liberation struggle, sacrificing herself to free people—herself included, perhaps—who were politically subjugated and oppressed. She's waged that battle to the point of "death," but even though she's now fallen and fighting for her life, none of the people she's freed will "help her to rise." They got what they needed out of her, the speaker snorts (with cynical irony), so why should they care what happens to her now?

As a prominent feminist of her day, Louisa Lawson may be using these lines to criticize false friends, or indifferent observers, of her own political movement. That is, she may be protesting women who benefited from the feminist struggle, yet betrayed or failed to help those who sacrificed the most for it. (She may even be drawing another parallel with the Gospels, in keeping with the allusive title; after all, Jesus was famously betrayed by Judas.) More broadly, Lawson is critiquing bystanders who accept the "gain[s]" that activists, freedom fighters, etc. achieve on their behalf, but offer no assistance in return.

LINES 13-16

Can we not help her? Oh, no!
In her good fight it is so
That all who work never must shirk
Suff'ring and woe.

Lines 13-16 bring a somewhat unexpected twist. Posing a last rhetorical question, the speaker asks, "Can we not help her?"

Given the speaker's obvious sympathy for the fallen woman (and sarcastic mockery of those who fail to help her), the reader might expect the answer to be a resounding, "Yes!" Instead it's, "Oh, no!"—a near-echo of the "Nay!" in line 6. So even the speaker won't, or perhaps can't, help the woman in her hour of need.

The speaker explains that, unfortunately, this is the nature of the "work" the woman has taken on:

> In her good fight it is so
> That all who work never must shirk
> Suff'ring and woe.

In other words, this is what it means to fight the "good fight" on behalf of justice: rather than enthusiastic help from others, or glory of any kind, one can expect "Suff'ring and woe." Pain becomes a kind of duty that the activist, freedom fighter, etc. can't "shirk" or avoid.

This stanza introduces some ambiguity in terms of the speaker's position and views. Again, throughout the rest of the poem, the speaker seems supportive of the fallen woman and her cause. Perhaps there's a valid reason why they can't "help" in her current crisis; if so, the poem doesn't fully explain it. On the other hand, perhaps the speaker is displaying a little hypocrisy of their own here, and rationalizing it by declaring that "woe" is simply a part of activism.

LINES 17-20

But she'll not ever lie down—
On her head, in the dust, is a crown
Jewelled and bright, under whose light
She'll rise alone.

After a series of irony- and sarcasm-filled stanzas, lines 17-20 offer a straightforward tribute to the woman's heroic persistence. The imagery of this stanza is charged with symbolism:

> But she'll not ever lie down—
> On her head, in the dust, is a crown
> Jewelled and bright, under whose light
> She'll rise alone.

The "fall[en]" woman—who herself seems symbolic of feminists, or activists and freedom fighters, in general—turns out to be fallen only temporarily. "[S]he'll not ever lie down" echoes the familiar idiom about refusing to "take defeat lying down." This woman has too much energy, passion, and vitality to accept permanent defeat. Though there was previously a look of "death in her eyes," she appears to be alive after all—or perhaps she's a goddess figure who will be resurrected *after* death.

Either way, glory awaits her. The speaker promises that she will "rise" again. Though she seems humbled for now (lying "in the dust"), she's wearing a "Jewelled" crown that symbolizes victory, power, and authority all at once. Perhaps it even symbolizes *divine* power, as an extension of the Christ parallels and biblical allusions that haunt the poem from the title onward. (Compare, for example, this passage from Hebrews 2:9, as translated in the King James Version: "But we see Jesus [...] crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.") In this reading, the poem's heroine—a Christ-like martyr for every *woman*, perhaps—will rise from death or defeat, radiating the "bright [...] light" of divinity her crown confers on her. Alternatively, the speaker could be describing a non-supernatural triumph: perhaps the woman will simply "dust" herself off and keep fighting (with queenly dignity).

However she rises, she will rise "alone." This word marks a bittersweet ending to the poem. There's a suggestion that, since the sacrifice was hers "alone," the ultimate glory (or divine reward) will be hers alone as well. At the same time, even her moment of triumph is solitary: she has no one to *share* the victory with, just as she had no one fighting beside her. All in all, the poem implies—or warns—that the activist's path is a hard and solitary one, though glorious and honorable in the end.

SYMBOLS

THE CROWN

The "crown" in the final stanza is a symbolic crown of victory. The speaker claims that the hero—herself a symbol of womanhood and feminism—died wearing this crown and will "rise alone" with its "light" shining around her. In other words, she was regal even in defeat, and her defeat was only temporary. She (and, by extension, feminism) will triumph in the end, rising from the "dust" with queenly dignity.

The crown is also a symbol of authority and power, perhaps including divine power. The title frames the woman as a Christ-like martyr (see the Allusions section of this guide), so her crown may suggest that, when she "rise[s]" from death and defeat like a goddess, she will claim her rightful power in the world. The "light" shining from her crown might be interpreted as divine glory, the light of justice, etc. Compare, for example, Hebrews 2:9 from the King James Version of the Bible:

> But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 18-20:** "On her head, in the dust, is a crown / Jewelled and bright, under whose light / She'll rise alone."

POETIC DEVICES

REPETITION

Repetition highlights several of the poem's most thematically important words. It also contributes to the poem's logical, easy-to-follow structure. Look at the anaphora and parallelism in

lines 1-2, for example:

> How did she fight? She fought well.
> How did she light? Ah, she fell.

The simple, repetitive structure of rhetorical questions and answers continues throughout the first four stanzas. It provides exposition about, and commentary on, the heroine's struggle while giving the poem a logical and predictable flow. It also structures the poem as a kind of insistent inquiry into the fallen heroine, as though her community were fascinated by her and buzzing about what happened to her.

The speaker also repeats variations on the words "fight," "fall," and "rise." (The verb tense changes sometimes, as with "fight"/"fought" and "fall"/"fell.") All of these words are central to the poem's narrative; in fact, they provide a miniature summary of the heroine's story. She *fought*, she *fell*, but she will *rise* again. She is defined by her fighting spirit, by her willingness to sacrifice herself ("fall" in pain and/or temporary defeat), and by her refusal to take defeat lying down.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "How did she," "fight," "She," "fought"
- **Line 2:** "How did she," "she," "fell"
- **Line 3:** "did she," "fall"
- **Line 5:** "fighting"
- **Line 9:** "rise"
- **Line 11:** "Can," "not"
- **Line 13:** "Can," "not"
- **Line 14:** "fight"
- **Line 20:** "rise"

RHETORICAL QUESTION

Roughly half of "The Hour Is Come" consists of rhetorical questions. The poem has a first-person plural speaker ("we"), so its questions and answers resemble a dialogue between two voices. But it never marks off separate voices in any way (e.g., through quotation marks), so it's best read as one communal voice questioning *themselves* rhetorically, then answering their own questions. The questions either set up points the speaker wants to make or make a point in their own right, via sarcasm and irony.

Because the poem describes a woman who has "fall[en]" and is dying or dead, the questions also help establish what has happened to her. In that way, they sound a little like a postmortem inquiry, though the answers leave a great deal unresolved. Look at the first stanza, for example:

> How did she fight? She fought well.
> How did she light? Ah, she fell.
> Why did she fall? God, who knows all,
> Only can tell.

The Q&A here establishes that she was a fighter for a cause, that she's been defeated (at least temporarily) or killed, and that the speaker can't or won't say what brought her down. But later questions and answers, such as those in lines 9-12, are less about establishing information than conveying barbed irony:

> Will they not help her to rise
> If there is death in her eyes?
> Can you not see? She made them free.
> What if she dies?

Sarcastically, the speaker makes clear that the people ("they") whom the woman "free[d]" have no intention of helping her in return. The verbal irony here sounds bitterly angry; the speaker is saying, in effect: *Can't you see? They've gotten what they needed out of her. Why should they care if she dies?*

But the final question and answer—"Can we not help her? Oh, no!"—complicates the picture. Suddenly, the speaker seems to turn the irony back on themselves. They may be accusing themselves of laziness or cowardice, expressing a degree of honest frustration at their own helplessness, or both.

Where Rhetorical Question appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "How did she fight?"
- **Line 2:** "How did she light?"
- **Line 3:** "Why did she fall?"
- **Lines 5-6:** "Those she was fighting for—they / Surely would go to her?"
- **Line 7:** "What of her pain!"
- **Lines 9-10:** "Will they not help her to rise / If there is death in her eyes?"
- **Line 11:** "Can you not see?"
- **Line 12:** "What if she dies?"
- **Line 13:** "Can we not help her?"

IRONY

At several moments in the poem, the speaker uses verbal irony or sarcasm to express anger on behalf of the fallen woman. Look at lines 5-7, for example:

> Those she was fighting for—they
> Surely would go to her? Nay!
> What of her pain! Theirs is the gain.

This is an ironic rhetorical question followed by a sarcastic answer. Loosely translated, it means: *Surely the people she helped would help her in her time of distress? Of course not! Why should they care about her pain when they benefit from it?* Through this scathing irony, the speaker indirectly sympathizes with the

woman who has sacrificed herself.

A similar tone and sentiment returns in lines 11-12:

> Can you not see? She made them free.
> What if she dies?

Again, the speaker means the opposite of what they're saying. They sound callous on the surface: *Can't you see? She already liberated them, so why should they care if she dies as a result?* But their sarcasm suggests that the people she liberated actually *should* care, and *should* help her in her time of need. The speaker is mimicking the others' callousness in order to criticize it.

The irony in line 13 is more ambiguous: "Can we not help her? Oh, no!" Here, the speaker may be sarcastically mocking their own failure to help—or they may actually be pleading an *inability* to help. In the latter case, the poet, Lawson, might be turning the irony around on the speaker. In other words, there may be some situational irony here: by now, the reader might expect the speaker to help the woman, but despite the speaker's apparent sympathy, they claim she has to go it alone.

Where Irony appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** "Those she was fighting for—they / Surely would go to her? Nay!"
- **Line 7:** "What of her pain! Theirs is the gain."
- **Lines 11-12:** "Can you not see? She made them free. / What if she dies?"
- **Line 13:** "Can we not help her? Oh, no!"

CAESURA

The poem contains numerous caesuras, many of which are punctuated by question marks. In other words, the speaker has a habit of ending questions mid-line, then using the rest of the line (and/or the following line) to answer those questions. This effect appears in lines 1, 2, 3, 6, 11, and 13 (as well as line 7, where the question is marked with an exclamation point).

Why might Lawson have relied on this effect? Possibly because it helps suggest that the rhetorical questions and their answers are part of one continuous flow of thought, rather than a Q&A between different speakers. (People often use this device in conversational speech, too, as when saying things like, "Did I expect it? No. Am I glad it happened? Yes.")

Another noteworthy caesura appears in line 5:

> Those she was fighting for—they
> Surely would go to her?

Here, the caesura subtly helps convey tone. Because the word "they" is preceded by a caesura (marked with a dramatic dash) *and* followed by a line break (plus enjambment), it receives a lot of emphasis. This emphasis practically forces the reader to hear the sentence as follows: "Those she was fighting for—*they* surely would go to her?" In other words, surely they, of all people, were willing to help in her time of need? Sadly, the answer is: "Nay!" Even the people the woman helped liberate let her down.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "fight? She"
- **Line 2:** "light? Ah, she"
- **Line 3:** "fall? God, who"
- **Line 5:** "for—they"
- **Line 6:** "her? Nay!"
- **Line 7:** "pain! Theirs"
- **Line 11:** "see? She"
- **Line 13:** "her? Oh, no!"
- **Line 18:** "head, in," "dust, is"
- **Line 19:** "bright, under"

ALLUSION

The title of the poem is a biblical allusion—actually, several biblical allusions in one. The phrase "the hour is come" appears at several key moments in the King James Version of the Bible (the translation English poets have quoted most often). In Mark 14:41, for example, Jesus uses it in reference to his betrayal by Judas:

> [...] Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

In John 17:1, Jesus also speaks this phrase in anticipation of his crucifixion or "glorif[ication]":

> [...] Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:

A similar sentiment appears in John 12:23. Finally, in John 16:21, Jesus uses the phrase as part of an analogy involving women and childbirth:

> A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

In other words, the joy of the child causes the woman to forget the pains of birth; in the same way, Jesus promises, the "joy" of his resurrection will wipe out the "sorrow" of his crucifixion.

All of these passages relate to the situation in Lawson's poem. Her hero is a martyr-figure, a goddess-like archetype of female power, who sacrifices herself to her cause but will "rise" again in

victory and glory (lines 17-20). The speaker implies that her ultimate triumph will redeem her "Suff'ring and woe" (line 16). In general, the poem's final stanzas—with their references to suffering, rising from the dead, a "crown," etc.—strongly echo biblical descriptions of Jesus, as in Hebrews 2:9:

> But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

In a similar sense, Lawson's feminist hero dies on behalf of every woman, or on behalf of all the people she has "made [...] free" (line 11).

Where Allusion appears in the poem:

- **Lines 15-16:** "That all who work never must shirk / Suff'ring and woe."
- **Lines 17-20:** "But she'll not ever lie down— / On her head, in the dust, is a crown / Jewelled and bright, under whose light / She'll rise alone."

VOCABULARY

Light (Line 2) - Here a verb meaning to "alight" or land after falling or flying.

Nay (Line 6) - Old-fashioned synonym for "no."

Shirk (Line 15) - Avoid or refuse (a responsibility).

Suff'ring (Line 16) - Old-fashioned poetic contraction of "suffering" (used to indicate that the word should be read as two rather than three syllables for metrical purposes).

Crown (Line 18) - A symbolic crown of victory (and perhaps divinity).

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The Hour Is Come" consists of five rhymed quatrains (four-line stanzas) with an unusual structure. It uses dactylic meter (a DUM-da-da, DUM-da-da rhythm), which is quite rare in English-language poetry, and its rhyme scheme includes internal rhyme in the third line of each stanza.

This form is highly constrained and difficult, and also distinctive. There's no traditional name for it: Lawson is pretty much paving her own way here. And that's part of the point! As a feminist activist, Lawson seems to be rejecting the conventional tools of the English poetic tradition—which, in 1905, was still overwhelmingly male-dominated—in favor of original, individual effects.

The short quatrains and heavy rhyming have a song-like quality; they make the poem both musical and memorable. (Perhaps Lawson was striving to write the poetry equivalent of a feminist anthem.) The dactylic meter starts each line with a strong stress (e.g., "How did she fight?"), so, like trochaic meter (DUM-da, DUM-da), it has a heavy, almost martial quality. That effect fits a poem about a woman warrior "fighting" the "good fight," and also marching to the beat of her own drum.

METER

"The Hour Is Come" uses dactylic meter, meaning that its syllables are generally arranged in a stressed-unstressed-unstressed rhythm (DUM-da-da, DUM-da-da).

The number of dactylic feet in each line varies. The first two lines of each stanza are dactylic trimeter (three feet), as in lines 1-2:

> How did she | fight? She fought | well.
> How did she | light? Ah, she | fell.

The last line of each stanza is dactylic dimeter (two feet), as in line 4:

> Only can | tell.

Notice that, in each case, the final foot is missing its two unstressed syllables. (The technical term for this effect is *catalexis*, or more specifically, *brachycatalexis*.)

The third line of each stanza varies the rhythm a bit. It's like two dactylic trimeter lines (again, with the unstressed syllables missing from the second foot) squashed together. Look at line 3, for example:

> Why did she | fall? | God, who knows | all,

The internal rhyme ("fall"/"all") highlights this structure, which would be easier to see if the stanza were lineated as follows:

> How did she fight? She fought well.
> How did she light? Ah, she fell.
> Why did she fall?
> God, who knows all,
> Only can tell.

But Lawson seems to want to make the poem formally unconventional and challenging! After all, it's about a lonely, nonconformist hero who "fight[s]" a hard fight. The dactyls give the language a galloping rhythm, but this rhythm is frequently interrupted by line breaks and caesuras, so that the language—like the hero herself—seems to drive forward in the face of obstacles.

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RHYME SCHEME

The basic rhyme scheme of each quatrain is AABA, so the full rhyme scheme is AABA CCDC EEFE, etc. However, the third line of each quatrain also contains an internal rhyme, as in line 3:

> Why did she **fall**? God, who knows **all**,

In other words, it would be possible to write out each stanza so that the rhyme scheme read AABBA:

> How did she fight? She fought well.
> How did she light? Ah, she fell.
> Why did she fall?
> God, who knows all,
> Only can tell.

Lawson's scheme instead maximizes the contrast between the longer third line (with its internal B rhymes) and the shorter fourth line (which brings the A rhyme back). The contrast gives each stanza a punchy ending, adding dramatic force to a bitter line like "Ever the way" (line 8) and a triumphant line like "She'll rise alone" (line 20).

SPEAKER

The poem has an unnamed, first-person plural speaker: a "we" who observes and comments on the fallen heroine. Since the poem follows a question-and-answer format but uses no quotation marks or other dialogue notation, it's unclear whether the questioner(s) and answerer(s) here are separate voices, or whether this is a single communal voice posing and answering its own rhetorical questions. Look at lines 13-16, for example:

> Can we not help her? Oh, no!
> In her good fight it is so
> That all who work never must shirk
> Suff'ring and woe.

The voice asking "Can we not help her?" may or may not be different from the voice that speaks the rest of the stanza.

In either case, the effect is similar. The speaker represents a community of onlookers, who admire and sympathize with (but don't actually assist) the heroine. They cue the reader to share their pity and admiration, but through their inability or unwillingness to "help her," they also illustrate the loneliness of the heroine's struggle.

SETTING

The poem never mentions a geographical or historical setting. This lack of specifics gives a symbolic, universal quality to the heroine's "fight": she could be fighting for others' "free[dom]" anytime, anywhere.

The physical setting may be some sort of battlefield, though again, this would be more symbolic than literal. The heroine has "fall[en]" in the "dust," as though wounded or killed in battle. She is wearing a jeweled "crown," like a monarch fighting on the battlefield (as happened in many historical wars!). But if the poem is read as an allegory for feminist struggle—the kind Louisa Lawson waged in real life—the actual, implied setting is the *political* battlefield on which women fight for their rights.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Louisa Lawson (1848-1920) was a poet, independent publisher, political essayist, and one of the leading Australian feminists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "The Hour Is Come" appears in her only volume of poetry, the self-published collection *The Lonely Crossing and Other Poems* (1905). In her preface to the collection, Lawson dedicated her work expressly to her "countrywomen":

> [...] I decided to arrange and publish this unpretentious little collection of verses, some of which were composed before leaving school, and others later on with babe at nurse. Those of widowed years were written for solace when under stress of pain and sorrow. Should they find a place in the hearts of the most humble among my countrywomen I shall feel more than repaid for the trouble and cost of publication.

In addition to her literary writing, Lawson published and contributed political essays to the feminist magazine *The Dawn*. In one representative essay, called "The Need of the Hour," Lawson attacks the kind of moral passivity she criticizes in "The Hour Is Come" (lines 5-16):

> There are plenty of persons who applaud the good deeds of others and yet what are they themselves doing? [...] Did you ever think how dangerous a thing it is for us to attend a meeting, where evils are talked about, and to read articles about them in papers, and get into an agonised state of mind over them and yet do nothing? There is no surer way to deaden moral energy.

A tireless social reformer, she was instrumental in securing women's right to vote in the Australian state of New South Wales. Her son Henry Lawson (1867-1922), who collaborated with her on *The Dawn*, became a noted Australian poet in his own right.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Lawson was a major Australian figure in what is now known as "first-wave feminism": the feminist and women's suffrage movements that swept much of the world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This decades-long struggle focused mainly but not exclusively on voting and property rights. A broader fight against patriarchal institutions, including unequal workplaces, began with the "second wave" of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s.

Lawson's role in this movement took various forms. She founded and published *The Dawn*, Australia's first magazine produced solely by women. *The Dawn* published a mix of editorials, stories, poems, domestic and fashion advice, and news reportage, including numerous pieces contributed by Lawson herself. It became a popular success and ran from 1888 through 1905. Lawson also founded the Dawn Club, a feminist discussion group that became instrumental to Australia's suffrage movement, and advocated for trade unionism, temperance (alcohol prohibition), and other reforms. She was publicly credited as the leading force behind the 1902 Womanhood Suffrage Bill, which secured women's right to vote in her home state of New South Wales.

Due to Lawson's lifelong activism, "The Hour Is Come" is usually read as an allegory about the feminist "fight," including the lonely heroism of its leaders and the hypocrisy of those who benefited from but did not join it. However, since the poem does not specify a time, place, or cause, it can be generalized to other liberation movements as well.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Feminism in Australia: A Brief History — A summary of feminist movements in Australia from the 19th through the 21st century. (https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-27/sex-power-and-anger-a-history-of-feminist-protests-in-australia/100030592)
- The Poet's Life — A short biography of Lawson via Encyclopedia.com. (https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/lawson-louisa-1848-1920)
- Women's Suffrage in Australia — More context on the late 19th and early-20th century women's suffrage movement, via the National Library of Australia. (https://www.nla.gov.au/digital-classroom/senior-secondary/shoulder-shoulder-feminism-australia/womens-suffrage)
- Lawson's Feminist Writing — A selection of Lawson's articles for her feminist periodical, The Dawn. (https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks06/0606891h.html#TheNeedOfTheHour)
- More About the Poet — A summary of Lawson's life, courtesy of the Australian Dictionary of Biography. (https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lawson-louisa-7121)

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