An Analysis of Leigh Hunt’s “Jenny Kissed Me”

Jenny Kissed Me
Leigh Hunt

Jenny kissed me when we met,
Jumping from the chair she sat in;
Time, you thief, who love to get
Sweets in your list, put that in.
Say I’m weary, say I’m sad,
Say that health and wealth have missed me,
Say I’m growing old, but add,
Jenny kissed me.

“Jenny Kissed Me,” a poem by 19th century English essayist and poet, Leigh Hunt, is, at first glance, a simple poem noting a simple event. Upon one reading, the reader may file away the poem as a brief, nice experience for the speaker and little more. But upon closer inspection, one will soon recognize the eight lines that make up “Jenny Kissed Me” hold a rather profound message. Its structure is simple, but its message is extraordinary.

Obviously a short poem, it has the “sing-song” rhythm of many nursery rhymes. (Compare the first line, “Jenny kissed me when we met” with “Twinkle, twinkle little star.”) This meter is called trochaic. Trochaic meter consists of a series of three stressed syllables each followed by an unstressed syllable with a stressed syllable tacked on for good measure. This makes each line of the poem seven syllables long. But, poetry is poetry, so there is some room for deviation. (See lines 2 and 6 which have eight syllables each, and line 8 which only has 4.) The rhyme scheme is ABABCDCD. One must be careful when reading “Jenny Kissed Me” aloud that the rhythm and rhyme do not get in the way of the meaning.

The speaker of the poem is reminiscing about a fond memory of a special, momentary kiss. In his remembrance, he converses with Time. Because he talks with a concept, this gives “time” the qualities of a human. Therefore, the poem uses extended personification to develop its theme. There is also a considerable amount of repetition in these eight lines. First, there is the obvious repetition of the all-important line “Jenny kissed me” which opens the poem and becomes the impactful last line as well.
Leigh also chooses to repeat the word “say” four times within the short span of three lines which lends to the mocking tone of the discussion with “Time.”

The theme that develops throughout the poem is that, while time has a way of putting distance between ourselves and the events that shape our lives as well as reminding us of where we are presently, it is not as powerful as it seems. Every phrase that begins with the word “say” is followed by human experiences that we generally view as negative. The speaker, however, does not concede victory to time. The speaker becomes somewhat triumphant in reminding time that he cannot only remind us of the negative aspects in his “list.” We have the special moments like when “Jenny kissed me.”