*Tears, Idle Tears* Analysis

Stanza 1

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

The speaker feels tears in his eyes, but he doesn’t know why they are there, so he calls him “idle tears” and he says that he “know[s] not what they mean”. He may not know exactly what his tears mean, but he does know that they come “from the depth of some divine despair”. The speaker feels something spiritual building up inside his soul. This is why he says that the source of his tears is something “divine”. Generally, when something is described as “divine” it is angelic, joyful, and glorious. But this is different. This is “divine despair”. Somehow, the despair that is causing these tears is divine. It stems from something deep and spiritual within the speaker. He then describes the way this feeling “rise[s] in the heart, and gather[s] to the eyes”. With the last two lines of this stanza, the speaker reveals when has triggered this “divine despair”. He simultaneously provides the setting. The speaker is “looking on the happy Autumn-fields”. When he sees something beautiful and “happy”, it does not make him feel happy. Rather, it fills his heart with despair and brings tears to his eyes, tears that he cannot completely account for. The speaker does tell the readers, however, that it was something about “the days that are no more” that have causes this feeling of despair. For some reason, looking at a beautiful field in the fall has brought back a flood of memories and caused him to mourn over the days that are gone.

Stanza 2

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

The speaker reveals that the pain he feels at this moment of recollection feels as fresh as it did the moment he first felt it. He describes it as “fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail”. Then, in the second line, the speaker reveals why thinking about days gone causes him such pain. He claims that this memories “bring our friends up from the underworld”. Here, it becomes apparent that the speaker is thinking about people that have already gone. The wound feels fresh as the memory of their lives and deaths spring upon him.

## Stanza 3

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;

In this stanza, the speaker says that he finds these days gone by as something very strange. Throughout the poem, the speaker seems unable to fully understand his own feelings. He does not know exactly where the tears come from. He doesn’t know exactly what divine despair causes them, but he does know that the wound feels fresh, that he thinks of those who have passed before him, and then he mourns over the days that are gone. He says that this feeling that is in his heart is “strange as in dark summer dawns”. He then describes the sound of birds as they are just awakening, and he contrasts that sound with his own feelings. He knows that he is in his last days. While the birds are just awakening, he has realized that he is just about to go to sleep in death. It is a strange thing for “dying ears” to hear the birds beginning to wake. As he hears the birds and thinks about the days gone by and how few days he has left, he thinks about “the casement”. This is perhaps his own coffin that he things about. It grows in his mind as he thinks about it.

## Stanza 4

Dear as remembered kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feigned
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more!

With this stanza, the speaker begins to talk as if he has already died. He somehow experiences “kisses after death” which make his voice suddenly sound as though it is one from beyond the grave. Then, the speaker says that those kisses after death were sweet, but somehow a “hopeless fancy feigned”. This implies that these kisses after death were merely a made up fancy, hopeless. He says that these kisses were “on lips that are for others”. Perhaps, the speaker feels that his days of love are gone, and that any imagined kiss is really meant for another. He describes these kisses as “deep as love” and even “deep as first love” and yet somehow “wild with all regret”. The speaker seems to regret the days that have gone by and not having loved as fully and as wildly as he might have. But now it is too late, and all that he can experience are “feigned” kisses of “hopeless fancy” that seem to be from beyond the grave. The speaker then says that he is experiencing death even while he lives. He says, “O Death in Life, the days that are no more!” He mourns the days that are past, and he mourns the person he was when he was young, and he mourns the loss of his youth.