**English Romantic Verse** One-Page Guides

**Poet: Wordsworth**

Poem: Lines Written In Early Spring

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| Context (biographical, Romantic attitudes, social/historical etc)  | Wordsworth wrote the poem whilst on a walk near Alford village in 1978. This was just after he had published the “Lyrical Ballards”, and before writing “Tintern Abbey”. At this time of his life, he began to become disillusioned with the French Revolution, shocked at the cruelty and violence of it. Industrialisation had also led to urbanisation and the destruction of nature, widely condemned by Wordsworth and the Romantics. Wordsworth saw his role as a poet to mediate between nature and the common man. |
| A poem about… (Interpretations, key Romantic themes, nature, mortality) | The speaker’s mediations over man’s relationship with nature, and how through the loss of the intimacy of this relationship, man has wronged himself – “what man has made of man”. Hence, concerned with nature as a muse and as a cleanser as well as with man’s fall through the loss of appreciation of nature. A tension exists between the harmony of nature and the disharmony of man. |
| Speaker (who? talking to whom? attitude to subject- ironic, reverent etc) | Solitary speaker “in a grove” and close to nature, observing “her fair works” causing him to lament the lack of pleasure man gains from nature and the loss of the “nature link” to the “human soul”.Ironic since struggles himself to gain pleasure “must think, do all I can, that there was pleasure there” portraying the human flaw he laments.Intrinsic poem, mostly about the state of the speakers’ “sad thoughts” though always in connection to nature. |
| Form (sonnet, ballad, verse form, rhyme and rhythm) | Always three eight syllable lines followed by one shorter six syllable line with exceptions for second line of stanza four and five also only having six syllables – six syllable lines concerned with appreciation and pleasure of nature or a lack of this: heightens contrast and tension between harmony and disharmony. Conforming and tight form with consistent ABAB rhyme scheme perhaps to enforce harmony of nature and to make this accessible to the reader, using simple language and generalised language of “sad thoughts” and “pleasant thoughts”. |
| Overall structure (shifts, changes, climax of narrative etc) | Climax at the end through only exclamative repeating “what man has made of man!” conveying urgency in trying to make man aware of his downfall. Begins with omnipresence of natures’ “thousand blended notes” but quickly turns to “sad thoughts”, every stanza roughly following this initial celebration of nature as pastoral and ending with hint at own exclusion from this - “tis my faith” and “it seemed a thrill of pleasure” more subtle.  |
| Language (vocabulary - heightened or demotic; rhetorical features etc) | Given Wordsworth’s aim to extend nature and poetry to the ordinary man, the use of demotic and simple language of his time, intends to make the poem accessible for all – language such as “hopped and played” also underlining the innocence of nature and its like to childhood. Rhetorical ending when question is replaced with exclamation, to demand “have I not reason to lament” without need for confirmation – wanting to convey certainty of having reason.  |
| Sound effects (harsh and soft, onomatopoeia etc) | Use of onomatopoeias but subtly at the beginning with “blended notes” and “hipped” and “tufts” to add sensory texture to the poem, underlining the pleasures to be gained from nature. |
| Imagery (metaphor, simile, images etc) | Personification of nature ironic given the lack of these qualities in humanity – “every flower enjoys the air it breathes” contrary to “what man has made of man”.Sensory and visual descriptions to add to pastoral nature of “green bower” and “periwinkle trailed its wreaths”. Personification and hence capitalisation of “Nature” as power that “link[s] the human soul” to itself – image of “soul” adding to purity of connection to nature. |
| Patterns of language (semantic fields, repetitions, oppositions) | Repetition of “pleasure” and “pleasant” tension to negative emotions of “grieved” and “lament” to convey paradox of pleasure bringing pain – lack of appreciation of pleasure. Semantics of the pastoral and of nature throughout poem. |
| Punctuation and grammar (sentence length, end-stopping, caesura, verb mood - imperative, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory) | Every stanza is end stopped, with all containing a colon or semi-colon except the first and final stanza: pause always at point of division between celebrating nature and changed tone to lamenting “what man has made of man”. Use of imperative that “I must think, do all I can” implication of duty, perhaps of the poet, to explore the “pleasure there”.Every stanza single long sentence adds to structure that celebrates new aspect of nature from “blended notes” to “fair works” to “primrose tufts” to “the birds”, “budding twigs” and ending with “this belief from heaven”.  |
| Links to other poems | Rime of the Ancient Mariner – man’s folly and fall, man’s relationship to nature Tintern Abbey – pastoral nature, intrinsic speaker To Autumn – nature presented as saturated and full, effect of nature on speakerGrecian Urn – pastoral nature, nature out of reach (“cold pastoral”)Ode to the West wind – nature and speaker relationship |