**English Romantic Verse** One-Page Guides

**Poet: Keats**

Poet: Sonnet on the Sea

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| Context (biographical, Romantic attitudes, social/historical etc)  | Written in 1817 while staying on the Isle of Wight, a year before he produced the great Odes. |
| A poem about… (Interpretations, key Romantic themes, nature, mortality) | Nature’s power to heal; to act as a counterpoint to the ‘uproar’ of life; speaker invests nature with human, emotive qualities (‘temper’) |
| Speaker (who? talking to whom? attitude to subject- ironic, reverent etc) | Someone with strong opinions, but not identified. No use of first person in the poem so perhaps not important. Same as Ode on Melancholy, but different to Nightingale where we know plenty about the speaker.Strong sense of speaker advising the implied reader (‘Oh ye!... Feast them… etc). Dramatic (‘Oh ye!’) |
| Form (sonnet, ballad, verse form, rhyme and rhythm) | Petrarchan sonnet, with ABBA ABBA CDCDCD. The first two quatrains go together, but are distinct, perhaps both moving in and out, like the sea, from soft ‘whisperings’ to ‘mighty swell’ back to ‘old shadowy sound’ in the first; in the second from ‘gentle temper’ back to ‘winds of heaven’.The expected iambic rhythm broken (e.g. ‘gluts’ - which is violent sounding and designed to show sudden violence of sea is a stressed first syllable; or the urgency of the commands ‘feast’ and ‘sit’ later in the poem).Iambic in lines when sea is presented as gentle (e.g. ‘That scarcely…. fell’)Last three syllables all stressed?  |
| Overall structure (shifts, changes, climax of narrative etc) | Octave (1st 8 lines) describes the states and moods of the sea. Sense of wonder and mystery/magic (with allusion to Hecate) at sea’s majesty, power and gentleness.Sestet (last 6 lines) answers these statements with a series of commands – nature can act as a solace and release from modern life. It may allow deep thought (‘brood’) and may even enchant you (‘sea-nymphs’) |
| Language (vocabulary - heightened or demotic; rhetorical features etc) | Some unusual language, such as the classical allusion (‘Hecate’, ‘sea nymphs’) and some of the verbs ‘vex’d’, ‘dinn’d’, ‘quir’d’, ‘gluts’ (an archaic form of ‘choir’) At times language is simple, to fit the simple emotion of the sea at its most gentle. |
| Sound effects (harsh and soft, onomatopoeia etc) | Soft sounds mimic the sea’s sounds (sibilant ‘whisperings’, for example). ‘Glut’ perhaps mimicking the sucking sound of a sea in a hollow or cave.‘Uproar rude’ probably all syllables stressed, to match force of the speaker’s criticism of modern life. |
| Imagery (metaphor, simile, images etc) | Sea is personified throughout – typical of Romantics to invest human emotion in natural world.It ‘keeps eternal whisperings’, ‘gluts’, is in ‘gentle temper’. |
| Patterns of language (semantic fields, repetitions, oppositions) | Words related to sound (‘whisperings’, ‘sound’ of the sea, mostly positive, and ‘dinn’d’, ‘uproar rude’, ‘cloying melody’ negative. Ends on positive ‘quir’d’, giving sea magical quality?) |
| Punctuation and grammar (sentence length, end-stopping, caesura, verb mood - imperative, declarative, interrogative, exclamatory) | No caesura (except comma, fittingly after ‘start’) and lots of run-on lines – to give fluid, liquid quality of the sea – to convey its freedom perhaps. Statements at first, turn to urgent commands and exclamations – highly emotive sestet. |
| Links to other poems | *Lines Written in Early Spring* – nature and mankind contrasted; *Tintern Abbey* – nature as teacher and guide |