

ABOUT THE POET AND HIS POETRY

William Blake

William Blake was born in London on November 28, 1757, to James, a hosier, and Catherine Blake. Two of his six siblings died in infancy. From early childhood, Blake spoke of having visions—at four he saw God “put his head to the window”; around age nine, while walking dathrough the countryside, he saw a tree filled with angels. Although his parents tried to discourage him from “lying,” they did observe that he was different from his peers and did not force him to attend conventional school. He learned to read and write at home. At age ten, Blake expressed a wish to become a painter, so his parents sent him to drawing school. Two years later, Blake began writing poetry. When he turned fourteen, he apprenticed with an engraver because art school proved too costly. One of Blake’s assignments as apprentice was to sketch the tombs at Westminster Abbey, exposing him to a variety of Gothic styles from which he would draw inspiration throughout his career. After his seven-year term ended, he studied briefly at the Royal Academy.

In 1782, he married an illiterate woman named Catherine Boucher. Blake taught her to read and to write, and also instructed her in draftsmanship. Later, she helped him print the illuminated poetry for which he is remembered today; the couple had no children. In 1784 he set up a printshop with a friend and former fellow apprentice, James Parker, but this venture failed after several years. For the remainder of his life, Blake made a meager living as an engraver and illustrator for books and magazines. In addition to his wife, Blake also began training his younger brother Robert in drawing, painting, and engraving. Robert fell ill during the winter of 1787 and succumbed, probably to consumption. As Robert died, Blake saw his brother’s spirit rise up through the ceiling, “clapping its hands for joy.” He believed that Robert’s spirit continued to visit him and later claimed that in a dream Robert taught him the printing method that he used in *Songs of Innocence* and other “illuminated” works.

Blake’s first printed work, *Poetical Sketches* (1783), is a collection of apprentice verse, mostly imitating classical models. The poems protest against war, tyranny, and King George III’s treatment of the American colonies. He published his most popular collection, *Songs of Innocence*, in 1789 and followed it, in 1794, with *Songs of Experience*. Some readers interpret *Songs of Innocence* in a straightforward fashion, considering it primarily a children’s book, but others have found hints at parody or critique in its seemingly naive and simple lyrics. Both books of *Songs* were printed in an illustrated format reminiscent of illuminated manuscripts. The text and illustrations were printed from copper plates, and each picture was finished by hand in watercolors.

Blake was a nonconformist who associated with some of the leading radical thinkers of his day, such as Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft. In defiance of 18th-century neoclassical conventions, he privileged imagination over reason in the creation of both his poetry and images, asserting that ideal forms should be constructed not from observations of nature but from inner visions. He declared in one poem, “I must create a system or be enslaved by another man’s.” Works such as “The French Revolution” (1791), “America, a Prophecy” (1793), “Visions of the Daughters of Albion” (1793), and “Europe, a Prophecy” (1794) express his opposition to the English monarchy, and to 18th-century political and social tyranny in general. Theological tyranny is the subject of *The Book of Urizen* (1794). In the prose work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-93), he

satirized oppressive authority in church and state, as well as the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish philosopher whose ideas once attracted his interest.

In 1800 Blake moved to the seacoast town of Felpham, where he lived and worked until 1803 under the patronage of William Hayley. He taught himself Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Italian, so that he could read classical works in their original language. In Felpham he experienced profound spiritual insights that prepared him for his mature work, the great visionary epics written and etched between about 1804 and 1820. *Milton* (1804-08), *Vala, or The Four Zoas* (1797; rewritten after 1800), and *Jerusalem* (1804-20) have neither traditional plot, characters, rhyme, nor meter. They envision a new and higher kind of innocence, the human spirit triumphant over reason.

Blake believed that his poetry could be read and understood by common people, but he was determined not to sacrifice his vision in order to become popular. In 1808 he exhibited some of his watercolors at the Royal Academy, and in May of 1809 he exhibited his works at his brother James's house. Some of those who saw the exhibit praised Blake's artistry, but others thought the paintings "hideous" and more than a few called him insane. Blake's poetry was not well known by the general public, but he was mentioned in *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland*, published in 1816. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had been lent a copy of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, considered Blake a "man of Genius," and Wordsworth made his own copies of several songs. Charles Lamb sent a copy of "The Chimney Sweeper" from *Songs of Innocence* to James Montgomery for his *Chimney-Sweeper's Friend, and Climbing Boys' Album* (1824), and Robert Southey (who, like Wordsworth, considered Blake insane) attended Blake's exhibition and included the "Mad Song" from *Poetical Sketches* in his miscellany, *The Doctor* (1834-1837).

Blake's final years, spent in great poverty, were cheered by the admiring friendship of a group of younger artists who called themselves "the Ancients." In 1818 he met John Linnell, a young artist who helped him financially and also helped to create new interest in his work. It was Linnell who, in 1825, commissioned him to design illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*, the cycle of drawings that Blake worked on until his death in 1827.

In his *Life of William Blake* (1863) Alexander Gilchrist warned his readers that Blake "neither wrote nor drew for the many, hardly for work'y-day men at all, rather for children and angels; himself 'a divine child,' whose playthings were sun, moon, and stars, the heavens and the earth." Yet Blake himself believed that his writings were of national importance and that they could be understood by a majority of men. Far from being an isolated mystic, Blake lived and worked in the teeming metropolis of London at a time of great social and political change that profoundly influenced his writing. After the peace established in 1762, the British Empire seemed secure, but the storm wave begun with the American Revolution in 1775 and the French Revolution in 1789 changed forever the way men looked at their relationship to the state and to the established church. Poet, painter, and engraver, Blake worked to bring about a change both in the social order and in the minds of men.

One may wonder how a child born in moderate surroundings would become such an original artist and powerful writer. Unlike many well-known writers of his day, Blake was born into a family of moderate means. His father, James, was a hosier, one who sells stockings, gloves, and haberdashery, and the family lived at 28 Broad Street in London in an unpretentious but "respectable" neighborhood. Blake was born on 28 November 1757. In all, seven children were born to James and Catherine Harmitage Blake, but only five survived infancy. Blake seems to have been closest to his youngest brother, Robert, who died while yet young.

By all accounts Blake had a pleasant and peaceful childhood, made even more pleasant by his skipping any

formal schooling. As a young boy he wandered the streets of London and could easily escape to the surrounding countryside. Even at an early age, however, his unique mental powers would prove disquieting. According to Gilchrist, on one ramble he was startled to "see a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars." His parents were not amused at such a story, and only his mother's pleadings prevented him from receiving a beating.

His parents did, however, encourage his artistic talents, and the young Blake was enrolled at the age of ten in Pars' drawing school. The expense of continued formal training in art, however, was a prohibitive one, and the family decided that at the age of fourteen William would be apprenticed to a master engraver. At first his father took him to William Ryland, a highly respected engraver. William, however, resisted the arrangement telling his father, "I do not like the man's face: it looks as if he will live to be hanged!" The grim prophecy was to come true twelve years later. Instead of Ryland the family settled on a lesser-known engraver but a man of considerable talents, James Basire. Basire seems to have been a good master, and Blake was a good student of the craft. Blake was later to be especially grateful to Basire for sending the young student to Westminster Abbey to make drawings of monuments Basire was commissioned to engrave. The vast Gothic dimensions of Westminster and the haunting presence of the tombs of kings affected Blake's romantic sensibilities and were to provide fertile ground for his active imagination.

At the age of twenty-one Blake left Basire's apprenticeship and enrolled for a time in the newly formed Royal Academy. It was as a journeyman engraver, however, that Blake earned his living. Booksellers employed him to engrave illustrations for publications ranging from novels such as *Don Quixote* to serials such as *Ladies' Magazine*.

One incident at this time affected Blake deeply. In June of 1780 riots broke out in London incited by the anti-Catholic preaching of Lord George Gordon but also by resistance to continued war against the American colonists. Houses, churches, and prisons were burned by uncontrollable mobs bent on destruction. On one evening, whether by design or by accident, Blake found himself at the front of the mob that burned Newgate prison. These images of violent destruction and unbridled revolution gave Blake powerful material for works such as *Europe* (1794) and *America* (1793).

Not all of the young man's interests were confined to art and politics. After one ill-fated romance, Blake met Catherine Boucher, an attractive and compassionate woman who took pity on Blake's tales of being spurned. After a year's courtship the couple were married on 18 August 1782. The parish registry shows that Catherine, like many women of her class, could not sign her own name. Blake soon taught her to read and to write, and under Blake's tutoring she also became an accomplished draftsman, helping him in the execution of his designs.

By all accounts the marriage was a successful one, but no children were born to the Blakes. Catherine also managed the household affairs and was undoubtedly of great help in making ends meet on Blake's always limited income.

Blake's friend John Flaxman introduced Blake to the bluestocking Harriet Mathew, wife of the Rev. Henry Mathew and a celebrated lady of fashion whose drawing room was often a meeting place for artists and musicians. There Blake gained favor by reciting and even singing his early poems. Thanks to the support of Flaxman and Mrs. Mathew, a thin volume of poems was published under the title *Poetical Sketches* (1783). Many of these poems are imitations of classical models, much like the sketches of models of antiquity the young artist made to learn his trade. Even here, however, one sees signs of Blake's protest against war and the

tyranny of kings. David Erdman argues that the ballad "Gwin, King of Norway" is a protest against King George's treatment of the American colonies, a subject Blake treated more extensively in America (1793). Only about fifty copies of Poetical Sketches are known to have been printed. Blake's financial enterprises also did not fare well. In 1784, after his father's death, Blake used part of the money he inherited to set up shop as a printseller with his friend James Parker. The Blakes moved to 27 Broad Street, next door to the family home and close to Blake's brothers. The business did not do well, however, and the Blakes soon moved out.

Of more concern to Blake was the deteriorating health of his favorite brother, Robert. Blake tended to his brother in his illness and according to Gilchrist watched the spirit of his brother escape his body in his death: "At the last solemn moment, the visionary eyes beheld the released spirit ascend heaven ward through the matter-of-fact ceiling, 'clapping its hands for joy.'"

Blake always felt the spirit of Robert lived with him. He even announced that it was Robert who informed him how to illustrate his poems in "illuminated writing." Blake's technique was to produce his text and design on a copper plate with an impervious liquid. The plate was then dipped in acid so that the text and design remained in relief. That plate could be used to print on paper, and the final copy would be then hand colored.

After experimenting with this method in a series of aphorisms entitled *There is No Natural Religion and All Religions are One* (1788?), Blake designed the series of plates for the poems entitled *Songs of Innocence* and dated the title page 1789. Blake continued to experiment with the process of illuminated writing and in 1794 combined the early poems with companion poems entitled *Songs of Experience*. The title page of the combined set announces that the poems show "the two Contrary States of the Human Soul." Clearly Blake meant for the two series of poems to be read together, and Robert Gleckner has pointed out in reading the poems one should always consider the point of view of the speaker of the poem and the context of the situation.

The introductory poems to each series display Blake's dual image of the poet as both a "piper" and a "Bard." As man goes through various stages of innocence and experience in the poems, the poet also is in different stages of innocence and experience. The pleasant lyrical aspect of poetry is shown in the role of the "piper" while the more somber prophetic nature of poetry is displayed by the stern Bard.

In the "Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence*, Blake presents the poet in the form of a simple shepherd: "Piping down the valleys wild / Piping songs of pleasant glee." The frontispiece displays a young shepherd simply dressed and holding a pipe, and it is clear Blake is establishing a pastoral world. The "piping songs" are poems of pure pleasure.

The songs of pleasure are interrupted by the visionary appearance of an angel who asks for songs of more seriousness:

"Pipe a song about a Lamb!"

So I piped with merry cheer.

"Piper, pipe that song again."

So I piped: he wept to hear.

The piper is no longer playing his songs for his own enjoyment. Now the piper is in the position of a poet playing at the request of an appreciative audience. The "song about a Lamb" suggests a poem about the "Lamb of God," Christ.

The child commands that the poet not keep the songs for himself but share them with his audience:

"Piper sit thee down and write

In a book that all may read."

So he vanish'd from my sight

And I pluck'd a hollow reed.

The "book" is *Songs of Innocence*, which is designed in a form that "all may read." The simple piper is now a true poet. He no longer writes only for his own enjoyment but for the delight of his audience. The piper is inspired by the directions of the child, and the poet is inspired by his vision of his audience. The child vanishes as the author interiorizes his vision of his audience and makes it a central part of his work. Immediately after the child's disappearance, the author begins the actual physical composition of the poem by plucking the hollow reed for his poem. At the end of the poem the poet is no longer the simple shepherd of Arcadia playing for his own amusement. Now he writes his poems for "Every child" of England.

The "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience* is a companion to the earlier poem, and, as a poem written in the state of experience, it presents a different view of the nature of the poet and his relation to his audience.

The strident tone of the first stanza provides a marked contrast to the gentle piping of the first poem and reminds us that we are now in the state of experience:

Hear the voice of the Bard!

Who Present, Past and Future sees:

Whose ears have heard

The Holy Word

That walk'd among the ancient trees.

This is not an invocation, but a direct command to the reader to sit up and pay attention. Instead of playing at the request of his audience, the poet now demands that his reader listen to him. The speaker now has authority because of what he has heard. The voice of the poet is that of the ancient Bard and that also of the biblical prophet who has heard the "Holy Word," the word of God. Assuming the role of the prophet and the Bard gives the modern poet a sense of biblical authority to speak on matters sacred and profane.

With his authority, the Bard is more willing to instruct his audience than is the piper. The Bard repeats the call of the Holy Word to fallen man. The message repeated by the Bard is that man still "might control" the world of

nature and bring back the "fallen light" of vision.

Blake presents two sides of his view of the poet in these introductory poems. Neither one should be dismissed in favor of the other. The poet is both a pleasant piper playing at the request of his audience and a stern Bard lecturing an entire nation. In part this is Blake's interpretation of the ancient dictum that poetry should both delight and instruct. More important, for Blake the poet is a man who speaks both from the personal experience of his own vision and from the "inherited" tradition of ancient Bards and prophets who carried the Holy Word to the nations.

In reading any of the poems, one has to be aware of the mental "state" of the speaker of the poems. In some cases the speakers address the same issue, but from entirely different perspectives. The child of "The Chimney Sweeper" in Songs of Innocence lives in deplorable conditions and is clearly exploited by those around him: "So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep." Yet in his childish state he explains away his misery with a dream of a promised afterlife where God will be his father and he will "never want joy." The same issue of child exploitation is addressed in "The Chimney Sweeper" of Songs of Experience. The speaker is also a child, but one who understands the social forces that have reduced him to misery:

"And because I am happy, & dance & sing

They think they have done me no injury.

And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King.

Who make up a heaven of our misery."

In each poem the reader can see what the speaker can not always see because of his unique perspective: religion and government share a responsibility in the persecution of children.

The famous companion poems "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" are also written on the same subject: man's conception of God. Yet, how man understands God depends on man's view of God's divinity. In "The Lamb" the speaker makes the traditional association between a lamb and the "Lamb of God," Christ:

For he calls himself a Lamb:

He is meek & he is mild;

He became a little child:

I a child & thou a lamb.

The speaker sees God in terms he can understand. God is gentle and kind and very much like us. The close association between the "I," "child," and "lamb" suggests that all men share in the same spiritual brotherhood.

The speaker in "The Tyger" also sees God in terms he can understand, but he sees him from a different perspective. The raging violence of the animal forces him to ask what kind of God could create such terror:

When the stars threw down their spears,

And water'd heaven with their tears,

Did he smile his work to see?

Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

The answer, of course, is never given, but again the reader should be able to perceive more than the speaker of the poem. God did make both the lamb and the tyger, and his nature contains both the gentleness of the lamb and the violence of the tyger. Neither perspective is true by itself; both have to be understood.

The two states of innocence and experience are not always clearly separate in the poems, and one can see signs of both states in many poems. The companion poems titled "Holy Thursday" are on the same subject, the forced marching of poor children to St. Paul's Cathedral in London. The speaker in the state of innocence approves warmly of the progression of children:

'Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean

The children walking two & two in red & blue & green

Grey headed beadles walkd before with wands as white as snow

Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow[.]

The brutal irony is that in this world of truly "innocent" children there are evil men who repress the children, round them up like so many herd of cattle, and force them to show their piety. In this state of innocence, experience is very much present.

The speaker of the companion "Holy Thursday" presents an entirely different perspective:

Is this a holy thing to see,

In a rich and fruitful land,

Babes reduc'd to misery,

Fed with cold and usurous hand?

The speaker of experience understands that the children have been brutalized and places the blame for this condition not just on the "Grey headed beadles" who have direct responsibility for the children but on the country at large. In a "rich and fruitful land" like England, it is appalling that children are allowed to suffer:

For where-e'er the sun does shine,

And where-e'er the rain does fall:

Babe can never hunger there,

Nor poverty the mind appall[.]

If experience has a way of creeping into the world of innocence, innocence also has a way of creeping into experience. The golden land where the "sun does shine" and the "rain does fall" is a land of bountiful goodness and innocence. But even here in this blessed land, there are children starving. The sharp contrast between the two conditions makes the social commentary all the more striking and supplies the energy of the poem.

The contrast between innocence and experience is also apparent in another illuminated book produced in 1789, *The Book of Thel*. Thel is a maiden who laments the passing of youth and of innocence: "O life of this our spring! why fades the lotus of the water, / Why fade these children of the spring, born but to smile & fall?" Thel questions elements of nature, like the Lilly of the Valley and the Cloud, that are beautiful but transitory. Yet each understands that the transitory nature of beauty is necessary. The Cloud answers Thel's complaint by saying that "Every thing that lives / Lives not alone nor for itself." Thel is innocent but when one is stuck in a state of innocence there can be no growth.

Thel is allowed to enter into the world of experience, and she is startled by a voice from her own grave:

"Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy?

Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?"

The Virgin is shocked by this peek into her own sexuality and mortality and runs back to the quiet vales of Har "with a shriek." Blake satirizes those who are unable to see the necessary connection between innocence and experience, the spiritual world and the physical world. Thel's world of soft watercolors is not enough. She cannot understand that even the lowly worm is loved by God and serves his part in creating life.

The storming of the Bastille in Paris in 1789 and the agonies of the French Revolution sent shock waves through England. Some hoped for a corresponding outbreak of liberty in England while others feared a breakdown of the social order. In much of his writing Blake argues against the monarchy. In his early *Tiriel* (written circa 1789) Blake traces the fall of a tyrannical king.

Politics was surely often the topic of conversation at the publisher Joseph Johnson's house, where Blake was often invited. There Blake met important literary and political figures such as William Godwin, Joseph Priestly, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Paine. According to one legend Blake is even said to have saved Paine's life by warning him of his impending arrest. Whether or not that is true, it is clear that Blake was familiar with some of the leading radical thinkers of his day.

In *The French Revolution* Blake celebrates the rise of democracy in France and the fall of the monarchy. King Louis represents a monarchy that is old and dying. The sick king is lethargic and unable to act: "From my window I see the old mountains of France, like aged men, fading away." The "old mountains" of monarchy are doomed to collapse under the pressure of the people and their representatives in the assembly. The "voice of the people" demands the removal of the king's troops from Paris, and their departure at the end of the first book signals the triumph of democracy.

On the title page for book one of *The French Revolution* Blake announces that it is "A Poem in Seven Books," but none of the other books has been found. The "Advertisement" to the poem promises "The remaining Books of the Poem are finished, and will be published in their Order." The first book was set in type in 1791, but exists only in proof copies. Johnson never published the poem, perhaps because of fear of prosecution, or perhaps because Blake himself withdrew it from publication. Johnson did have cause to be nervous. Erdman points out that in the same year booksellers were thrown in jail for selling the works of Thomas Paine.

In America (1793) Blake also addresses the idea of revolution, but the poem is less a commentary on the actual revolution in America as it is a commentary on universal principles that are at work in any revolution. The fiery figure of Orc represents all revolutions:

The fiery joy, that Urizen perverted to ten commands,

What night he led the starry hosts thro' the wide wilderness,

That stony law I stamp to dust; and scatter religion abroad

To the four winds as a torn book, & none shall gather the leaves.

The same force that causes the colonists to rebel against King George is the force that overthrows the perverted rules and restrictions of established religions.

The revolution in America suggests to Blake a similar revolution in England. In the poem the king, like the ancient pharaohs of Egypt, sends pestilence to America to punish the rebels, but the colonists are able to redirect the forces of destruction to England. Erdman suggests that Blake is thinking of the riots in England during the war and the chaotic condition of the English troops, many of whom deserted. Writing this poem in the 1790s, Blake also surely imagined the possible effect of the French Revolution on England.

Another product of the radical 1790s is *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Written and etched between 1790 and 1793, Blake's poem brutally satirizes oppressive authority in church and state. The poem also satirizes the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish philosopher whose ideas once attracted Blake's interests.

The powerful opening of the poem suggests a world of violence: "Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the burden'd air / Hungry clouds swag on the deep." The fire and smoke suggest a battlefield and the chaos of revolution. The cause of that chaos is analyzed at the beginning of the poem. The world has been turned upside down. The "just man" has been turned away from the institutions of church and state, and in his place are fools and hypocrites who preach law and order but create chaos. Those who proclaim restrictive moral rules and oppressive laws as "goodness" are in themselves evil. Hence to counteract this repression, Blake announces that he is of the "Devil's Party" that will advocate freedom and energy and gratified desire.

The "Proverbs of Hell" are clearly designed to shock the reader out of his commonplace notion of what is good and what is evil:

Prisons are built with stones of Law,

Brothels with bricks of Religion.

The pride of the peacock is the glory of God.

The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.

The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.

The nakedness of woman is the work of God.

It is the oppressive nature of church and state that has created the repulsive prisons and brothels. Sexual energy is not an inherent "evil," but the repression of that energy is. The preachers of morality fail to understand that God is in all things, including the sexual nature of men and women.

Blake is, of course, not advocating moral and political anarchy, but a proper balance of energy and its opposing force, reason. Reason is defined as "the bound or outward circumference of Energy." Reason is a vital and necessary force to define Energy, and "Without Contraries is no progression." The problem now is that the forces of reason have predominated, and the forces of energy must be let loose.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell contains many of the basic religious ideas developed in the major prophecies. Blake analyzes the development of organized religion as a perversion of ancient visions: "The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & Numerous senses could perceive." Ancient man created those gods to express his vision of the spiritual properties that he perceived in the physical world. So far, so good, but the gods began to take on a life of their own separate from man: "Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of, & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood." The "system" or organized religion keeps man from perceiving the spiritual in the physical. The gods are seen as separate from man, and an elite race of priests is developed to approach the gods: "Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast." Instead of looking for God on remote altars, Blake warns, man should look within.

In August of 1790 Blake moved from his house on Poland Street across the Thames to the area known as Lambeth. The Blakes lived in the house for ten years, and the surrounding neighborhood often becomes mythologized in his poetry. Felpham was a "lovely vale," a place of trees and open meadows, but it also contained signs of human cruelty, such as the house for orphans. At his home Blake kept busy not only with his illuminated poetry but also with the daily chore of making money. During the 1790s Blake earned fame as an engraver and was glad to receive numerous commissions.

One story told by Blake's friend Thomas Butts shows how much the Blakes enjoyed the pastoral surroundings of Lambeth. At the end of Blake's garden was a small summer house, and coming to call on the Blakes one day Butts was shocked to find the couple stark naked: "Come in!" cried Blake; "it's only Adam and Eve you know!" The Blakes were reciting passages from Paradise Lost, apparently "in character."

Sexual freedom is addressed in Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793), also written during the Lambeth period. Oothoon, the "soft soul of America," expresses her unrestricted love for Theotormon who cannot accept such love because he is limited by jealousy and possessiveness. In the poem Oothoon is raped by Bromion, and the enraged Theotormon binds the two together. The frontispiece to the book shows Bromion and Oothoon back-to-back with their arms bound together while Theotormon, hunched over, stares at the ground. The

relationship between Bromion and Oothoon is like that of marriage that is held together only by laws and not by love. In her lament to Theotormon, Oothoon denounces the destruction of a woman's sexual desire:

Till she who burns with youth, and knows no fixed lot, is bound

In spells of law to one she loathes? and must she drag the chain

Of life in weary lust?

The marriage "spells of law" bind a woman to man much like a slave is bound to a master, and marriage can become, in Mary Wollstonecraft's phrase, a form of "legalized prostitution."

Oothoon calls for the freedom of desire: "Open to joy and to delight where ever beauty appears" and even promises to provide women for Theotormon to enjoy "in lovely copulation," but Theotormon, bound by law and custom, cannot accept such love.

In 1793-1795 Blake produced a remarkable collection of illuminated works that have come to be known as the "Minor Prophecies." In *Europe* (1794), *The First Book of Urizen* (1794), *The Book of Los* (1795), *The Song of Los* (1795), and *The Book of Ahania* (1795) Blake develops the major outlines of his universal mythology. In these poems Blake examines the fall of man. In Blake's mythology man and God were once united, but man separated himself from God and became weaker and weaker as he became further divided. Throughout the poems Blake writes of the destructive aspects of this separation into warring identities.

The narrative of the universal mythology is interwoven with the historical events of Blake's own time. The execution of King Louis XVI in 1793 led to an inevitable reaction, and England soon declared war on France. England's participation in the war against France and its attempt to quell the revolutionary spirit is addressed in *Europe*. In Blake's poem liberty is repressed in England after it declares war on France:

Over the windows Thou shalt not; & over the chimneys

Fear is written

With bands of iron round their necks fasten'd into

the walls of citizens

The very force of that repression, however, will cause its opposite to appear in the revolutionary figure of Orc: "And in the vineyards of reds France appear'd the light of his fury." Orc promises fire and destruction, but he also wars against the forces of repression.

Blake's minor prophecies are, of course, much more than political commentaries. In these poems Blake analyzes the universal forces at work when repression and revolution clash. Erdman has pointed out the historical parallel in Europe between Rintrah and William Pitt, the English Prime Minister who led his country into war against France. Yet in the same poem we see references to repression from the time of Christ to the Last Judgement. Blake saw English repression of the French Revolution as but one moment in the stream of history.

The causes of that repression are examined in *The First Book of Urizen*. The word Urizen suggests "your reason" and also "horizon." He represents that part of the mind that constantly defines and limits human thought and action. In the frontispiece to the poem he is pictured as an aged man hunched over a massive book writing with both hands in other books. Behind him stand the tablets of the ten commandments, and Urizen is surely writing other "thou shalt nots" for others to follow. His twisted anatomical position shows the perversity of what should be the "human form divine."

The poem traces the birth of Urizen as a separate part of the human mind. He broods upon himself and comes to insist on laws for all to follow:

"One command, one joy, one desire

One curse, one weight, one measure,

One King, one God, one Law."

Urizen's repressive laws bring only further chaos and destruction. Like Milton's hell, Urizen's world is filled with the contradictions of darkness and fire: "no light from the fires." The lawgiver can only produce destruction, not understanding. Appalled by the chaos he himself created, Urizen fashions a world apart.

The process of separation continues as the character of Los is divided from Urizen. Los, the "Eternal Prophet," represents another power of the human mind. Los forges the creative aspects of the mind into works of art. Like Urizen he is a limiter, but the limitations he creates are productive and necessary. In the poem Los forms "nets and gins" to bring an end to Urizen's continual chaotic separation.

Los is horrified by the figure of the bound Urizen and is separated by his pity, "for Pity divides the Soul." Los undergoes a separation into a male and female form. His female form is called Enitharmon, and her creation is viewed with horror:

Eternity shudder'd when they saw

Man begetting his likeness

On his own divided image.

This separation into separate sexual identities is yet another sign of man's fall. The "Eternals" contain both male and female forms within themselves, but man is divided and weak.

Enitharmon gives birth to the fiery Orc, whose violent birth gives some hope for radical change in a fallen world, but Orc is bound in chains by Los, now a victim of jealousy. Enitharmon bears an "enormous race," but it is a race of men and women who are weak and divided and who have lost sight of eternity.

Urizen explores the fallen world, spreading his "Net of Religion" over the cities of men:

And their children wept, & built

Tombs in the desolate places,

And form'd laws of prudence, and call'd them

The eternal laws of God.

In his fallen state man has limited senses and fails to perceive the infinite. Divided from God and caught by the narrow traps of religion, he sees God only as a crude lawgiver who must be obeyed.

The Book of Los also examines man's fall and the binding of Urizen, but from the perspective of Los whose task it is to place a limit on the chaotic separation begun by Urizen. The decayed world is again one of ignorance where there is "no light from the fires." From this chaos the bare outlines of the human form begin to appear:

Many ages of groans, till there grew

Branchy forms organizing the Human

Into finite inflexible organs.

The human senses are pale imitations of the true senses that allow one to perceive eternity. Urizen's world where man now lives is spoken of as an "illusion" because it masks the spiritual world that is everywhere present.

In The Song of Los, Los sings of the decayed state of man, where the arbitrary laws of Urizen have become institutionalized:

Thus the terrible race of Los & Enitharmon gave

Laws & Religions to the sons of Har, binding them more

And more to Earth, closing and restraining,

Till a Philosophy of five Senses was complete.

Urizen wept & gave it into the hands of Newton & Locke.

The "philosophy of the five senses" espoused by scientists and philosophers argues that the world and the mind are like industrial machines operating by fixed laws but devoid of imagination, creativity, or any spiritual life. Blake condemns this materialistic view of the world espoused in the writings of Newton and Locke.

Although man is in a fallen state, the end of the poem points to the regeneration that is to come:

Orc, raging in European darkness,

Arose like a pillar of fire above the Alps,

Like a serpent of fiery flame!

The coming of Orc is likened not only to the fires of revolution sweeping Europe, but also to the final apocalypse when the "Grave shrieks with delight."

The separation of man is also examined in The Book of Ahania, which Blake later incorporated in Vala, or The Four Zoas. In The Book of Ahania Urizen is further divided into male and female forms. Urizen is repulsed by his feminine shadow that is called Ahania:

He groan'd anguish'd, & called her Sin,

Kissing her and weeping over her;

Then hid her in darkness, in silence,

Jealous, tho' she was invisible.

Blake satirizes the biblical and Miltonic associations of sin and lust. "Ahania" in Blake's poem is only a "sin" in that she is given that name. Urizen, the lawgiver, can not accept the liberating aspects of sexual pleasure. At the end of the poem, Ahania laments the lost pleasures of eternity:

"Where is my golden palace?

Where my ivory bed?

Where the joy of my morning hour?

Where the sons of eternity singing."

The physical pleasures of sexual union are celebrated as an entrance to a spiritual state. The physical union of man and woman is sign of the spiritual union that is to come.

At the same time as he was writing these individual poems that center on aspects of man's fall, Blake was also composing an epic poem on the fall of man into separate identities. Blake originally called the poem Vala and later changed the name to The Four Zoas. He worked on the poem for a number of years but never completed it. It survives in manuscript form with rough designs for illustrations, but it never became one of the "illuminated books."

The Four Zoas is subtitled "The Torments of Love and Jealousy in the Death and Judgement of Albion the Ancient Man," and the poem develops Blake's myth of Albion, who represents both the country of England and the unification of all men. Albion is composed of "Four Mighty Ones": Tharmas, Urthona, Urizen, and Luvah. Originally, in "Eden," these four exist in the unity of "The Universal Brotherhood." At this early time all parts of man lived in perfect harmony, but now they are fallen into warring camps. The poem traces the changes in Albion:

His fall into Division & his Resurrection to Unity:

His fall into the Generation of decay & death, & his

Regeneration by the Resurrection from the dead.

The poem begins with Tharmas and examines the fall of each aspect of man's identity. The poem progresses from disunity toward unity as each Zoa moves toward final unification.

In the apocalyptic "Night the Ninth," the evils of oppression are overturned in the turmoil of the Last Judgment:

The thrones of Kings are shaken, they have lost their robes & crowns

The poor smite their oppressors, they awake up to the harvest.

The final overthrow of all kings and tyrants that earthly revolutions tried but failed to achieve will be accomplished on the last day. The "harvest" imagery is from the Book of Revelations and represents the process of gathering and discarding that marks the progress of man's soul on the last day.

As dead men are rejuvenated, Christ, the "Lamb of God," is brought back to life and sheds the evils of institutionalized religions:

Thus shall the male & female live the life of Eternity,

Because the Lamb of God Creates himself a bride & wife

That we his Children evermore may live in Jerusalem

Which now descendeth out of heaven, a City, yet a Woman

Mother of myriads redeem'd & born in her spiritual palaces,

By a New Spiritual birth Regenerated from Death.

The heavenly City of Jerusalem is the true form of God's church. The earthly city of Jerusalem and the numerous forms of religions are but pale imitations of that true religion where God and the church are joined. In that City man's separate identities are reunited, and man is reunited with God.

Very little of Blake's poetry of the 1790s was known to the general public. His reputation as an artist was mixed. Response to his art ranged from praise to derision, but he did gain some fame as an engraver. He received several commissions, the most important probably being his illustrations to Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*. In 1795 the publisher and bookseller Richard Edwards commissioned Blake to illustrate the then-famous poems of Young. Blake produced 537 watercolor designs of which 43 were selected for engraving. The first volume of a projected four-volume series was published in 1797. However, the project did not prove financially successful, and no further volumes were published. After the disappointment of that project, Blake's friend and admirer Flaxman commissioned Blake to illustrate the poems of Thomas Gray. Blake painted 116 watercolors and completed the project in 1798. Blake was also aided by his friend Thomas Butts, who commissioned a series of biblical paintings. His commissions did not produce much in the way of income, but

Blake never seems to have been discouraged. In 1799 Blake wrote to George Cumberland, "I laugh at Fortune & Go on & on."

Because of his monetary woes, Blake often had to depend on the benevolence of patrons of the arts. This sometimes led to heated exchanges between the independent artist and the wealthy patron. Dr. John Trusler was one such patron whom Blake failed to please. Dr. Trusler was something of a dabbler in a variety of fields. Aside from being a clergyman, he was a student of medicine, a bookseller, and the author of such works as *Hogarth Moralized* (1768), *The Way to be Rich and Respectable* (1750?), and *A Sure Way to Lengthen Life with Vigor* (circa 1819). Blake's friend Cumberland had recommended Blake to Trusler in hopes of providing some needed income for Blake. Blake, however, found himself unable to follow the clergyman's wishes: "I attempted every morning for a fortnight together to follow your Dictate, but when I found my attempts were in vain, resolv'd to shew an independence which I know will please an Author better than slavishly following the track of another, however admirable that track may be. At any rate, my Excuse must be: I could not do otherwise; it was out of my power!" Dr. Trusler was not convinced and replied that he found Blake's "Fancy" to be located in the "World of Spirits" and not in this world.

Blake's rebuttal is a classic defense of his own principles. To the charge that Blake needed someone to "elucidate" his idea, Blake replied with characteristic wrath: "That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients consider'd what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction, because it rouses the faculties to act." Blake relies on a basic principle of rhetoric that is evident in his writing: it is often best to leave some things unsaid so that the reader must employ his imagination. To the charge that his visions were not of this world, Blake replied that he had seen his visions in this world, but not all men see alike: "As a man is, So he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers. You certainly Mistake, when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination." The problem then is not the location of Blake's subjects, but the relative ability of man to perceive. If Dr. Trusler could not understand Blake's drawings, the problem was his inability to see with the imagination.

Dr. Trusler was not the only patron that tried to make Blake conform to popular tastes. Blake's stormy relation to his erstwhile friend and patron William Hayley directly affected the writing of the epics *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. When Blake met him Hayley was a well-known man of letters who had produced several popular volumes of poetry. His *Triumphs of Temper* (1781), which admonishes women to control their tempers in order to be good wives, was very popular. In 1800 under Hayley's promptings Blake moved from London to the village of Felpham, where Hayley lived. It was expected that Blake would receive numerous engraving commissions, and his financial problems would disappear.

Hayley did provide Blake with some small commissions. Blake began work on a series of eighteen "Heads of the Poets" for Hayley's library and worked on the engravings for Hayley's *Life of Cowper* (1802). Hayley also set Blake to work on a series of small portraits, but Blake soon bristled under the watchful eye of his patron. In January of 1803 Blake wrote to Butts that "I find on all hands great objections to my doing anything but the meer drudgery of business, & intimations that if I do not confine myself to this, I shall not live; this has always pursu'd me." In the same letter Blake argued that his duty to his art must take precedence to the necessity of making money: "But if we fear to do the dictates of our Angels, & tremble at the Tasks set before us; if we refuse to do Spiritual Acts because of natural Fears of natural Desires! Who can describe the dismal torments of such a state!"

The "Spiritual Acts" Blake referred to include the writing of his epic poetry despite Hayley's objections. In the same month Blake wrote to his brother James that he is determined "To leave This Place" and that he can no longer accept Hayley's patronage: "The truth is, As a Poet he is frighten'd at me & as a Painter his view & mine are opposite; he thinks to turn me into a Portrait Painter as he did Poor Romney, but this he nor all the devils in hell will never do."

Blake left Felpham in 1803 and returned to London. In April of that year he wrote to Butts that he was overjoyed to return to the city: "That I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoy'd, & that I may converse with my friends in Eternity, See Visions, Dream Dreams & Prophecy & Speak Parables unobserv'd & at liberty from the Doubts of other Mortals." In the same letter Blake refers to his epic poem Milton, composed while at Felpham: "But none can know the Spiritual Acts of my three years' Slumber on the banks of the Ocean, unless he has seen them in the Spirit, or unless he should read My long Poem descriptive of those Acts."

In a later letter to Butts, Blake declares his resolution to have Milton printed:

This Poem shall, by Divine Assistance be progressively Printed & Ornamented with Prints & given to the Public. But of this work I take care to say little to Mr H., since he is as much averse to my poetry as he is to a Chapter in the Bible. He knows that I have writ it, for I have shewn it to him, & he has read Part by his own desire & has looked with sufficient contempt to inhance my opinion of it. But I do not wish to irritate by seeming too obstinate in Poetic pursuits. But if all the World should set their faces against This, I have Orders to set my face like flint (Ezekiel iiiC, 9v) against their faces, & my forehead against their foreheads.

Blake's letter reveals much of his attitude toward his patron and toward his readers. Blake believed that his poetry could be read and understood by the general public, but he was determined not to sacrifice his vision in order to become popular. Men of letters such as Hayley would not be allowed to dictate his art. Blake compares himself to the prophet Ezekiel, whom the Lord made strong to warn the Israelites of their wickedness. Blake's images of a stern prophet locked head to head with his adversary is a fitting picture of part of Blake's relation with his reader. Blake knew that his poetry would be derided by some readers. In Milton Blake tells us that "the idiot reasoner laughs at the Man of Imagination," and in the face of that laughter Blake remained resolute.

In his "slumber on the banks of the Ocean," Blake, surrounded by financial worries and hounded by a patron who could not appreciate his art, reflected on the value of visionary poetry. Milton, which Blake started to engrave in 1804 (probably finishing in 1808), is a poem that constantly draws attention to itself as a work of literature. Its ostensible subject is the poet John Milton, but the author, William Blake, also creates a character for himself in his own poem. Blake examines the entire range of mental activity involved in the art of poetry from the initial inspiration of the poet to the reception of his vision by the reader of the poem. Milton examines as part of its subject the very nature of poetry: what it means to be a poet, what a poem is, and what it means to be a reader of poetry.

In the preface to the poem, Blake issues a battle cry to his readers to reject what is merely fashionable in art:

Rouze up, O Young Men of the New Age! set your foreheads against the ignorant Hirelings! For we have Hirelings in the Camp, the Court & the University, who would, if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War. Painters! on you I call. Sculptors! Architects! suffer not the fashionable Fools to depress your powers by the prices they pretend to give for contemptible works, or the expensive advertizing boasts that they make of such works; believe Christ & his Apostles that there is a Class of men whose whole delight is in Destroying. We do not want either Greek or Roman Models

if we are but just & true to our own imaginations, those Worlds of Eternity in which we shall live for ever in Jesus our Lord.

In attacking the "ignorant Hirelings" in the "Camp, the Court & the University," Blake repeats a familiar dissenting cry against established figures in English society. Blake's insistence on being "just & true to our own Imaginations" places a special burden on the reader of his poem. For as he makes clear, Blake demands the exercise of the creative imagination from his own readers.

In the well-known lyric that follows, Blake asks for a continuation of Christ's vision in modern-day England:

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green & pleasant Land.

The poet-prophet must lead the reader away from man's fallen state and toward a revitalized state where man can perceive eternity.

"Book the First" contains a poem-within-a-poem, a "Bard's Prophetic Song." The Bard's Song describes man's fall from a state of vision. We see man's fall in the ruined form of Albion as a representative of all men and in the fall of Palamabron from his proper position as prophet to a nation. Interwoven into this narrative are the Bard's addresses to the reader, challenges to the reader's senses, descriptions of contemporary events and locations in England, and references to the life of William Blake. Blake is at pains to show us that his mythology is not something far removed from us but is part of our day to day life. Blake describes the reader's own fall from vision and the possibility of regaining those faculties necessary for vision.

The climax of the Bard's Song is the Bard's sudden vision of the "Holy Lamb of God": "Glory! Glory! to the Holy lamb of God: / I touch the heavens as an instrument to glorify the Lord." The vision of the "Lamb of God" is traditional in apocalyptic literature. In this case the Bard's final burst of vision is important not only for its content, but also for its placement in the poem. The Bard's sudden vision of the Lamb of God testifies that man need not remain "in chains of the mind Lock'd up." The Bard begins by describing the fall from vision, but he ends with a vision of his own that indicates that man still possesses the powers of vision.

At the end of the Bard's Song, the Bard's power of vision is questioned much as Blake's prophecies were criticized. The Bard's spirit is incorporated into that of the poet Milton. Blake portrays Milton as a great but flawed poet who must unify the separated elements of his own identity before he can reclaim his powers of vision and become a true poet. Upon hearing the Bard's Song, Milton is moved to descend to earth and begin the process of becoming an inspired poet. It is a journey of intense self-discovery and self-examination that requires Milton to cast off "all that is not inspiration."

As Milton is presented as a man in the process of becoming a poet, Blake presents himself as a character in the poem undergoing the transformation necessary to become a poet. As Milton is inspired by the "Bard's Song," Blake is inspired by the spirit of Milton:

Then first I saw him in the Zenith as a falling star

Descending perpendicular, swift as the swallow or swift:

And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, enter'd there

But from my left foot a black cloud redounding spread over Europe.

This sudden moment of inspiration extends to the very end of book one. Like Saul on the road to Damascus, the character Blake is not fully aware of the importance of this moment of illumination. Like Milton, Blake is in the process of becoming a poet.

In a moment of sudden inspiration, Blake overcomes his "earthly lineaments" and binds "this Vegetable World" as a sandal under his foot so that he can "walk forward thro' Eternity." Blake's act of creativity enables him to merge with Los:

And I became One Man with him arising in my strength

'Twas too late now to recede. Los had enter'd into my soul:

His terrors now possess'd me whole! I arose in fury & strength!

Blake's act of faith in the world of the imagination enables him to increase his powers of perception and sets a pattern for the reader to follow. Blake's union with Los marks the end of one stage of the unification process that began at the completion of the Bard's Song. In each case faith in the power of the imagination precedes union.

Only Milton believes in the vision of the Bard's Song, and the Bard takes "refuge in Milton's bosom." As Blake realizes the insignificance of this "Vegetable World," Los merges with Blake, and he arises in "fury and strength." This ongoing belief in the hidden powers of the mind heals divisions and increases powers of perception. The Bard, Milton, Los, and Blake begin to merge into a powerful bardic union. Yet it is but one stage in a greater drive toward the unification of all men in a "Universal Brotherhood."

In the second book of Milton Blake initiates the reader into the order of poets and prophets. Blake continues the process begun in book one of taking the reader through different stages in the growth of a poet. Ololon, Milton's female form, descends to earth to unite with Milton. Her descent gives the reader a radically new view of this world. Ololon's unique perspective turns the reader's world of time and space upside down to make him see the decayed and limited nature of this world. If he can learn to see his familiar world from a new perspective, then the reader can develop his own powers of perception. Indeed "learning to see" is the first requirement of the poet.

The turning of the outside world upside down is a preliminary stage in an extensive examination of man's internal world. A searching inquiry into the self is a necessary stage in the development of the poet. Milton is told he must first look within: "Judge then of thy Own Self: thy Eternal Lineaments explore, / What is Eternal & what Changeable, & what Annihilable." Milton descends within himself and judges the separate parts of his own identity; he must distinguish between what is permanent and what transitory. Central to the process of

judging the self is a confrontation with that destructive part of man's identity Blake calls the Selfhood. The Selfhood continually hinders man's spiritual development. Only by annihilating the Selfhood, Blake believes, can one hope to participate in the visionary experience of the poem. Unless the Selfhood is annihilated, one cannot become a true poet, for the Selfhood continually blocks "the human center of creativity."

The Selfhood places two powerful forces to block our path: the socially accepted values of "love" and "reason." In its purest state love is given freely with no restrictions and no thought of return. In its fallen state love is reduced to a form of trade: "Thy love depends on him thou lovest, & on his dear loves / Depend thy pleasures, which thou hast cut off by jealousy." "Female love" is given only in exchange for love received. It is bartering in human emotions and is not love at all. When Milton denounces his own Selfhood, he gives up "Female love" and loves freely and openly.

As Blake attacks accepted notions of love, he also forces the reader to question the value society places on reason. The Seven Angels of the Presence warn that the "memory is a state Always, & the Reason is a State / Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created." Both Memory and Reason exercise the lesser powers of the mind. Nothing new can be created by the mental processes involved in memory and reason. In his struggle with Urizen, who represents man's limited power of reason, Milton seeks to cast off the deadening effect of the reasoning power and free the mind for the power of the imagination. Milton gains control of Urizen, and it is clear that in Milton's mind it is now the imagination that directs reason.

Destroying the Selfhood allows Milton to unite with others. He descends upon Blake's path and continues the process of uniting with Blake that had begun in book one. This union is also a reflection of Blake's encounter with Los that is described in book one and illustrated in book two. As was the case with seeing Los, Blake is startled by Milton's arrival. Los appears as a "terrible flaming Sun," and Milton's arrival turns Blake's path into a "solid fire, as bright as the Clear Sun." Both events describe the process of union and the assumption of the powers of the imagination necessary to become a true poet. All of this comes about through the individual annihilation of the Selfhood. To become a poet and prophet, the man of imagination must first look within and destroy the Selfhood.

Milton's final speech in praise of the virtue of self-annihilation is followed by Ololon's own annihilation of the Selfhood. She rejects her virgin Selfhood and joins with Milton:

Then as a Moony Ark Ololon descended to Felpham's Vale

In clouds of blood, in streams of gore, with dreadful thunderings

Into the fires of Intellect that rejoic'd in Felpham's Vale

Around the Starry Eight; with one accord the Starry Eight became

One Man, Jesus the Savior, wonderful!

As Noah's Ark saved lives upon earth, the "Moony Ark" of Ololon preserves man's individual nature. The Seven Eyes of God that had instructed Milton are now merged with Milton, Blake, and all men on earth. Jesus is "One Man," for he unites all men in a Universal Brotherhood. By destroying the Selfhood, we do not lose our identity but rather gain a new identity in the body of the universal brotherhood. Our entry into this union

prepares us for the promise of vision.

The apex of Blake's vision in Felpham is the brief image of the Throne of God. In Revelation, John's vision of the Throne of God is a prelude to the apocalypse itself. Similarly Blake's vision of the throne is also a prelude to the coming apocalypse. Blake's vision is abruptly cut off as the Four Zoas sound the Four Trumpets, signaling the call to judgment of the peoples of the earth. The trumpets bring to a halt Blake's vision, as he falls to the ground and returns to his mortal state. The apocalypse is still to come.

Blake's falling to the ground is not a mystic swoon, but part of his design to take himself out of the poem and leave it to the reader to continue the vision of the coming apocalypse. The author falls before the vision of the Throne of God and the awful sound of the coming apocalypse. However, the vision of the author does not fall with him to the ground. In the very next line after Blake describes his faint, we see his vision soar: "Immediately the lark mounted with a loud trill from Felpham's Vale." We have seen the lark as the messenger of Los and the carrier of inspiration. Its sudden flight here demonstrates that the vision of the poem does not end but continues. It is up to the reader to follow the flight of the lark to the Gate of Los and continue the vision of Milton.

Milton does not come to a firm conclusion, for it can only be concluded by the reader. The reader, armed with the creative power of poetry and the power of his own imagination, is asked to continue the work of the poet and prophet.

Before Blake could leave Felpham and return to London, an incident occurred that was very disturbing to him and possibly even dangerous. Without Blake's knowledge, his gardener had invited a soldier by the name of John Scofield into his garden to help with the work. Blake seeing the soldier and thinking he had no business being there promptly tossed him out. In a letter to Butts, Blake recalled the incident in detail:

I desired him, as politely as possible, to go out of the Garden; he made me an impertinent answer. I insisted on his leaving the Garden; he refused. I still persisted in desiring his departure; he then threaten'd to knock out my Eyes, with many abominable imprecations & with some contempt for my Person; it affronted my foolish Pride. I therefore took him by the Elbows & pushed him before me till I had got him out; there I intended to leave him, but he, turning about, put himself into a Posture of Defiance, threatening & swearing at me. I, perhaps foolishly & perhaps not, stepped out at the Gate, & putting aside his blows, took him again by the Elbows, &, keeping his back to me, pushed him forwards down the road about fifty yards--he all the while endeavouring to turn round & strike me, & raging & cursing, which drew out several neighbours....

What made this almost comic incident so serious was that the soldier swore before a magistrate that Blake had said "Damn the King" and had uttered seditious words. Blake denied the charge, but he was forced to post bail and appear in court. Hayley came to Blake's aid by helping to post the bail money and arranging for counsel.

Blake left Felpham at the end of September 1803 and settled in a new residence on South Molton Street in London. His trial was set for the following January at Chichester. Hayley was almost forced to miss the trial because of a fall he suffered while riding his horse, but he was determined to help Blake and appeared in court to testify to the good character of the accused. The soldier's testimony was shown to be false, and the jury acquitted Blake. A local newspaper, the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* (16 January 1804), reported on the acquittal: "After a very long and patient hearing, he was by the Jury acquitted, which so gratified the auditory, that the court was, in defiance of all decency, thrown into an uproar by their noisy exultations."

Blake's radical political views made him sometimes fear persecution, and he wondered if Scofield had been a government agent sent to entrap him. In any event Blake forever damned the soldier by attacking him in the epic poem Jerusalem. One positive result of the trial was that Blake was reconciled with Hayley, whose support during the trial was greatly appreciated.

Jerusalem is in many ways Blake's major achievement. It is an epic poem consisting of 100 illuminated plates. Blake dated the title page 1804, but he seems to have worked on the poem for a considerable length of time after that date.

In Jerusalem Blake develops his mythology to explore man's fall and redemption. As the narrative begins, man is apart from God and split into separate identities. As the poem progresses man's split identities are unified, and man is reunited with the divinity that is within him.

In chapter one Blake announces the purpose of his "great task":

To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes
Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought, into Eternity
Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination.

It is sometimes easy to get lost in the complex mythology of Blake's poetry and forget that he is describing not outside events but a "Mental Fight" that takes place in the mind. Much of Jerusalem is devoted to the idea of awakening the human senses, so that the reader can perceive the spiritual world that is everywhere present.

At the beginning of the poem, Jesus addresses the fallen Albion: "I am not a God afar off, I am a brother and friend; / 'Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me.'" In his fallen state Albion rejects this close union with God and dismisses Jesus as the "Phantom of the overheated brain!" Driven by jealousy Albion hides his emanation, Jerusalem. Separation from God leads to further separation into countless male and female forms creating endless division and dispute.

Blake describes the fallen state of man by describing the present day. Interwoven into the mythology are references to present-day London. There one finds: "Inspiration deny'd, Genius forbidden by laws of punishment." Instead of inspiration man is driven by the "Reasoning Power" which Blake calls "An Abstract objecting power that Negates everything." It is against this mental error that Los wars: "I must create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's. / 'I will not Reason & Compare : my business is to Create.'" Like the poet Blake, Los emphasizes the importance of the human imagination. Systems of thought, philosophies or religions, when separated from men, destroy what is human. To put an end to the destructive separation, Los struggles to build "The Great City of Golgonooza." Like a work of art, Golgonooza gives form to abstract ideas. It represents the human form and is composed of bodies of men and women.

In chapter two the "disease of Albion" leads to further separation and decay. As the human body is a limited form of its divine origin, the cities of England are limited representations of the Universal Brotherhood of Man. Fortunately for man, there is "a limit of contraction," and the fall must come to an end.

Caught by the errors of sin and vengeance, Albion gives up hope and dies. The flawed religions of moral law

cannot save him: "The Visions of Eternity, by reason of narrowed perceptions, / Are become weak Visions of Time & Space, fix'd into furrows of death." Our limited senses make us think of our lives as bounded by time and space apart from eternity. In such a framework physical death marks the end of existence. But there is also a limit to death, and Albion's body is preserved by the Savior.

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Songs of Innocence and of Experience

Summary

William Blake published his second collection of poetry, *Songs of Innocence*, in 1789. He published it with the accompanying illustrative plates, a feat accomplished through an engraving and illustrating process of his own design. The publication of *Songs of Innocence* began his series of "Illuminated Books," in which Blake combined text and visual artwork to achieve his poetic effect. Blake always intended the poems of *Songs of Innocence* to be accompanied by their respective illustrations, making analysis of the texts alone problematic at times.

While ostensibly about the naivety and simplicity of innocent youth, *Songs of Innocence* is not merely a collection of verses for children. Several of the poems include an ironic tone, and some, such as "The Chimney Sweeper," imply sharp criticism of the society of Blake's time. Although clearly intended as a celebration of children and of their unadulterated enjoyment of the world around them, *Songs of Innocence* is also a warning to adult readers. Innocence has been lost not simply through aging, but because the forces of culture have allowed a hope-crushing society to flourish, sometimes at the direct expense of children's souls.

Songs of Experience followed five years later, bound with a reprinting and slight revision of Songs of Innocence. Songs of Experience has never been printed separately from the former volume, and Blake intended it as a companion piece to the earlier work. The same method of engraving plates to illustrate the poems is used in Songs of Experience.

Songs of Experience allows Blake to be more direct in his criticism of society. He attacks church leaders, wealthy socialites, and cruel parents with equal vehemence. Blake also uses Songs of Experience to further develop his own personal theological system, which was portrayed as mostly very traditional in Songs of Innocence. In Songs of Experience, Blake questions how we know that God exists, whether a God who allows poor children to suffer and be exploited is in fact, good, and whether love can exist as an abstract concept apart from human interaction. Blake also hints at his belief in “free love” in this volume, suggesting that he would like to dismantle the institution of marriage along with all other artificial restrictions on human freedom.

Both Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience contain poems that are interdependent. A critical reading of “The Lamb,” for example, is impossible without also reading the “Introduction,” “The Shepherd,” and “Night” from Songs of Innocence. Its meaning is further deepened when reading “The Tyger” from Songs of Experience, and vice versa.

Taken as a whole, Blake’s Songs of Innocence and of Experience offer a romanticized yet carefully thought out view of nature, God, society, and religion from a variety of perspectives, ultimately demanding that the reader choose the view he or she finds most compelling from among the myriad voices of the poems.

Analysis

Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Experience (1794) juxtapose the innocent, pastoral world of childhood against an adult world of corruption and repression; while such poems as “The Lamb” represent a meek virtue, poems like “The Tyger” exhibit opposing, darker forces. Thus the collection as a whole explores the value and limitations of two different perspectives on the world. Many of the poems fall into pairs, so that the same situation or problem is seen through the lens of innocence first and then experience. Blake does not identify himself wholly with either view; most of the poems are dramatic—that is, in the voice of a speaker other than the poet himself. Blake stands outside innocence and experience, in a distanced position from which he hopes to be able to recognize and correct the fallacies of both. In particular, he pits himself against despotic authority, restrictive morality, sexual repression, and institutionalized religion; his great insight is into the way these separate modes of control work together to squelch what is most holy in human beings.

The Songs of Innocence dramatize the naive hopes and fears that inform the lives of children and trace their transformation as the child grows into adulthood. Some of the poems are written from the perspective of children, while others are about children as seen from an adult perspective. Many of the poems draw attention to the positive aspects of natural human understanding prior to the corruption and distortion of experience. Others take a more critical stance toward innocent purity: for example, while Blake draws touching portraits of the emotional power of rudimentary Christian values, he also exposes—over the heads, as it were, of the innocent—Christianity’s capacity for promoting injustice and cruelty.

The Songs of Experience work via parallels and contrasts to lament the ways in which the harsh experiences of adult life destroy what is good in innocence, while also articulating the weaknesses of the innocent perspective (“The Tyger,” for example, attempts to account for real, negative forces in the universe, which innocence fails

to confront). These latter poems treat sexual morality in terms of the repressive effects of jealousy, shame, and secrecy, all of which corrupt the ingenuousness of innocent love. With regard to religion, they are less concerned with the character of individual faith than with the institution of the Church, its role in politics, and its effects on society and the individual mind. Experience thus adds a layer to innocence that darkens its hopeful vision while compensating for some of its blindness.

The style of the Songs of Innocence and Experience is simple and direct, but the language and the rhythms are painstakingly crafted, and the ideas they explore are often deceptively complex. Many of the poems are narrative in style; others, like "The Sick Rose" and "The Divine Image," make their arguments through symbolism or by means of abstract concepts. Some of Blake's favorite rhetorical techniques are personification and the reworking of Biblical symbolism and language. Blake frequently employs the familiar meters of ballads, nursery rhymes, and hymns, applying them to his own, often unorthodox conceptions. This combination of the traditional with the unfamiliar is consonant with Blake's perpetual interest in reconsidering and reframing the assumptions of human thought and social behavior.

Major Themes

The Destruction of Innocence

Throughout both Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience, Blake repeatedly addresses the destruction of childlike innocence, and in many cases of children's lives, by a society designed to use people for its own selfish ends. Blake romanticizes the children of his poems, only to place them in situations common to his day, in which they find their simple faith in parents or God challenged by harsh conditions. Songs of Experience is an attempt to denounce the cruel society that harms the human soul in such terrible ways, but it also calls the reader back to innocence, through Imagination, in an effort to redeem a fallen world.

Redemption

Throughout his works, Blake frequently refers to the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. While he alludes to the atoning act of Christ Crucified, more often Blake focuses on the Incarnation, the taking on of human form by the divine Creator, as the source of redemption for both human beings and nature. He emphasizes that Christ "became a little child" just as men and women need to return to a state of childlike grace in order to restore the innocence lost to the social machinery of a cruel world.

Religious Hypocrisy

In such poems as "Holy Thursday" and "The Little Vagabond," Blake critiques the religious leaders of his day for their abuse of spiritual authority. The men who should be shepherds to their flocks are in fact reinforcing a political and economic system that turns children into short-lived chimney sweepers and that represses love and creative expression in adults. Blake has no patience with clergy who would assuage their own or their earthly patrons' guilt by parading poor children through a church on Ascension Day, as in "Holy Thursday" from both sections, and he reserves most of his sharpest verse for these men.

Imagination over Reason

Blake is a strong proponent of the value of human creativity, or Imagination, over materialistic rationalism, or Reason. As a poet and artist, Blake sees the power of art in its various forms to raise the human spirit above its earth-bound mire. He also sees the soul-killing materialism of his day, which uses rational thought as an excuse to perpetuate crimes against the innocent via societal and religious norms. Songs of Experience in particular decries Reason's hold over Imagination, and it uses several ironic poems to undermine the alleged superiority of rationalism.

Blake was not opposed to intelligent inquiry, however. In "A Little Boy Lost" from Songs of Experience, Blake admires the boy's inquiries into the nature of God and his own Thought, even as he sharply criticizes the religious leaders of his day for demanding mindless obedience to dogma.

Nature as the Purest State of Man

Like many of his contemporary Romantic poets, Blake sees in the natural world an idyllic universe that can influence human beings in a positive manner. Many of his poems, such as "Spring," celebrate the beauty and fecundity of nature, while others, such as "London," deride the sterile mechanism of urban society. Blake's characters are happiest when they are surrounded by natural beauty and following their natural instincts; they are most oppressed when they are trapped in social or religious institutions or are subject to the horrors of urban living.

The Flaws of Earthly Parents

One recurring motif in both Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience is the failure of human parents to properly nurture their children. The "Little Boy Lost" is abandoned by his earthly father, yet rescued by his Heavenly Father. The parents of "The Little Vagabond" weep in vain as their son is burned alive for heresy. Both mother and father seem frustrated by their child's temperament in "Infant Sorrow." This recurring motif allows Blake to emphasize the frailty of human communities, in which the roles of mother and father are defined by society rather than by natural instincts, and to emphasize the supremacy of Nature and of divine care in the form of God the Father.

Social Reform

While much of Blake's poetry focuses on leaving behind the material world in favor of a more perfect spiritual nature, his poetry nonetheless offers realistic and socially conscious critiques of existing situations. Both of his "Chimney Sweeper" poems highlight the abuse of children by parents and employers as they are forced into hazardous, and potentially fatal, situations for the sake of earning money. Both "Holy Thursday" poems decry the overt display of the poor as a spectacle of absolution for the wealthy and affluent. "The Human Abstract" points out that our virtues are predicated on the existence of human suffering. Although Blake is certainly more spiritually than practically minded, the seeds of social reform can be seen in the philosophy underlying his verses: innocence is a state of man that must be preserved, not destroyed, and the social systems that seek to destroy innocence must be changed or eliminated.

Holy Thursday (Songs of Innocence)

Holy Thursday is a poem by William Blake, from his 1789 book of poems Songs of Innocence. (There is also a Holy Thursday poem in Songs of Experience, which contrasts with this song.)

The poem depicts a ceremony held on Ascension Day, which in England was then called Holy Thursday, a name now generally applied to what is also called Maundy Thursday: six thousands orphans of London's charity schools, scrubbed clean and dressed in the coats of distinctive colours, are marched two by two to Saint Paul's Cathedral, under the control of their beadles, and sing in the cathedral.

The children in their colourful dresses are compared to flowers and their procession toward the church as a river. Their singing on the day that commemorated the Ascension of Jesus is depicted as raising them above their old, lifeless guardians, who remain at a lower level.

The bleak reality of the orphans' lives is depicted in the contrasting poem, Holy Thursday (Songs of Experience).

Holy Thursday

Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean
The children walking two & two in red & blue & green
Grey headed beadles walk'd before with wands as white as snow
Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow

O what a multitude they seem'd these flowers of London town
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own
The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs
Thousands of little boys & girls raising their innocent hands

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among
Beneath them sit the aged men wise guardians of the poor
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door

Summary

“Holy Thursday” recounts the annual marching of approximately six thousand poor children to St. Paul’s Cathedral on Ascension Day. These children hailed from the charity schools of the city and were taken to the Cathedral to demonstrate their reverence for God and their gratitude to their benefactors. The clean-scrubbed charity-school children of London flow like a river towards St. Paul’s Cathedral. Dressed in bright colors they march double-file, supervised by “gray headed beadles.” Seated in the cathedral, the children form a vast and

radiant multitude. They remind the speaker of a company of lambs sitting by the thousands and “raising their innocent hands” in prayer. Then they begin to sing, sounding like “a mighty wind” or “harmonious thunderings,” while their guardians, “the aged men,” stand by. The speaker, moved by the pathos of the vision of the children in church, urges the reader to remember that such urchins as these are actually angels of God.

This ostensibly admiring poem contains hints of irony, however. The beadle seats the children “in companies” as if they were soldiers rather than children. The compulsory note of their praise is implied in this regimented worship. The poem ends with a moral: have pity on those less fortunate than yourself, as they include angelic boys and girls like those described here.

Synopsis

On Holy Thursday (Ascension Day), the clean-scrubbed charity school children of London flow like a river toward St. Paul's Cathedral. Supervised by aged beadles and dressed in bright colours they walk two-by-two. Seated, the children form a vast, radiant multitude as they sit in the Cathedral. To the speaker, they are like thousands of lambs, who are ‘raising their innocent hands’ in prayer. Then they begin to sing, sounding like ‘a mighty wind’ or ‘harmonious thunderings,’ while their guardians, ‘the aged men,’ stand by. The speaker is moved by this vision of the children in church. He urges the reader to remember that poor children like these are actually [3]angels of God.

Compared to the abstract concepts of *The Divine Image*, *Holy Thursday* asks readers to consider their understanding of ideas like mercy and pity as they are found in a concrete situation. It also links these issues with a concern for the poverty that characterised Blake's England.

Charity Schools were funded by public donations to care for and educate orphaned and abandoned children in the city. Every year, on Ascension Day, the charity school children of London took part in a special service of thanksgiving in St. Paul's Cathedral in London. Thus, the poem uses an actual historical circumstance to explore deeper human tendencies and attitudes.

Analysis

"Holy Thursday" has three stanzas, each consisting of two rhyming couplets. The singsong quality of the AABB rhyme, usually a sign of innocence in these poems, belies the thinly veiled subtext of the poem regarding the exploitation of the innocent by those who are, ultimately, their moral and spiritual inferiors.

As always, Blake favors the innocent children even as he despises the system which enslaves or abuses them. The “wise guardians of the poor,” the children’s patrons, are seated “beneath them.” Even though the gratitude may be forced upon the children, their innocence, which is stated twice outright in the poem, trumps the self-serving nature of the spectacle.

Blake closes with the warning to “cherish pity; lest you drive and angel from your door,” a statement that seems out of place on the surface. When compared to the Biblical account of the angels’ visit to Lot in the city of Sodom, however, the driving away of an angel at the door becomes a more sobering image. Lot, alone of all the denizens of Sodom, offered the angels, who were disguised as travelers, hospitality in a city full of dangers for the unwary visitor. His pity for his guests results in his own family’s rescue from the destruction about to strike

the wicked city. Similarly, the reader is encouraged to “cherish pity” even in the midst of a sin-stricken and cynical system that would use a parade of poor children as a show of public virtue.

The poem is based on the contrast between the ‘innocent faces’ of the children and the authority of the ‘grey headed beadles’ and the other ‘aged men’ who act as their guardians. Although the children are made to enter the cathedral in regimented order, their angelic innocence overcomes all the constraints put upon them by authority – they even make the ‘red and blue and green’ of their school uniforms look like ‘flowers of London town’. As the boys and girls raise their hands and their voices to heaven, the narrator imagines them rising up to heaven too, just as Christ himself did on Ascension Day. In the poet’s vision they leave their ‘wise Guardians’ beneath them and become angels – which is why the last line tells us to ‘cherish pity’ and remember our duty to the poor. Although the triple repetition of ‘multitude(s)’ notes how many thousands of children live in poverty in London, the emphasis in this poem is on the ‘radiance’ which they bring to the church – they are ‘multitudes of lambs’. We must wait for the contrary *Songs of Experience* for Blake’s social critique: ‘And so many children poor? It is a land of poverty’.

Form

The poem has three stanzas, each containing two rhymed couplets. The lines are longer than is typical for Blake’s *Songs*, and their extension suggests the train of children processing toward the cathedral, or the flowing river to which they are explicitly compared.

Commentary

The poem’s dramatic setting refers to a traditional Charity School service at St. Paul’s Cathedral on Ascension Day, celebrating the fortieth day after the resurrection of Christ. These Charity Schools were publicly funded institutions established to care for and educate the thousands of orphaned and abandoned children in London. The first stanza captures the movement of the children from the schools to the church, likening the lines of children to the Thames River, which flows through the heart of London: the children are carried along by the current of their innocent faith. In the second stanza, the metaphor for the children changes. First they become “flowers of London town.” This comparison emphasizes their beauty and fragility; it undercuts the assumption that these destitute children are the city’s refuse and burden, rendering them instead as London’s fairest and finest. Next the children are described as resembling lambs in their innocence and meekness, as well as in the sound of their little voices. The image transforms the character of humming “multitudes,” which might first have suggested a swarm or hoard of unsavory creatures, into something heavenly and sublime. The lamb metaphor links the children to Christ (whose symbol is the lamb) and reminds the reader of Jesus’s special tenderness and care for children. As the children begin to sing in the third stanza, they are no longer just weak and mild; the strength of their combined voices raised toward God evokes something more powerful and puts them in direct contact with heaven. The simile for their song is first given as “a mighty wind” and then as “harmonious thunderings.” The beadles, under whose authority the children live, are eclipsed in their aged pallor by the internal radiance of the children. In this heavenly moment the guardians, who are authority figures only in an earthly sense, sit “beneath” the children.

The final line advises compassion for the poor. The voice of the poem is neither Blake’s nor a child’s, but rather that of a sentimental observer whose sympathy enhances an already emotionally affecting scene. But the poem calls upon the reader to be more critical than the speaker is: we are asked to contemplate the true meaning of Christian pity, and to contrast the institutionalized charity of the schools with the love of which God—and

innocent children—are capable. Moreover, the visual picture given in the first two stanzas contains a number of unsettling aspects: the mention of the children’s clean faces suggests that they have been tidied up for this public occasion; that their usual state is quite different. The public display of love and charity conceals the cruelty to which impoverished children were often subjected. Moreover, the orderliness of the children’s march and the ominous “wands” (or rods) of the beadle suggest rigidity, regimentation, and violent authority rather than charity and love. Lastly, the tempestuousness of the children’s song, as the poem transitions from visual to aural imagery, carries a suggestion of divine wrath and vengeance.

Critical Appreciation

Stanza one

The voice of the poem is neither Blake's nor a child's, but rather an observer's who sees an emotionally affecting scene. The first stanza captures the movement of the children from the schools to the church, comparing the lines of children to the River Thames, which also flows through the heart of London.

However, there are potentially negative aspects to this vision:

- That the children's faces are clean suggests to us, but not to the speaker, that they have been scrubbed for this public occasion. What might be their usual state?
- The orderliness of the children's march (reminiscent of primary school crocodiles) could be interpreted as suggesting rigidity and regimentation rather than charity and love
- Beadles are figures of authority who can inflict punishment, yet here are seen simply as benevolent old men. Their rods are depicted more as magic wands than as signs of authority and punishment.

Stanza two

In the second stanza, the children become ‘flowers of London town.’ Instead of seeing them as destitute children dependent on charity, they are presented as the city's fairest product, as though they shine like angels. Next the children are described as lamb-like in their innocence and meekness, as well as in the sound of their little voices. The lamb metaphor links the children to Christ and reminds the reader of Jesus' special tenderness and care for children.

However, the reader may also be alive to less positive connotations:

- Unlike the speaker, the reader may ask whether these children receive the tender care Jesus intends for his lambs
- They would be alive to references to lambs in the Bible as sacrificial animals. Lambs are reared to be slaughtered and devoured, so what does this say about the fate of the children?
- The ‘hum of multitudes’ in association with angels and lambs might remind Blake's readers of Revelation 5:11-14. However, the hum of multitudes (in an era of social unrest and the French Revolution) could suggest something threatening which the speaker has to hurriedly disclaim.

Thus, the reader is left to see tension and an under-current of threat of which the speaker is ignorant.

Stanza three

In the third stanza, the children are no longer depicted as frail and mild. Their combined voices raised toward God are now powerful and put them in direct contact with heaven. The 'mighty wind' and the 'harmonious thunderings' are perceived by the speaker as glorious, perhaps mindful of the 'mighty wind' of the Holy Spirit that came at Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4. However:

- This mighty wind is also potentially destructive, as are 'thunderings'
- Are these sounds voices clamouring to heaven for justice?
- The beadle, under whose authority the children live, sit 'beneath' the children. Is this their moral as well as physical position? If so, the idea that they are 'wise guardians of the poor' is an unintentional irony from the speaker.

We are left to ask how much this outward display of love and charity conceals the cruelty to which such children were often subjected.

True pity

The final line of *Holy Thursday* advises pity for the poor. But:

- The poem might suggest that the end result of 'pity' is institutionalized charity, which conceals a regime of neglect and abusive authority
- The ulterior motive behind not rejecting an 'angel' seems to be the benefit of the householder.

True pity, which recognised the children for what they were, would not subject them to such a regime. It would not allow children to be abandoned and destitute in the first place. True pity, too, would not be self-regarding.

Holy Thursday (Songs of Experience)

"**Holy Thursday**" is a poem by William Blake, first published in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* in 1794. This poem, unlike its companion poem in "Songs of Innocence" (1789), focuses more on society as a whole than on the ceremony held in London.

Analysis

The primary objective of this poem is to question social and moral injustice. In the first stanza, Blake contrasts the "rich and fruitful land" with the actions of a "cold and usurous hand" - thereby continuing his questioning of the virtue of a society where resources are abundant but children are still "reduced to misery".

The "Holy Thursday" referred to in the poem is Ascension Day, which in the Church of England and other parts of the Anglican Communion, is a synonym for the same feast. This usage is now described as "dated", and today even Anglicans generally apply the term "Holy Thursday" instead to what is also called Maundy Thursday.

On that day a service was held in St. Paul's Cathedral for the poor children of London's charity schools. Appreciation of the "wise guardians of the poor" thus advertising their charity may not be wholly shared by Blake's "Piper", the supposed narrator of the "Songs of Innocence". In their state of innocence, children should not be regimented; rather, they should be playing blithely on the "echoing green". The children in this poem

'assert and preserve their essential innocence not by going to church, but by freely and spontaneously, "like a mighty wind," raising to "heaven the voice of song." '

With his "Holy Thursday" of the "Songs of Experience", Blake's "Bard" clarifies his view of the hypocrisy of formal religion and its claimed acts of charity. He sees the established church's hymns as a sham, suggesting in his second stanza that the sound which would represent the day more accurately would be the "trembling cry" of a poor child.

The poet, as Bard, states that although England may be objectively a "rich and fruitful land", the unfeeling profit-orientated power of authority has designed for the innocent children suffering within it an "eternal winter". The biblical connotations of the rhetorical opening point us towards Blake's assertion that a country whose children live in want cannot be described as truly "rich". With the apparent contradiction of two climatic opposites existing simultaneously within the one geopolitical unit, we are offered a metaphor for England's man-made "two nations".

Blake wrote during the industrial revolution, whose pioneers congratulated themselves upon their vigorous increases in output. The poet argues that until increases in production are linked to more equitable distribution, England will always be a land of barren winter.

Holy Thursday

Is this a holy thing to see
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reduced to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?
It is a land of poverty!

And their sun does never shine,
And their fields are bleak and bare,
And their ways are filled with thorns:
It is eternal winter there.

For where'er the sun does shine,
And where'er the rain does fall,
Babes should never hunger there,
Nor poverty the mind appall.

Summary

The narrator considers it a scandal that a country as 'rich and fruitful' as England condemns so many of its children to live in poverty. Indeed, the second verse corrects the first: England cannot be called 'rich' when there are such huge numbers of poor children living there. These children live sunless, barren lives in a state of

‘eternal winter’. Again, the final verse takes it further: there cannot be other seasons as long as children go hungry. Sunshine and rain are cause for happiness, and we have no right to such happiness when thousands are suffering all around us.

In the corresponding poem from *Songs of Innocence*, Blake subtly critiques the treatment of poor children by English society. Here, he is more direct, questioning the holiness of a day that essentially celebrates the existence of poverty. England is a “rich and fruitful land” but her children are “reduced to misery,/Fed with cold and usurious hand.” Despite the outward praise that the poor children offer at the Holy Thursday spectacle, their country is “a land of poverty!” England is doomed to be “bleak & bare” in an “eternal winter” so long as poverty exists within her borders.

In contrast, Blake points to lands where “the sun does shine” because there a child “can never hunger...Nor poverty the mind appall.”

Analysis

The poem picks up where its contrary *Holy Thursday* in *Songs of Innocence* left off, with reference to the annual Holy Thursday (Ascension Day) service in St Paul’s Cathedral for the poor children of the London charity schools. Yet there can be nothing ‘holy’ about a service which shows us how many thousands of children are ‘reduced to misery’ in England. The poem challenges the very image of Great Britain as a rich and civilised nation. In the 1790s Britain was the world’s wealthiest superpower, so the statement that it was ‘a land of poverty’ was radical. The poem also attacks the whole system of caring for poor children as ‘cold and usurious’ (usury is the practice of lending money for profit, by charging interest on it and therefore getting back more than you lent). This may sound a harsh description, but we need to remember that the charity schools of the eighteenth century were aimed at turning out child workers for the most brutal industries. This brought profit to their employers but drove thousands of children into an early grave.

"Holy Thursday" consists of four quatrains. The first is a heroic quatrain (ABAB) but the remaining three vary. The second stanza strikes discord by having no rhyme (ABCD, although there may be an intended slant rhyme for "joy" and "poverty" in their spelling). The last two follow the ABCB pattern. This irregularity contributes to the poem's tone of decay and confusion as the subject matter, the exploitation and neglect of children, becomes clear to the reader.

The “Holy Thursday” of *Innocence* was open to two contrasting readings. This version is blunt and may only be read as a harsh critique of the religious hypocrisy inherent in the institutions of Blake’s day.

The "eternal winter" in which the children live suggests that poverty is a state of death in nature, and that the true order of things is not to have children languishing in squalor and hunger. The children lack the sun and life-giving rain of summer and spring, and are thus doomed to this unnatural state by the machinations of a system that remembers them only to justify its own righteousness.

London (Songs of Experience)

London is a poem by William Blake, published in Songs of Experience in 1794. It is one of the few poems in *Songs of Experience* which does not have a corresponding poem in Songs of Innocence.

Context

The poet William Blake was a poet and artist who specialised in illuminated texts, often of a religious nature. He rejected established religion for various reasons, including the failure of the established Church to help children in London who were forced to work. Blake lived and worked in the capital, so he was arguably well placed to write clearly about the conditions people who lived there faced.

Songs of Innocence and of Experience Published in 1794, this collection of poems, fully illustrated and originally hand-printed by Blake, aimed to show the "Two Contrary States of the Human Soul". The Songs of Innocence section contains poems which are positive in tone and celebrate love, childhood and nature. The Songs of Experience poems are obviously intended to provide a contrast, and illustrate the effects of modern life on people and nature. Dangerous industrial conditions, child labour, prostitution and poverty are just some of the topics Blake explores.

The French Revolution In 1789, the French people revolted against the monarchy and aristocracy, using violence and murder to overthrow those in power. Many saw the French Revolution as inspirational - a model for how ordinary, disadvantaged people could seize power. Blake alludes to the revolution in London, arguably suggesting that the experience of living there could encourage a revolution on the streets of the capital.

Analysis of the context Of “London”

The work where this poem is taken place is in “Songs of Innocence and of Experience”, published in 1794. The book combines two sets of poems related by the principle of contrast; a contrast between the state of “innocence” (childhood, idealism, hope) with poems as *The Lamb* or *The Little Black Boy*; and that of “Experience” (adulthood, disillusionment, social criticism and despair) as *The Tyger* and *The Little Vagabond*. Innocence is the world of the Lamb, the world of the true God of Love and Understanding, or Jesus, while Experience is the word of the false God, or the great negative influence (*Skoletorget, 2004*). The poem “London” is clearly inside his last work, Experience, where he shows that if the institution and structure of a place is corrupt, then people can never have a chance for innocence (*Plagiarist, 1998-2007*). Within this context, it is necessary to point out that London is the only poem from this collection without an innocent pair. This reiterates Blake’s disgust at the state of affairs in London. There’s no nice innocent side (*Plagiarist, 1998-2007*).

His spiritual beliefs are evidenced in “Songs of Experience”, in which he shows his own distinction between the Old Testament God, whose restrictions he rejected, and the New Testament God; whom he saw as a positive influence (*Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia; “William Blake”; 28 Nov. 2007*).

Blake’s affection for the Bible was accompanied by hostility for the established church. It was an early and profound influence on Blake, and would remain a source of inspiration throughout his life (*Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia; “William Blake”; 28 Nov. 2007*). The last works are based on the idea of God and the symbolism of the vital relationship and unity between divinity and humanity. Blake designed his own mythology, which appears largely in his prophetic books. It was based mainly upon the Bible and on Greek mythology, to accompany his ideas about the everlasting Gospel. He believed that the joy of man glorified god and that the religious of this world is actually the worship of Satan (*Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia; “William Blake”; 28 Nov. 2007*). Relating to the idea of humanity, Blake abhorred slavery and believed in racial and sexual equality. Several of his poems and printings express a notion of universal humanity. He retained an active

interest in social and political events for all his life, but was often forced to resort to cloaking social idealism and political statements in Protestant mystical allegory (*Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia; "William Blake"*, 28 Nov. 2007).

Many of the poems appearing in "Songs of Innocence" have a counterpart in "Songs of Experience" with opposing perspectives of the world. The disastrous end of the French Revolution caused Blake to lose faith in the goodness of mankind, explaining much of the volume's sense of despair (*Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia; "Songs of Innocence and of Experience"*; 28 Nov. 2007).

Relating to history, London could be a place of honest work, where merchants and artisans were able to stand up as citizens, defending their rights against tyrannical authority. But citizens might be corrupted by the profits of war. As an imperial centre, and a harmony of war, London also had a dark side for Blake. Even though London was not really a factory town, he saw in it an emblem for the emerging Industrial Revolution's pollution of the English land and oppression of the common people. He was powerfully influenced by the French and American revolutions, and his critique of the new modernity was a comprehensive one, ranging from imperialistic government, to industry, to the social relations of everyday life (*W.W. Norton, 2005*).

According to Blake's legacy, like other great artists, he had a profound intuitive grasp of human psychology. More explicitly than any English writer before him, however, he pointed out the interrelationship of problems associated with cruelty, self-righteousness, sexual disturbance, social inequity, repression of energy by reason, and revolutionary violence. He identified all these ills as symptoms rather than causes: symptoms of the absence of love, the starvation of the spirit, and the fragmentation of both the individual personality and the human family. For Blake, the fragmentation and emptiness of most people's lives can best be understood through a myth of the Fall of Man. The prophet sees all the misery and bewilderment resulting from the Fall; his duty is both to identify the causes of evil and to dispel the illusion that it is inevitable: "The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative; it is an Endeavour to Restore what the Ancients called the Golden Age". Blake dreamed dreams and saw visions not for escape but for change and renewal. The purpose of art, he insisted, is to enable all people to share in vision, to coordinate a prophetic insight into contemporary events with a visionary perception of how life might be different and better. With him, a few of his contemporaries were able to recognize that artistic innovations, unlike debates in Parliament or battles in Europe, can unify and inspire a society to work for the New Age (*W.W. Norton, 2005*).

Blake's poem becomes a critique of contemporary global capital and its encroachment upon all aspects of daily life (*Roger Whitson, 2006*). Moreover, largely unrecognised during his lifetime, Blake's work is today considered seminal and significant in the history of both poetry and the visual arts. He was voted 38th in a poll of the 100 Greatest Britons organised by the BBC in 2002 (*Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia; "William Blake"*; 28 Nov. 2007).

London

I wander thro' each charter'd street,
Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
And mark in every face I meet
Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In every cry of every Man,
In every Infants cry of fear,
In every voice: in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear

How the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every black'ning Church appalls,
And the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls

But most thro' midnight streets I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse

Summary

The speaker wanders through the streets of London and comments on his observations. He sees despair in the faces of the people he meets and hears fear and repression in their voices. The woeful cry of the chimney-sweeper stands as a chastisement to the Church, and the blood of a soldier stains the outer walls of the monarch's residence. The nighttime holds nothing more promising: the cursing of prostitutes corrupts the newborn infant and sullies the "Marriage hearse."

Form

The poem has four quatrains, with alternate lines rhyming. Repetition is the most striking formal feature of the poem, and it serves to emphasize the prevalence of the horrors the speaker describes.

Analysis

As with most of Blake's poetry, there are several critical interpretations of *London*. The most common interpretation, favored by critics such as Camille Paglia and E. P. Thompson, holds that *London* is primarily a social protest. A less frequently held view is that of Harold Bloom; that *London* primarily is Blake's response to the tradition of Biblical prophecy.

The use of the word 'Chartered' is ambiguous and portrays control and ownership. It may express the political and economic control that Blake considered London to be enduring at the time of his writing. Blake's friend Thomas Paine had criticised the granting of Royal Charters to control trade as a form of class oppression. However, 'chartered' could also mean 'freighted', and may refer to the busy or overburdened streets and river, or to the licenced trade carried on within them.

In Thompson's view, Blake was an unorthodox Christian of the dissenting tradition, who felt that the state was abandoning those in need. He was heavily influenced by mystical groups. The poem reflects Blake's extreme disillusionment with the suffering he saw in London.

The reference to a harlot blighting the 'marriage hearse' with 'plague' is usually understood to refer to the spread of venereal disease in the city, passed by a prostitute to a man and thence his bride, so that marriage can become a sentence of death.

The poem was published during the upheavals of the French Revolution, and London was suffering political and social unrest, due to the marked social and working inequalities of the time. An understandably nervous government had responded by introducing restrictions on the freedom of speech and the mobilisation of foreign mercenaries.

Within the poem that bears the city's name, Blake describes 18th century London as a conurbation filled with people who understood, with depressing wisdom, both the hopelessness and misery of their situation.

The London described in this poem is full of dirt, disease, and death. Notice, for example, the references to blood, the color black ("blackning Church," chimney sweeper), the "plagues" of the last stanza, the words "blights" and "hearse"—do we need to go on? London is not the vibrant commercial and cultural center we often think it is here. Nope, it is a very "dead," unhappy place. Children die, women die, cherished institutions like marriage die or are sick, and so on.

Line 9: Chimney sweeping was a dirty and dangerous business that, without question, symbolizes death here.

Line 10: The church is described as metaphorically black. Black is rarely a good color in most literature. The word's presence in the context of chimney sweeping is a play on the dirt and soot that covered children who worked in that industry, but also suggests that the church is associated with death, not life.

- Lines 11-12: The soldier sighs, and that sigh metaphorically turns to blood. Put another way, the palace is covered in blood—has blood on its hands—because it is responsible for this soldier and his sigh (and the things he may or may not have done in battle). No real blood runs down the walls, so this is a metaphor for governmental responsibility for death.
- Line 15: The word "blasts" doesn't sound too good—nope, sure doesn't. Here it is a metaphor for how the infant's tears are interrupted—stained and sullied by a gross curse. The word "blast" also, however, makes us think the infant's innocence is being metaphorically destroyed or killed.
- Line 16: "Blights with plagues"—there's a deathly phrase if we ever saw one. The harlot's curse possesses a strong, killing power. It ruins or destroys the institution of marriage by blighting it with plagues literally and metaphorically. It is responsible for real disease (of the venereal kind) but also for metaphorically sullyng or ruining marriage with promiscuity and prostitution. Marriage is definitely dead; it's not a union or symbol of life, but a hearse.

Blake wrote a lot about children. Children are everywhere in his poetry as characters, and many of the poems in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* resemble children's poems. "London" is no different. There are several infants mentioned, as well as a chimney sweeper (back then, that deplorable job was reserved for children). Strangely, the children in this poem aren't really doing childish things. Okay, they cry, but their cries are cries of fear, or tear that are corrupted by a harlot's curse. Instead of playing, the children work. The basic idea is that the world is upside down, and that is obvious in the fact that children aren't really children. Line 6: The speaker

hears cries of fear from London's infants. Those cries, he notes, apprise him of the presence of "mind-forg'd manacles," which is to say that they somehow symbolize or conjure up the idea of slavery and confinement. Infants and slavery? That's no good. Lines 9-10: The less specific slavery alluded to in line 6 is made more literal here. Chimney sweepers were usually children. They don't sing as they work, but cry, and their cries "appall" the church, which is to say, cast shame on it. The church, for its part, is metaphorically black, underscoring its role in the mistreatment of children. Lines 15-16: The infant's "tear" is blasted. "Blasted" is a metaphor for the way in which the people's innocent crying is marred or fouled by the inappropriate, gross cursing of a nearby harlot. Things are bad when a baby can't even cry in peace, the speaker implies.

Commentary

The opening image of wandering, the focus on sound, and the images of stains in this poem's first lines recall the Introduction to *Songs of Innocence*, but with a twist; we are now quite far from the piping, pastoral bard of the earlier poem: we are in the city. The poem's title denotes a specific geographic space, not the archetypal locales in which many of the other *Songs* are set. Everything in this urban space—even the natural River Thames—submits to being "charter'd," a term which combines mapping and legalism. Blake's repetition of this word (which he then tops with two repetitions of "mark" in the next two lines) reinforces the sense of stricture the speaker feels upon entering the city. It is as if language itself, the poet's medium, experiences a hemming-in, a restriction of resources. Blake's repetition, thudding and oppressive, reflects the suffocating atmosphere of the city. But words also undergo transformation within this repetition: thus "mark," between the third and fourth lines, changes from a verb to a pair of nouns—from an act of observation which leaves some room for imaginative elaboration, to an indelible imprint, branding the people's bodies regardless of the speaker's actions.

Ironically, the speaker's "meeting" with these marks represents the experience closest to a human encounter that the poem will offer the speaker. All the speaker's subjects—men, infants, chimney-sweeper, soldier, harlot—are known only through the traces they leave behind: the ubiquitous cries, the blood on the palace walls. Signs of human suffering abound, but a complete human form—the human form that Blake has used repeatedly in the *Songs* to personify and render natural phenomena—is lacking. In the third stanza the cry of the chimney-sweep and the sigh of the soldier metamorphose (almost mystically) into soot on church walls and blood on palace walls—but we never see the chimney-sweep or the soldier themselves. Likewise, institutions of power—the clergy, the government—are rendered by synecdoche, by mention of the places in which they reside. Indeed, it is crucial to Blake's commentary that neither the city's victims nor their oppressors ever appear in body: Blake does not simply blame a set of institutions or a system of enslavement for the city's woes; rather, the victims help to make their own "mind-forg'd manacles," more powerful than material chains could ever be.

The poem climaxes at the moment when the cycle of misery recommences, in the form of a new human being starting life: a baby is born into poverty, to a cursing, prostitute mother. Sexual and marital union—the place of possible regeneration and rebirth—are tainted by the blight of venereal disease. Thus Blake's final image is the "Marriage hearse," a vehicle in which love and desire combine with death and destruction.

Theme

This poem is also interested in guilt, too. The church and the government, for example, should be innocent of wrongdoing but, strangely, are guilty of taking innocence away from children and infants. Death is all over "London"—literally. The title of the poem may well have been "London: the Dead City." Hearses, bloody

palace walls, blights, and plagues—death is everywhere. In this poem's universe, all this death is the result of war-mongering governments ("palace") and corrupt institutions like the church ("blackning church"), which allow child labor, prostitution, and war. Things that formerly promoted life and unity, like marriage, now only create more death ("hearse"). Sadly, the picture is bleak—there seems to be no end in sight for all this death, a fact evident in the poem's extremely repetitive structure, word choice, and tone. Death is another theme of this poem. Death is all over "London"—literally. The title of the poem may well have been "London: the Dead City." Hearses, bloody palace walls, blights, and plagues—death is everywhere. In this poem's universe, all this death is the result of war-mongering governments ("palace") and corrupt institutions like the church ("blackning church"), which allow child labor, prostitution, and war. Things that formerly promoted life and unity, like marriage, now only create more death ("hearse"). Sadly, the picture is bleak—there seems to be no end in sight for all this death, a fact evident in the poem's extremely repetitive structure, word choice, and tone.

This is a poem about literal forms of confinement: chartering, a way of controlling, narrowing, and confining things that should be open (like rivers and streets). Then we've got that chimney sweeper, who for all intents and purposes is a slave worker; ditto that soldier (he's gotta do whatever the government tells him). On top of all this, there's those pesky "mind-forg'd manacles," the poem's metaphor for all the ways in which people dream up (that's the mind part) to enslave people. This could be governments planning wars, or governments mismanaging geographical space (the Thames, the streets), or even random people looking at things all wrong.

Critical Appretiation

In the poem, William Blake is principally describing a very corrupted society dominated by the power of materialism and the contrast between upper and working-class sections of society. It is written from a very negative perspective where people who exist in a dark and oppressive world, suffering the consequences of corruption of those in positions of power. The problem is that they do not realize this is happening to them. For this reason, he is rejecting the idea of an ideological or perfect place to live and he wants people to be aware of the misery surrounding them. No wonderful streets, no pleasant people. A world with a very depressing atmosphere, where everything is poverty stricken. All these ideas are represented in one place: London. The poem is divided in four quatrains in iambic tetrameter, with a basic rhyme scheme starting a/b/a/b.

In the first quatrain, the author is talking about how he is walking through every transitory street. The adjective "chartered" seems to connote the importance of money to live everyday in this ephemeral world, where everything is focused around money, richness and its value to reach anything. But, in despite of the role of money has in the world and happiness because of its value, many people are dominated by sorrow and sadness. The verses "In every cry of every man" and "in every infant's cry of fear" are examples of this fact. People are not happy. They are living in fear all the time, inside the dark of a society influenced by materialism. Human beings are losing the real sense of life.

The materialism of words is reflected in the second quatrain with "the mind-forged manacles", which represents people's preoccupation for money and the dependence to the important institutions.

In the third quatrain, the author is comparing two different representations: a chimney-sweeper and a soldier. Both of them are archetypal that represent the most important institutions of that time: Monarchy and the Church, which are the reason of the suffering of human beings. This one has a clear connotation of power and manipulation in society.

The fourth quatrain represents the author talking again about what he hears metaphorically while he is walking through the street. "The youthful harlot's curse" makes reference to the disease of *syphilis*, very frequent in that time, in the 18th century, which is the principal cause of death. The term "harlot" has negative connotations, as "curse". It is interpreted as something which destroys life and society. *Syphilis* destroys life, whereas harlots destroy families, and family is the most important part in society, in this case, in English society. "The marriage-hearse" could be understood as a "vehicle in which love and desire combine with death and destruction" (*Elite Skills classics, 2004*).

The final idea of this poem is the claim of a free society, without any chains, without any kind of ideological condition. The message is to be free yourself from the restriction of your own mind and the conceptions to be able to find freedom.

Essay On William Blake`s Poem "London" by Sophie

As one of William Blake's Songs of Experience, the poem, 'London' has a naturally supressing atmosphere with its underlying theme surrounding the corruption, industrialisation and capitalism brought upon London town in the 1790's and the rage it provoked among society. Even Michael Ferber, author of 'London and it Politics' quotes Arthur Miller saying, 'there is more understanding of the nature of a capitalist society in a poem like 'I wander through each charter'd street' than in the whole of the Socialist literature'.

Reflecting on this quote, the use of the word 'charter'd' seems notably ambiguous at first glance as it illustrates the chaotic streets of London as something almost organised and without confusion. This sense of organisation associated with the word dates back to the Chartist Movement of the nineteenth-century, dominated by its People's Charter and structured revolutionary tactics. However, the word 'charter'd' in this sense is not without confusion in such a context. As Ferber says, 'one man's charter is another's manacle; charters are exclusive' and this is a perfectly valid comment; when one man is given rights it is almost certain the consequence will be another's are removed. In a sense this shines a light on the nature of English society in the nineteenth-century. When the state believed to be 'chartering' the streets and creating stability, they were in fact only prompting further unrest and distancing themselves further from the needs of society.

Similarly, the word 'charter'd' can also have connotations of hiring and leasing which emphasises how the city is claiming to own its people and suggests the unjust nature of capitalism in its infancy with money being taken from the majority, the working classes, and transferred to the minority of aristocracy through taxation. This lack of freedom and essential funds is essentially highlighted through the use of the word 'wander' which illuminates the idea of isolation, vulnerability and predominantly slavery. In a sense, this stresses the exploitation of labourers throughout the industrialisation period, with Ferber commenting that it was prompted by 'the monopolistic and exploitative practices of England's commercial empire'. In every way, the opening line of the poem encompasses, more philosophically, Marx's view on society that it mirrors its economic base; for instance if we are surrounded by a corrupted economical system, in this case dominated by capitalism, our workers will become alienated and the aspect of equality throughout humanity will be evaporated.

Additionally, the way the first stanza is structured compliments the undercurrents of depression and ultimate unrest mentioned. The use of the words 'wander', 'charter'd' and 'mark' all contribute to the sombre atmosphere with the long, drawn out, 'A' sound conjuring up a sense of lethargy, prompting the reader to almost imagine the man's 'cry' of despair. Furthermore, the repetition of the word, 'mark' is particularly disturbing as it emphasises

how the people are constantly branded with visible signs of misery and 'woe'. The way the word shifts from the verb formation to the noun in line 4 can also stand to emphasise how the narrator is not just an apathetic spectator but acting as one of the sufferers himself, immediately making the poem seem more personal.

As the poem enters its second stanza, the sense of suffering and hopelessness is only emphasised further. The immediate introduction to the repeated 'every' instantly stresses how no one is immune from such destruction and imprisonment; even the reader is caught up in the action with the constant references to sounds, making escape that much harder as we cannot shut our ears to what is going on; the reader is made to endure and participate in the action instead of passively observing it. In particular, it is powerful to hear the words, 'in every ban' which could be referencing excommunication by the church, as it illuminates how the church, a persons only sanctuary, is being removed from them, establishing even more this sense of isolation among society. However, it is more likely to be seen as a metaphor for corruption and a criticism of the institutionalised world or more simply capitalism. From a Marxist perspective, such an institution would be seen as a key feature of a capitalist society and equally supports the Marxist critic Althusser when he says, 'the power of the state is also maintained more subtly, by seeming to secure the internal consent of the citizen using ideological structures such as churches' Therefore, it can be said that the presence of this corrupt religious structure is the tool constraining the thoughts and actions of the people of London.

However, possibly the most potent image of entrapment comes with the picture of 'mind-forged manacles'. There is a strong sense here that the people were creating their own fear, their own mental chains, prompted by the harsh capitalist authority to terrify them into committing to intensive, hard labour to make their industrial businesses boom. As such a phrase ends with 'I hear' and the 'T' figure after no intervention from the narrator throughout the stanza, it emphasises the shock and overwhelmed responses to such human suffering where people could not find the words to react to what was happening around them. Intrinsically, the quote could also be seen to represent the typical Marxist view that the working classes could not rise up against the bourgeoisie, in the corrupted capitalist world they were surrounded by, as they had them convinced that society could not be changed and that they were free, only imagining their own exploitation. This evidently supports the well known quote from Karl Marx that 'No mind is free, they only perceive it to be'.

In stanza 3 of the poem, the tone intensifies with the giving of further harsh examples of corruption in society. It begins as though in mid-sentence, emphasising to the reader that the list is a never-ending one, prompting an even bleaker view of England in the nineteenth-century. The opening phrase in the stanza introduces us to the 'chimney-sweeper's cry every blackening church appalls' which can be taken literally in the respect that the sweeps made the church look noticeably blackened, however it can also be seen more metaphorically in that the church's reputation was being besmirched by their blatant lack of response to the corruption of society with its subsequent interest in child labour. The word 'appalls' only emphasises this, meaning the cover that is laid over a coffin, influencing the reader to think of the church as effectively dead, burying its traditional principles in order to satisfy the capitalist phenomenon.

The reference to 'the hapless soldier's sigh runs in blood down palace walls' is similarly powerful. The deliberate use of sibilance provides an onomatopoeic hiss that conjures a particularly sinister atmosphere to emphasise the soldier's on-going weakness, being forced into battle for a country they no longer appreciate and are appreciated by. The addition of 'runs in blood down palace walls' is a particularly strong image as it shows how the soldiers blood is symbolically marking the palace walls, and most importantly the walls of the ultimate power, making it obvious to the whole of society that death and suffering is ever present all around them.

The final stanza begins in 'midnight streets' setting up an ominous atmosphere from the outset, yet the talk of 'the youthful harlot's curse blasts the new-born infant's tear' is particularly striking. The image of the harlot is again looked on with some sympathy for the fact that 'youthful' is placed before it; she is being pushed into such mature acts when she herself has not matured. As a result of her actions, she has cursed her child for she will never feel love towards it; it has been produced as a result of business and not out of genuine love. Essentially this can be seen as a perversion of maternity and more generally a metaphor concerning the sexual exploitation of women by the ruling elite. Blake's phrasing could be insinuating the sexually transmitted infections common amongst prostitutes of this time with the talk of her curse blasting the 'new-born infants tear' and subsequently their prominent guilt felts towards a child whom they knew would be infected with the same disease when born.

The phrase that ends the entire poem is possibly the most significant, the 'marriage hearse'. The phrase is an obvious oxymoron describing on the one hand a joyous and cheerful occasion comparing it with an uncomfortable image of death and unhappiness. Essentially this suggests that marriage prompts the death of love, in its most symbolic form, whereby the typical bourgeois relationship is surrounded by hypocrisy, with the husband frequently disowning his wife to pursue his other desires.

Reviewing “London”: English Literature Essay

William Blake's poem, “London”, was written in 1792 and is a description of a society in which the individuals are trapped, exploited and infected. Blake starts the poem by describing the economic system and moves to its consequences of the selling of people within a locked system of exploitation. One technique that is used is the repetition of a specific word to help accent its meaning to the fullest extent. Blake uses the word “charter'd” (1-2) in the first stanza to describe the street and river of Thames. The word gives the river and street a very legalistic feel as though they are protected by laws and are privately owned. Blake moves on to explain how the people have visible “marks” (3-4) of weakness and woe which are like visible brands of sorrow and distress. In the second stanza Blake stresses the word “every” (5-7) five times. This word gives us the sense of commonality to everyone suffering. It says that no one in London is immune to the exploitation and disease. This idea is driven home with the words “mind-forg'd manacles” (8) which symbolize a society in chains; imprisoned by ideology and status quo. It is possible to assume that there is no deviance from the status quo as the stanza itself has no deviation from its strict iambic tetrameter meter and A-B rhyme scheme. The strict adherence to poetic meter in this stanza strongly contrast the irregular meter of the third stanza.

In the third stanza Blake lists out several social positions that are affected by the turmoil; the Chimney-sweep, Church, and the Soldier. The job titles listed in the stanza are capitalized making them pronouns and personified. The chimney-sweeper is a figure of pity and industrialization because due to the ever increasing amount of dirty chimneys blackening the entire city with soot. The Church is “black'ning” (10), its reputation is becoming more tarnished as it is trying to ignore or glaze over the brutal smoke belching economy that Blake is describing. The metaphor of the Soldier's blood on the Palace Walls demonstrate not only a mistreatment of soldiers but also a poor leader of the country creating a disjointed society. Evidence of this disjointness can be found in the structure of the third stanza as it no longer adheres to a strict iambic tetrameter meter. We see this disjointedness in poetic meter continues into the final stanza where Blake uses the technique of enjambment to accent the “Harlot's curse”(14) and “Infant's tear” (15). It is now dark and the youthful Harlot does not have a chance to lover her baby because it is a result of commerce and not love. She passes her own misery onto the child who will likely continue passing it onto future generations. She also passes on her disease to cheating husbands which lead us to the potent phrase “the Marriage hearse.” (16) The marriage hearse is an oxymoron for the notion of a happy marriage being undermined by death and disease and causing the marriage to become

a funeral procession for love and freedom. Blake's poem is designed to imply that vision is needed to lift London out of despair and away from its economy driven exploitation.

Allen Ginsberg's poem "A Supermarket in California" is a protest poem aimed towards postwar American society and focuses most on the consumerist aspects of society and the lack of connection between the modern world and nature. "A Supermarket in California" is written in prose form and does not adhere to any sort of traditional meter or rhyme scheme making it a shocking and offbeat poem that is sure to stand out which is what a protester would want. Ginsberg is quick to kick off the theme of consumerism by going "shopping for images" (2). In this case the images are not real as he is longing for society to return back to the state it was in pre-war during Whitman's time. The supermarket in this line also introduces the idea of capitalist America where fruit is mass produced to be the same and is not necessarily produced in the wild. The next few lines describe how families are now shopping at night rather than during the daytime. It can be implied that these families are perfect nuclear families and anyone who does not fit into the family structure stands out as being separate from society and considered unnatural. These individuals in this poem are Gracia Lorca, Walt Whitman, and the speaker himself Allen Ginsberg all of whom are homosexual and have lost their place in society. In this time era, the homosexual community is never spoken about and is not accepted by the norms of society as it may have been in Whitman's time. Ginsberg notes Whitman as a homosexual because he is described as "childless, lonely, old grubber" (4) and not as a husband. It is possible that Whitman is brought into the poem as a way of juxtaposing what Whitman described America to be in his poetry, and what America has become in Ginsberg's poetry. The lines "who killed the pork chops? What price bananas?" (5) pose questions of economics. In Whitman's day a consumer would know where the food came from, who killed it, and how it got its price. It is implied that Whitman's questions could not be answered by the store employees. Ginsberg is saying that due to consumerism, we no longer know exactly what we are buying and are therefore no longer connected to nature through the produce available at a supermarket. Ginsberg also uses Whitman's tasting spree through the store as a way of showing that in Whitman's day there was no capitalism that forced you to always pay for your pleasures. There is a suggestion here that paying for ones pleasures is not natural. The line "the doors close in an hour" (8) shows that Ginsberg is beginning to acknowledge that his vision of Whitman's vision of the natural world will not last as it cannot stand up to the modern economy where you can buy everything at a price. Their quest through "solitary streets" (10) past symbols that represent "the lost America" (11), which Whitman described in his poetry, will only lead them to the absolute darkness and loneliness in the current society. Ginsberg closes the poem by comparing "the lost America" (11) to Hades. Charon was the guardian of Hades who would ferry souls across the river Styx. Charon stopped short and let Whitman out on the "smoking bank" (12) of Lethe. The river Lethe, according to Greek mythology, would cause forgetfulness to those who drank from it. One can surmise that Ginsberg is referring to modern society and how it forgets its past and the difference between what is natural and what is a product of humans. This is what ties Ginsberg's protest against modern America together. The peach, the porkchops, the bananas in the supermarket no longer create a relationship between the consumer and the natural world from which the fruit originated.

Allen Ginsberg's and William Blake's poems are both examples poetry designed to make a statement about how society has changed for the worse and that a better alternative needs to be found. Even though these pieces were written over sixty years ago, we can still find a way to relate to them today. The idea of society losing touch with nature as it is expressed in Ginsberg's poem "A supermarket in California", is still a concern with today's processed food, indoor fruit factories, and now even larger supermarkets. Unfortunately the impact of William Blake's poem has lost quite a bit of its shock value on today's society but we can still relate to the idea of mechanization with the encroaching robotic arms spread of incurable diseases. If we can feel the impact of the

poetry now in 2011, imagine how much impact and shock value the pieces would have had on their audiences when they were first written.

The Tyger (Songs of Experience)

"**The Tyger**" is a poem by the English poet William Blake published in 1794 as part of the *Songs of Experience* collection. Literary critic Alfred Kazin calls it "the most famous of his poems," and *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake* says it is "the most anthologized poem in English." It is one of Blake's most reinterpreted and arranged works. "The Tiger," originally called "The Tyger," is a lyric poem focusing on the nature of God and his creations. Modern anthologies often print "The Tiger" alongside an earlier Blake poem, "The Lamb," published in 1789 in a collection entitled *Songs of Innocence*.

Background

The *Songs of Experience* was published in 1794 as a follow up to Blake's 1789 *Songs of Innocence*. The two books were published together under the merged title *Songs of Innocence and Experience, showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul: the author and printer, W. Blake* featuring 54 plates. The illustrations are arranged differently in some copies, while a number of poems were moved from *Songs of Innocence* to *Songs of Experience*. Blake continued to print the work throughout his life. Of the copies of the original collection, only 28 published during his life are known to exist, with an additional 16 published posthumously. Only 5 of the poems from *Songs of Experience* appeared individually before 1839.

About The Tyger

Published in a collection of poems called *Songs of Experience* in 1794, Blake wrote "The Tyger" during his more radical period. He wrote most of his major works during this time, often railing against oppressive institutions like the church or the monarchy, or any and all cultural traditions – sexist, racist, or classist – which stifled imagination or passion. Blake published an earlier collection of poetry called the *Songs of Innocence* in 1789. Once *Songs of Experience* came out five years later, the two were always published together.

In general, *Songs of Innocence* contains idyllic poems, many of which deal with childhood and innocence. Idyllic poems have pretty specific qualities: they're usually positive, sometimes extremely happy or optimistic and innocent. They also often take place in pastoral settings (think countryside; springtime; harmless, cute wildlife; sunsets; babbling brooks; wandering bards; fair maidens) and many times praise one or more of these things as subjects.

The poems in *Songs of Experience*, on the other hand, wrestle with issues of what happens when that innocence is lost. "The Tyger" is often paired with the poem called "The Lamb" from *Songs of Innocence*. The former references the latter and reexamines the themes of "The Lamb" through the lens of experience. "The Lamb" is one of those idyllic poems which asks the Lamb who made "thee" (just like "The Tyger"), praises how soft and cute it is, then tells it that God made it and how wonderful that is. Blake's tone almost seems ironic (i.e., he actually means something very different than what he seems to be saying). Many scholars have argued just that, especially when paired next to his poems about the dangers of religious dogma.

"The Tyger" is Blake's most-read poem, hands down. It is easier to read than a lot of his work, but by no means a walk in the park. Even though the themes and meaning are about as elusive or difficult as you can muster, but not so obscure you don't understand a thing.

The excitement that Blake inspires in a lot of really smart people, as well as normal people like us, is pretty compelling. He questions everything: religion, politics, poetry itself, history, science, and philosophy. He attacks traditional order, systems of rules and regulations, and people who think they have it all figured out. No one is spared from his critical eye, not angels, gods, God, kings, priests, or even you, the reader.

In any case, Blake is awesome, and "The Tyger" is a great introduction to the rest of his work. His poetry is a bit like Michael Moore meets Emily Dickinson. He's topical, sometimes very critical, and can be clever. He also has a brilliant poetic mind, and the eye of a visionary who sees the world in ways of which we can only dream. Not to mention, "The Tyger" is short, and doesn't require knowledge of Blake's personal mythology.

The symbol of the Tyger is one of the two central mysteries of the poem (the other being the Tyger's creator). It is unclear what it exactly symbolizes, but scholars have hypothesized that the Tyger could be inspiration, the divine, artistic creation, history, the sublime (the big, mysterious, powerful and sometimes scary. Read more on this in the "Themes and Quotes" section), or vision itself. Really, the list is almost infinite. The point is, the Tyger is important, and Blake's poem barely limits the possibilities.

stanza 4: In the poem, these tools make up an extended metaphor of the creator and his creation of the Tyger. A blacksmith uses these tools to make objects out of super-hot metal. The word "forge" – to create or form – is a smith term as well as another name for a smith's furnace. The smith reference also ties into all the fire imagery associated with the Tyger, and heightens the energy and danger of the Tyger's creation. If you don't think forging metal is hot or dangerous, you might want to visit even a modern-day steel mill.

You can't get away from religion in "The Tyger." In Blake's day, religious individuals and their institutions held great sway over people, far more than they do now in Europe. Questioning God's absolute supremacy was pretty rare, and was all but political suicide. Blake, on the other hand, has no problem questioning God, or dabbling in religious arenas that don't automatically assume that the Christian God is actually alpha and omega ("the beginning and the end" of the Greek alphabet). Thus, Blake questions who "could" create the Tyger, casting aside the notion that such a being is omnipotent (all-powerful). He also challenges he who "dares" forge the Tyger, and contain ("frame") its "fearful symmetry." Blake is not afraid of religious visions, since this poem is full of them, but he's not interested in simply rehashing the Christian doctrine. Rather, he interacts with Christian religion by challenging its assumptions.

Line 20: When you read the word "lamb," always first think: symbol of Jesus Christ ("the Lamb of God"). As the tradition holds, animals such as lambs were sacrificed to God or gods in general until God offered his Son, Jesus Christ – his lamb – as the final sacrifice for the sins of mankind. In line 20, Blake references a version of Christianity that states that God created Jesus (Protestant version vs. the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity). In any case, you don't need to know all the theology, just that it's a reference to Jesus and an allusion to Christianity. Blake asks whether God, who created Jesus, also created the Tyger. Also, don't forget that "The Lamb" is the title of another poem by Blake, from the *Songs of Innocence*; the two poems are often read together.

The fire serves multiple purposes as an extended metaphor. First, it's often associated with the Tyger, which contributes to the Tyger's ferocity and sublimity (the fact it's big, powerful, and mysterious). Fire is also a source of energy, and since the Tyger seems to be filled with fire, then he must also be filled with energy. In another sense, the fire of the smith's furnace is the fire of creation, the means by which the Tyger was formed.

The body parts referenced in this poem – hands, eyes, shoulders, and feet – are examples of synecdoche. Synecdoche is when a part of something is used to refer to the whole thing. For example, when someone yells "All hands on deck!" he doesn't actually mean that he wants a bunch of severed hands on the deck; rather, he wants the people *and* their hands to help with the ship. So, the phrase "immortal hand" references the whole being or person that the hand belongs to, while at the same time focusing on the hands as the means of creation. The eye is representative of the whole body and person, but also focuses (ha ha) our attention on the faculty of sight.

Also, by including only parts of the creator in the actually poem, Blake contributes to the mystery of who or what he actually is. It's like having only a few extreme close-ups of a person: you can see the hands, shoulder, feet, and eyes, but you can't see the whole package, and that means you can't even tell who you're looking at. Wings are what the creator uses to "aspire" to the creation of the Tyger. Essentially, they are the power or inspiration that allows the creator to "dare" go about the task of creating the Tyger.

Tyger

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,

In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

Summary

Stanza 1

What immortal being created this terrifying creature which, with its perfect proportions (*symmetry*), is an awesome killing machine?

Stanza 2

Was it created in hell (*distant deeps*) or in heaven (*skies*)? If the creator had wings, how could he get so close to the fire in which the tiger was created? How could he work with so blazing a fire?

Stanza 3

What strength (*shoulder*) and craftsmanship (*art*) could make the tiger's heart? What being could then stand before it (*feet*) and shape it further (*hand*)?

Stanza 4

What kind of tool (*hammer*) did he use to fashion the tiger in the forge fire? What about the chain connected to the pedal which the maker used to pump the bellows? What of the heat in the furnace and the anvil on which the maker hammered out his creation? How did the maker muster the courage to grasp the tiger?

Stanza 5

When the stars cast their light on the new being and the clouds cried, was the maker pleased with his creation?

Stanza 6

The poet repeats the central question of the poem, stated in Stanza 1. However, he changes *could* (line 4) to *dare* (line 24). This is a significant change, for the poet is no longer asking who had the capability of creating the tiger but who dared to create so frightful a creature.

The poem begins with the speaker asking a fearsome tiger what kind of divine being could have created it: "What immortal hand or eye/ Could frame they fearful symmetry?" Each subsequent stanza contains further questions, all of which refine this first one. From what part of the cosmos could the tiger's fiery eyes have come, and who would have dared to handle that fire? What sort of physical presence, and what kind of dark craftsmanship, would have been required to "twist the sinews" of the tiger's heart? The speaker wonders how, once that horrible heart "began to beat," its creator would have had the courage to continue the job. Comparing the creator to a blacksmith, he ponders about the anvil and the furnace that the project would have required and the smith who could have wielded them. And when the job was done, the speaker wonders, how would the creator have felt? "Did he smile his work to see?" Could this possibly be the same being who made the lamb? "The Tyger" contains only six stanzas, and each stanza is four lines long. The first and last stanzas are the same, except for one word change: "could" becomes "dare." "The Tyger" is a poem made of questions. There are no less than thirteen question marks and only one full sentence that ends with a period instead of a question mark. Addressing "The Tyger," the speaker questions it as to its creation – essentially: "Who made you Mr. Tyger?" "How were you made? Where? Why? What was the person or thing like that made you?" The poem is often interpreted to deal with issues of inspiration, poetry, mystical knowledge, God, and the sublime (big, mysterious, powerful, and sometimes scary. Ever heard the phrase, "To love God is to fear him"? That's talking about something sublime). But it's not about any *one* thing: this is William Blake. For better or worse, there really is no narrative movement in "The Tyger": nobody really *does* anything other than the speaker questioning "the Tyger." The first stanza opens the central question: "What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?" The second stanza questions "the Tyger" about where he was created, the third about how the creator formed him, the fourth about what tools were used. The fifth stanza goes on to ask about how the creator reacted to his creation ("the Tyger") and who exactly was this creator. Finally, the sixth restates the central question while raising the stakes; rather than merely question what/who *could* create the Tyger, the speaker wonders: who *dares*.

Form

The poem is in trochaic tetrameter with catalexis at the end of each line. Here is an explanation of these technical terms:

Tetrameter Line: a poetry line usually with eight syllables.

Trochaic Foot: A pair of syllables--a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable.

Catalexis: The absence of a syllable in the final foot in a line. In Blake's poem, an unstressed syllable is absent in the last foot of each line. Thus, every line has seven syllables, not the conventional eight.

The following illustration using the first two lines of the poem demonstrates tetrameter with four trochaic feet, the last one catalectic:

```

.....1.....2.....3.....4
Tiger,..|.Tiger,..|.BURN ing..|.BRIGHT
.....1.....2.....3.....4
IN the..|.FOR ests..|.OF the..|.NIGHT

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Notice that the fourth foot in each line eliminates the conventional unstressed syllable (catalexis). However, this irregularity in the trochaic pattern does not harm the rhythm of the poem. In fact, it may actually enhance it, allowing each line to end with an accented syllable that seems to mimic the beat of the maker's hammer on the anvil. For a detailed discussion of meter and the various types of feet,

The poem is comprised of six quatrains in rhymed couplets. The meter is regular and rhythmic, its hammering beat suggestive of the smithy that is the poem's central image. The simplicity and neat proportions of the poems form perfectly suit its regular structure, in which a string of questions all contribute to the articulation of a single, central idea.

Commentary

The opening question enacts what will be the single dramatic gesture of the poem, and each subsequent stanza elaborates on this conception. Blake is building on the conventional idea that nature, like a work of art, must in some way contain a reflection of its creator. The tiger is strikingly beautiful yet also horrific in its capacity for violence. What kind of a God, then, could or would design such a terrifying beast as the tiger? In more general terms, what does the undeniable existence of evil and violence in the world tell us about the nature of God, and what does it mean to live in a world where a being can at once contain both beauty and horror?

The tiger initially appears as a strikingly sensuous image. However, as the poem progresses, it takes on a symbolic character, and comes to embody the spiritual and moral problem the poem explores: perfectly beautiful and yet perfectly destructive, Blake's tiger becomes the symbolic center for an investigation into the presence of evil in the world. Since the tiger's remarkable nature exists both in physical and moral terms, the speaker's questions about its origin must also encompass both physical and moral dimensions. The poem's series of questions repeatedly ask what sort of physical creative capacity the "fearful symmetry" of the tiger bespeaks; assumedly only a very strong and powerful being could be capable of such a creation.

The smithy represents a traditional image of artistic creation; here Blake applies it to the divine creation of the natural world. The "forging" of the tiger suggests a very physical, laborious, and deliberate kind of making; it emphasizes the awesome physical presence of the tiger and precludes the idea that such a creation could have been in any way accidentally or haphazardly produced. It also continues from the first description of the tiger the imagery of fire with its simultaneous connotations of creation, purification, and destruction. The speaker stands in awe of the tiger as a sheer physical and aesthetic achievement, even as he recoils in horror from the moral implications of such a creation; for the poem addresses not only the question of who *could* make such a creature as the tiger, but who *would* perform this act. This is a question of creative responsibility and of will, and the poet carefully includes this moral question with the consideration of physical power. Note, in the third stanza, the parallelism of "shoulder" and "art," as well as the fact that it is not just the body but also the "heart" of the tiger that is being forged. The repeated use of word the "dare" to replace the "could" of the first stanza introduces a dimension of aspiration and willfulness into the sheer might of the creative act.

The reference to the lamb in the penultimate stanza reminds the reader that a tiger and a lamb have been created by the same God, and raises questions about the implications of this. It also invites a contrast between the perspectives of "experience" and "innocence" represented here and in the poem "The Lamb." "The Tyger" consists entirely of unanswered questions, and the poet leaves us to awe at the complexity of creation, the sheer magnitude of God's power, and the inscrutability of divine will. The perspective of experience in this poem involves a sophisticated acknowledgment of what is unexplainable in the universe, presenting evil as the prime example of something that cannot be denied, but will not withstand facile explanation, either. The open awe of "The Tyger" contrasts with the easy confidence, in "The Lamb," of a child's innocent faith in a benevolent universe.

Structure

The poem consists of six quatrains. (A quatrain is a four-line stanza.) Each quatrain contains two couplets. (A couplet is a pair of rhyming lines). Thus we have a twenty-four-line poem with twelve couplets and six stanzas—a neat, balanced package. The question in the final stanza repeats (except for one word, *dare*) the wording of the first stanza, perhaps suggesting that the question Blake raises will continue to perplex thinkers ad infinitum.

The first and last stanzas are identical except the word "could" becomes "dare" in the second iteration. Kazin says to begin to wonder about the tiger, and its nature, can only lead to a daring to wonder about it. Blake achieves great power through the use of alliteration ("frame" and "fearful") combined with imagery, (burning, fire, eyes), and he structures the poem to ring with incessant repetitive questioning, demanding of the creature, "Who made thee?". In the second stanza the focus moves from the tiger, the creation, to the creator – of whom Blake wonders "What dread hand? & what dread feet?". "The Tyger" is six stanzas in length, each stanza four lines long. Much of the poem follows the metrical pattern of its first line and can be scanned as trochaic tetrameter catalectic. A number of lines, however—such as line four in the first stanza—fall into iambic tetrameter.

"The Tyger" lacks narrative movement. The first stanza opens the central question: "What immortal hand or eye, / Could frame thy fearful symmetry?". Here the direct address to the creature becomes most obvious, but certainly the tyger cannot provide the lyrical I with a satisfactory answer. So the contemplation continues. The second stanza questions "the Tyger" about where he was created, the third about how the creator formed him, the fourth about what tools were used. In the fifth stanza Blake wonders how the creator reacted to "the Tyger" and who created the creature. Finally, the sixth restates the central question while raising the stakes; rather than merely question what/who could create the Tyger, the speaker wonders: *who dares*.

Examples Figures of Speech and Allusions

Alliteration: Tiger, tiger, burning bright (line 1); frame thy fearful symmetry? (line 4)

Metaphor: Comparison of the tiger and his eyes to fire.

Anaphora: Repetition of *what* at the beginning of sentences or clauses. Example: *What dread hand and what dread feet? / What the hammer? what the chain?*

Allusion: *Immortal hand or eye*: God or Satan

Allusion: *Distant deeps or skies*: hell or heaven

Symbols

The Tiger: Evil (or Satan)

The Lamb: Goodness (or God)

Distant Deeps: Hell

Skies: Heaven

Themes and Critical Analysis

The Existence of Evil

“The Tiger” presents a question that embodies the central theme: Who created the tiger? Was it the kind and loving God who made the lamb? Or was it Satan? Blake presents his question in lines 3 and 4:

What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

Blake realizes, of course, that God made all the creatures on earth. However, to express his bewilderment that the God who created the gentle lamb also created the terrifying tiger, he includes Satan as a possible creator while raising his rhetorical questions, notably the one he asks in lines 5 and 6:

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thy eyes?

Deeps appears to refer to hell and *skies* to heaven. In either case, there would be fire--the fire of hell or the fire of the stars.

Of course, there can be no gainsaying that the tiger symbolizes evil, or the incarnation of evil, and that the lamb (Line 20) represents goodness, or Christ. Blake's inquiry is a variation on an old philosophical and theological question: Why does evil exist in a universe created and ruled by a benevolent God? Blake provides no answer. His mission is to reflect reality in arresting images. A poet's first purpose, after all, is to present the world and its denizens in language that stimulates the aesthetic sense; he is not to exhort or moralize. Nevertheless, the poem does stir the reader to deep thought. Here is the tiger, fierce and brutal in its quest for sustenance; there is the lamb, meek and gentle in its quest for survival. Is it possible that the same God who made the lamb also made the tiger? Or was the tiger the devil's work?

The Awe and Mystery of Creation and the Creator

The poem is more about the creator of the tiger than it is about the tiger itself. In contemplating the terrible ferocity and awesome symmetry of the tiger, the speaker is at a loss to explain how the same God who made the lamb could make the tiger. Hence, this theme: humans are incapable of fully understanding the mind of God and the mystery of his handiwork.

"The Tyger" is the sister poem to "The Lamb" (from "Songs of Innocence"), a reflection of similar ideas from a different perspective (Blake's concept of "contraries"), with "The Lamb" bringing attention to innocence. "The Tyger" presents a duality between aesthetic beauty and primal ferocity, and Blake believes that to see one, the hand that created "The Lamb", one must also see the other, the hand that created "The Tyger": "Did he who made the Lamb make thee? *The Songs of Experience* were written as a contrary to the "Songs of Innocence" – a central tenet in Blake's philosophy, and central theme in his work. The struggle of humanity is based on the concept of the contrary nature of things, Blake believed, and thus, to achieve truth one must see the contraries in innocence and experience. Experience is not the face of evil but rather another facet of that which created us. Kazin says of Blake, "Never is he more heretical than ... where he glories in the hammer and fire out of which

are struck ... the Tyger". Rather than believing in war between good and evil or heaven and hell Blake thought each man must first see and then resolve the contraries of existence and life; in "The Tyger" he presents a poem of "triumphant human awareness", and "a hymn to pure being", according to Kazin.

Understanding William Blake's "The Tyger"

by Ed Friedlander

As an online William Blake fan, I receive at least one request per month from students asked to interpret William Blake's wonderful lyric, "The Tyger."

The contrast with "The Lamb" is obvious. ("Little Lamb, who made thee? Dost thou know who made thee?" The answer is God, who became incarnate as Jesus the Lamb.) "The Tyger" asks, "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" And the answer is, "Yes, God made the Tyger too."

To understand "The Tyger" fully, you need to know Blake's symbols. One of the central themes in his major works is that of the Creator as a blacksmith. This is both God the Creator (personified in Blake's myth as Los) and Blake himself (again with Los as his alter-ego.) Blake identified God's creative process with the work of an artist. And it is art that brings creation to its fulfillment -- by showing the world as it is, by sharpening perception, by giving form to ideas.

Blake's story of creation differs from the Genesis account. The familiar world was created only after a cosmic catastrophe. When the life of the spirit was reduced to a sea of atoms, the Creator set a limit below which it could not deteriorate farther, and began creating the world of nature. The longer books that Blake wrote describe Los's creation of animals and people within the world of nature. One particularly powerful passage in "Milton" describes Los's family weaving the bodies of each unborn child.

In believing that creation followed a cosmic catastrophe and a fall of spiritual beings into matter, Blake recalls Gnosticism, a multi-faceted religious movement that has run parallel to mainstream Christianity. Unlike most other Gnosticizers, Blake considered our own world to be a fine and wonderful place, but one that would ultimately give way to a restored universe. Blake believed that his own visions, which included end-of-the-world images and sometimes a sense of cosmic oneness, prefigured this, and that his art would help raise others "to the perception of the infinite." For Blake (and for many, if not most, mainstream Christians), the purpose of creation is as a place for our own growth, in preparation for the beginning of our real lives. Although the natural world contains much that is gentle and innocent ("Songs of Innocence"), those who are experienced with life ("Songs of Experience") know that there is also much that is terrible and frightening. (The "fearful symmetry" might be that of the lamb and the tyger, innocence and experience. What do you think?)

A casual reader or student does not have to understand Blake's mystical-visionary beliefs to appreciate "The Tyger". For the casual reader, the poem is about the question that most of us asked when we first heard about God as the benevolent creator of nature. "Why is there bloodshed and pain and horror?" If you're like me, you've heard various answers that are obviously not true. "The Tyger", which actually finishes without an answer, is (on this level) about your own experience of not getting a completely satisfactory answer to this essential question of faith.

There is more. "The Tyger" is about having your reason overwhelmed at once by the beauty and the horror of the natural world. "When the stars threw down their spears / And watered heaven with their tears" is the most

difficult section of "The Tyger". In the creation story in "Job", the stars sing for joy at creation, a scene that Blake illustrated. In Blake's later books, the stars throw down their cups (the notebook poem "When Klopstock England Defied...") and in "The Four Zoas" figure prominently in the account of Urizen's failed clockwork universe founded on pure reason. For Blake, the stars represent cold reason and objective science. (They are weaker than the Sun of inspiration or the moon of love. Their mechanical procession has reminded others, including the author of "Lucifer in Starlight", of "the army of unalterable law"; in this case the law of science.) Although Blake was hostile (as I am, and as most real scientists are) to attempts to reduce all phenomena to chemistry and physics, Blake greatly appreciated the explosion of scientific knowledge during his era. But there is something about seeing a Tyger that you can't learn from a zoology class. The sense of awe and fear defy reason. And Blake's contemporary "rationalists" who had hoped for a tame, gentle world guided by kindness and understanding must face the reality of the Tyger.

Other people will tell you the Tyger represents evil. When I hear the word, I think of (among other things) a blathering alcoholic adult bully ridiculing and beating a small child. This should not happen, and makes no sense, but it happens all the time, and when it does, "the stars throw down their spears / and water heaven with their tears." Given that different people use the word "evil" in different ways, you'll need to decide for yourself whether the Tyger encompasses more. It seems to me that it is not "evil" for a real tiger to eat a lamb, but is part-and-parcel of our world. Yet it still inspires a certain horror and a sense of awe, that we are in the presence of a transcendent mystery at the very heart of creation -- and a certain terrible beauty. If Blake's lyric has brought this to our attention, it has been successful.

The poem is often quoted. One extended example is in the graphic novel "Origin: The True Story of Wolverine", in which it reminds the heroine of the clawed hero's ferocious character and mysterious origins.

If you found that you really enjoyed "The Tyger", then I hope you'll have a chance to explore more of Blake's writings -- even the difficult "Prophetic Books" -- as well as his own influences (especially the Bible and "Paradise Lost"). You may also enjoy learning about his times, and the social injustices of which he was so deeply aware.

You may also enjoy reading about T.S. Eliot and "Christ the Tiger". Yesterday's romantic poets and today's liberation theologians write about Christ as rebel, liberator, advocate for the politically oppressed, type of Prometheus, and so forth. The Bible and the human family's mystics and visionaries have written much about the fear and awe that come from encountering the Lord. Do you think "The Tyger" is actually about Christ's coming... to individuals, in historical movements, at the end of time?

Yes!

- The companion piece is "The Lamb." Everybody knows Christ is "the lamb of God".
- Blake's Jesus liberates people, though by providing visions rather than focusing on political activism.
- Los, Blake's spirit of poetry, vision, and liberation, is a blacksmith.

No!

- In "The Lamb", Christ becomes a child, not a lamb.
- Both poems are about created beings.
- There is nothing to suggest the Tyger is a liberator. Contrast Blake's fiery Los.

- The rest of the "Songs of Experience" are about the terrifying and horrible side of life.

You can argue either side. You decide.

I have always loved the classical poets like Blake because of the intensity and compactness of their expression, especially within the discipline of rhyme and meter that make it easy to remember the words. Today there is very little interest outside of academia and trendoid circles in the amorphous stuff that passes for "contemporary poetry". But Shakespeare, Chaucer, Milton, Keats, and Tennyson were extraordinarily popular with ordinary people. Blake was less well-known to his contemporaries, but now is hugely popular with casual readers.

The real heirs of the classical poets are the lyricists of popular music. Sometimes lyrics make no sense, and it's hard for me to appreciate this. (A friend who's knowledgeable about such things told me: "'Stairway to Heaven' is supposed to mean whatever you want it to mean.") At their best, they present a bit of human experience that makes you say, "Wow! I knew that, but never heard it expressed so clearly!"

If you like "The Tyger", you may want to go on to learn more about Blake. For his era, he was extremely radical, both politically and philosophically. He and his wife practiced nudism in a friend's garden ("It's okay, we're just Adam and Eve"). Blake was tried for treason for saying something like "you soldiers of the god-damned king, I hope Napoleon kills all of you" while throwing a drunken soldier out of his garden. Blake used to see visions and hear voices, and we have sketches he made of famous people who visited him. In my undergraduate thesis paper, Understanding William Blake's "Milton", I have described how Blake's visions appear identical to those typical of schizophrenia.

One of the most important principles of medicine is that "just because something is diagnosable, it isn't necessarily a disease." It would be very foolish to claim that Blake was "sick" or "disabled". Blake's genius transformed what for many would be a crippling illness into a vast treasure of art and poetry of great meaning and beauty.

By the way, the claim has proved extraordinarily unpopular among Blake's non-physician admirers. But since I'm the only physician who's addressed the question, and the extraordinarily high quality of Blake's character and output speak for themselves, I'm standing by it.

Imagery and Symbolism

Blake makes many references to Greek and Roman mythology in his poetry. Myths are more than stories; they were told to suggest some truths about human nature and experiences or to explain how the world has become the way it is. They are appropriate in presenting *The Tyger* because the poem deals with ideas about our understanding of life. Like many writers in the Christian tradition, Blake also combines classical with biblical symbols, images and stories.

On what wings dare he aspire – This seems to allude primarily to angels, in particular to the fallen angels who aspired to overthrow God and were cast down into Hell. This would suggest that the speaker is inclined to believe that the force who made the tiger is not God but a demonic power, in opposition to God.

It is often seen, also, as a possible allusion to the classical tale of Icarus. Icarus desired to fly and his father made him wings of wax. These wings melted when he flew too near to the sun. As a symbol of humankind aspiring beyond its limits, it suggests that this creator is being extremely audacious in creating this beast, almost going beyond his own limits.

What the hand dare seize the fire? – Many critics see here a possible allusion to Prometheus who stole fire from the gods to help humankind. This would make it another symbol of daring aspiration. Prometheus' action was benevolent but the context in which this occurs suggests something dreadful about the hand seizing the fire. It is as though the speaker is possessed by the ferocity and power of the tiger; that he is blind to the possibility of something beneficent lying within it.

Hammer .. furnace .. anvil – This is an allusion to Hephaestus, the Greek blacksmith god of fire. His symbols are a hammer and anvil. Some legends say that Prometheus stole fire from Hephaestus' forge and was punished by him. It would suggest that this creator is seen as demonic rather than benevolent.

In his poem *Paradise Lost*, Milton, an influence on Blake, linked this story of Hephaestus with the fall of the angels after their rebellion against God. Milton presented Hephaestus as the creator of Pandemonium, the dwelling-place of all the demons. This would link this image with those of wings and of the furnace.

'When the stars threw down their spears' - is another allusion to the fall of the angels. It suggests that Blake's primary thought is to link the images of wings, seizing fire and throwing down spears with Milton's account of the fall of the angels and the figure of Hephaestus as a demonic figure rather than a benevolent god.

The use of this complex of images suggests the mind of the speaker. He sees ferocious power, daring and energy at the heart of creation, his language suggesting the fascination this vision exerts. Blake here may also be alluding to the revolutionary spirit of the age, when the 'Terror' was unleashed by French Revolutionaries audaciously seizing power (see Social / political background > The spirit of rebellion – politics).

The Lamb - Blake here alludes to *The Lamb* (I) and to biblical tradition in the line, 'Did he who made the Lamb make thee?' The Lamb represents all that is gentle, tender, innocent, playful and mild in creation. It represents ideas of divinity as found in Jesus. He is referred to as 'the Lamb of God' who takes away the sins of the world in John 1:29. He is also called a lamb in 1 Peter 1:19 and is identified as a sacrificial lamb in 1 Corinthians 5:7. However, this lamb is not a soft, woolly and cuddly animal but a sacrificial victim whom Christians believe achieves victory over evil for humanity. Thus Blake is drawing together the contraries of dark and light, of might and tenderness, of dark forces and their conqueror.

Investigating imagery and symbolism

- How does Blake's use of the story of Hephaestus add to your understanding of the poem?

How the human mind sees the nature of the world and its creator

According to Blake, 'contraries' are facts about the world and about the nature of the creative force behind it. For example, ferocious power and energy exist alongside what is fragile and tender. Humans falsify their understanding of the creator and of the human beings made 'in his image' when one of these dimensions is

excluded from the picture. This creates unnecessary questions and produces unhealthy splits between what are understood as forces of good and forces of evil.

According to the Bible, Heaven and Hell impinge on human experience. Thus, the powerful energies within the world and the energies and instincts within human beings are necessary and beautiful. They become destructive when they are either denied or seen as the sole factor in life and experience. Blake's sub-theme is that vision based wholly on experience is as incomplete as the inadequacy of ignorant innocence.

God in man's image

Blake disagreed with the creation of the image of an external God-figure, as simply being a projection of human needs and attitudes. Blake felt that merely human understanding created a limiting vision of the creator, simply as a projection of its own human qualities:

- Those who see only gentleness and tenderness in nature and in themselves produce an image of a creator who is mild and gentle but lacks energy and power
- Those who have fallen into divided selfhood see the creator only in terms of their own capacity for jealousy, cruelty and possessiveness. They create an image of God as a tyrant who is a tyrannical ruler and must be appeased.

Here, the speaker struggles to hold together the qualities of the lamb and the tiger and, therefore, seems to believe in separate creators and in the malevolent nature of the creator of the tiger.

Study Questions

1. Discuss Blake's use of auditory imagery in the poems, and cite one example.

Blake's work shows a constant awareness of the ironies of publishing "songs" in written form—publishing poems that lay claim to an oral culture in a series of elaborately visual engravings. This awareness reflects the general Romantic preoccupation with the possibility of capturing in writing the rhythms, immediacy, and spontaneity of the spoken human voice. Blake seems, if not pessimistic, at least dubious about such a possibility, as can be seen in his Introduction to *Songs of Innocence*. Here, a child gives a wandering bard three commands: first to play his pipe, second to sing his songs, and third to write them. This progression may imply a decline, from the purity of music (without linguistic meaning), to orality (bound by meaning but still spontaneous and fleeting), to literacy (without need for human presence and perhaps less personal). The speaker's pen, ambiguously, "stain[s] the water clear"; thus the image simultaneously implies both a purification (to "stain" it "clear") and a corruption (to "stain" the "clear" water). On which process does the emphasis lie? Is writing part of the descent into experience?

2. Comment on Blake as a social critic.

Blake wrote in an era of great social and political upheaval. The democratic ideals of the French Revolution of 1789—the year of the first publication of *Songs of Innocence*—undoubtedly influenced him. But in politics

Blake aligned with no particular system or idealism; he speaks always for the primacy of the individual and the imagination. Blake did attach importance to particular social reforms: one might extrapolate some of these from a poem such as "London," depicting great suffering and oblivious social institutions, or one might consider Blake's use of the plights of innocent children in a whole range of poems such as "Holy Thursday." But a reading of Blake as social critic should always keep in mind the transcendent, humane values of the imagination and of the self unrestricted by narrow social convention; for these values formed the core of his moral code. This code stringently opposes an impersonal, conventional transcendence, and rejects the consolation of a life after this world—both of which are offered by the Church. See in particular the irony of "The Little Black Boy" for evidence of this last point.

3. What were (and are) the effects of Blake's mode of publishing his poems with handcrafted colored engravings?

Blake is somewhat misnamed as a poet; he is perhaps better called a craftsman or artisan, and is widely studied and valued as a visual artist. To be understood fully his poems must be considered as material artifacts. The color and composition of surrounding images can deeply change our stance on a poem. (You might find an edition of Blake containing his images in color and test out this hypothesis on "The Nurse's Song.") We should also recognize that such an arduous publication process helped condemn Blake to relative obscurity during his own lifetime. Poems universally known today would have been read by very, very few of Blake's contemporaries.

4. Comment on Blake's use of the ballad form.

5. What are Blake's favorite images of innocence, and how does he use them?

6. Discuss Blake's use of simple sentence structure and diction in these poems. What is the overall effect of this stylistic decision? What keeps the poems themselves from being simple?

7. How does Blake portray nature? How does the conception of nature differ in the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience*?

8. Are Blake's poems symbolic? Explain your answer.

9. How does Blake use repetition in the *Songs of Innocence and Experience*?

10. How does Blake portray childhood?

11. What can you discern from these poems about Blake's views on religion?

12. Why do you think the speaker never actually says the word "London" in the poem itself? Could this poem be about other cities?

13. How one-sided is the speaker's perspective of London? Why doesn't he say anything positive, or point out any of the beauties of London?

14. What do you make of the phrase "marriage hearse"? Why might be marriage be associated with death in "London"?

15. Why are there so many children in this poem (chimney sweeper, infants, etc.)? What do they symbolize, and why do you think so?

ABOUT THE POET

William Wordsworth

Discussing prose written by poets, Joseph Brodsky has remarked, “the tradition of dividing literature into poetry and prose dates from the beginnings of prose, since it was only in prose that such a distinction could be made.” This insight is worth bearing in mind when considering the various prose works of the *poet* William Wordsworth. For Wordsworth poetic composition was a primary mode of expression; prose was secondary. Wordsworth seems to have written prose mostly in order to find a structure for his poetic beliefs and political enthusiasms. Over the course of a prolific poetic career, in fact, Wordsworth produced little prose, though he did compose two works of lasting general interest, one on poetics—“Preface to Lyrical Ballads”—and the other on the landscape of his native region—his tourist handbook, *A Guide through the District of the Lakes*, which retains more than a local interest as geographical background to his poems and biography. Wordsworth is not, of course, remembered as a prose writer but as a poet of spiritual and epistemological speculation, a poet concerned with the human relationship to nature. Yet recently, certain critics, as part of a revisionist critique of older interpretations of Wordsworth’s verse, have turned to his political essays for evidence, especially concerning the poet’s rejection of his youthful radicalism. Wordsworth’s political writings, especially “A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff,” *The Convention of Cintra* (1809), and *Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmoreland* (1818), while historically significant, are of primary interest as background for the poetry: for Wordsworth, poetics always determined politics.

William Wordsworth, son of John and Ann Cookson Wordsworth, was born on 7 April 1770 in Cockermouth, Cumberland. The Wordsworth children—Richard, William, Dorothy, John, and Christopher—remained close throughout their lives, and the support Dorothy offered William during his long career has attained legendary status. John Wordsworth, William’s father, was legal agent to Sir James Lowther, Baronet of Lowther (later Earl of Lonsdale), a political magnate and property owner. Wordsworth’s deep love for the “beauteous forms” of the natural world was established early. The Wordsworth children seem to have lived in a sort of rural paradise along the Derwent River, which ran past the terraced garden below the ample house whose tenancy John Wordsworth had obtained from his employer before his marriage to Ann Cookson. William attended the grammar school near Cockermouth Church and Ann Birkett’s school at Penrith, the home of his maternal grandparents. The intense lifelong friendship between Dorothy and William Wordsworth probably began when they, along with Mary Hutchinson, attended school at Penrith. Wordsworth’s early childhood beside the Derwent and his schooling at Cockermouth are vividly recalled in various passages of *The Prelude* and in shorter poems such as the sonnet “Address from the Spirit of Cockermouth Castle.” His experiences in and around Hawkshead, where William and Richard Wordsworth began attending school in 1779, would also provide the poet with a store of images and sensory experience that he would continue to draw on throughout his poetic career, but especially during the “great decade” of 1798 to 1808. This childhood idyll was not to continue, however. In March of 1778 Ann Wordsworth died while visiting a friend in London. In June 1778 Dorothy was sent to live in Halifax, Yorkshire, with her mother’s cousin Elizabeth Threlkeld, and she lived with a succession of relatives thereafter. She did not see William again until 1787.

In December of 1783 John Wordsworth, returning home from a business trip, lost his way and was forced to spend a cold night in the open. Very ill when he reached home, he died 30 December. Though separated from their sister, all the boys eventually attended school together at Hawkshead, staying in the house of Ann Tyson. In 1787, despite poor finances caused by ongoing litigation over Lord Lowther’s debt to John Wordsworth’s estate, Wordsworth went up to Cambridge as a sizar in St. John’s College. As he himself later noted,

Wordsworth's undergraduate career was not distinguished by particular brilliance. In the third book of *The Prelude* Wordsworth recorded his reactions to life at Cambridge and his changing attitude toward his studies. During his last summer as an undergraduate, he and his college friend Robert Jones—much influenced by William Coxe's *Sketches of the Natural, Civil, and Political State of Switzerland* (1779)—decided to make a tour of the Alps, departing from Dover on 13 July 1790.

Though Wordsworth, encouraged by his headmaster William Taylor, had been composing verse since his days at Hawkshead Grammar School, his poetic career begins with this first trip to France and Switzerland. During this period he also formed his early political opinions—especially his hatred of tyranny. These opinions would be profoundly transformed over the coming years but never completely abandoned. Wordsworth was intoxicated by the combination of revolutionary fervor he found in France—he and Jones arrived on the first anniversary of the storming of the Bastille—and by the impressive natural beauty of the countryside and mountains. Returning to England in October, Wordsworth was awarded a pass degree from Cambridge in January 1791, spent several months in London, and then traveled to Jones's parents' home in North Wales. During 1791 Wordsworth's interest in both poetry and politics gained in sophistication, as natural sensitivity strengthened his perceptions of the natural and social scenes he encountered. In a letter to William Matthews, a Cambridge friend, he lamented his lack of Italian and weak Spanish—he would have liked to be reading modern poetry.

Wordsworth's passion for democracy, as is clear in his “Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff” (also called “Apology for the French Revolution”), is the result of his two youthful trips to France. In November 1791 Wordsworth returned to France, where he attended sessions of the National Assembly and the Jacobin Club. In December he met and fell in love with Annette Vallon, and at the beginning of 1792 he became the close friend of an intellectual and philosophical army officer, Michel Beaupuy, with whom he discussed politics. Wordsworth had been an instinctive democrat since childhood, and his experiences in revolutionary France strengthened and developed his convictions. His sympathy for ordinary people would remain with Wordsworth even after his revolutionary fervor had been replaced with the “softened feudalism” he endorsed in his *Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmoreland* in 1818.

While still in France, Wordsworth began work on the first extended poetic efforts of his maturity, *Descriptive Sketches*, which was published in 1793, after the appearance of a poem written at Cambridge, *An Evening Walk* (1793). Having exhausted his money, he left France in early December 1792 before Annette Vallon gave birth to his child Caroline. Back in England, the young radical cast about for a suitable career. As a fervent democrat, he had serious reservations about “vegetating in a paltry curacy,” though he had written to William Matthews from France in May 1792 that he intended to be ordained the following winter or spring. Perhaps this plan was why he was reading sermons early in 1793, when he came across a sermon by Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, on “the Wisdom and Goodness of God” in making both rich and poor, with an appendix denouncing the French Revolution. His democratic sympathies aroused, he spent several weeks in February and March working on a reply.

By this time, his relationship with Annette Vallon had become known to his English relatives, and any further opportunity of entering the Church was foreclosed. In any case Wordsworth had been reading atheist William Godwin's recently published *Political Justice* (1793), and had come powerfully under its sway. “A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff”—not published until 1876, when it was included in Alexandere B. Grosart's edition of Wordsworth's prose—is the youthful poet and democrat's indignant reply to the forces of darkness, repression, and monarchy. Its prose shares something of the revolutionary clarity of Thomas Paine's. Wordsworth, in fact, quoted Paine in his refutation of Bishop Watson's appendix: “If you had looked in the articles of the rights of

man, you would have found your efforts superseded. Equality, without which liberty cannot exist, is to be met with in perfection in that state in which no distinctions are admitted but such as have evidently for their object the general good.” Just how radical Wordsworth’s political beliefs were during this period can be judged from other passages in this “Letter”: “At a period big with the fate of the human race, I am sorry that you attach so much importance to the personal sufferings of the late royal martyr.... You wish it to be supposed that you are one of those who are unpersuaded of the guilt of Louis XVI. If you had attended to the history of the French revolution as minutely as its importance demands, so far from stopping to bewail his death, you would rather have regretted that the blind fondness of his people had placed a human being in that monstrous situation....” Remarking upon the stripping of property from the French priesthood, Wordsworth asserted: “The assembly were true to justice and refused to compromise the interests of the Nation by accepting as a satisfaction the insidious offerings of compulsive charity. They enforced their right: they took from the clergy a considerable portion of their wealth, and applied it to the alleviation of the national misery.”

“A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff” is remarkable partly because Wordsworth seems to have begun relinquishing its tenets almost as soon as he had composed them. Though he remained for the time being a strong supporter of the French Revolution, the poetic side of Wordsworth’s personality began asserting itself, causing the poet to reexamine, between 1793 and 1796, his adherence to Godwin’s rationalistic model of human behavior, upon which Wordsworth’s republicanism was largely founded. Whether “A Letter to Bishop the of Llandaff” remained unpublished through caution or circumstance is not clear. As Wordsworth turned his attention to poetry, he developed, through the process of poetic composition, his own theory of human nature, one that had very little to do with Godwin’s rationalism. During this period Wordsworth met another radical young man with literary aspirations, Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

In 1794 and 1795 Wordsworth divided his time between London and the Lake Country, at one point telling William Matthews that he would rather be in London because cataracts and mountains were good occasionally but would not do for constant companions. Nevertheless, in September 1795 William and Dorothy Wordsworth settled at Racedown Lodge in Dorset, the first of their several Lake Country dwellings. In *The Prelude* Wordsworth wrote that his sister “Maintained a saving intercourse / With my true self,” and “preserved me still / A poet.” At Racedown Wordsworth composed *The Borderers*, a tragedy in which he came fully to terms with Godwin’s philosophy, finally rejecting it as an insufficiently rich approach to life for a poet. Then Wordsworth for the first time found his mature poetic voice, writing *The Ruined Cottage*, which would be published in 1814 as part of *The Excursion*, itself conceived as one part of a masterwork, *The Recluse*, which was to worry Wordsworth throughout his life, a poem proposed to him by Coleridge and planned as a full statement of the two poets’ emerging philosophy of life.

In 1797, to be closer to Coleridge, the Wordsworth’s moved to Alfoxden House, near the village of Nether Stowey. Because of the odd habits of the household—especially their walking over the countryside at all hours—the local population suspected that the Wordsworth’s and their visitors were French spies, and a government agent was actually dispatched to keep an eye on them. The years between 1797 and 1800 mark the period of Wordsworth and Coleridge’s close collaboration, and also the beginning of Wordsworth’s mature poetic career. Wordsworth wrote the poems that would go into the 1798 and 1800 editions of *Lyrical Ballads*—poems such as “Tintern Abbey,” “Expostulation and Reply,” “The Tables Turned,” “Goody Blake and Harry Gill,” and “Michael” (written, Wordsworth told James Fox, “to shew that men who did not wear fine clothes can feel deeply”). During 1798 Wordsworth also worked on a piece of prose setting out his evolving ideas on justice and morality. Called the “Essay on Morals” by later editors, it was set aside and never finished. Wordsworth seems to have been attempting to work out and justify his changing political and social ideas—ideas that had begun to develop intuitively during the process of poetic composition. The poet in Wordsworth

was beginning to dominate the democrat, and the poet found a political philosophy based on power, violence, and reason anathema. In the “Essay on Morals” Wordsworth concerns himself with the relationship between writing and political justice, and, though he had explicitly rejected Edmund Burke’s philosophy in his scorching “Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff,” he seems to be developing a Burkean idea of community.

In September 1798 the Wordsworth’s set off for Germany with Coleridge, returning separately, after some disagreements, in May 1799. In Germany Wordsworth continued to write poems, and when he returned to England he began to prepare a new edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. The second edition—that of 1800—included an extended preface by Wordsworth, explaining his reasons for choosing to write as he had and setting out a personal poetics that has remained influential and controversial to the present day. For Victorian readers such as Matthew Arnold, who tended to venerate Wordsworth, the preface was a fount of wisdom; but the modernists were deeply suspicious of Wordsworth’s reliance on *feeling*: poets such as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, while they could accept the strictures on poetic diction, found the underlying theory unacceptable. Subsequent critics have focused on the literary and historical sources of Wordsworth’s ideas, demonstrating that, while the poet certainly reinvented English poetic diction, his theories were deeply rooted in the practice of earlier poets, especially John Milton. This preface, Wordsworth’s only extended statement of his poetics, has become the source of many of the commonplaces and controversies of poetic theory and criticism. For Wordsworth, poetry, which should be written in “the real language of men,” is nevertheless “the spontaneous overflow of feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.”

The “Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*” (revised and expanded many times for later editions) is not a systematic poetics, but a partly polemical, partly pedantic, and still problematic statement of Wordsworth’s beliefs about poetry and poetic language. The preface in all its versions is highly discursive, the poet “thinking aloud” in an attempt to formulate ideas about poetry based on poems he has already written. It is important to remember when reading the preface that it both chronologically and logically follows the composition of most of the poems. The two central ideas of the preface are the need for reforming poetic diction—which, according to Wordsworth, had become far too artificial—and the role of the poet in society, which Wordsworth saw as having become too marginal. He had also come to the conclusion that the troubles of society were specifically urban in nature. This view finds eloquent expression in Wordsworth’s most powerful early poem, “Tintern Abbey.” Thinking of the way in which his memories of the Wye River valley had sustained him, Wordsworth wrote:

Though absent long,
These forms of beauty have not been to me,
As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet [.]

The poem concludes with a meditation on the power of nature to prevail against the false and superficial “dreary intercourse of daily life” that Wordsworth associated with city life, especially literary life in London. In the preface, Wordsworth characterized those forces as acting against the elevation of mind in which the poet specializes, and he identified them with urban life:

For a multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost

savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature of the atirical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespear and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.”

In a letter to Catherine Clarkson years later (4 June 1812), Wordsworth blamed not social institutions but people themselves for the ills of society: “As to public affairs; they are most alarming ... The [Prince Regent] seems neither respected or beloved; and the lower orders have been for upwards of thirty years accumulating in pestilential masses of ignorant population; the effects now begin to show themselves....” These words are remarkable in light of Wordsworth’s early identification with just such “masses of population,” though it is evident even in the preface that he had already begun to represent “the lower orders” as fundamentally removed from the affairs of both state and the arts. This belief is extraordinary considering the faith he had expressed in “the people” in “A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff.”

Even before the publication of the first edition in 1798, Wordsworth was certainly aware that the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* were different from the conventional verse of the day, and he knew that fashionable reviewers would probably dismiss them as insufficiently elevated in tone and subject matter. They did, with a vengeance, and a good part of Wordsworth’s additions to the preface for the 1802 edition are attempts to answer his critics. But even in the 1800 version of the preface Wordsworth made an explicit connection between a plain poetic diction and a proper relationship to nature and society; that is, he makes the issue of a poetic diction a moral one, and his critique of a sonnet by Thomas Gray is an ethical demonstration as well as an example of literary criticism directed by one generation against the preceding one. As Wordsworth revised the preface for later editions, the changes reflected Wordsworth’s increasingly conservative and establishment views.

By December 1799 William and Dorothy Wordsworth were living in Dove Cottage, at Town End, Grasmere. In May 1802 Sir James Lowther, Earl of Lonsdale, died, and, though the litigation over his debt to the estate of Wordsworth’s father had not been settled, his heir, Sir William Lowther, agreed to pay the Wordsworth children the entire sum. With financial prospects, Wordsworth married Mary Hutchinson on 2 October 1802. The settlement helped to support a growing family and also allowed the Wordsworths to continue their generosity to various friends and men of letters, many of whom came to stay at Dove Cottage, sometimes for months on end. The death of the earl of Lonsdale also marked the beginning of a close economic and political relationship between William Wordsworth and Sir William Lowther (who became earl of Lonsdale in 1807) that would have a significant effect on the poet’s political philosophy in the years to come.

Wordsworth continued to write poetry with energy and passion over the next several years, and while fashionable critics such as Francis Jeffrey continued to snipe, his reputation and finances slowly improved. During these years he composed “The Solitary Reaper,” “Resolution and Independence,” and “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” perhaps the greatest lyrics of his maturity. In these poems Wordsworth presents a fully developed, yet morally flexible, picture of the relationship between human beings and the natural world. Influenced by Neoplatonism, these poems also prepare the way for Wordsworth’s return to conventional religious belief. In 1805 Wordsworth completed a massive revision of the “poem to Coleridge” that would be published, after undergoing periodic adjustment and revision, after the poet’s death in 1850. Many critics believe that the “1805 Prelude,” as it has come to be called, is Wordsworth’s greatest poetic achievement.

In May 1808, his “great decade” behind him, Wordsworth moved with his family to Allan Bank, a larger house in Grasmere. Thomas De Quincy took over Dove Cottage. Evidence of a decisive turn in Wordsworth’s social and political views—and, by extension, his poetical views as well—during this period is to be found in *The Convention of Cintra* (1809), an extended political tract concerning the British expedition to Portugal to fight against Napoleon’s forces encamped on the Spanish peninsula. In 1793 Wordsworth had written in his “Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff,” “In France royalty is no more.” In 1808 he might have said “In William Wordsworth, Jacobinism is no more.” In place of Wordsworth’s early belief in equality, *The Convention of Cintra* presents a narrowly patriotic and nationalist view of European politics and a profoundly reactionary political philosophy expressed in tortured rhetoric:

But, from the moment of the rising of the people of the Pyrenean peninsula, there was a mighty change; we were instantaneously animated; and, from that moment, the contest assumed the dignity, which it is not in the power of any thing but hope to bestow; and, if I may dare to transfer language, prompted by a revelation of the state of being that admits not of decay or change, to the concerns and interests of our transitory planet, from that moment “this corruptible put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality.”

The rest of Wordsworth’s peroration is similarly tangled in syntax and thought. Furthermore, Wordsworth seems to have retreated into a form of rationalism he had rejected in order to become the great poet of 1797-1807:

Never, indeed, was the fellowship of our sentient nature more intimately felt—never was the irresistible power of justice more gloriously displayed than when the British and Spanish Nations, with an impulse like that of two ancient heroes throwing down their weapons and reconciled in the field, ... embraced each other—to solemnize this conversion of love, not by festivities of peace, but by combating side by side through danger and under affliction in the devotedness of perfect brotherhood. This was a conjunction which excited hope as fervent as it was rational.

Throughout *The Convention of Cintra* Wordsworth seems to have given himself over to rigid abstractions such as Patriotism, Justice, and Power, and it is possible to argue that the diminution of Wordsworth’s poetic power dates from this period. If “A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff” was derivative of Godwin, *The Convention of Cintra* is certainly derivative of Edmund Burke. When Henry Crabb Robinson showed a copy of Wordsworth’s pamphlet to Thomas Quayle, Quayle said that Wordsworth’s style resembled the worst of Burke’s. The radical republican of 1793 has by this point adopted not only Burke’s style but the essence of his thought as well. The transformation of his ideas seems to have cost Wordsworth his clarity of language, so apparent in “A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff,” and even the “Preface to Lyrical Ballads,” which, though structurally complicated, is never obscure in the way of *The Convention of Cintra*.

In spite of his claim that he wrote “so few letters, and employ my pen so little in any way,” Wordsworth was a prolific correspondent throughout his life, and his letters provide a useful prose fabric upon which to trace the embroidery of the poems. One brief sequence of letters from 1811 and 1812 illustrates Wordsworth’s range of tone and subject in this literary subgenre. Writing on 28 March 1811 to C. W. Pasley, who had sent Wordsworth a copy of his *Military Policy and Institutions of the British Empire* (1810), Wordsworth said how much he enjoyed the book, which he had “expected with great impatience,” and remarked that having read it carefully, he considered himself “in a high degree instructed” by the volume. Then the theorist of *The Convention of Cintra* began a critique of Pasley’s book, which according to Wordsworth is overly pessimistic about Britain’s chances for defeating France and overly belligerent in suggesting that the English must launch an all-out war of conquest, beginning in Sicily, on the European continent, planting the seeds of justice wherever the armies are

successful. Wordsworth, whose life had taught him to be economically astute, saw the folly of such an expedition, and told Pasley so, in exquisite detail. In fact, one is able to gain a clearer appreciation of Wordsworth's later political thinking from this and other letters of the period than from *The Convention of Cintra* with its overblown rhetoric. The letter to Pasley has the considerable virtue, for the sake of Wordsworth's prose, that it is rooted in the specifics of replying to an actual text. The letter to Pasley still, however, exhibits the poet's lamentable willingness to subscribe to the clichés of nationalism: "Was there ever an instance, since the world began, of the peaceful arts thriving under a despotism so oppressive as that of France is and must continue to be, and among a people so unsettled, so depraved, and so undisciplined in civil arts and habits as the French nation must now be?" In his youth, Wordsworth, while an enthusiast of the French Revolution, had the analytic ability of a historian; by 1811 he had only the empty categories of a pedant. His idealism, adopted for the purposes of poetic composition, led him to sweeping political conclusions unfounded in reality: "The *mind* of the Country [England] is so far before that of France, and that *that* mind has empowered the *hands* of the country to raise so much national wealth, that France must condescend to accept from us what she will be unable herself to produce" [emphasis in original]. Wordsworth argued that Pasley's scheme is unnecessary because the *mind* and *hands* of England would produce the economic defeat of the French. There is, as has been noted, considerable economic acumen in this letter, though the commonsense insights are continually undercut by the rhetoric in which they are couched.

Another side of Wordsworth is revealed in a 6 February 1812 letter to the early of Lonsdale: "I regret that it is not in my power to wait upon you personally; as the experience which I have had of your Lordship's gracious manners would have rendered quite pleasing to me the delicate task, which, through the means of a Letter, I am undertaking not without some reluctance." Wordsworth's self-consciousness clings to every word, as well it might—he was asking that Lord Lonsdale consider appointing him to "any Office [that] should be at your Lordship's disposal (the duties of which would not call so largely upon my exertions as to prevent me from giving a considerable portion of my time to study)...." Though he had to wait more than a year, in 1813 Wordsworth was appointed, under Lonsdale's patronage, to the post of Distributor of Stamps for Westmorland and Penrith.

On Wednesday evening, 2 December 1812, William Wordsworth wrote to his friend Robert Southey about the death of Thomas Wordsworth, the poet's six-year-old son, the previous day. The simplicity and directness of this letter communicate Wordsworth's sorrow with great power and integrity:

Symptoms of the measles appeared upon my Son Thomas last Thursday; he was most favorable held till Tuesday, between ten and eleven at that hour was particularly lightsome and comfortable; without any assignable cause a sudden change took place, an inflammation had commenced on the lungs which it was impossible to check and the sweet Innocent yielded up his soul to God before six in the evening. He did not appear to suffer much in body, but I fear something in mind as he was of an age to have thought much upon death a subject to which his mind was daily led by the grave of his Sister.

Thomas was the second child of William and Mary Wordsworth to die in childhood. Catherine had died the previous June, a few months before her fourth birthday.

In late 1812 Lord Lonsdale proposed that he provide one hundred pounds a year for the support of Wordsworth and his family until a salaried position became available. Wordsworth was at first somewhat reluctant to accept the patronage, but he accepted, and on 8 January 1813 he wrote to acknowledge receipt of payment. He was relieved when the post of Distributor of Stamps was offered to him a few months later. With this assurance of

economic security, the Wordsworths moved to Rydal Mount, the poet's final home, in May 1813. Lonsdale's gift and patronage marked a deepening of the relations between the aristocratic earl and the formerly radical republican and supporter of revolution in France and democracy in England. Politically, Wordsworth had completely transformed himself; poetically, he repeated earlier formulas and began rearranging his poems in a seemingly infinite sequence of thematically organized volumes.

Other than letters and miscellaneous notes, Wordsworth's political prose writings conclude with *Two Addresses to the Freeholders of Westmoreland* (1818). These have been described by one critic as "nearly unreadable," but they are crucial to an understanding of Wordsworth's entanglement in local and national politics. As Distributor of Stamps, Wordsworth should not have engaged in electioneering, but his two addresses back the local nobility in no uncertain terms. By this time, Wordsworth had come to believe that the only way to preserve the virtues celebrated in "Michael" and other early poems was to maintain the traditional social orders of English society. Fully the Tory mouthpiece, Wordsworth argued that the Whigs had put too much faith in human nature, as they (and he) did at the commencement of the French Revolution. The *Two Addresses* praise Edmund Burke for just those values Wordsworth had earlier excoriated. By this time Wordsworth had fully incorporated Burke's system of beliefs into his own, and several passages of the 1850 *Prelude* are redolent with Burkean sentimental and political philosophy.

Wordsworth's last major work in prose represents a return to his earliest interest in the land and scenery of the English Lake District. In 1810 artist Joseph Wilkinson published *Select Views in Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire*, with an introduction by Wordsworth. In 1822 Wordsworth returned to his introduction, expanding it into a book most commonly known as *A Guide through the District of the Lakes*, which continues to be republished in a variety of editions. Wordsworth's love of his native region is evident in the *Guide*, which remains useful for the reader of Wordsworth's poetry as well as for the tourist of the Lake District. Samuel Taylor Coleridge died in 1834, and, though the men had grown apart, Wordsworth continued to pay particular attention to Coleridge's erratic first son, Hartley, a minor poet and biographer who haunted the Lake District on "pot house wanderings," to use Wordsworth's memorable phrase. Hartley, the child addressed in Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight" and Wordsworth's "To H.C. Six Years Old," as well as the basis for the child represented in the Immortality Ode, was a feckless figure beloved by the local farmers, and Wordsworth took a special interest in seeing to his welfare. Hartley died in 1849, only a few months before Wordsworth, who instructed that his friend's son be buried in the Wordsworth plot in Grasmere Churchyard. "He would have wished it," said Wordsworth.

In 1843 Wordsworth was named poet laureate of England, though by this time he had for the most part quit composing verse. He revised and rearranged his poems, published various editions, and entertained literary guests and friends. When he died in 1850 he had for some years been venerated as a sage, his most ardent detractors glossing over the radical origins of his poetics and politics. Wordsworth's prose, while not extensive and often difficult, reveals the poet's historical context. A careful reading of Wordsworth's prose will lead, perhaps, to a clearer understanding of the path he traveled from the eighteenth century to the Victorian age, and modern readers will recognize the origins of their own literary and political culture.

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About Wordsworth's Poetical Works

William Wordsworth, along with Robert Southey and Samuel Coleridge, is one of the "Lakeland Poets," a group that is widely credited with beginning the English Romantic Movement. The movement was characterized by a rejection of the Enlightenment, which focused on reason, logic, and structure. Romanticism, on the other hand, focuses on emotion and imagination. Often the poets are called "nature poets" because of their emphasis on man's connection to nature. Wordsworth addressed this connection in poems such as "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," "Ode; Intimations of Immortality," and "I wandered lonely as a cloud." The stress placed on the importance of imagination and the sublime in the English Romantic Movement subsequently inspired the American Romantic Movement, which was headed by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, and followed up by Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne, among others. The most famous poets of the English Romantic Movement are William Wordsworth, Samuel Coleridge, William Blake, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats.

Wordsworth's poetry is distinguished by his straightforward use of language and meter and his natural and often colloquial themes and imagery. This is not to say, however, that Wordsworth's ideas are simple. He weaves several ideas throughout his poetic works, including the importance of the natural world, transcendentalism and interconnectedness, religion, morality, mortality, memory and the power of the human mind.

Wordsworth began publishing in 1793, at the age of 23, with a collection of poetry about a tour he took in the Swiss Alps - *Descriptive Sketches*. In 1798 Wordsworth and Coleridge published *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems* anonymously. In 1800 the two published another edition of *Lyrical Ballads* that included Wordsworth's famous preface highlighting several of the key ideas of the Romantic Movement. Wordsworth published *Elegiac Stanzas* and *Poems in two volumes* in 1803 and 1805 respectively, followed by *The Excursion* in 1812, *Collected Poems* in 1815, and *Peter Bell* and *The Waggoner* in 1819. Wordsworth published *Ecclesiastical Sketches* in 1822. After Wordsworth's death, his wife published *Preface*, which was previously known only as "Poem for Coleridge." At the time of his death, Wordsworth was known in England as the best poet in the world.

Wordsworth's Poetry

Analysis

Wordsworth's monumental poetic legacy rests on a large number of important poems, varying in length and weight from the short, simple lyrics of the 1790s to the vast expanses of *The Prelude*, thirteen books long in its 1808 edition. But the themes that run through Wordsworth's poetry, and the language and imagery he uses to embody those themes, remain remarkably consistent throughout the Wordsworth canon, adhering largely to the tenets Wordsworth set out for himself in the 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Here, Wordsworth argues that poetry should be written in the natural language of common speech, rather than in the lofty and elaborate dictions that were then considered "poetic." He argues that poetry should offer access to the emotions contained in memory. And he argues that the first principle of poetry should be pleasure, that the chief duty of poetry is to provide pleasure through a rhythmic and beautiful expression of feeling—for all human sympathy, he claims, is based on a subtle pleasure principle that is "the naked and native dignity of man."

Recovering "the naked and native dignity of man" makes up a significant part of Wordsworth's poetic project, and he follows his own advice from the 1802 preface. Wordsworth's style remains plain-spoken and easy to understand even today, though the rhythms and idioms of common English have changed from those of the early nineteenth century. Many of Wordsworth's poems (including masterpieces such as "Tintern Abbey" and the "Intimations of Immortality" ode) deal with the subjects of childhood and the memory of childhood in the mind of the adult in particular, childhood's lost connection with nature, which can be preserved only in memory. Wordsworth's images and metaphors mix natural scenery, religious symbolism (as in the sonnet "It is a beauteous evening, calm and free," in which the evening is described as being "quiet as a nun"), and the relics of the poet's rustic childhood—cottages, hedgerows, orchards, and other places where humanity intersects gently and easily with nature.

Wordsworth's poems initiated the Romantic era by emphasizing feeling, instinct, and pleasure above formality and mannerism. More than any poet before him, Wordsworth gave expression to inchoate human emotion; his lyric "Strange fits of passion have I known," in which the speaker describes an inexplicable fantasy he once had that his lover was dead, could not have been written by any previous poet. Curiously for a poet whose work

points so directly toward the future, many of Wordsworth's important works are preoccupied with the lost glory of the past—not only of the lost dreams of childhood but also of the historical past, as in the powerful sonnet “London, 1802,” in which the speaker exhorts the spirit of the centuries-dead poet John Milton to teach the modern world a better way to live.

Themes, Motifs & Symbols

Themes

Nature

"Come forth into the light of things, / Let Nature be your Teacher." No discussion on Wordsworth would be complete without mention of nature. Nature and its connection to humanity makes an appearance in the vast majority of Wordsworth's poetry, often holding a poem's focus, and has become the cornerstone of the Romantic Movement primarily because of him. For Wordsworth, nature is a kind of religion in which he has the utmost faith. Nature fills two major roles in Wordsworth's poetry:

1. Even though it is intensely beautiful and peaceful, nature often causes Wordsworth to feel melancholy or sad. This is usually because, even as he relishes in his connection with nature, he worries about the rest of humanity, most of who live in cities completely apart from nature. Wordsworth wonders how they could possibly revive their spirits. In the end, however, he often decides that it is wrong to be sad while in nature: "A poet could not but be gay, / In such jocund company."

2. Nature also gives Wordsworth hope for the future. From past experience Wordsworth knows that spending time in nature is a gift to his future self, because later, when he is alone, tired and frustrated in the busy, dirty city, he will be able to look back on a field of daffodils he once spent time in and be happy again.

The Beneficial Influence of Nature

Throughout Wordsworth's work, nature provides the ultimate good influence on the human mind. All manifestations of the natural world—from the highest mountain to the simplest flower—elicit noble, elevated thoughts and passionate emotions in the people who observe these manifestations. Wordsworth repeatedly emphasizes the importance of nature to an individual's intellectual and spiritual development. A good relationship with nature helps individuals connect to both the spiritual and the social worlds. As Wordsworth explains in *The Prelude*, a love of nature can lead to a love of humankind. In such poems as “The World Is Too Much with Us” (1807) and “London, 1802” (1807) people become selfish and immoral when they distance themselves from nature by living in cities. Humanity's innate empathy and nobility of spirit becomes corrupted by artificial social conventions as well as by the squalor of city life. In contrast, people who spend a lot of time in nature, such as laborers and farmers, retain the purity and nobility of their souls.

The Power of the Human Mind

Wordsworth praised the power of the human mind. Using memory and imagination, individuals could overcome difficulty and pain. For instance, the speaker in “Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey” (1798) relieves his loneliness with memories of nature, while the leech gatherer in “Resolution and Independence” (1807) perseveres cheerfully in the face of poverty by the exertion of his own will. The transformative powers

of the mind are available to all, regardless of an individual's class or background. This democratic view emphasizes individuality and uniqueness. Throughout his work, Wordsworth showed strong support for the political, religious, and artistic rights of the individual, including the power of his or her mind. In the 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth explained the relationship between the mind and poetry. Poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquility"—that is, the mind transforms the raw emotion of experience into poetry capable of giving pleasure. Later poems, such as "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" (1807), imagine nature as the source of the inspiring material that nourishes the active, creative mind.

The Splendor of Childhood

In Wordsworth's poetry, childhood is a magical, magnificent time of innocence. Children form an intense bond with nature, so much so that they appear to be a part of the natural world, rather than a part of the human, social world. Their relationship to nature is passionate and extreme: children feel joy at seeing a rainbow but great terror at seeing desolation or decay. In 1799, Wordsworth wrote several poems about a girl named Lucy who died at a young age. These poems, including "She dwelt among the untrodden ways" (1800) and "Strange fits of passion have I known" (1800), praise her beauty and lament her untimely death. In death, Lucy retains the innocence and splendor of childhood, unlike the children who grow up, lose their connection to nature, and lead unfulfilling lives. The speaker in "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" believes that children delight in nature because they have access to a divine, immortal world. As children age and reach maturity, they lose this connection but gain an ability to feel emotions, both good and bad. Through the power of the human mind, particularly memory, adults can recollect the devoted connection to nature of their youth.

Mortality

Wordsworth's fascination with death frequently shows up in his poetry. The Lucy Poems, for instance, are a series of poems about a young girl who may or may not have been a figment of Wordsworth's imagination, and who ultimately dies. Wordsworth looks at the event from several angles. In "She dwelt among the untrodden ways" he focuses on the unexpectedness of her death, and the unpredictability of life and death in general. In "Three years she grew" Wordsworth creates a fanciful rationale for her death: Nature became entranced by her and promised to give her an incredible life, but once all of her promises were fulfilled Lucy had to die. In "We are Seven" Wordsworth looks at a young girl who had six siblings but now lives at home with only her mother, because two of her siblings have died and the others have moved away. The little girl seems not to understand death throughout the poem, but in the end the reader learns that she may have a clearer understanding than the speaker. In "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth is comforted by the thought that he will live on after his death, because his sister Dorothy will remember him lovingly.

Humanity

One of Wordsworth's greatest worries is the descent of humanity. As man moves further and further away from humanity he seems to be losing more and more of his soul. Often when Wordsworth is in nature he is saddened because he is forced to think about the people trapped in cities, unable or unwilling to commune with nature. In "London, 1802," for instance, Wordsworth makes a plea to the poet John Milton to return and teach humanity how to regain the morality and virtue it once had. Similarly, in "The world is too much with us" Wordsworth

worries that the world is too full of people who have lost their connection to divinity, and more importantly, to nature: "Getting and spending we lay waste our powers, / Little we see in Nature that is ours."

Transcendence and Connectivity

The idea of transcendence did not gain full speed until the Romantic Movement moved to America, but Wordsworth was certainly a fan of the idea long before then. "Transcendence" simply means "being without boundaries." For Wordsworth, this means being able to connect with people and things outside of oneself, especially in terms of nature. It was Wordsworth's supreme aspiration to metaphorically transcend the limitations of his body and connect completely with nature. Mankind's difficulty accepting the beauty that nature has to offer saddened Wordsworth; he found the loss of such a gift difficult to accept.

Morality

In Wordsworth's poems, morality doesn't necessarily stem directly from religion, but rather from doing what is right by oneself, by humanity, and by nature. In "London, 1802" Wordsworth complains that man's morals are in a state of constant decline, but the morals he is talking about have more to do with following the natural process of life - being free and powerful, not tied down by city living or common thoughts. The most important lesson a person can learn, according to Wordsworth, is to be true to his own impulses and desires, but not greedy. A person should be available to help his fellow man, but should not be consumed by other peoples' needs. He should be in communion with nature, with humanity, and with himself.

Religion

Religion, while not as prevalent as in the poetry of the Enlightenment, does have a place in much of Wordsworth's poetry. Often religion is included simply to help Wordsworth's more pious readers understand the level of his commitment to and faith in nature. Wordsworth uses religious imagery and language in his poems in order to convey his ideas about the power of nature, the human mind, and global interconnectivity.

Motifs

Wandering and Wanderers

The speakers of Wordsworth's poems are inveterate wanderers: they roam solitarily, they travel over the moors, they take private walks through the highlands of Scotland. Active wandering allows the characters to experience and participate in the vastness and beauty of the natural world. Moving from place to place also allows the wanderer to make discoveries about himself. In "I travelled among unknown men" (1807), the speaker discovers his patriotism only after he has traveled far from England. While wandering, speakers uncover the visionary powers of the mind and understand the influence of nature, as in "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (1807). The speaker of this poem takes comfort in a walk he once took after he has returned to the grit and desolation of city life. Recollecting his wanderings allows him to transcend his present circumstances. Wordsworth's poetry itself often wanders, roaming from one subject or experience to another, as in *The*

Prelude. In this long poem, the speaker moves from idea to idea through digressions and distractions that mimic the natural progression of thought within the mind.

Memory

For Wordsworth, the power of the human mind is extremely important. In several of his poems he begins in a negative or depressed mood, and then slowly becomes more positive. The most important use of memory, however, is to maintain connections. For instance, in poems like "Line Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" and "I wandered lonely as a cloud" Wordsworth is in nature (his favorite place to be) and he is happy, but he becomes even happier when he realizes that he never actually has to leave his memories behind. Once he has returned to the daily gloom of the city, he will be able to remember the time he spent among nature and make himself happy again: "And then my heart with pleasure fills, and dances with the daffodils."

As Wordsworth begins to consider his own mortality memory is again a huge comfort, because he realizes that even after he has died he will be able to live on in the memory of his family and friends, just as those who have passed on before him are in his memory. Wordsworth is especially heartened to know that his sister Dorothy, with whom he spent countless hours, will remember him fondly, carrying him with her wherever she goes.

Memory allows Wordsworth's speakers to overcome the harshness of the contemporary world. Recollecting their childhoods gives adults a chance to reconnect with the visionary power and intense relationship they had with nature as children. In turn, these memories encourage adults to re-cultivate as close a relationship with nature as possible as an antidote to sadness, loneliness, and despair. The act of remembering also allows the poet to write: Wordsworth argued in the 1802 preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that poetry sprang from the calm remembrance of passionate emotional experiences. Poems cannot be composed at the moment when emotion is first experienced. Instead, the initial emotion must be combined with other thoughts and feelings from the poet's past experiences using memory and imagination. The poem produced by this time-consuming process will allow the poet to convey the essence of his emotional memory to his readers and will permit the readers to remember similar emotional experiences of their own.

Vision and Sight

Throughout his poems, Wordsworth fixates on vision and sight as the vehicles through which individuals are transformed. As speakers move through the world, they see visions of great natural loveliness, which they capture in their memories. Later, in moments of darkness, the speakers recollect these visions, as in "I wandered lonely as a cloud." Here, the speaker daydreams of former jaunts through nature, which "flash upon that inward eye / which is the bliss of solitude" (21–22). The power of sight captured by our mind's eye enables us to find comfort even in our darkest, loneliest moments. Elsewhere, Wordsworth describes the connection between seeing and experiencing emotion, as in "My heart leaps up" (1807), in which the speaker feels joy as a result of spying a rainbow across the sky. Detailed images of natural beauty abound in Wordsworth's poems, including descriptions of daffodils and clouds, which focus on what can be seen, rather than touched, heard, or felt. In Book Fourteenth of *The Prelude*, climbing to the top of a mountain in Wales allows the speaker to have a prophetic vision of the workings of the mind as it thinks, reasons, and feels.

Symbols

Light

Light often symbolizes truth and knowledge. In "The Tables Turned" (1798), Wordsworth contrasts the barren light of reason available in books with the "sweet" (11) and "freshening" (6) light of the knowledge nature brings. Sunlight literally helps people see, and sunlight also helps speakers and characters begin to glimpse the wonders of the world. In "Expostulation and Reply" (1798), the presence of light, or knowledge, within an individual prevents dullness and helps the individual to see, or experience. Generally, the light in Wordsworth's poems represents immortal truths that can't be entirely grasped by human reason. In "Ode: Imitations of Immortality," the speaker remembers looking at a meadow as a child and imagining it gleaming in "celestial light" (4). As the speaker grows and matures, the light of his youth fades into the "light of common day" (78) of adulthood. But the speaker also imagines his remembrances of the past as a kind of light, which illuminate his soul and give him the strength to live.

The Leech Gatherer

In "Resolution and Independence," the ancient leech gatherer who spends his days wandering the moors looking for leeches represents the strong-minded poet who perseveres in the face of poverty, obscurity, and solitude. As the poem begins, a wanderer travels along a moor, feeling elated and taking great pleasure in the sights of nature around him but also remembering that despair is the twin of happiness. Eventually he comes upon an old man looking for leeches, even though the work is dangerous and the leeches have become increasingly hard to find. As the speaker chats with the old man, he realizes the similarities between leech gathering and writing poetry. Like a leech gather, a poet continues to search his or her mind and the landscape of the natural world for poems, even though such intense emotions can damage one's psyche, the work pays poorly and poverty is dangerous to one's health, and inspiration sometimes seems increasingly hard to find. The speaker resolves to think of the leech gatherer whenever his enthusiasm for poetry or belief in himself begins to wane.

William Wordsworth as a Poet of Nature

As a poet of Nature, Wordsworth stands supreme. He is a worshipper of Nature, Nature's devotee or high-priest. His love of Nature was probably truer, and more tender, than that of any other English poet, before or since. Nature comes to occupy in his poem a separate or independent status and is not treated in a casual or passing manner as by poets before him. Wordsworth had a full-fledged philosophy, a new and original view of Nature. Three points in his creed of Nature may be noted:

- (a) He conceived of Nature as a living Personality. He believed that there is a divine spirit pervading all the objects of Nature. This belief in a divine spirit pervading all the objects of Nature may be termed as mystical Pantheism and is fully expressed in *Tintern Abbey* and in several passages in Book II of *The Prelude*.
- (b) Wordsworth believed that the company of Nature gives joy to the human heart and he looked upon Nature as exercising a healing influence on sorrow-stricken hearts.
- (c) Above all, Wordsworth emphasized the moral influence of Nature. He spiritualised Nature and regarded her as a great moral teacher, as the best mother, guardian and nurse of man, and as an elevating influence. He believed that between man and Nature there is mutual consciousness, spiritual communion or 'mystic intercourse'. He initiates his readers into the secret of the soul's communion with Nature. According to him, human beings who grow up in the lap of Nature are perfect in every respect.

Wordsworth believed that we can learn more of man and of moral evil and good from Nature than from all the philosophies. In his eyes, "Nature is a teacher whose wisdom we can learn, and without which any human life is vain and incomplete." He believed in the education of man by Nature. In this he was somewhat influenced by Rousseau. This inter-relation of Nature and man is very important in considering Wordsworth's view of both.

Cazamian says that "To Wordsworth, Nature appears as a formative influence superior to any other, the educator of senses and mind alike, the sower in our hearts of the deep-laden seeds of our feelings and beliefs. It speaks to the child in the fleeting emotions of early years, and stirs the young poet to an ecstasy, the glow of which illuminates all his work and dies of his life."

Development of His Love for Nature

Wordsworth's childhood had been spent in Nature's lap. A nurse both stern and kindly, she had planted seeds of sympathy and understanding in that growing mind. Natural scenes like the grassy Derwent river bank or the monster shape of the night-shrouded mountain played a "needful part" in the development of his mind. In *The Prelude*, he records dozens of these natural scenes, not for themselves but for what his mind could learn through.

Nature was "both law and impulse"; and in earth and heaven, in glade and bower, Wordsworth was conscious of a spirit which kindled and restrained. In a variety of exciting ways, which he did not understand, Nature intruded upon his escapades and pastimes, even when he was indoors, speaking "memorable things". He had not sought her; neither was he intellectually aware of her presence. She riveted his attention by stirring up sensations of fear or joy which were "organic", affecting him bodily as well as emotionally. With time the sensations were fixed indelibly in his memory. All the instances in Book I of *The Prelude* show a kind of primitive animism at work"; the emotions and psychological disturbances affect external scenes in such a way that Nature seems to nurture "by beauty and by fear".

In *Tintern Abbey*, Wordsworth traces the development of his love for Nature. In his boyhood Nature was simply a playground for him. At the second stage he began to love and seek Nature but he was attracted purely by its sensuous or aesthetic appeal. Finally his love for Nature acquired a spiritual and intellectual character, and he realized Nature's role as a teacher and educator.

In the *Immortality Ode* he tells us that as a boy his love for Nature was a thoughtless passion but that when he grew up, the objects of Nature took a sober colouring from his eyes and gave rise to profound thoughts in his mind because he had witnessed the sufferings of humanity:

To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Spiritual Meaning in Natural Objects

Compton Rickett rightly observes that Wordsworth is far less concerned with the sensuous manifestations than with the spiritual significance that he finds underlying these manifestations. To him the primrose and the daffodil are symbols to him of Nature's message to man. A sunrise for him is not a pageant of colour; it is a moment of spiritual consecration:

My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
Were then made for me; bound unknown to me

Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly,
A dedicated Spirit.

To combine his spiritual ecstasy with a poetic presentment of Nature is the constant aim of Wordsworth. It is the source of some of his greatest pieces, grand rhapsodies such as *Tintern Abbey*.

Nature Descriptions

Wordsworth is sensitive to every subtle change in the world about him. He can give delicate and subtle expression to the sheer sensuous delight of the world of Nature. He can feel the elemental joy of Spring:

It was an April morning, fresh and clear
The rivulet, delighting in its strength,
Ran with a young man's speed, and yet the voice
Of waters which the river had supplied
Was softened down into a vernal tone.

He can take an equally keen pleasure in the tranquil lake:

The calm
And dead still water lay upon my mind
Even with a weight of pleasure

A brief study of his pictures of Nature reveals his peculiar power in actualising sound and its converse, silence.

Being the poet of the ear and of the eye, he is exquisitely felicitous. No other poet could have written:

A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard
In springtime from the cuckoo-bird,
Breaking the silence of the seas
Among the farthest Hebrides.

Unlike most descriptive poets who are satisfied if they achieve a static pictorial effect, Wordsworth can direct his eye and ear and touch to conveying a sense of the energy and movement behind the workings of the natural world. "Goings on" was a favourite word he applied to Nature. But he is not interested in mere Nature description.

Wordsworth records his own feelings with reference to the objects which stimulate him and call forth the description. His unique apprehension of Nature was determined by his peculiar sense-endowment. His eye was at once far-reaching and penetrating. He looked through the visible scene to what he calls its "ideal truth". He pored over objects till he fastened their images on his brain and brooded on these in memory till they acquired the liveliness of dreams. He had a keen ear too for all natural sounds, the calls of beasts and birds, and the sounds of winds and waters; and he composed thousands of lines wandering by the side of a stream. But he was not richly endowed in the less intellectual senses of touch, taste and temperature.

Conclusion

Wordsworth's attitude to Nature can be clearly differentiated from that of the other great poets of Nature. He did not prefer the wild and stormy aspects of Nature like Byron, or the shifting and changeable aspects of Nature and the scenery of the sea and sky like Shelley, or the purely sensuous in Nature like Keats. It was his special

characteristic to concern himself, not with the strange and remote aspects of the earth, and sky, but Nature in her ordinary, familiar, everyday moods. He did not recognize the ugly side of Nature 'red in tooth and claw' as Tennyson did. Wordsworth stressed upon the moral influence of Nature and the need of man's spiritual discourse with her.

Wordsworth: Celebration of Man and Nature by Caleb Williams

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) changed the course of English Poetry. He made its subject the internal world of man, the strivings of the mind and the sublime experience of the soul. His immediate predecessors John Dyer (1700-1758), James Thomson (1700-1748) and Thomas Gray (1716-1771) wrote nature poetry like Wordsworth, but in a rather different manner. They described the external world in a conventional stylised way, almost as a series of two-dimensional, painted scenes, in a stage set.

To the external world hints of a greater spiritual reality; trees are symbols, rocks and stones a hidden language, mountains mysterious statements made by a creator who tries to communicate with his creation. This supreme consciousness, spirit of nature, or God is present every where:

*And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky and the mind of Man
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts
And rolls through all things.*

William was part of the Romantic movement in English poetry which set itself at odds with the standards of the previous generation. Romanticism has been typically described as a condition of flux, in which imprecise yearnings, a preference for nature rather than machines, primitivism instead of civilisations and intuition rather than rationality prevails. Wordsworth however was not a typical romantic, following the cult or rebellion for its own sake. Rather he saw the dawning of a new literary epoch as a chance to liberate the stilled poetic diction of his day and create a language of men speaking to men.

'Wordsworth is one of the few English poets to describe mystical states and his writings contain similarities with Buddhist and Yogic scripture'

Wordsworth produced a style of poetry which was psychologically persuasive and based on direct autobiographical experience. In his view poetry was a philosophical vehicle and meditative activity formed from 'emotion recollected in tranquillity.' Above all it was a means of apprehending a natural landscape charged with divine significance.

In his nature work Wordsworth did away with allusions to classical gods and goddesses, nymphs, sprites, and heroes of Mythology. As a love of the meadows and the woods and mountains; and all that we behold' this became the principle subject of his verse. Above all in poems such as The Prelude and Tintern Abbey

Wordsworth's poetry is the poetry of consciousness becoming aware of itself, of man using contemplation of the natural world as a means of coming to grips with his cosmic insignificance. It is a poetry of transcendence, in which the individual soul touches Divinity by putting aside the petty needs of ego and materialistic distractions- 'The fever of the world.'

Wordsworth is one of the few English poets to describe mystical states and his writings contain similarities with Buddhist and Yogic scripture. He describes a 'serene and blessed mood' in which

*"... the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul...."*

In an epigraph before one poem he describes the child as 'the father as the man;' and later within the poem "Intimations of Immortality" he sets himself apart from the rational materialism of the philosopher Locke, and Locke's belief the human mind was a blank state at birth

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting
The soul that rises with us, our life's star
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God who is our home.*

Wordsworth was not immune to human despair 'The still sad Music of humanity' as he called it, nor did he ignore the social pressure to conform in his poetry 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy/ shades of the prison house begin to close / upon the growing boy' he wrote. However, he leaves us a poetry of celebration in which consciousness reaches new heights and nature is given a new meaning. He remains a revolutionary poet, one whose concerns are not out of place in our eco-sensitive age. He will always be read with profit, the rolling cadences of his verse the repository of a rare, and marvellous vision.

Intimations of Immortality

Title Information

.....When Wordsworth completed this work in 1804, he called it simply "Ode," and the poem carried this title when it was published in 1807. In 1815, when the poem was republished, Wordsworth expanded the title to "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." *Intimations* means hints, inklings, or indirect suggestions. Most readers and critics today use the title "Intimations of Immortality" when referring to the poem.

Type of Work

....."Intimations of Immortality" is a lyric poem in the form of an ode. A lyric poem presents deep feelings and emotions rather than telling a story; an ode uses lofty language and a dignified tone and may contain several hundred lines.

Composition and Publication Information

.....Wordsworth completed the first four stanzas of "Intimations of Immortality" between March and April of 1802. He completed the rest of the poem by early 1804. Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme published the poem at Paternoster Row, London, in May 1807 as part of a collection of Wordsworth's works, *Poems, in Two Volumes*.

Ode: Intimations of Immortality

Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood (also known as *Ode, Immortality Ode* or *Great Ode*) is a poem by William Wordsworth, completed in 1804 and published in *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807). The poem was completed in two parts, with the first four stanzas written among a series of poems composed in 1802 about childhood. The first part of the poem was completed on 27 March 1802 and a copy was provided to Wordsworth's friend and fellow poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who responded with his own poem, *Dejection: An Ode*, in April. The fourth stanza of the ode ends with a question, and Wordsworth was finally able to answer it with 7 additional stanzas completed in early 1804. It was first printed as *Ode* in 1807, and it was not until 1815 that it was edited and reworked to the version that is currently known, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*.

The poem is an irregular Pindaric ode in 11 stanzas that combines aspects of Coleridge's Conversation poems, the religious sentiments of the Bible and the works of Saint Augustine, and aspects of the elegiac and apocalyptic traditions. It is split into three movements: the first of 4 stanzas discusses concerns about lost vision, the second of 4 stanzas describes how age causes man to lose sight of the divine, and the third of 3 stanzas is hopeful in that the memory of the divine allows us to sympathise with our fellow man. The poem relies on the concept of Pre-existence, the idea that the soul existed before the body, to connect children with the ability to witness the divine within nature. As children mature, they become more worldly and lose this divine vision, and the ode reveals Wordsworth's understanding of psychological development that is also found in his poems *The Prelude* and *Tintern Abbey*. Wordsworth's praise of the child as the "best philosopher" was criticised by Coleridge and became the source of later critical discussion.

Modern critics sometimes have referred to Wordsworth's poem as the "Great Ode" and ranked it among his best poems, but this wasn't always the case. Contemporary reviews of the poem were mixed, with many reviewers attacking the work or, like Lord Byron, dismissing the work without analysis. The critics felt that Wordsworth's subject matter was too "low" and some felt that the emphasis on childhood was misplaced. Among the Romantic poets, most praised various aspects of the poem however. By the Victorian period, most reviews of the ode were positive with only John Ruskin taking a strong negative stance against the poem. The poem continued to be well received into the 20th-century, with few exceptions. The majority ranked it as one of Wordsworth's greatest poems.

In 1802, Wordsworth wrote many poems that dealt with his youth. These poems were partly inspired by his conversations with his sister, Dorothy, whom he was living with in the Lake District at the time. The poems, beginning with *The Butterfly* and ending with *To the Cuckoo*, were all based on Wordsworth's recalling both the

sensory and emotional experience of his childhood. From *To the Cuckoo*, he moved onto *The Rainbow*, both written on 26 March 1802, and then on to *Ode: Intimation of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. As he moved from poem to poem, he began to question why, as a child, he once was able to see an immortal presence within nature but as an adult that was fading away except in the few moments he was able to meditate on experiences found in poems like *To the Cuckoo*. While sitting at breakfast on 27 March, he began to compose the ode. He was able to write four stanzas that put forth the question about the faded image and ended, "Where is it now, the glory and the dream?" The poem would remain in its smaller, four-stanza version until 1804.

The short version of the ode was possibly finished in one day because Wordsworth left the next day to spend time with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Keswick. Close to the time Wordsworth and Coleridge climbed the Skiddaw mountain, 3 April 1802, Wordsworth recited the four stanzas of the ode that were completed. The poem impressed Coleridge, and, while with Wordsworth, he was able to provide his response to the ode's question within an early draft of his poem, *Dejection: an Ode*. In early 1804, Wordsworth was able to return his attention to working on the ode. It was a busy beginning of the year with Wordsworth having to help Dorothy recover from an illness in addition to writing his poems. The exact time of composition is unknown, but it probably followed his work on *The Prelude*, which consumed much of February and was finished on 17 March. Many of the lines of the ode are similar to the lines of *The Prelude* Book V, and he used the rest of the ode to try to answer the question at the end of the fourth stanza.

The poem was first printed in full for Wordsworth's 1807 collection of poems, *Poems, in Two Volumes*, under the title *Ode*. It was the last poem of the second volume of the work, and it had its own title page separating it from the rest of the poems, including the previous poem *Peele Castle*. Wordsworth added an epigraph just before publication, "paulò majora canamus". The Latin phrase is from Virgil's *Eclogue* 4, meaning "let us sing a somewhat loftier song". The poem was reprinted under its full title *Ode: Intimation of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* for Wordsworth's collection *Poems* (1815). The reprinted version also contained an epigraph that, according to Henry Crabb Robinson, was added at Crabb's suggestion. The epigraph was from "My Heart Leaps Up". In 1820, Wordsworth issued *The Miscellaneous Poems of William Wordsworth* that collected the poems he wished to be preserved with an emphasis on ordering the poems, revising the text, and including prose that would provide the theory behind the text. The ode was the final poem of the fourth and final book, and it had its own title-page, suggesting that it was intended as the poem that would serve to represent the completion of his poetic abilities. The 1820 version also had some revisions, including the removal of lines 140 and 141.

Style

The poem uses an irregular form of the Pindaric ode in 11 stanzas. The lengths of the lines and of the stanzas vary throughout the text, and the poem begins with an iambic meter. The irregularities increase throughout the poem and Stanza IX lacks a regular form before being replaced with a march-like meter in the final two stanzas. The poem also contains multiple enjambments and there is a use of an ABAB rhyme scheme that gives the poem a singsong quality. By the end of the poem, the rhymes start to become as irregular in a similar way to the meter, and the irregular Stanza IX closes with an iambic couplet. The purpose of the change in rhythm, rhyme, and style is to match the emotions expressed in the poem as it develops from idea to idea. The narration of the poem is in the style of an interior monologue, and there are many aspects of the poem that connects it to Coleridge's style of poetry called "Conversation poems", especially the poem's reliance on a one sided discussion that expects a response that never comes. There is also a more traditional original of the discussion

style of the poem, as many of the prophetic aspects of the poem are related to the Old Testament of the Bible. Additionally, the reflective and questioning aspects are similar to the Psalms and the works of Saint Augustine, and the ode contains what is reminiscent of Hebrew prayer.

In terms of genre, the poem is an ode, which makes it a poem that is both prayer and contains a celebration of its subject. However, this celebration is mixed with questioning and this hinders the continuity of the poem. The poem is also related to the elegy in that it mourns the loss of childhood vision, and the title page of the 1807 edition emphasises the influence of Virgil's *Eclogue 4*. Wordsworth's use of the elegy, in his poems including the "Lucy" poems, parts of *The Excursion*, and others, focus on individuals that protect themselves from a sense of loss by turning to nature or time. He also rejects any kind of fantasy that would take him away from reality while accepting both death and the loss of his own abilities to time while mourning over the loss. However, the elegy is traditionally a private poem while Wordsworth's ode is more public in nature. The poem is also related to the genre of apocalyptic writing in that it focuses on what is seen or the lack of sight. Such poems emphasise the optical sense and were common to many poems written by the Romantic poets, including his own poem *The Ruined Cottage*, Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode* and *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* and *The Zucca*.

Form

Wordsworth's Immortality Ode, as it is often called, is written in eleven variable ode stanzas with variable rhyme schemes, in iambic lines with anything from two to five stressed syllables. The rhymes occasionally alternate lines, occasionally fall in couplets, and occasionally occur within a single line (as in "But yet I *know*, where'er I *go*" in the second stanza).

Ode: Intimations of Immortality

The child is father of the man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.
(Wordsworth, "My Heart Leaps Up")

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,

The earth, and every common sight,

To me did seem

Apparelled in celestial light,

The glory and the freshness of a dream.

It is not now as it hath been of yore;—

Turn wheresoe'er I may,

By night or day.

The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The Rainbow comes and goes,

And lovely is the Rose,

The Moon doth with delight

Look round her when the heavens are bare,

Waters on a starry night

Are beautiful and fair;

The sunshine is a glorious birth;

But yet I know, where'er I go,

That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,

And while the young lambs bound

As to the tabor's sound,

To me alone there came a thought of grief:

A timely utterance gave that thought relief,

And I again am strong:

The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep;

No more shall grief of mine the season wrong;

I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,

The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,

And all the earth is gay;

Land and sea

Give themselves up to jollity,

And with the heart of May

Doth every Beast keep holiday;—

Thou Child of Joy,
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy Shepherd-boy.

Ye blessèd creatures, I have heard the call

Ye to each other make; I see

The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;

My heart is at your festival,

My head hath its coronal,

The fulness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all.

Oh evil day! if I were sullen

While Earth herself is adorning,

This sweet May-morning,

And the Children are culling

On every side,

In a thousand valleys far and wide,

Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm,

And the Babe leaps up on his Mother's arm:—

I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!

—But there's a Tree, of many, one,

A single field which I have looked upon,

Both of them speak of something that is gone;

The Pansy at my feet

Doth the same tale repeat:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?

Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a Mother's mind,
And no unworthy aim,
The homely Nurse doth all she can
To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came.

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
A six years' Darling of a pigmy size!
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,
With light upon him from his father's eyes!
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learn{e}d art

A wedding or a festival,

A mourning or a funeral;

And this hath now his heart,

And unto this he frames his song:

Then will he fit his tongue

To dialogues of business, love, or strife;

But it will not be long

Ere this be thrown aside,

And with new joy and pride

The little Actor cons another part;

Filling from time to time his "humorous stage"

With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,

That Life brings with her in her equipage;

As if his whole vocation

Were endless imitation.

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie

Thy Soul's immensity;

Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,—
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest,
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like the Day, a Master o'er a Slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by;
Thou little Child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That Nature yet remembers

What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;

Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:—

Not for these I raise

The song of thanks and praise

But for those obstinate questionings

Of sense and outward things,

Fallings from us, vanishings;

Blank misgivings of a Creature

Moving about in worlds not realised,

High instincts before which our mortal Nature

Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised:

But for those first affections,

Those shadowy recollections,

Which, be they what they may

Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,

Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;

Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make

Our noisy years seem moments in the being

Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,

To perish never;

Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,

Nor Man nor Boy,

Nor all that is at enmity with joy,

Can utterly abolish or destroy!

Hence in a season of calm weather

Though inland far we be,

Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea

Which brought us hither,

Can in a moment travel thither,

And see the Children sport upon the shore,

And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!

And let the young Lambs bound

As to the tabor's sound!

We in thought will join your throng,

Ye that pipe and ye that play,

Ye that through your hearts to-day

Feel the gladness of the May!

What though the radiance which was once so bright

Be now for ever taken from my sight,

Though nothing can bring back the hour

Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;

We will grieve not, rather find

Strength in what remains behind;

In the primal sympathy

Which having been must ever be;

In the soothing thoughts that spring

Out of human suffering;

In the faith that looks through death,

In years that bring the philosophic mind.

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,

Forebode not any severing of our loves!

Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway.
I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
Is lovely yet;
The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

Notes

1. as to the tabor's sound: Like the sound of a small drum.
2. timely utterance: The sounds of nature, such as wind and waterfalls.
3. Our birth . . . forgetting: At birth, humans close their eyes to the heavenly world from which they came and begin to lose their memory of their pre-existent abode.
4. fit . . . dialogues: Speak.
5. eternal mind: God.
6. Mighty prophet! Seer blest: The little child of line 126.
7. palms: Palm leaves worn as symbols of victory.

Interpretation

.....Wordsworth's poem expresses the view that the human soul exists first in heaven. When united at birth with a body, it brings with it impressions of heaven, as the following passage from the poem indicates:

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory

These “trailing clouds” remain in a growing child as “intimations of immortality,” or memories of his celestial abode. However, when the child passes into his adolescent and teen years, his increasing exposure to the material world and the beauty of nature dims his memories of his heavenly beginning. By the time he enters adulthood, all but the merest recollection of his previous existence disappears. (In the ancient world, Plato believed that the human soul existed before birth in an incorporeal realm. Although it possessed vast knowledge, its memory of this knowledge failed after it united with a body at birth. A human being then occupied himself with restoring this knowledge through education.) Nevertheless, this faint memory is enough to light for him the path back to heaven:

Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may,
Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing

Summary

The ode contains 11 stanzas split into three movements. The first movement is four stanzas long and discusses the narrator's inability to see the divine glory of nature, the problem of the poem. The second movement is four stanzas long and has a negative response to the problem. The third movement is three stanzas long and contains a positive response to the problem. The ode begins by contrasting the narrator's view of the world as a child and as a man, with what was once a life interconnected to the divine fading away:

In the second and third stanzas, the narrator continues by describing his surroundings and various aspects of nature that he is no longer able to feel. He feels as if he is separated from the rest of nature until he experiences a moment that brings about feelings of joy that are able to overcome his despair:

The joy in stanza III slowly fades again in stanza IV as the narrator feels like there is "something that is gone". As the stanza ends, the narrator asks two different questions to end the first movement of the poem. Though they appear to be similar, one asks where the visions are now ("Where is it now") while the other doesn't ("Whither is fled"), and they leave open the possibility that the visions could return:

The second movement begins in stanza V by answering the question of stanza IV by describing a Platonic system of pre-existence. The narrator explains how humans start in an ideal world that slowly fades into a shadowy life:

Before the light fades away as the child matures, the narrator emphasises the greatness of the child experiencing the feelings. By the beginning of stanza VIII, the child is described as a great individual, and the stanza is written in the form of a prayer that praises the attributes of children:

The end of stanza VIII brings about the end of a second movement within the poem. The glories of nature are only described as existing in the past, and the child's understanding of morality is already causing them to lose what they once had:

The questions in Stanza IV are answered with words of despair in the second movement, but the third movement is filled with joy. Stanza IX contains a mixture of affirmation of life and faith as it seemingly avoids discussing what is lost. The stanza describes how a child is able to see what others do not see because children do not comprehend mortality, and the imagination allows an adult to intimate immortality and bond with his fellow man:

The children on the shore represents the adult narrator's recollection of childhood, and the recollection allows for an intimation of returning to that mental state. In stanza XI, the imagination allows one to know that there are limits to the world, but it also allows for a return to a state of sympathy with the world lacking any questions or concerns.

.....The entire earth—all its fields and streams and trees—seemed like heaven to me when I was a child. Now, however, as spring begins to unfold its splendor, I no longer perceive the world this way. True, there is much beauty around me: rainbows, roses, moonlight, sunlight, the reflection of the stars on evening waters. But these sights, magnificent as they are, lack the full glory of what I once saw.

.....At this moment, while the birds sing and the lambs frolic, my inability to perceive the fullness of this glory makes me sad. But the sounds of nature—the wind and the waterfalls—cheer me as I realize all the earth is happy, land and sea. Even the beasts revel in the spirit of spring. Shepherd boy, let me hear your shouts of joy!

.....You creatures of the forest, I hear the calls you make to one another, and I hear the heavens laugh with you in your joy. I feel your happiness—all of it. How could I be sullen on such a fine May morning. Children are picking fresh flowers in a thousand valleys, the sun shines brightly, and babies leap in their mother's arms. But even amid all this joy and wonder, there is a tree and there is a field that speak to me of something that is missing. So, too, does the pansy at my feet. Where is that heavenly glory I once perceived?

.....When we are born, our souls—which previously existed in the celestial realm—go to sleep momentarily. When they awake to the new world around them, they forget almost everything about their heavenly existence. But a hint of that existence remains in our souls even though the world begins to enclose us, like prison walls. Still, a growing boy can perceive heavenly light. But when he becomes a man, the light fades. Earth, without malice, further blinds him to the fullness of the glory he once knew by exhibiting its own glory. However, although the glory of nature is not equal to heavenly glory, it is a reflection of it

.....A child of six, while enjoying the kisses of his mother and the admiring gaze of his father, already begins to plot out the life he will lead and the events he will take part in—a wedding, a festival, a funeral—and prepares himself for business, love, and strife. He may foresee himself in many roles in imitation of others, even down to the time when old age overtakes him.

.....The outward appearance of a child belies the immensity of his soul within. That soul, that inner light, still perceives something of the heavenly presence, still fathoms something of the eternal deep, even as we adults labor in darkness to discover the truths of the eternal realm. You, child, are the best seer, prophet, and philosopher. But why do you, with the memory of the glories of heaven within you, press on so urgently toward adulthood, which dims your inner light and lays its earthly burdens upon your back?

.....But how heartening it is to know that at least a glimmer of celestial light yet lies within us as adults and manifests itself in our natural surroundings. I give thanks for my knowledge of how things are and that nothing can entirely eliminate the awareness in us of the immortal sea that brought us to the shore of life. So sing, birds, a joyous song of May. Though the time will come when the glories of spring's fields and flowers will be forever gone from us, we will not grieve; for we know that greater glories await us beyond death.

.....I love the fountains, meadows, hills, and brooks—the brilliance of a morning sun and the beauty of a flower. But I know that the flower is only a hint of what is to come.

Analysis

"Ode; Intimations of Immortality" is a long and rather complicated poem about Wordsworth's connection to nature and his struggle to understand humanity's failure to recognize the value of the natural world. The poem is elegiac in that it is about the regret of loss. Wordsworth is saddened by the fact that time has stripped away much of nature's glory, depriving him of the wild spontaneity he exhibited as a child."

As seen in "The world is too much with us," Wordsworth believes that the loss stems from being too caught up in material possessions. As we grow up, we spend more and more time trying to figure out how to attain wealth, all the while becoming more and more distanced from nature. The poem is characterized by a strange sense of duality. Even though the world around the speaker is beautiful, peaceful, and serene, he is sad and angry because of what he (and humanity) has lost. Because nature is a kind of religion to Wordsworth, he knows that it is wrong to be depressed in nature's midst and pulls himself out of his depression for as long as he can.

In the seventh stanza especially, Wordsworth examines the transitory state of childhood. He is pained to see a child's close proximity to nature being replaced by a foolish acting game in which the child pretends to be an adult before he actually is. Instead, Wordsworth wants the child to hold onto the glory of nature that only a person in the flush of youth can appreciate.

In the ninth, tenth and eleventh stanzas Wordsworth manages to reconcile the emotions and questions he has explored throughout the poem. He realizes that even though he has lost his awareness of the glory of nature, he had it once, and can still remember it. The memory of nature's glory will have to be enough to sustain him, and he ultimately decides that it is. Anything that we have, for however short a period of time, can never be taken away completely; it will forever be held in our memory.

Meter, Feet, and Line Length

.....Wordsworth uses iambic feet throughout the poem. An iambic foot (or iamb) consists of a pair of syllables, the first one unstressed and the second stressed. For example, in the fifth line of the first stanza, the first two syllables (*The GLOR*) make up the first iambic foot, and the second two syllables (*y AND*) make up the second iambic foot. The meter of the poem varies from dimeter to hexameter. (A line with two iambic feet makes up a dimeter; three feet, a trimeter; four feet, a tetrameter; five feet, a pentameter; and six feet a hexameter.)

.....Below is a graphic illustrating the iambic feet and meter of each line in the first stanza. Numbers appear above each iambic foot in the lines on the left. On the right is the name of the meter. Line 1 is in iambic pentameter, line 2 in iambic tetrameter, line 3 in iambic dimeter, and so on.

.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5
There **WAS**...a **TIME**...when **MEAD**...ow, **GROVE**,...and **STREAM**, Pentameter

.....1.....2.....3.....4.
The **EARTH**,...and **EV**...ry **COM**...mon **SIGHT**, Tetrameter

....1.....2
To **ME**...did **SEEM** Dimeter

.....1.....2.....3.....4
Ap **PAR**...elled **IN**...cel **EST**...ial **LIGHT**, Tetrameter

.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5
The **GLOR**...y **AND**...the **FRESH**...ness **OF**...a **DREAM**. Pentameter

..1.....2.....3.....4.....5
It **IS**...not **NOW**...as **IT**...hath **BEEN**...of **YORE**; Pentameter

.....1.....2.....3
Turn **WHERE**...so **E'ER**...I **MAY**, Trimeter

.....1.....2
By **NIGHT**...or **DAY**, Dimeter

.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6
The **THINGS**...which **I**...have **SEEN**...I **NOW**...can **SEE**...no **MORE**. Hexameter

Rhyme

.....The poem uses end rhyme and internal rhyme. The pattern of the end rhyme varies. Note, for example, the difference between the rhyming pattern of the first stanza and that of the second.

There was a time when meadow, grove, and **stream**,
The earth, and every common **sight**,

To me did **seem**
Apparell'd in celestial **light**,
The glory and the freshness of a **dream**. 5
It is not now as it hath been of **yore**;—
Turn wheresoe'er I **may**,
By night or **day**,
The things which I have seen I now can see no **more**.

The rainbow comes and **goes**, 10
And lovely is the **rose**;
The moon doth with **delight**
Look round her when the heavens are **bare**;
Waters on a starry **night**
Are beautiful and **fair**; 15
The sunshine is a glorious **birth**;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath pass'd away a glory from the **earth**.

Wordsworth uses internal rhyme sparingly but to good effect. Following are examples:

But yet I **know**, where'er I **go** (line 17)
Fallings from us, vanishings; 147 (line 147)
Which, be **they** what **they may**, (line 155)
Though inland far **we be** (line 167)

Figures of Speech

.....Examples of figures of speech in the poem are the following:

Alliteration

Repetition of a consonant sound

From God, **who** is our **home** (line 66)

Behold the Child among **his** new-born **blisses** (line 86)

See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some **fragment** from his dream of human life (lines 91 and 92)

Anaphora

Repetition of a word, phrase, or clause at the beginning of word groups occurring one after the other

Ye that pipe and **ye that** play,
Ye that through your hearts to-day (lines 177-178)

Apostrophe

Addressing an abstraction or a thing, present or absent, or addressing an absent person or entity

And O ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves! (lines 192-193)

Metaphor

Comparison between unlike things without using like, as, or than

The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep (line 25)
(Comparison of waterfalls to musicians)

The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star (line 60)
(Comparison of the soul to a guiding star)

Paradox

Contradictory statement used to express a truth

Those **shadowy recollections**,
Which, be they what they may, 155
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing
(Shadows are a source of light)

Personification

Comparison of a thing to a person

The Moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare (lines 12-13)
(These lines compare the moon to a person experiencing delight)

Land and sea
Give themselves up to jollity (lines 30-31)
(These lines compare the land and the sea to jolly persons)

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a mother's mind,
And no unworthy aim,
The homely nurse doth all she can
To make her foster-child, her Inmate Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,

And that imperial palace whence he came. (lines 78-85)
(*This stanza compares earth to a woman—in particular, to a mother and a nurse*)

Synecdoche

Substitution of a part to stand for the whole, or the whole to stand for a part

thou **eye** among the blind (line 112)
(*"Eye" represents a child who guides adults*)

Themes

Children See the Light

.....The speaker of the poem maintains paradoxically that the more a person ages—the more educated and experienced he becomes—the less he knows about heaven and God. A very young child, on the other hand, is a fountain of insight and enlightenment about the supernal world. After all, says the poem's speaker, a child's soul is a recent arrival from paradise. Memories of his heavenly abode are still vivid to him. He still sees the light of the eternal God.

Faith

.....There is in all of us a heavenly spark that can ignite the fire of faith to support us through troubled times, keeping alive the thought of reuniting with the Creator in the celestial realm.

Ennui

.....Humans become jaded and world-weary after losing their childhood innocence and enthusiasm.

The first version of the ode is similar to many of Wordsworth's spring 1802 poems. The ode is like *To the Cuckoo* in that both poems discuss aspects of nature common to the end of spring. Both poems were not crafted at times that the natural imagery could take place, so Wordsworth had to rely on his imagination to determine the scene. Wordsworth refers to "A timely utterance" in the third stanza, possibly the same event found in his *The Rainbow*, and the ode contains feelings of regret that the experience must end. This regret is joined with feelings of uneasiness that he no longer feels the same way he did as a boy. The ode reflects Wordsworth's darker feelings that he could no longer return to a peaceful state with nature. This gloomy feeling is also present in *The Ruined Cottage* and in *Tintern Abbey*. Of the other 1802 poems, the ode is different from his *Resolution and Independence*, a poem that describes the qualities needed to become a great poet. The poem argued that a poet should not be excessive or irresponsible in behaviour and contains a sense of assurance that is not found within the original four stanzas. Instead, there is a search for such a feeling but the poem ends without certainty, which relates the ode to Coleridge's poem *Dejection: An Ode*. When read together, Coleridge's and Wordsworth's poem form a dialogue with an emphasis on the poet's relationship with nature and humanity. However, Wordsworth's original four stanzas describing a loss is made darker in Coleridge and, to Coleridge, only humanity and love are able to help the poet.

While with Wordsworth, Coleridge was able to read the poem and provide his response to the ode's question within an early draft of his poem, *Dejection: an Ode*. Coleridge's answer was to claim that the glory was the

soul and it is a subjective answer to the question. Wordsworth took a different path as he sought to answer the poem, which was to declare that childhood contained the remnants of a beatific state and that being able to experience the beauty that remained later was something to be thankful for. The difference between the two could be attributed to the differences in the poets' childhood experiences; Coleridge suffered from various pain in his youth whereas Wordsworth's was far more pleasant. It is possible that Coleridge's earlier poem, *The Mad Monk* (1800) influenced the opening of the ode and that discussions between Dorothy and Wordsworth about Coleridge's childhood and painful life were influences on the crafting of the opening stanza of the poem. However, the message in the ode, as with *Tintern Abbey*, describes the pain and suffering of life as able to dull the memory of early joy from nature but it is unable to completely destroy it. The suffering leads Wordsworth to recognise what is soothing in nature, and he credits the pain as leading to a philosophical understanding of the world.

The poem is similar to the conversation poems created by Coleridge, including *Dejection: An Ode*. The poems were not real conversations as there is no response to the narrator of the poem, but they are written as if there would be a response. The poems seek to have a response, though it never comes, and the possibility of such a voice though absence is a type of prosopopoeia. In general, Coleridge's poems discuss the cosmic as they long for a response, and it is this aspect, not a possible object of the conversation, that forms the power of the poem. Wordsworth took up the form in both *Tintern Abbey* and *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, but he lacks the generous treatment of the narrator as found in Coleridge's poems. As a whole, Wordsworth's technique is impersonal and more logical, and the narrator is placed in the same position as the object of the conversation. The narrator of Wordsworth is more self-interested and any object beyond the narrator is kept without a possible voice and is turned into a second self of the poet. As such, the conversation has one of the participants lose his identity for the sake of the other and that individual represents loss and mortality.

Pre-existence

The expanded portion of the ode is related to the ideas expressed in Wordsworth's *The Prelude* Book V in their emphasis on childhood memories and a connection between the divine and humanity. To Wordsworth, the soul was created by the divine and was able to recognise the light in the world. As a person ages, they are no longer able to see the light, but they can still recognise the beauty in the world. He elaborated on this belief in a note to the text: "Archimedes said that he could move the world if he had a point whereon to rest his machine. Who has not felt the same aspirations as regards the world of his own mind? Having to wield some of its elements when I was impelled to write this poem on the "Immortality of the Soul", I took hold of the notion of pre-existence as having sufficient foundation in humanity for authorising me to make for my purpose the best use I could of it as a Poet." This "notion of pre-existence" is somewhat Platonic in nature, and it is the basis for Wordsworth believing that children are able to be the "best philosopher". The idea was not intended as a type of metempsychosis, the reincarnation of the soul from person to person, and Wordsworth later explained that the poem was not meant to be regarded as a complete philosophical view: "In my Ode... I do not profess to give a literal representation of the state of the affections and of the moral being in childhood. I record my feelings at that time,--my absolute spirituality, my 'all-soulness,' if I may so speak. At that time I could not believe that I should lie down quietly in the grave, and that my body would moulder into dust."

Wordsworth's explanation of the origin of the poem suggests that it was inspiration and passion that led to the ode's composition, and he later said that the poem was to deal with the loss of sensations and a desire to overcome the natural process of death. As for the specific passages in the poem that answer the question of the early version, two of the stanzas describe what it is like to be a child in a similar manner to his earlier poem,

"To Hartley Coleridge, Six Years Old" dedicated to Coleridge's son. In the previous poem, the subject was Hartley's inability to understand death as an end to life or a separation. In the ode, the child is Wordsworth and, like Hartley or the girl described in "We are Seven", he too was unable to understand death and that inability is transformed into a metaphor for childish feelings. The later stanzas also deal with personal feelings but emphasise Wordsworth's appreciation for being able to experience the spiritual parts of the world and a desire to know what remains after the passion of childhood sensations are gone. This emphasis of the self places mankind in the position of the object of prayer, possibly replacing a celebration of Christ's birth with a celebration of his own as the poem describes mankind coming from the eternal down to earth. Although this emphasis seems non-Christian, many of the poem's images are Judeo-Christian in origin. Additionally, the Platonic theory of pre-existence is related to the Christian understanding of the Incarnation, which is a connection that Shelley drops when he reuses many of Wordsworth's ideas in *The Triumph of Life*.

The idea of pre-existence within the poem contains only a limited theological component, and Wordsworth later believed that the concept was "far too shadowy a notion to be recommended to faith." In 1989, Gene Ruoff argued that the idea was connected to Christian theology in that the Christian theorist Origen adopted the belief and relied on it in the development of Christian doctrine. What is missing in Origen's platonic system is Wordsworth's emphasis on childhood, which could be found in the beliefs of the Cambridge Platonists and their works, including Henry Vaughan's "The Retreat". Even if the idea is not Christian, it still cannot be said that the poem lacks a theological component because the poem incorporates spiritual images of natural scenes found in childhood. Among those natural scenes, the narrator includes a Hebrew prayer-like praise of God for the restoration of the soul to the body in the morning and the attributing of God's blessing to the various animals he sees. What concerns the narrator is that he is not being renewed like the animals and he is fearful over what he is missing. This is similar to a fear that is provided at the beginning of *The Prelude* and in *Tintern Abbey*. As for the understanding of the soul contained within the poem, Wordsworth is more than Platonic in that he holds an Augustinian concept of mercy that leads to the progress of the soul. Wordsworth differs from Augustine in that Wordsworth seeks in the poem to separate himself from the theory of solipsism, the belief that nothing exists outside of the mind. The soul, over time, exists in a world filled with the sublime before moving to the natural world, and the man moves from an egocentric world to a world with nature and then to a world with mankind. This system links nature with a renewal of the self.

Childhood and Growth

Ode: Intimations of Immortality is about childhood, but the poem doesn't completely focus on childhood or what was lost from childhood. Instead, the ode, like *The Prelude* and *Tintern Abbey*, places an emphasis on how an adult develops from a child and how being absorbed in nature allows one a deeper connection to humanity. The ode focuses not on Dorothy or on Wordsworth's love, Mary Hutchinson, but on himself and is part of what is called his "egotistical sublime". Of his childhood, Wordsworth told Catherine Clarkson in an 1815 letter that the poem "rests entirely upon two recollections of childhood, one that of a splendour in the objects of sense which is passed away, and the other an indisposition to bend to the law of death as applying to our particular case.... A Reader who has not a vivid recollection of these feelings having existed in his mind in childhood cannot understand the poem." Childhood, therefore, becomes a means to exploring memory, and the imagination, as Wordsworth claims in the letter, is connected to man's understanding of immortality. In a letter to Isabella Fenwick, he explained his particular feelings about immortality that he held when young: "I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial nature." These feelings were influenced by

Wordsworth's own experience of loss, including the death of his parents, and may have isolated him from society if the feelings did not ease as he matured.

Like the two other poems, *The Prelude* and *Tintern Abbey*, the ode discusses Wordsworth's understanding of his own psychological development, but it is not a scientific study of the subject. He believed that it is difficult to understand the soul and emphasises the psychological basis of his visionary abilities, an idea found in the ode but in the form of a lamentation for the loss of vision. To Wordsworth, vision is found in childhood but is lost later, and there are three types of people that lose their vision. The first are men corrupted through either an apathetic view of the visions or through meanness of mind. The second are the "common" people who lose their vision as a natural part of ageing. The last, the gifted, lose parts of their vision, and all three retain at least a limited ability to experience visions. Wordsworth sets up multiple stages, infancy, childhood, adolescence, and maturity as times of development but there is no real boundary between each stage. To Wordsworth, infancy is when the "poetic spirit", the ability to experience visions, is first developed and is based on the infant learning about the world and bonding to nature. As the child goes through adolescence, he continues to bond with nature and this is slowly replaced by a love for humanity, a concept known as "One Life". This leads to the individual despairing and only being able to resist despair through imagination. When describing the stages of human life, one of the images Wordsworth relies on to describe the negative aspects of development is a theatre stage, the Latin idea of *theatrum mundi*. The idea allows the narrator to claim that people are weighed down by the roles they play over time weigh them down. The narrator is also able to claim through the metaphor that people are disconnected from reality and see life as if in a dream.

Wordsworth returns to the ideas found within the complete ode many times in his later works. There is also a strong connection between the ode and Wordsworth's *Ode to Duty*, completed at the same time in 1804. The poems describe Wordsworth's assessment of his poetry and contains reflections on conversations held between Wordsworth and Coleridge on poetry and philosophy. The basis of the *Ode to Duty* states that love and happiness are important to life, but there is something else necessary to connect an individual to nature, affirming the narrator's loyalty to a benevolent divine presence in the world. However, Wordsworth was never satisfied with the result of *Ode to Duty* as he was with *Ode: Intimations on Immortality*. In terms of use of light as a central image, the ode is related to *Peele Castle*, but the light in the latter poem is seen as an illusion and stands in opposition to the ode's ideas. In an 1809 essay as part of his *Essays upon Epitaphs* for Coleridge's journal, *The Friend*, Wordsworth argued that people have intimations that there is an immortal aspect of their life and that without such feelings that joy could not be felt in the world. The argument and the ideas are similar to many of the statements in the ode along with those in *The Prelude*, *Tintern Abbey*, and "We Are Seven". He would also return directly to the ode in his 1817 poem *Composed upon an Evening of Extraordinary Splendor and Beauty* where he evaluates his own evolving life and poetic works while discussing the loss of an early vision of the world's joys. In the *Ode: Intimations on Immortality*, Wordsworth concluded that he gives thanks that was able to gain even though he lost his vision of the joy in the world, but in the later work he tones down his emphasis on the gain and provides only a muted thanks for what remains of his ability to see the glory in the world.

Wordsworth's ode is a poem that describes how suffering allows for growth and an understanding of nature, and this belief influenced the poetry of other Romantic poets. Wordsworth followed a Virgilian idea called *lachrimae rerum*, which means that "life is growth" but it implies that there is also loss within life. To Wordsworth, the loss brought about enough to make up for what was taken. Shelley, in his *Prometheus Unbound*, describes a reality that would be the best that could be developed but always has the suffering, death, and change. John Keats developed an idea called "the Burden of the Mystery" that emphasizes the importance

of suffering in the development of man and necessary for maturation. However, Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode* describes the loss of his own poetic ability as he aged and mourned what time took. In Coleridge's theory, his poetic abilities were the basis for happiness and without them there would only be misery. In addition to views on suffering, Shelley relies on Wordsworth's idea of pre-existence in *The Triumph of Life*, and Keats relies on Wordsworth's interrogative technique in many of his poems, but he discards the egocentric aspects of the questions.

Commentary

If "Tintern Abbey" is Wordsworth's first great statement about the action of childhood memories of nature upon the adult mind, the "Intimations of Immortality" ode is his mature masterpiece on the subject. The poem, whose full title is "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," makes explicit Wordsworth's belief that life on earth is a dim shadow of an earlier, purer existence, dimly recalled in childhood and then forgotten in the process of growing up. (In the fifth stanza, he writes, "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.../Not in entire forgetfulness, / And not in utter nakedness, /But trailing clouds of glory do we come / From God, who is our home...")

While one might disagree with the poem's metaphysical hypotheses, there is no arguing with the genius of language at work in this Ode. Wordsworth consciously sets his speaker's mind at odds with the atmosphere of joyous nature all around him, a rare move by a poet whose consciousness is so habitually in unity with nature. Understanding that his grief stems from his inability to experience the May morning as he would have in childhood, the speaker attempts to enter willfully into a state of cheerfulness; but he is able to find real happiness only when he realizes that "the philosophic mind" has given him the ability to understand nature in deeper, more human terms—as a source of metaphor and guidance for human life. This is very much the same pattern as "Tintern Abbey" 's, but whereas in the earlier poem Wordsworth made himself joyful, and referred to the "music of humanity" only briefly, in the later poem he explicitly proposes that this music is the remedy for his mature grief.

The structure of the Immortality Ode is also unique in Wordsworth's work; unlike his characteristically fluid, naturally spoken monologues, the Ode is written in a lilting, songlike cadence with frequent shifts in rhyme scheme and rhythm. Further, rather than progressively exploring a single idea from start to finish, the Ode jumps from idea to idea, always sticking close to the central scene, but frequently making surprising moves, as when the speaker begins to address the "Mighty Prophet" in the eighth stanza—only to reveal midway through his address that the mighty prophet is a six-year-old boy.

Wordsworth's linguistic strategies are extraordinarily sophisticated and complex in this Ode, as the poem's use of metaphor and image shifts from the register of lost childhood to the register of the philosophic mind. When the speaker is grieving, the main tactic of the poem is to offer joyous, pastoral nature images, frequently personified—the lambs dancing as to the tabor, the moon looking about her in the sky. But when the poet attains the philosophic mind and his fullest realization about memory and imagination, he begins to employ far more subtle descriptions of nature that, rather than jauntily imposing humanity upon natural objects, simply draw human characteristics out of their natural presences, referring back to human qualities from earlier in the poem.

So, in the final stanza, the brooks "fret" down their channels, just as the child's mother "fretted" him with kisses earlier in the poem; they trip lightly just as the speaker "tripped lightly" as a child; the Day is new-born,

innocent, and bright, just as a child would be; the clouds “gather round the setting sun” and “take a sober coloring,” just as mourners at a funeral (recalling the child’s playing with some fragment from “a mourning or a funeral” earlier in the poem) might gather soberly around a grave. The effect is to illustrate how, in the process of imaginative creativity possible to the mature mind, the shapes of humanity can be found in nature and vice-versa. (Recall the “music of humanity” in “Tintern Abbey.”) A flower can summon thoughts too deep for tears because a flower can embody the shape of human life, and it is the mind of maturity combined with the memory of childhood that enables the poet to make that vital and moving connection.

Coleridge's Analysis

The ode praises children for being the "best Philosopher" ("lover of truth") because they live in truth and have prophetic abilities. This claim bothers Coleridge and he writes, in *Biographia Literaria*, that Wordsworth was trying to be a prophet in an area that he could have no claim to prophecy. In his analysis of the poem, Coleridge breaks down many aspects of Wordsworth's claims and asks, "In what sense can the magnificent attributes, above quoted, be appropriated to a *child*, which would not make them equally suitable to a *be*, or a *dog*, or a *field of corn*: or even to a ship, or to the wind and waves that propel it? The omnipresent Spirit works equally in them, as in the child; and the child is equally unconscious of it as they." The knowledge of nature that Wordsworth thinks is wonderful in children, Coleridge feels is absurd in Wordsworth since a poet couldn't know how to make sense of a child's ability to sense the divine any more than the child with a limited understanding could know of the world. I. A. Richards, in his work *Coleridge on Imagination* (1934), responds to Coleridge's claims by asking, "Why should Wordsworth deny that, in a much less degree, these attributes are equally suitable to a bee, or a dog, or a field of corn?"

Later, Cleanth Brooks reanalyzes the argument to point out that Wordsworth would include the animals among the children. He also explains that the child is the "best philosopher" because of his understanding of the "eternal deep", which comes from enjoying the world through play: "They are playing with their little spades and sand-buckets along the beach on which the waves break." In 1992, Susan Eilenberg returned to the dispute and defended Coleridge's analysis by explaining that "It exhibits the workings of the ambivalence Coleridge feels toward the character of Wordsworth's poetry; only now, confronting greater poetry, his uneasiness is greater... If Wordsworth's weakness is incongruity, his strength is propriety. That Coleridge should tell us this at such length tells as much about Coleridge as about Wordsworth: reading the second volume of the *Biographia*, we learn not only Wordsworth's strong and weak points but also the qualities that most interest Coleridge."

Critical Reception

The *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* is the most celebrated poem published in Wordsworth's *Poems in Two Volumes* collection. While modern critics believe that the poems published in Wordsworth's 1807 collection represented a productive and good period of his career, contemporary reviewers were split on the matter and many negative reviews cast doubts on his circle of poets known as the Lake Poets. Negative reviews were found in the *Critical Review*, *Le Beau Monde* and *Literary Annual Register*. George Gordon Byron, a fellow Romantic poet but not an associate of Wordsworth's, responded to *Poems in Two Volumes*, in a 3 July 1807 *Monthly Literary Recreations* review, with a claim that the collection lacked the quality found in *Lyrical Ballads*. When referring to *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, he dismissed the poem as Wordsworth's "innocent odes" without providing any in-depth response, stating only: "On the whole, however, with the exception of the above, and

other innocent odes of the same cast, we think these volumes display a genius worthy of higher pursuits, and regret that Mr. W. confines his muse to such trifling subjects... Many, with inferior abilities, have acquired a loftier seat on Parnassus, merely by attempting strains in which Mr. W. is more qualified to excel." The poem was received negatively but for a different reason from Wordsworth's and Coleridge's friend Robert Southey, also a Romantic poet. Southey, in an 8 December 1807 letter to Walter Scott, wrote, "There are certainly some pieces there which are good for nothing... and very many which it was highly injudicious to publish.... The Ode upon Pre-existence is a dark subject darkly handled. Coleridge is the only man who could make such a subject luminous."

Francis Jeffrey, a Whig lawyer and editor of the *Edinburgh Review*, originally favoured Wordsworth's poetry following the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 but turned against the poet from 1802 onward. In response to Wordsworth's 1807 collection of poetry, Jeffrey contributed an anonymous review to the October 1807 *Edinburgh Review* that condemned Wordsworth's poetry again. In particular, he declared the ode "beyond all doubt, the most illegible and unintelligible part of the publication. We can pretend to give no analysis or explanation of it;-- our readers must make what they can of the following extracts." After quoting the passage, he argues that he has provided enough information for people to judge if Wordsworth's new school of poetry should be replaced by the previous system of poetry: "If we were to stop here, we do not think that Mr Wordsworth, or his admirers, would have any reason to complain; for what we have now quoted is undeniably the most peculiar and characteristic part of his publication, and must be defended and applauded if the merit or originality of his system is to be seriously maintained. In putting forth his own opinion, Jeffrey explains, "In our own opinion, however, the demerit of that system cannot be fairly appreciated, until it be shown, that the author of the bad verses which we have already extracted, can write good verses when he pleases". Jeffrey later wrote a semi-positive review of the ode, for the 12 April 1808 *Edinburgh Review*, that praised Wordsworth when he was least Romantic in his poetry. He believed that Wordsworth's greatest weakness was portraying the low aspects of life in a lofty tone.

Another semi-negative response to the poem followed on 4 January 1808 in the *Eclectic Review*. The writer, James Montgomery, attacked the 1807 collection of poems for depicting low subjects. When it came to the ode, Montgomery attacked the poem for depicting pre-existence. After quoting the poem with extracts from the whole collection, he claimed, "We need insist no more on the necessity of using, in poetry, a language different from and superior to 'the real language of men,' since Mr. Wordsworth himself is so frequently compelled to employ it, for the expression of thoughts which without it would be incommunicable. These volumes are distinguished by the same blemishes and beauties as were found in their predecessors, but in an inverse proportion: the defects of the poet, in this performance, being as much greater than his merits, as they were less in his former publication." In his conclusion, Montgomery returned to the ode and claimed, that "the reader is turned loose into a wilderness of sublimity, tenderness, bombast, and absurdity, to find out the subject as well as he can... After our preliminary remarks on Mr. Wordsworth's theory of poetical language, and the quotations which we have given from these and his earlier compositions, it will be unnecessary to offer any further estimate or character of his genius. We shall only add one remark.... Of the pieces now published he has said nothing: most of them seem to have been written *for* no purpose at all, and certainly *to* no good one." In January 1815, Montgomery returned to Wordsworth's poetry in another review and argues, "Mr. Wordsworth often speaks in ecstatic strains of the pleasure of infancy. If we rightly understand him, he conjectures that the soul comes immediately from a world of pure felicity, when it is born into this troublous scene of care and vicissitude... This brilliant allegory, (for such we must regard it,) is employed to illustrate the mournful truth, that looking back from middle age to the earliest period of remembrance we find, 'That there hath pass'd away a glory from the earth,'... Such is *Life*".

Later Responses

John Taylor Coleridge, nephew to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, submitted an anonymous review for the April 1814 *Quarterly Review*. Though it was a review of his uncle's *Remorse*, he connects the intention and imagery found within Coleridge's poem to that in *Ode: Intimation of Immortality* and John Wilson's "To a Sleeping Child" when saying, "To an extension or rather a modification of this last mentioned principle [obedience to some internal feeling] may perhaps be attributed the beautiful tenet so strongly inculcated by them of the celestial purity of infancy. 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy,' says Mr. Wordsworth, in a passage which strikingly exemplifies the power of imaginative poetry". John Taylor Coleridge returned to Wordsworth's poetry and the ode in a May 1815 review for the *British Critic*. In the review, he partially condemns Wordsworth's emphasis in the ode on children being connected to the divine: "His occasional lapses into childish and trivial allusion may be accounted for, from the same tendency. He is obscure, when he leaves out links in the chain of association, which the reader cannot easily supply... In his descriptions of children this is particularly the case, because of his firm belief in a doctrine, more poetical perhaps, than either philosophical or christian, that 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy.'"

John Taylor Coleridge continues by explaining the negative aspects of such a concept: "Though the tenderness and beauty resulting from this opinion be to us a rich overpayment for the occasional strainings and refinements of sentiment to which it has given birth, it has yet often served to make the author ridiculous in common eyes, in that it has led him to state his own fairy dreams as the true interpretation and import of the looks and movements of children, as being even really in their minds." In a February 1821 review for the *British Critic*, John Taylor Coleridge attacked the poem again for a heretical view found in the notion of pre-existence and how it reappeared in Wordsworth's poem "On an Extraordinary Evening of Splendour and Beauty". However, he does claim that the passage of the ode containing the idea is "a passage of exquisite poetry" and that "A more poetical theory of human nature cannot well be devised, and if the subject were one, upon which error was safe, we should forbear to examine it closely, and yield to the delight we have often received from it in the ode from which the last extract [*Ode: Intimations of Immortality*] is made." He was to continue: "If, therefore, we had met the doctrine in any poet but Mr. Wordsworth, we should have said nothing; but we believe him to be one not willing to promulgate error, even in poetry, indeed it is manifest that he makes his poetry subservient to his philosophy; and this particular notion is so mixed up by him with others, in which it is impossible to suppose him otherwise than serious; that we are constrained to take it for his real and sober belief."

In the same year came responses to the ode by two Romantic writers. Leigh Hunt, a second generation Romantic poet, added notes to his poem *Feast of the Poets* that respond to the ideas suggested in Wordsworth's poetry. These ideas include Wordsworth's promotion of a simple mental state without cravings for knowledge, and it is such an ideas that Hunt wanted to mock in his poem. However, Hunt did not disagree completely with Wordsworth's sentiments. After quoting the final lines of the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, those that "Wordsworth has beautifully told us, that to him '--the meanest flow'r that blows can give/ Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears", Hunt claims, "I have no doubt of it; and far be it from me to cast stones into the well in which they lie,-- to disturb those reposing waters,-- that freshness at the bottom of warm hearts,-- those thoughts, which if they are too deep for tears, are also, in their best mood, too tranquil even for smiles. Far be it also from me to hinder the communication of such thoughts to mankind, when they are not sunk beyond their proper depth, so as to make one dizzy in looking down to them." Following Hunt, William Hazlitt, a critic and Romantic writer, wrote a series of essays called "Character of Mr. Wordsworth's New Poems" in three parts, starting in the 21 August 1814 *Examiner*. Although Hazlitt treated Wordsworth's poetry fairly, he was critical of Wordsworth himself and he removed any positive statements about Wordsworth's person from a reprint of the

essays. The 2 October 1814 essay examined poetry as either of imagination or of sentiment, and quotes the final lines of the poem as an example of "The extreme simplicity which some persons have objected to in Mr. Wordsworth's poetry is to be found only in the subject and style: the sentiments are subtle and profound. In the latter respect, his poetry is as much above the common standard or capacity, as in the other it is below it... We go along with him, while he is the subject of his own narrative, but we take leave of him when he makes pedlars and ploughmen his heroes and the interpreters of his sentiments."

In 1817 came two more responses by Romantic poets to the ode. Coleridge was impressed by the ode's themes, rhythm, and structure since he first heard the beginning stanzas in 1802. In an analysis of Wordsworth's poetry for his work *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge described what he considered as both the positives and the defects of the ode. In his argument, he both defended his technique and explained: "Though the instances of this defect in Mr. Wordsworth's poems are so few, that for themselves it would have been scarce just to attract the reader's attention toward them; yet I have dwelt on it, and perhaps the more for this very reason. For being so very few, they cannot sensibly detract from the reputation of an author, who is even characterized by the number of profound truths in his writings, which will stand the severest analysis; and yet few as they are, they are exactly those passages which his blind admirers would be most likely, and best able, to imitate." Of the positives that Coleridge identified within the poem, he placed emphasis on Wordsworth's choice of grammar and language that established a verbal purity in which the words chosen could not be substituted without destroying the beauty of the poem. Another aspect Coleridge favoured was the poem's originality of thought and how it contained Wordsworth's understanding of nature and his own experience. Coleridge also praised the lack of a rigorous structure within the poem and claimed that Wordsworth was able to truly capture the imagination. However, part of Coleridge's analysis of the poem and of the poet tend to describe his idealised version of positives and negative than an actual concrete object. In the same year, it was claimed by Benjamin Bailey, in an 7 May 1849 letter to R. M. Milnes, that John Keats, one of the second generation Romantic poets, discussed the poem with him. In his recollection, Bailey said, "The following passage from Wordsworth's ode on Immortality [lines 140–148] was deeply felt by Keats, who however at this time seemed to me to value this great Poet rather in particular passages than in the full length portrait, as it were, of the great imaginative & philosophic Christian Poet, which he really is, & which Keats obviously, not long afterwards, felt him to be."

Following Coleridge's response was an anonymous review in the May 1820 *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, possible by either John Lockhart and John Wilson together or just Lockhart on his own. Of Wordsworth's abilities as a poet in general, the review claimed: "Mr Wordsworth ... is entitled to be classed with the very highest names among his predecessors, as a pure and reverent worshipper of the true majest of the English Muse" and that "Of the genius of Mr Wordsworth, in short, it is now in the hands of every man to judge freely and fully, and for himself. Our own opinion, ever since this Journal commenced, has been clearly and entirely before them; and if there be any one person, on whose mind what we have quoted now, is not enough to make an impression similar to that which our own judgment had long before received – we have nothing more to say to that person in regard to the subject of poetry." In discussing the ode in particular, the review characterised the poem as "one of the grandest of his early pieces". In December 1820 came an article in the *New Monthly Magazine* titled "On the Genius and Writings of Wordsworth" written by Thomas Noon Talfourd. When discussing the poem, Talfourd declared that the ode "is, to our feelings, the noblest piece of lyric poetry in the world. It was the first poem of its author which we read, and never shall we forget the sensations which it excited within us. We had heard the cold sneers attached to his name... and here – in the works of this derided poet – we found a new vein of imaginative sentiment open to us – sacred recollections brought back to our hearts with all the freshness of novelty, and all the venerableness of far-off time". When analysing the relationship between infants and the divine within the poem, the article continued: "What a gift did we then

inherit! To have the best and most imperishable of intellectual treasures – the mighty world of reminiscences of the days of infancy – set before us in a new and holier light".

William Blake, a Romantic poet and artist, thought that Wordsworth was at the same level as the poets Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton. In a diary entry for 27 December 1825, H. C. Robinson recounted a conversation between himself and William Blake shortly before Blake's death: "I read to him Wordsworth's incomparable ode, which he heartily enjoyed. But he repeated, 'I fear Wordsworth loves nature, and nature is the work of the Devil. The Devil is in us as 'far as we are nature.'... The parts of Wordsworth's ode which Blake most enjoyed were the most obscure—at all events, those which I least like and comprehend." Following Blake, Chauncy Hare Townshend produced "An Essay on the Theory and the Writings of Wordsworth" for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1829. In the third part, he critiqued Wordsworth's use of pre-existence within the poem and asked "unless our author means to say that, having existed from all eternity, we are of an eternal and indestructible essence; or, in other words, that being incarnate portion of the Deity... we are as Immortal as himself. But if the poet intends to affirm this, do you not perceive that he frustrates his own aim?" He continued by explaining why he felt that Wordsworth's concept fell short of any useful purpose: "For if we are of God's indivisible essence, and receive our separate consciousness from the wall of flesh which, at our birth, was raised between us and the Found of Being, we must, on the dissolution of the body... be again merged in the simple and uncompounded Godhead, lose our individual consciousness... in another sense, become as though we had never been." He concluded his analysis with a critique of the poem as a whole: "I should say that Wordsworth does not display in it any great clearness of thought, or felicity of language... the ode in question is not so much abstruse in idea as crabbed in expression. There appears to be a laborious toiling after originality, ending in a dismal want of harmony."

Victorian Responses

The ode, like others of Wordsworth's poetry, was favoured by Victorians for its biographical aspects and the way Wordsworth approached feelings of despondency. The American Romantic poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his 1856 work *English Traits*, claimed that the poem "There are torpid places in his mind, there is something hard and sterile in his poetry, want of grace and variety, want of due catholicity and cosmopolitan scope: he had conformities to English politics and tradition; he had egotistic puerilities in the choice and treatment of his subjects; but let us say of him, that, alone in his time he treated the human mind well, and with an absolute trust. His adherence to his poetic creed rested on real inspirations." The editor of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, George William Curtis, praised the ode in his December 1859 column "Editor's Easy Chair" and claimed that "it was Wordsworth who has written one of the greatest English poets... For sustained splendor of imagination, deep, solemn, and progressive thought, and exquisite variety of music, that poem is unsurpassed. Since Milton's 'Ode upon the Nativity' there is nothing so fine, not forgetting Dryden, Pope, Collins, and the rest, who have written odes."

The philosopher John Stuart Mill liked Wordsworth's ode and found it influential to the formation of his own thoughts. In his *Autobiography* (1873), he credited Wordsworth's poetry as being able to relieve his mind and overcome a sense of apathy towards life. Of the poems, he particularly emphasised both Wordsworth's 1815 collection of poetry and the *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* as providing the most help to him, and he specifically said of the ode: "I found that he too had had similar experience to mine; that he also had felt that the first freshness of youthful enjoyment of life was not lasting; but that he had sought for compensation, and found it, in the way in which he was now teaching me to find it. The result was that I gradually, but completely, emerged from my habitual depression, and was never again subject to it." David Mason followed Mill in an

1875 essay on literature, including Wordsworth's poetry. After quoting from the ode, Mason claimed of the poem: "These, and hundreds of other passages that might be quoted, show that Wordsworth possessed, in a very high degree indeed, the true primary quality of the poet—imagination; a surcharge of personality or vital spirit, perpetually overflowing among the objects of the otherwise conditioned universe, and refashioning them according to its pleasure."

After Mill, critics focused on the ode's status among Wordsworth's other poems. In July 1877, Edward Dowden, in an article for the *Contemporary Review*, discussed the Transcendental Movement and the nature of the Romantic poets. When referring to Wordsworth and the ode, he claimed: "Wordsworth in his later years lost, as he expresses it, *courage*, the spring-like hope and confidence which enables a man to advance joyously towards new discovery of truth. But the poet of 'Tintern Abbey' and the 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' and the 'Prelude' is Wordsworth in his period of highest energy and imaginative light". Matthew Arnold, the preface to an 1879 edition of Wordsworth's poetry, explains that he was a great lover of the poems. However, he explains why he believed that the ode was not one of best: "I have a warm admiration for *Laodameia* and for the great *Ode*; but if I am to tell the very truth, I find *Laodameia* not wholly free from something artificial, and the great *Ode* not wholly free from something declamatory." His concern was over what he saw as the ideas expressed on childhood and maturity: "Even the 'intimations' of the famous Ode, those corner-stones of the supposed philosophic system of Wordsworth... has itself not the character of poetic truth of the best kind; it has no real solidity" "to say that universally this instinct is mighty in childhood, and tends to die away afterwards, is to say what is extremely doubtful... In general, we may say of these high instincts of early childhood... what Thucydides says of the early achievements of the Greek race:--'It is impossible to speak with certainty of what is so remote; but from all that we can really investigate, I should say that they were no very great things.'"

The Victorian critic John Ruskin, towards the end of the 19th century, provided short analyses of various writers in his "Nature and Literature" essays collected in "Art and Life: a Ruskin Anthology". In speaking of Wordsworth, Ruskin claimed, "Wordsworth is simply a Westmoreland peasant, with considerably less shrewdness than most border Englishmen or Scotsmen inherit; and no sense of humor; but gifted... with vivid sense of natural beauty, and a pretty turn for reflection, not always acute, but, as far as they reach, medicinal to the fever of the restless and corrupted life around him." After mocking the self-reflective nature of Wordsworth's poetry, he then declared that the poetry was "Tuneful nevertheless at heart, and of the heavenly choir, I gladly and frankly acknowledge him; and our English literature enriched with a new and singular virtue in the aerial purity and healthful rightness of his quiet song;--but *aerial* only—not ethereal; and lowly in its privacy of light". The ode, to Ruskin, becomes a means to deride Wordsworth's intellect and faith when he claims that Wordsworth was "content with intimations of immortality such as may be in skipping of lambs, and laughter of children-incurious to see in the hands the print of the nails." Ruskin's claims were responded to by an article by Richard Hutton in the 7 August 1880 *Spectator*. The article, "Mr. Ruskin on Wordsworth", stated, "We should hardly have expected Mr. Ruskin—a great master of irony though he be—to lay his finger so unerringly as he does on the weak point of Wordsworth's sublime ode on the 'Intimations of Immortality,' when he speaks of him—quite falsely, by the way—as 'content with intimations of immortality'". The article continued with praise of Wordsworth and condemns Ruskin further: "But then, though he shows how little he understands the ode, in speaking of Wordsworth as content with such intimations, he undoubtedly does touch the weak chord in what, but for that weak chord, would be one of the greatest of all monuments of human genius... But any one to whom Wordsworth's great ode is the very core of that body of poetry which makes up the best part of his imaginative life, will be as much astonished to find Mr. Ruskin speaking of it so blindly and unmeaningly as he does".

The ode was viewed positively by the end of the century. George Saintsbury, in his *A Short History of English Literature* (1898), declared the importance and greatness of the ode: "Perhaps twice only, in *Tintern Abbey* and in the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, is the full, the perfect Wordsworth with his half-pantheistic worship of nature, informed and chastened by an intense sense of human conduct, of reverence and almost humbleness, displayed in the utmost poetic felicity. And these two are accordingly among the great poems of the world. No unfavorable criticism on either has hurt them, though it may have hurt the critics. They are, if not in every smallest detail, yet as a whole, invulnerable and unperishable. They could not be better done."

Modern Responses

At the beginning of the 20th century, response to the ode by critics was mostly positive. Andrew Bradley declared in 1909 that "The Immortality Ode, like *King Lear*, is its author's greatest product, but not his best piece of work." When speaking of Grasmere and Wordsworth, Elias Sneath wrote in 1912: "It witnessed the composition of a large number of poems, many of which may be regarded among the finest products of his imagination. Most of them have already been considered. However, one remains which, in the judgment of some critics, more than any other poem of the numerous creations of his genius, entitles him to a seat among the Immortals. This is the celebrated [ode]... It is, in some respects, one of his most important works, whether viewed from the stand point of mere art, or from that of poetic insight." George Harper, following Sneath in 1916, described the poem in positive terms and said, "Its radiance comes and goes through a shimmering veil. Yet, when we look close, we find nothing unreal or unfinished. This beauty, though supernal, is not evanescent. It bides our return, and whoever comes to seek it as a little child will find it. The imagery, though changing at every turn, is fresh and simple. The language, though connected with thoughts so serious that they impart to it a classic dignity, is natural and for the most part plain.... Nevertheless, a peculiar glamour surrounds the poem. It is the supreme example of what I may venture to term the romance of philosophic thought."

The 1930s contained criticism that praised the poem, but most critics found fault with particular aspects of the poem. F. R. Leavis, in his *Revaluation* (1936), argued that "Criticism of Stanza VIII ... has been permissible, even correct, since Coleridge's time. But the empty grandiosity apparent there is merely the local manifestation of a general strain, a general factitiousness. The *Ode*... belongs to the transition at its critical phase, and contains decided elements of the living." He continued, "But these do not lessen the dissatisfaction that one feels with the movement—the movement that makes the piece an ode in the Grand Style; for, as one reads, it is in terms of the movement that the strain, the falsity, first asserts itself. The manipulations by which the change of mood are indicated have, by the end of the third stanza, produced an effect that, in protest, one described as rhythmic vulgarity..., and the strain revealed in technique has an obvious significance". In 1939, Basil Willey argued that the poem was "greatly superior, as poetry, to its psychological counterpart in *The Prelude*" but also said that "the semi-Platonic machinery of pre-existence... seems intrusive, and foreign to Wordsworth" before concluding that the poem was the "final and definitive expression to the most poignant experience of his poetic life".

Cleanth Brooks used the *Ode: Intimation of Immortality* as one of his key works to analyse in his 1947 work *The Well Wrought Urn*. His analysis broke down the ode as a poem disconnected from its biographical implications and focused on the paradoxes and ironies contained within the language. In introducing his analysis, he claimed that it "may be surmised from what has already been remarked, the 'Ode' for all its fine passages, is not entirely successful as a poem. Yet, we shall be able to make our best defense of it in proportion as we recognize and value its use of ambiguous symbol and paradoxical statement. Indeed, it might be maintained that, failing to do this, we shall miss much of its power as poetry and even some of its accuracy of statement." After breaking down the use of paradox and irony in language, he analyses the statements about the

childhood perception of glory in Stanza VI and argued, "This stanza, though not one of the celebrated stanzas of the poem, is one of the most finely ironical. Its structural significance too is of first importance, and has perhaps in the past been given too little weight." After analysing more of the poem, Brooks points out that the lines in Stanza IX contains lines that "are great poetry. They are great poetry because ... the children are not terrified... The children exemplify the attitude toward eternity which the other philosopher, the mature philosopher, wins to with difficulty, if he wins to it at all." In his conclusion about the poem, he argues, "The greatness of the 'Ode' lies in the fact that Wordsworth is about the poet's business here, and is not trying to inculcate anything. Instead, he is trying to dramatize the changing interrelations which determine the major imagery." Following Brooks in 1949, C. M. Bowra stated, "There is no need to dispute the honour in which by common consent it [the ode] is held" but he adds "There are passages in the 'Immortal Ode' which have less than his usual command of rhythm and ability to make a line stand by itself... But these are unimportant. The whole has a capacious sweep, and the form suits the majestic subject... There are moments when we suspect Wordsworth of trying to say more than he means. Similarly, George Mallarby also revealed some flaws in the poem in his 1950 analysis: "In spite of the doubtful philosophical truth of the doctrine of pre-existence borrowed from Platon, in spite of the curiously placed emphasis and an exuberance of feeling somewhat artificially introduced, in spite of the frustrating and unsatisfying conclusion, this poem will remain, so long as the English language remains, one of its chief and unquestionable glories. It lends itself, more than most English odes, to recitation in the grand manner."

By the 1960s and 1970s, the reception of the poem was mixed but remained overall positive. Mary Moorman analysed the poem in 1965 with an emphasis on its biographical origins and Wordsworth's philosophy on the relationship between mankind and nature. When describing the beauty of the poem, she stated, "Wordsworth once spoke of the *Ode* as 'this famous, ambitious and occasionally magnificent poem'. Yet it is not so much its magnificence that impresses, as the sense of resplendent yet peaceful light in which it is bathed—whether it is the 'celestial light' and 'glory' of the first stanza, or the 'innocent Brightness of a new-born Day' of the last." In 1967, Yvor Winters criticised the poem and claimed that "Wordsworth gives us bad oratory about his own clumsy emotions and a landscape that he has never fully realized." Geoffrey Durrant, in his 1970 analysis of the critical reception of the ode, claimed, "it may be remarked that both the admirers of the Ode, and those who think less well of it, tend to agree that it is unrepresentative, and that its enthusiastic, Dionysian, and mystical vein sets it apart, either on a lonely summit or in a special limbo, from the rest of Wordsworth's work. And the praise that it has received is at times curiously equivocal." In 1975, Richard Brantley, labelling the poem as the "great Ode", claimed that "Wordsworth's task of tracing spiritual maturity, his account of a grace quite as amazing and perhaps even as Christian as the experience recorded in the spiritual autobiography of his day, is therefore essentially completed". He continued by using the ode as evidence that the "poetic record of his remaining life gives little evidence of temptations or errors as unsettling as the ones he faced and made in France." Summarizing the way critics have approached the poem, John Beer claimed in 1978 that the poem "is commonly regarded as the greatest of his shorter works". Additionally, Beer argued that the ode was the basis for the concepts found in Wordsworth's later poetry.

Criticism of the ode during the 1980s ranged in emphasis on which aspects of the poem were most important, but critics were mostly positive regardless of their approach. In 1980, Hunter Davies analysed the period of time when Wordsworth worked on the ode and included it as one of the "scores of poems of unarguable genius", and later declared the poem Wordsworth's "greatest ode". Stephen Gill, in a study of the style of the 1802 poems, argued in 1989 that the poems were new and broad in range with the ode containing "impassioned sublimity". He later compared the ode with Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty" to declare that "The *Ode: Intimations*, by contrast, rich in phrases that have entered the language and provided titles for other people's books, is Wordsworth's greatest achievement in rhythm and cadence. Together with *Tintern Abbey* it has always commanded attention

as Wordsworth's strongest meditative poem and Wordsworth indicated his assessment of it by ensuring through the layout and printing of his volumes that the *Ode* stood apart." In 1986, Marjorie Levinson searched for a political basis in many of Wordsworth's poems and argued that the ode, along with "Michael", *Peele Castle*, and *Tintern Abbey*, are "incontestably among the poet's greatest works". Susan Wolfson, in the same year, claimed that "the force of the last lines arises from the way the language in which the poet expresses a resolution of grief at the same time renders a metaphor that implies that grief has not been resolved so much as repressed and buried. And this ambiguity involves another, for Wordsworth makes it impossible to decide whether the tension between resolution and repression... is his indirect confession of a failure to achieve transcendence or a knowing evasion of an imperative to do so." After performing a Freudian based analysis of the ode, William Galperin, in 1989, argues that "Criticism, in short, cannot accept responsibility for *The Excursion's* failings any more than it is likely to attribute the success of the 'Intimations Ode' to the satisfaction it offers in seeing a sense of entitlement, or self-worth, defended rather than challenged."

1990s critics emphasised individual images within the poem along with Wordsworth's message being the source of the poem's power. In 1991, John Hayden updated Russell Noyes's 1971 biography of Wordsworth and began his analysis of the ode by claiming: "Wordsworth's great 'Ode on Immortality' is not easy to follow nor wholly clear. A basic difficulty of interpretation centers upon what the poet means by 'immortality.'" However, he goes on to declare, "the majority of competent judges acclaim the 'Ode on Immortality' as Wordsworth's most splendid poem. In no other poem are poetic conditions so perfectly fulfilled. There is the right subject, the right imagery to express it, and the right meter and language for both." Thomas McFarland, when emphasising the use of a river as a standard theme in Wordsworth's poems, stated in 1992: "Not only do Wordsworth's greatest statements--'Tintern Abbey', 'The Immortality Ode', 'The Ruined Cottage', 'Michael', the first two books of *The Prelude*--all overlie a streaming infrashape, but Wordsworth, like the other Romantics, seemed virtually hypnotized by the idea of running water." After analysing the Wordsworth's incorporation of childhood memories into the ode, G. Kim Blank, in 1995, argued, "It is the recognition and finally the acceptance of his difficult feelings that stand behind and in the greatness and power of the *Ode*, both as a personal utterance and a universal statement. It is no accident that Wordsworth is here most eloquent. Becoming a whole person is the most powerful statement any of us can ever made. Wordsworth in the *Ode* here makes it for us." In 1997, John Mahoney praised the various aspects of the poem while breaking down its rhythm and style. In particular, he emphasised the poem's full title as "of great importance for all who study the poem carefully" and claimed, "The final stanza is a powerful and peculiarly Wordsworthian valediction."

In the 21st century, the poem was viewed as Wordsworth's best work. Adam Sisman, in 2007, claimed the poem as "one of [Wordsworth's] greatest works". Following in 2008, Paul Fry argued, "Most readers agree that the Platonism of the Intimations Ode is foreign to Wordsworth, and express uneasiness that his most famous poem, the one he always accorded its special place in arranging his successive editions, is also so idiosyncratic." He continued, "As Simpon and Snowdon also suggest, it was a matter of *achieving heights* (not the depth of 'Tintern Abbey'), and for that reason the metaphor comes easily when one speaks of the Intimations Ode as a high point in Wordsworth's career, to be highlighted in any new addition as a pinnacle of accomplishment, a poem of the transcendental imagination *par excellence*."

Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802

"**Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802**" is a sonnet by William Wordsworth describing London and the River Thames, viewed from Westminster Bridge in the early morning. It was first published in the collection *Poems, in Two Volumes* in 1807.

History

.....we left London on Saturday morning at $\frac{1}{2}$ past 5 or 6, the 31st July (I have forgot which) we mounted the Dover Coach at Charing Cross. It was a beautiful morning. The City, St Pauls, with the River & a multitude of little Boats, made a most beautiful sight as we crossed Westminster Bridge. The houses were not overhung by their cloud of smoke & they were spread out endlessly, yet the sun shone so brightly with such a pure light that there was even something like the purity of one of nature's own grand Spectacles ”

—Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Grasmere Journal*, 31 July 1802,

The sonnet was originally dated 1803, but this was corrected in later editions and the date of composition given precisely as 31 July 1802, when Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy were travelling to Calais to visit Annette Vallon and his daughter Caroline by Annette, prior to his forthcoming marriage to Mary Hutchinson.

The sonnet has always been popular, escaping the generally excoriating reviews from critics such as Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* when *Poems in Two Volumes* was first published. The reason undoubtedly lies in its great simplicity and beauty of language, turning on Dorothy's observation that this man-made spectacle is nevertheless one to be compared to nature's grandest natural spectacles. Cleanth Brooks analysed the sonnet in these terms in *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry*.

Stephen Gill remarks that at the end of his life Wordsworth, engaged in editing his works, contemplated a revision even of "so perfect a poem" as this sonnet in response to an objection from a lady that London could not both be "bare" and "clothed" (an example of the use of paradox in literature).

That the sonnet so closely follows Dorothy's journal entry comes as no surprise because Dorothy wrote her *Grasmere Journal* to "give Wm pleasure by it" and it was freely available to Wordsworth, who said of Dorothy that "She gave me eyes, she gave me ears" in his poem "The Sparrow's Nest".

Type of Work

....."Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" is a lyric poem in the form of a sonnet. In English, there are two types of sonnets, the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean, both with fourteen lines. Wordsworth's poem is a Petrarchan sonnet, developed by the Italian poet Petrarch (1304-1374), a Roman Catholic priest. A Petrarchan sonnet consists of an eight-line stanza (octave) and a six-line stanza (sestet). The first stanza presents a theme or problem, and the second stanza develops the theme or suggests a solution to the problem. The rhyme of a Petrarchan sonnet is discussed under Rhyme Scheme and Meter, below.

Composition and Publication

.....William Wordsworth completed the poem between July 31 and September 3, 1802. Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme published the work in 1807 in *Poems in Two Volumes*, a collection of Wordsworth's poems.

Setting

.....The setting is London as seen from Westminster Bridge, which connects the south bank of the Thames River with Westminster on the north bank. Westminster, called an inner borough, is now part of London.

Inspiration

.....Wordsworth's inspiration for the poem was the view he beheld from Westminster Bridge on the morning of July 31, 1802, when most of the residents were still in bed and the factories had not yet stoked their fires and polluted the air with smoke. He and his sister, Dorothy, were crossing the bridge in a coach taking them to a boat for a trip across the English Channel to France. In her diary, Dorothy wrote:

We mounted the Dover Coach at Charing Cross. It was a beautiful morning. The City, St. Paul's, with the River and a Multitude of little boats, made a most beautiful sight.... The houses were not overhung with their cloud of smoke and they were spread out endlessly, yet the sun shone so brightly with such pure light that there was even something like a purity of Nature's own grand spectacles.

Theme: Seeing the City in a New Light

What is strange about this poem is that Wordsworth, a Romantic poet who focussed so much on the beauty of Nature and the countryside, takes as his topic the city of London and treats it with a distinctly Romantic flavour. This sonnet praises the quiet and shimmering beauty of London in the light of an early morning. Throughout the poem Wordsworth uses personification to present the city and its houses and so on as humans, emphasising the peace of tranquility of his view:

This City now doth, like a garment, wear

The beauty of the morning...

The theme of this poem thus seems to be that cities can inspire similar feelings of "calm so deep" as Nature can, and in the final line, Wordsworth uses a paradox to present us with a final image of tranquility and silence:

And all that mighty heart is lying still!

Of course, hearts by their very nature never lie still, yet from his viewpoint, Wordsworth is able to imagine the "heart" of the country, London, "lying still" as he savours the peace and relaxation that the sight gives him. Such a poem allows us to see that Romanticism does not exclusively focus on Nature, and that similar themes can be found in poetry describing cities, which were normally seen as the anthesis of the simplicity and beauty to be found in nature.

London during the workday was rude and dirty. A walk across a bridge or through streets and alleyways confronted the pedestrian with smoke, dust, grimy urchins, clacking carts, ringing hammers, barking dogs, jostling shoppers, smelly fish, rotting fruit. But at dawn on a cloudless morning, when London was still asleep and the fires of factories had yet to be stoked, the city joined with nature to present the early riser a tableau of glistening waters, majestic towers, unpeopled boats on the River Thames--bobbing and swaying--and the glory of empty, silent streets. The message here is that even an ugly, quacking duckling can become a lovely, soundless swan.

Rhyme Scheme and Meter

.....The rhyme scheme of "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" and other Petrarchan sonnets is as follows: (1) first stanza (octave): abba, abba; (2) second stanza (sestet): cd, cd, cd (or another combination, such as cde, cde; cdc, cdc; or cde, dce).

.....The meter of the poem is iambic pentameter, with ten syllables (five iambic feet) per line. (An iambic foot consists of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.) The first two lines of the poem demonstrate the metric pattern:

.....1..... ..2..... 3.....4.....5
Earth **HAS**..|..not **AN**..|.y **THING**..|.to **SHOW**..|.more **FAIR**:
.....1..... ..2..... 3.....4.....5
Dull **WOULD**..|.he **BE**..|.of **SOUL** | who **COULD**..|.pass **BY**

Text With Summary

- a...Earth has not anything to show more fair:
- b...Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
- b...A sight so touching in its majesty:
 - a...This City now doth like a garment wear
 - a...The beauty of the morning: silent, bare,
 - b...Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
 - b...Open unto the fields, and to the sky,
 - a...All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.....8
 - c...Never did sun more beautifully steep
 - d...In his first splendour valley, rock, or hill;
 - c...Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
 - d...The river glideth at his own sweet will:
 - c...Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
 - d...And all that mighty heart is lying still!.....14

Summary

The first eight lines present a view of the city as it wears the sunlit morning like a garment and its edifices glitter beneath the sky. The last six lines then boldly declare that this man-made "formation" is just as beautiful in the sunlight as any natural formation, such as a valley or hill. Moreover, it is just as calming to the observer, for even the houses seem to sleep, like the people in them. The poem begins with a rather shocking statement, especially for a Romantic poet: "Earth has not anything to show more fair." This statement is surprising because Wordsworth is not speaking of nature, but of the city. He goes on to list the beautiful man-made entities therein, such as "Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples." In fact, nature's influence isn't described until the 7th line, when the speaker relates that the city is "open to the fields, and to the sky." While the city itself may not be a part of nature, it is certainly not in *conflict* with

nature. This becomes even more clear in the next line, when the reader learns that the air is "smokeless" (free from pollution).

Wordsworth continues to surprise his reader by saying that the sun has never shone more beautifully, even on natural things. He then personifies the scene, giving life to the sun, the river, the houses, and finally to the whole city, which has a symbolic heart. The reader imagines that the city's heart beats rapidly during the day, while everything and everyone in it is bustling about, but now, in the early morning hours, the city's heart is "lying still." By using personification in his poem, Wordsworth brings a kind of spirit to the city, which is usually seen as a simple construction of rock and metal.

In lines 1 through 8, which together compose a single sentence, the speaker describes what he sees as he stands on Westminster Bridge looking out at the city. He begins by saying that there is nothing "more fair" on Earth than the sight he sees, and that anyone who could pass the spot without stopping to look has a "dull" soul. The poem takes place in the "beauty of the morning," which lies like a blanket over the silent city. He then lists what he sees in the city and mentions that the city seems to have no pollution and lies "Open unto the fields, and to the sky."

In lines 9 through 14, the speaker tells the reader that the sun has never shone more beautifully, even on nature ("valley , rock, or hill"), and that he has never seen or felt such deep calm. He goes on to describe the way that the river (which he personifies) glides along at the slow pace it chooses. The poem ends with an exclamation, saying that "the houses seem asleep" and the heart of the city is still.

Imagery

.....The most striking figure of speech in the poem is personification. It dresses the city in a garment and gives it a heart, makes the sun "in his first splendour" a benefactor, and bestows on the river a will of its own.

.....Examples of other figures of speech in the poem are as follows:

Line 2, alliteration: Dull would **he** be of soul **who** could pass **by**

Line 3, alliteration: A sight so touching in its majesty

Lines 4, 5 simile: This City now doth like a garment wear / The beauty of the morning: silent bare (comparison of beauty to a garment)

Line 13: metaphor: Dear God! the very houses seem asleep; (comparison of houses to a creature that sleeps)

UPON THE WESTMINSTER BRIDGE: An Analysis by M. Hasib

The Source: The poet William Wordsworth was greatly charmed by the early morning scene of London watched from a coach while crossing the Westminster Bridge on the way to Dover on 31st July, 1802. He immediately wrote a poem reflecting his personal feelings, perceptions and fascinations. The poem was Upon the Westminster Bridge. The poem got its final form when Wordsworth and Dorothy were returning from France on 3rd September, 1802. Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal supports these facts.

The Substance: The poet is crossing the Westminster Bridge over the Thames in a coach early in the morning. The sun is just rising up and the great city of London is bathed in its first light. The poet is deeply moved by the beauty of the scene. It appears to him to be the loveliest sight. Nobody can ignore this unparalleled and splendid sight. And if there is any, he is definitely devoid of any sense of natural beauty. The city seems to wear a dress of golden sunbeams. The city is totally silent and clearly visible. The sky is clear having no dust and no smoke. There is no noise in the atmosphere. All is calm and quiet. Everything of the city such as ships, towers, domes, theaters, temples etc is clearly visible even from the green fields that lie in distance in the unpolluted air of the early morning. All are brilliantly shining in the golden rays of the rising sun. The valley, rock and hill look lovely at sunrise. But the city of London is the loveliest. The river (Thames) flows freely. Its course is not obstructed by the movements of boats or ships. The very houses seem to be sleeping. London, the heart of the country, remains calm and quiet as if a roaring giant is stilled. The poet makes an impassioned address to God, the creator of all beauty upon the earth, to express his sincere gratitude to Him.

The Features: The poem Upon the Westminster Bridge is a perfect sonnet. It has a regular pattern following the Italian model. The simple diction, meter and style of the poem enhance the simplicity, frankness and beauty of the theme. The poem is a pleasant one to read and perceive. It is also a brilliant romantic poem. Wordsworth, a romantic poet, creates a purely romantic expression throughout the poem. Nature is all alive to him. The beautiful objects of nature stir his inner soul and make him fascinated towards them.

The city of London: The poet, Wordsworth gives a fine pen-picture of the city of London in his poem "Composed Upon the Westminster Bridge". He is deeply moved by the natural beauty of the city as seen from the Westminster Bridge in the early morning. London looks beautiful in the splendour of the rising sun. It seems as if the city of London has clothed itself in the beauty of the morning. A profound calm prevailed there. Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples are glittering brightly in the smokeless air. The city has become merged with adjacent green fields and the clear sky overhead. It seems that the sun has never shone more beautifully. The poet has never felt such a calmness as this before. The river Thames flows freely. The restful condition of the city inspires the poet to rejoice. He thanks God for such a rare experience.

The Simile

"The city now doth like a garment wear

The beauty of the morning; silent, bare."

The above lines are an extract of Wordsworth's poem "Composed Upon the Westminster Bridge". Here the poet describes the city of London in the early morning. He uses a fine image/simile to beautify the city. The poet views the city from the Westminster Bridge over the Thames. The sun has just come out. Its golden rays fall on the city which looks bright and beautiful. The poet is greatly pleased to observe that beauty in the smokeless air. That beauty gives him so much pleasure that he personifies the city, and he imagines that the city wears the beauty of the sun-lit morning like a garment. By comparing the morning beauty to a garment, he wants to glorify the city of London. By the simile, the poet imagines the city as a fair lady. And by making her wear the garment of the morning beauty, he wants to make the city look more attractive.

The Title: The poem, "Composed Upon the Westminster Bridge", depicts Wordsworth's reaction to the amazing beauty of the city of London. On his way to Dover from London along with his sister Dorothy in a coach in 1802, he is deeply moved by the incomparable beauty of the city viewed from Westminster Bridge over the Thames early in the morning. The spectacle was wonderful. The sun was shining brightly. Everything in the city was glittering in the smokeless air. It seemed to wear a new dress. It became one with the adjacent fields and the sky overhead. The serene silence all around soothed his soul. This evoked his joy and wonder

which promoted him to pen this sweet sonnet. Infact, the title clearly indicates the occasion. From that point of view it is appropriate.

The Personification: Personification is a literary style to impose human qualities on inanimate objects. In the poem, “Composed Upon the Westminster Bridge”, Wordsworth uses personifications to present a live picture of the beautiful city of London in the sun-lit morning. The poet gives life to the sun, the river, the houses and finally to the whole city which has a symbolic heart. He uses personal pronominal adjectives to personify the sun and the river. The sun has never shone more beautifully. The river Thames flows freely at ‘his own sweet will’. The city wears a garment like a far lady. The city’s mighty heart is ‘lying still’. Hence, by using personifications, Wordsworth enlivens the city.

Literary Analysis

The sonnet “Composed Upon Westminster Bridge” written by William Wordsworth reflects on the poet’s love of nature, and describes the magnificent sun rise over London. His thoughts and feelings are displayed in the form of a Petrarchan sonnet, with the “abba abba cdc dcd” rhyme scheme, and the eight-lined octave which sets the scenario of the poem, and the six-lined sestet which responds and contains a bit of his opinion. Through this form, we are able to grasp its message more effectively as the content is more compact in the limitations of the rules of the sonnet, and the theme is therefore more intense. By using the Petrarchan rhyming pattern, the poet is able to emphasize his feelings of love and beauty for that morning.

In the octave of the poem, the scene, London, is established and described. “Earth has not anything to show more fair”, the first line, starts the poem off unexpectedly with great exaggeration. This hyperbole emphasizes the depth of Wordsworth’s feelings. The next line begins with the word “dull” which uses syntax, as the poet created an odd rearrangement of words in order for “dull” to be stressed when read out, which signifies its meaning. Wordsworth then uses examples of personification and simile. “The City now doth, like a garment, wear the beauty of the morning”, is a meaningful simile to use as it implies to the reader that the beauty of this sun rise will be gone and removed as the day comes, but will appear again the next day – just as one wears clothes, sheds them, and then puts on fresh clean ones the next day. It suggests that beauty does not last forever, and will not be “worn” as the sun goes down. The personification in this line is also significant to how Wordsworth creates his impression of London because it creates a somewhat artistic beauty in the readers mind. Personification also helps readers to picture the scene, and describe it in everyday motions that people will be able to comprehend. Words and phrases such as “beauty”, “silent, bare”, “open” and “bright and glittering” can be found throughout the octave, and provide imagery, allowing for the reader to easily picture what Wordsworth experienced. Through these descriptive words, the poet shares his awe and admiration of the dazzling sight and are essential to help him convey his message. In addition, “silent, bare” gives a sense of tranquility in the area, not only setting a calm tone and atmosphere, but also hinting harmony with nature. The inactivity inferred here gives the sense of no human life, with only the narrator, and the individuality makes it seem more beautiful. This is highlighted in the next line, “Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie” as this use of personification once again demonstrates that London is somewhat alive, emitting fascination so elegant that he can only marvel in admiration. Furthermore, Wordsworth may have used personification because he thought what he was seeing was so stunning and unbelievable that it deserved to be given human characteristics. The word “open” alongside with “fields” and “sky” present the idea that the beauty is vast and endless, stretching throughout fields and reaching up to the sky.

William Wordsworth’s choice of voice, the 1st person narrative, is also appropriate as it suggests that he is involved, and lets us hear from his opinions and thoughts. The sights from the city that he shows us in the

content of the octave – the city at rest, the first glimpse of sunlight, fits in perfectly with the Romantic genre of poetry, as it depicts a landscape with a direct emphasis on nature. The tone of the poem is enchanted, as he writes in awe and peacefulness, and this further illustrates the depth of the poet's feelings. Adding on to the concept of peace and tranquility, the pace of the poem is slow, as if the city is sleeping and not yet awoken through sunrise. The rhyming pattern (abba abba) is repeating and regular, which gives a pulse to the poem like a heartbeat of the city, and its consistency reminds readers of nature or the breath of sleep.

The sestet focuses more on nature rather than the city, as the octave did. Again, there is use of hyperbole, in the opening word "Never". Instead of simply stating "the sun never more beautifully steep" the poet writes "Never did the sun more beautifully steep", which despite the unfamiliar word ordering, emphasizes the depth of his feelings towards nature, and shows a definite line dividing the octave and sestet, so readers can observe the change between the two. Hyperbole is used again in the third line of the sestet, for emphasis. There also is a lot of personification – "The river glideth at his own sweet will" and "the very houses seem asleep" and "mighty heart is lying still". Personification helps to provide life to the poem, making it more interesting for the reader, as well as stressing the beauty of the place. It shows the reader that the place is so beautiful, there is not a difference from man. "Never felt a calm so deep" in the third line suggests to the reader that this really is a special, outstanding place to the poet. The punctuation in the fifth line – "Dear God!" strengthens his feelings, and assures readers how important and significant this beautiful sight means to him.

The sestet dramatically changes from the octave, not only in length, but in tone. There are a lot more exclamations, "so deep!", "dear God!" and "lying still!", which changes the pace. In the octave, it was slow, but there seems to be more energy in the sestet, and the pace is faster and more lively. This fits in well with the use of human characteristics in the personification throughout the sestet. The rhyme scheme is cdcdcd, and this constant, shorter rhyming pattern also quickens the pace.

This sonnet, despite its ridged formality, did not limit Wordsworth capability in exploring and portraying the beauty of the sunrise over Westminster bridge for the readers; instead, it gives readers a more intense account from an unusual perspective of descriptive writing, which in the end, helps to signify the beauty of London in the morning.

Analysis of "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802": Part 1

According to Peter F. Morgan, "In the context of the scene before him Wordsworth is indeed concerned with what Bachelard calls 'the sacred instant of contemplation'" (171). Morgan continues to state that "[t]his is the time of absolute peace, the mystic moment proper . . . the prospect from Westminster Bridge;" "[i]t is the moment when, to use Hartman's words, in commenting on *The Prelude*, v,389ff and i,305ff, 'a force other than that of personal effort seems to sustain mind and body'" (172). Although I am not comparing or contrasting *The Prelude* in this blog, this particular analysis ties in with my thesis. Wordsworth indeed felt a sacred moment of peace upon Westminster Bridge, one of tranquility in a time of unsettled peace (Morgan 172). This force was bigger than life itself (Morgan 172). It, like Tintern Abbey, restoreth his soul, led him to a tranquil time, as well as a deep spirit for England.

A reference from a lecture on Romanticism is appropriate for this point in my blog: "Effusions are artant outpourings of feelings; Poetry is meditative; Romantic poets externalized their emotions" (Minor "Romanticism"). Wordsworth "outpour[ed]" his emotions when he composed his poem, "Composed upon

Westminster Bridge . . ." (Minor "Romanticism"). These emotions can be interpreted as literal ones; however, my analysis of the poem is more figurative than literal. Wordsworth's emotions for a country, a place, which is England, that he loves so dearly, were restored to him through nature, in his revisit to Tintern Abbey ("Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey"). He pauses upon Westminster Bridge on a trip to France to see his former lover and child ("Footnote 1"), and while doing so, he reflects upon this place, "[t]his City" (4), which he glorifies in his poem, "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802." The myth of England as an island nation is absolutely relevant for Wordsworth.

To further explain his unsettled peace is that he had "feelings for *his* lover and *his* child [that] were being revived and reengaged, along with his conviction that he was the necessary Poet for these unruly times" (Johnston 786). His visit to France was to relieve himself of these emotions, and be free to love the country which he adored. The sonnet that he wrote as he crossed Westminster Bridge not only expresses his view of London, it translates that spirit which he has for England: he is a soul set free. This tranquility, which he experienced in "Tintern Abbey," and that he experiences at Westminster Bridge as well, is his first view of England, and is not dissimilar from his usual writing style. It is not until his next poem, "London, 1802," which he composes after his visit to Calais, that he writes differently ("Footnote 6"). Yet, I will express this more explicitly in future blogs.

The poem's figurative analysis is expressed in the opening lines:

Earth has not any thing to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This City now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning: silent, bare, (1-5)

In these lines, Wordsworth is describing England (1-5), or the city square mile, itself (Bibbee). The view which he describes is not just about the literal view, it is about the spirit of England. The country which he loved previously in "Tintern Abbey" was clear on this July day for Wordsworth (1-5). He believes that everyone should see his country as he does: "Dull would he be of soul who could pass by / A sight so touching in its majesty:" (2-3). "This City now doth, like a garment, wear / The beauty of the morning: silent, bare," conveys that England ("this City") "now" has this spirit (4-5), which is the restoration of the spirit for his country that he obtained from his revisit to Tintern Abbey, physically, as well as in his mind ("Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey" 1-159). Also, according to Peter F. Morgan, "[t]he significance of light in the sonnet is signalled through the simile in [these lines]" (174). He also states: "[t]his contains an allusion to Psalm 104 where the Lord Himself is covered 'with light as with a garment'" (Morgan 174). The reference to the Biblical allusion conveys the spirit in a figurative sense, which is possibly why he chose to use a simile in this particular line in order to compare it to a sacredness (spirit) (Morgan 174).

According to Peter F. Morgan, the poem is about "[t]he 'wonder of the sudden view,' the sense of peril eluded, the enjoyment of the sight of the city at dawn" (115). Also, he states that "it could be said that the marriage Wordsworth is celebrating is that between nature and the city: comparable to the failed marriage in his personal life between himself and Annette, the illicit marriage between himself and Dorothy, and the not yet achieved of an ongoing relationship with his distant daughter, Caroline" (Morgan 113-14). While this is true on the surface, particularly if you are focusing upon the biographical content behind the poem, I disagree with Peter Morgan. I do not think that Wordsworth is celebrating the marriage between city and nature in a literal sense; he is

celebrating it figuratively. The marriage which he refers to is how his revisit to nature inspired him once more for a love for his country, England, much like I recaptured from my visit to Hyde Park (nature), and brought back with me upon my return to the city of London. It recreated a love, a glorification of a place, a country, which is England. This figurative marriage is between Wordsworth and his devotion to his country. To me, Wordsworth believed in the idea of England as an island nation. The poem which he composed upon Westminster Bridge on that July day reiterates this ("Composed upon Westminster Bridge" 1-14). It was a glorification of England as a separate entity, one which brought him tranquility in a time of unsettled peace. While the biographical information is relevant to the unsettled peace in his life, the poem is not about the author himself. It is a glorification of England, which is possibly why he chose to commemorate it as he paused upon Westminster Bridge.

Bibbee, Jeffrey. "Thoughts on the 'City' in the poem, 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802.'" EN 496. Study Abroad Trip, London, England. University of North Alabama, Florence, Alabama. July 2011. Lecture.

"Footnote 1." Wordsworth, William. "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 8th ed. Vol. D: The Romantic Period. Eds. Stephen Greenblatt, M. H. Abrams, Jack Stillinger, Deidre Shauna Lynch. New York: Norton, 2006. 317. Print.

"Footnote 6." Wordsworth, William. "London, 1802." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 8th ed. Vol. D: The Romantic Period. Eds. Stephen Greenblatt, M. H. Abrams, Jack Stillinger, Deidre Shauna Lynch. New York: Norton, 2006. 319. Print.

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Wordsworth, William. "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 8th ed. Vol. D: The Romantic Period. Eds. Stephen Greenblatt, M. H. Abrams, Jack Stillinger, Deidre Shauna Lynch. New York: Norton, 2006. 317. Print.

Wordsworth, William. "London, 1802." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 8th ed. Vol. D: The Romantic Period. Eds. Stephen Greenblatt, M. H. Abrams, Jack Stillinger, Deidre Shauna Lynch. New York: Norton, 2006. 319. Print.

"Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802" Analysis: Part 2

Peter F. Morgan states that "[t]he panoramic view which Wordsworth presents is similar to that of Laurence Binyon in his London Visions of 1908, but this poet looks down and around over the city from 'the Golden Gallery at Saint Paul's'" (132). This view which Wordsworth describes in his poem is certainly breathtaking; I looked upon it myself during the same month (July), only two hundred nine years later. Another critic, Burke, suggests that "[b]efore the vastness of the sun, contemplated by the vastness and variety of the city in the prospect before him, Wordsworth gets a sense of the power of God" (Morgan 137). A sense of spirit is certainly

here; I have reiterated this in each blog post, and will continue to do so in order to affirm this. A sense of sacredness, or tranquility, came from his reflection upon a love for his country, England. As I stated in my last blog: "Although it is certainly important to the poem, it is not just about the history, or architecture, of England itself." I also stated that "[h]e reflects upon these buildings as sentiment, or glorification of his country: a separate entity." According to Peter Ackroyd in his book *London: The Biography*, Westminster Bridge is depicted as being constructed in 1750, which changed the interrelation of London, and "this City" became an entity in itself (511-12). "This City[']s" square mile is the City of London, which has a separate government, its own administration, etc. (Bibbee); "this City[']s" square mile is the reason for its capitalization within the poem itself (4).

Having said this, lines 6-7 are appropriate here:

Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;

These places which he does not specifically name in his poem are amongst nature (6-7). Since he does not choose to name them, I assert that the poem is not just about these historical places; although important, it also brought a glorification of England (myth of England as an island nation) back to the literature as well. My visit to Westminster Bridge early on a July morning, much like Wordsworth, confirms this, which I will discuss at the end of this blog.

According to Peter F. Morgan, he could see Westminster Abbey, which is one of the towers that he references in his poem (145). My reflection includes: "[My] site visit of Westminster Abbey was one filled with emotion. William Wordsworth said that "[e]motions [are] recollected in tranquility," during his lifetime, which relates to myself ("Introduction"). I am now recollecting my emotions toward this place. I am not quite certain what my preconceived notions of this particular location were. I have never traveled; however, I imagined Westminster Abbey to be an exceptionally religious place, perhaps one which appeared ancient throughout its interior walls. My general knowledge of this site is that kings, queens, as well as monarchs are buried within the Abbey. I also know that William Wordsworth, perhaps, saw the Abbey from his view of Westminster Bridge when he composed his poem, "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802." As far as my expectations of Westminster Abbey, I envisioned it to be quite beautiful, as well as sacred; otherwise, my expectations were open to suggestion. I realized that I was going to observe a place where many had gone before, and where memorable events had taken place, such as Princess Diana's funeral, and more recently, the marriage of her son, Prince William, to Kate Middleton. Westminster Abbey was a sacred place; my analysis of why he chose to include that in his poem is that it provided a place of refuge for him in a time of conflict. I experienced emotions such as this within the Abbey, although in a different way, or is it? No one really knows how Wordsworth felt on that day but the man himself; however, the London that he saw was a place of peace in his unsettled life, which is why he reflected upon the Abbey itself.

My reflection upon Westminster Abbey shows the glorification of a place, much like I reflected upon during my visit to Hyde Park, which compared to Wordsworth's revisit to Tintern Abbey. The expectations which I brought to Westminster Abbey were those of an England which compares with the myth of an island nation: I glorified it because of royalty, Prince William's wedding to Kate Middleton. The love which I had for Princess Diana, William's mother, brought me to this place; although, when I entered, it not only became about the Royal wedding, but the religious sentiment itself. Wordsworth chose to view places (towers) in his poem (6) figuratively, not necessarily in a historical sense. I have already stated that he does not name them specifically. Of course, I can delve into the actual places through maps, or books; I will even list a few of them in this blog

post; however, he reflects upon an England which brought him tranquility in a time of unsettled peace.

Peter Morgan lists some of the places which Wordsworth might have seen so that we, as readers, can envision Wordsworth's view of England. Some of the places which he names are: Tower of London, "tower of St. Clement Danes," St. Paul's Cathedral, "the utilitarian Water Tower at Charing Cross," "tower of the Bridewell prison," "Drury Lane and Covent Garden" theatres, "ancient Temple district by the Thames," as well as "the steeple and towers of the churches dotted about the city" (Morgan 145). "Thomas Malton [observes the following places which Wordsworth might have seen:] . . . the towers and pinnacles of Westminster Abbey . . . the steeple of St. Margaret's," "Lambeth church and the venerable Palace of the Archbishop of Canterbury on the east shore," "the four turrets of St. John's Church in Westminster," "Somerset place," and "the temple buildings and gardens [which] terminate the distance" (Morgan 146). The significance of this list of buildings is to show how they relate to one another. Wordsworth looks to these as a kind of religious sacrament, much like I did to Westminster Abbey, as well as my visit to St. Paul's Cathedral.

The St. Paul's site visit was emotional as well. As I sat through the service, I noticed the interior dome. I pondered my thoughts as to why Wordsworth mentions these places, such as "domes" within his poem (6). These places of England revive his spirit for England; it even keeps it anew; therefore, he glorifies England as an island nation when he looks upon them.

According to Peter F. Morgan, "[s]ocial history is more concretely present, since Wordsworth is describing an ancient, but rapidly growing and changing city" (142). The next lines of the poem, "All bright and glittering in the smokeless air," reflect on this (8). "It is also present in the comparisons that he suggests between the normal pollution of the air and of the river Thames itself," as stated by Peter F. Morgan (142). David Perkins states the "[e]ven the city, the specific haunt of human stress and passion, can be contemplated with tranquil serenity from the vantage point of Westminster Bridge, particularly since, with its 'smokeless air' it has not yet awakened and become a city" (41).

The next lines of the poem: "Never did sun more beautifully steep / In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill; / Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep! / The river glideth at his own sweet will:" convey the glory of nature which he sees. The sun rises and gives him peace in this time of unsettled peace (9-12).

The last two lines of the poem are:

Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

According to Peter F. Morgan, "[t]he last word to comment on is 'still'" (176). Morgan "disagree[s] with the reading that 'still' means 'dead,'" [and, instead] "prefer[s] John Beer's comment that Wordsworth is more interested in presenting 'the experience of trance' than that of death" (177). He compares it to the "'still, sad music of humanity' in 'Tintern Abbey'" (Morgan 177). I do not assert that "still" means dead (Morgan 176), nor do I think Beer's criticism is correct. Instead, for me, the lines of the poem, "the very houses seem asleep; / And all that mighty heart is lying still!" simply means that the spirit of England is there: it "seem[s] asleep, not conveying that it actually is asleep (13-14). (Notice the use of "seem," which is a simile.) According to Florence Marsh, the city is personified by Wordsworth's language, "mighty heart" (21). This is the heart of England, which is neither dead, nor in a trance (Morgan 17), it is very much alive. "Mighty" is the key word here in this last line of the poem (14); it relates back to "still," meaning that the spirit of England is still there (14).

Ultimately, this poem conveys that "[t]his City," this country of England, which he overlooks on this July day brings him tranquility (1-14). The England that he sees is his first view. It is an entity all in its own for Wordsworth. He glorifies it, personifies it, and according to Peter Morgan, his ". . . view from the centre of the bridge enables the poet to experience, again momentarily "a holy calm (Prelude, ii, 367) like that gained from the 'jutting eminence (362) from which he had looked out on another morning'" (144). This "holy calm" is the tranquility that it brought Wordsworth in a time of unsettled peace. The view he got from nature in "Tintern Abbey," as well as that from Westminster Bridge, were the same.

My visit to Westminster Bridge at 6:30 am was worth the trip. I traveled alone, unlike Wordsworth; however, I wanted to be able to see clearly for myself the city in all its majesty. My preconceived notions and expectations of this place were great since I had read the poem many times, as well as did a lot of research on it, and the author himself, before I came to London. I had envisioned this place without traffic for some reason, perhaps because I was delving so much into the research. I had looked online at photographs of Westminster Bridge, which focused upon the foot traffic. I had considered using an online photograph for my research blog; however, I decided against it because it seemed more appropriate to take one for myself, as well as one with me in it. These expectations and preconceived notions are very dissimilar to the quiet morning view from Westminster Bridge which I encountered when I finally arrived, however. Much like the July day when Wordsworth composed his poem, the sky was gray (however, in the poem the sun is referenced (9-10)), the air was cool, crisp, and the water glideth . . . (12). It was a restful feeling, particularly since I awakened at four a.m. this morning. The traffic was already busy when I arrived on the morning of July 19, 2011; people were running, walking to work, etc.. However, I was only thinking about William Wordsworth, and what possibly he could have seen on that July day in 1802 that inspired him to write his poem, "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802." I got out my map, and looked at each angle to figure out which buildings that he could have seen, contemplating upon how I could figure out what he saw, especially without knowing all of London's history. In the poem, he speaks of temples, which were located in red on the map: these refer to places of law, perhaps, such as Inns of Court, as well as Parliament (6). As I stood on the bridge watching the dismal clouds and dimmer light on the beautiful, cool, morning that I beheld, I realized that it was not just about these buildings, or even their historical, or geographical location, I also felt that it was the spirit of England which brought him tranquility in a time of unsettled peace. I felt inspired by a city, a country that I have grown to love so dearly in such a short time. His unsettled peace was that he was going to close relationships ("Footnote 1"). This pause upon Westminster Bridge brought him that tranquility: a peace that cannot be gotten from just anywhere.

(I wrote this in the moment; therefore, I felt that it should be left in present tense). As I leave this bridge, I wonder if I will ever be standing on it again in my lifetime on a morning like this. Many thoughts race through my head . . . ; I cannot even write them all down; however, I know that this feeling, this experience, this moment, has changed me forever, and much like William Wordsworth, I stop to compose my thoughts.

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William Wordsworth: Lines composed upon Westminster Bridge, Sept.3, 1802

by: Nicole Gast

Introduction: The idea that nature's beauty is worth writing poems about was not new to the poet Wordsworth. In poems like "I wandered lonely as a cloud" and "A slumber did my spirit seal" he portrayed nature as gorgeous majesty where life begins and ends in. He was a poet with faith in the beauty of nature. Most of his poems can therefore in one way or another be related to nature. And Wordsworth, as a wanderer on earth who paid much attention to his environment, was able to SEE this reality with all their beauty - and put it into words. On this September morning in 1802 he walks across London's Westminster Bridge and gets enchanted – but not by nature that catches his eye, but by the sight of a city. Many sources claim that Wordsworth was accompanied by his sister, since she wrote about the walk over Westminster Bridge in her diary. In fact, it is not important to elaborate if this is true or not, since Wordsworth - the speaker of this poem – is only talking about HIS feelings and impressions.

The poem's main emphasis lies on a subjective description of the city of London at morning. Everything is calm and quiet, people are still asleep, the sun is shining and the chimneys of the industry have not yet started polluting the air. In order to describe the beauty of this city, Wordsworth uses well-known pictures from the wordfield of nature. Since he has more experience in describing nature, he now describes a city's beauty in natural terms.

This connection between nature and the city is achieved by imagination. The speaker's position is an artificial one – he imagines the city's beauty by remembering all the little details that turned this moment on the bridge into a special one. Due to his faith in his own imagination he can refresh his emotions that he had while walking over the bridge. So "Faith" and "Beauty" are the concepts with which Wordsworth works in this poem. But it is less the faith in God but the faith in imagination and the beauty of a city that form the topic of this poem. To underline this thesis, the connection between nature, city and imagination form the center of discussion in this paper.

Lines composed upon Westminster Bridge, Sept. 3, 1802: The contrast between rural landscape and city is obvious: Landscape is created by nature (or God if you want), a city is man-made. Nature stands as a symbol for peace, something that creates itself without help from outside. Cities show the face of humankind, they embody pollution, hectic and noise. Although Wordsworth's poem does not refer to nature as the center of discussion, he still uses nature to simplify and explain the beauty of the city. He uses contrasting elements (city & nature) to explain them – and because the reader gets to know his passionate relationship to nature, it is easier to understand Wordsworth's sudden love for the city.

“Earth has not anything to show more fair”- a sentence that could not be more convincing in its declaration. Even for Wordsworth, who knew about all the wonders and the beauty nature has to offer, this experience upon Westminster Bridge must have been deeply impressive. His sonnet seems to be a declaration of love and it seems as if the language he knew was not enough to describe the grace of the moment. This grace, he thought, would have touched anybody (“Dull would he be of soul who could pass by”) Wordsworth's terminology expresses beauty and splendor (fair, majesty, bright, beautifully, sweet, mighty) and describes the harmonious atmosphere upon the bridge. City, river and houses are no longer passive things but gain human attributes:

The poem, written in the Petrarchan sonnet form, describes the beauty of London in the early morning just when the sun rises. We perceive the beauty of the city not so much through the description of what can be seen as through a sense of the admiration of the speaker. It is as if he is looking at a wonder, at something that cannot be but is still there. This sense of admiration is communicated through the development of a strange paradox, which states the impossible unity of two contradictory things: the industrial city and the organic beauty of nature (cf. Cleanth Brook's analysis of this poem in his essay ‘The Language of Paradox’). This paradox is introduced through the image of dress, which the rhymes of the *octave* highlight: the city is *fair* (beautiful) because it *wears* ‘like a garment’ the natural beauty of the morning; but wearing the beauty of the morning in fact means that the city is *bare* (naked): what it wears is just ‘the smokeless *air*’.

The paradox is carried over and developed further in the sestet. The connection with the dress metaphor is established through the image of the city being steeped in the light of the sun and then the paradox is extended to the strange union of being dead (or asleep) and being alive. The city is now more beautiful and more alive than nature itself, but this is only so because it is steeped in the light of the sun and is thus deep asleep. The rhyming words *steep – deep – asleep* highlight these connections. As opposed to the city, which is ‘lying still’, the natural parts of the landscape, the sunlight, the ‘valley, rock, or hill’ as well as the river are now active, they dominate over the sleeping city, as is emphasized by the rhyming words *hill – at their will – lying still*. The city, represented in the last line by the metaphor of the heart, is thus alive because it is dead, because it is inactive and is dominated by its natural environment.

The thematic development of the poem is beautifully seconded by the rhythms. The enjambments (and the eye-rhyme) in the octave express the boundless admiration for this beautiful sight, the overflowing emotion of the speaker. This is further emphasised by the fact that although the lines of the Petrarchan sonnet in English should be iambic pentameters, none of these lines are exactly iambic. Even where the rhythm gets very close to this (lines 3, 4, 5, 12), the sentence structure or a caesura disrupts the smooth iambic rhythm. This is true of all the lines except the very last one where the rhythms smoothes out and a perfect iambic pentameter ends the poem:

u / | u / | u / | u / | u /
And all that mighty heart is lying still!

One function of this metrical development is clearly to mark the end of the poem. Apart from this, however, the clear iambic rhythm also functions here on another level. By the sound effect it creates it contradicts the explicit verbal meaning of the line in which it appears. While the line says that the 'mighty heart' of the city 'is lying still', the iambic rhythm gives us a strong sense of the beating of a heart. Thus the paradox that is developed all through the poem reaches its final statement in this line. The city now is 'lying still', it is dead, it is not itself, it is dominated by its natural environment; and it is precisely because of this that it can come to life: the mighty heart begins to beat only when it is lying still.

Important similarities between Blake's "London" and Wordsworth's "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802"

William Blake's "London" and Wordsworth's "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802" are both about London. Blake's poem is four stanzas of four lines each and Wordsworth's is in sonnet form.

In Wordsworth's poem, he favorably describes London as it appears early in the morning. He begins quite dramatically, saying that there is no sight "so fair" than this image of London in the morning:

The City now doth, like a garment, wear

The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,

Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie

Open unto fields, and to the sky;

The city wears the morning's beauty like a garment in the morning, before people are awake, before the noise and erratic movement of city life. It is also before the factories and furnaces are churning out smoke into the sky. The speaker notes that the sun shines more beautifully on the buildings than it ever has on valleys, rocks, or hills. This is ironic because much of Wordsworth's poetry is about the beauty of nature and its lack of industrialized distractions. However, it fits with Wordsworth's love of nature that the city is quite literally asleep and is therefore as calm as a scene in nature. The 12th line does directly address nature, noting (at least at this hour of the morning) that the river moves freely.

Blake's "London" describes the city quite negatively. He notes that each street is "charter'd" which has a double meaning: "given liberty" as in a charter, but also noted as private property and therefore rented out. This is significant to the rest of the poem because Blake comments on how the less fortunate are at the mercy of institutions, government and church.

In the second line, he also describes the Thames as "charter'd" meaning that it flows freely (given liberty) but also that it is the property of the state. This latter meaning contrasts with Wordsworth's notion that the river "glideth at its own sweet will:" - whereas in Blake's poem, the river is owned.

Whereas Wordsworth sees beauty in the city's morning, Blake sees "weakness" and "woe" in every face. Blake notes the limits and laws that act like "mind-forg'd manacles" and these include bans which can be legal or political prohibitions (ban can also mean a marriage proclamation, so Blake indicates that this arrangement is also like a business deal and/or a sentence).

In the last stanza, Blake (or the speaker) notes that at midnight, he hears the prostitutes curse their clients. The curse "Blasts the new-born infants tear," and this indicates that the prostitute, having contracted a venereal disease will pass it on to a man who will then pass it on to his wife; thereafter, the child (of the man's wife or the prostitute) will have a blind child as a result. With the last line, Blake gets another jab at marriage which, as a ritual of an institution (the Church of England) much like a law, people becoming indebted to a certain way of life.

Clearly, the two poems paint very different pictures of London. Blake's is bleak and Wordsworth's is full of beauty. However, Wordsworth is describing London in the morning, prior to the daily life of the city. Blake notes in the final stanza that he is viewing the city at midnight. Had Blake been writing at sunrise and/or had Wordsworth been writing in the evening or at night, their interpretations might have been different.

Criticism by Julie Renee Phelan

William Wordsworth composed this Petrarchan sonnet on the "roof of a coach, on [his] way to France." He was anxious about his reunion with—and final departure from—his mistress Annette Vallon and daughter Caroline. This sonnet is fourteen lines; written in iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter means there are five feet; each foot has an unstressed, stressed syllable. The first eight lines is the octave, and the next six lines is the sestet. The octave has a rhyming scheme of ABCAABBA, and represents one complete sentence. There is a slight variation from the typical rhyming scheme of ABBAABBA. The poet does this to bring the readers attention to line three, which rhymes with nothing, "A sight so touching in it's majesty:" That is the subject of the poem. If a person passes by without noticing the majesty of the sight, they have a "dull" soul.

The poem takes place in the "Beauty of the morning," which lies like a blanket over the silent city. In line six, the poet varies the metrical meter of iambic to spondee, iamb, trochee, iamb, iamb. The poet does this to seize the attention of the reader regarding this list of things; "Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie." Line seven starts with a trochee to startle the reader into understanding that all those things are "Open upon the fields, and to the sky."

Line eight, "All bright and glittering in the smokeless air" is the volta or turn in the sonnet indicating the poets intention of painting a picture of brightness and things a glitter. As well, that line has a metrical variation of iamb, iamb, iamb, anapest, and iamb. The anapest is used in this case to prolong and emphasize the "smokeless air."

In lines nine through fourteen, the poet describes the sun as never shining more beautifully in its splendor upon "valley, rock, or hill." How does this make the poet feel? The poet "never felt, a calm so deep." How deep is the calm? The calm is like "the river glideth at his own sweet will." What is the response of the poet? "Dear God!" The poet uses a metaphor of a "mighty heart" being likened to the sight he beholds. The reader may imagine the heart beating rapidly during the day, but for now that "mighty heart is lying still."

The City as Landscape: "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge,"

By Ken Sanes

This sonnet is arguably not a true nature poem so much as a poem in which a city appears as part of a natural landscape. In it, Wordsworth (or his speaker) gazes at the industrial city of early 1800s London before it wakes up for the day, and sees it as beautiful and in harmony with its natural surroundings.

In fact, his description of the city has a deeply idealized quality, as if he is talking about a heavenly rather than an earthly city. It uses beautiful and descriptive language, an easy flow of meter, and satisfying rhymes to convey a sense of the exalted feeling that has been evoked in the poet/speaker.

These lines convey that sense of exaltation:

This City now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.

The poem also describes the city as if it is a person since we are told that it is wearing the beauty of the morning and, later, that "the very houses seem asleep."

As the title suggests, the poem is based on something the poet himself experienced since it was, "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge." Of course, as has been pointed out before, the speaker sees the city's beauty only because it is asleep. In a sense, he has to rob it of its identity -- idealizing it and catching it when it isn't manifesting the activity and work we most associate with it -- to appreciate it. Catching it in this state, he depicts it as being in harmony with nature when it really isn't at all.

It is interesting to compare "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" to Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem, "God's World," which expresses a similar state of mind involving a deep enthusiasm for the beauty of the world. Like this poem, Millay's poem "humanizes" nature by giving it qualities such as primeval mystery that are about our own thoughts and perceptions.

In both poems, the speaker also describes a state of mind that matches what he or she is experiencing in nature. In the case of "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge," the speaker suggests that his calm state of body and mind is inspired by the same state in nature:

Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will:

Similarly, Millay's poem suggests her passion is inspired by the dynamism and beauty of nature -- by "Thy winds, thy wide grey skies! / Thy mists, that roll and rise!" The speaker also says:

Long have I known a glory in it all,
But never knew I this;
Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart,—Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year;

But the calm and dynamism that the two claim to observe really has more to do with them than nature. At most, they have come to nature ready to have these states of mind evoked.

"Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" can also be compared to another Wordsworth poem, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," which offers another idealized depiction of the world, but one that expresses delight rather than awe at the sight not of a city that is "sleeping," but "dancing" flowers. But then Wordsworth tended to idealize and romanticize his subjects, and produce beautiful word combinations, just as Millay tended to speak with great power, because their personalities predisposed them to both respond to the world and express themselves in certain ways.

Compare the ways in which the city is presented in William Blake's 'London' (1794) and William Wordsworth's 'Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802'.

In 'London' Blake describes the London set during the industrial revolution and the effects that it has had on society as people part with tradition and become helpless. In stanza two the anaphora, "In every... In every... In every...", acts to emphasise the universal nature of the suffering and sorrow. One of the most striking metaphors in 'London' is "mind-forged manacles" (line 8). It refers to the social restrictions induced by life in the city, resonating with the poem's rhyme scheme. I find "mind-forged" to be especially interesting because it suggests that these "manacles" do not in fact exist but are the cultivated in the minds of the people. Blake is suggesting that the people of London bend to conform to the power and control of authority, where this is not necessary. "mind-forged" seems to suggest the subversion of the people's power, attitudes of defiance and non-conformity, perhaps even stretching to suggestion of a breakdown of democracy and freedom of speech. The phrase implies that the "manacles", which are "shackles that consist of metal loops that can be locked around the wrist", have been imposed by some figure of authority. The juxtaposition of the "mind-forged" and "manacles" thus conflates he who is suppressed and he who has acted to suppress. Wordsworth gives glancing insights into what he thinks of the society in London, "Dull would he be of soul who could pass by" (line 2). Interestingly this is one of the only moments in 'Westminster Bridge' that could be construed as critical or bitter, showing contempt for anyone who does not appreciate the sight. Or perhaps Wordsworth is rationalising his overly emotional reaction, which could be interpreted as effeminate, by justifying that anyone who didn't react in this way would be 'dull'. Amplifying what little insight Wordsworth gives into society in London with information from an extract from Wordsworth's 'The Prelude', in which he describes his experience in London when he was 18, I feel that Wordsworth's view of society in London is in agreement with that of Blake. "The endless stream of men and moving things" (line 159), implies loss of identity in London, which compliments "manacles" in 'London'. Blake notes "marks of weakness, marks of woe" (line 4) in "every face" he meets. The repetition of mark gives emphasis to the "weakness" and "woe", Blake could have quite easily chosen to use more diverse language but the harsh repeated sound of "marks" really enhances the image. "Marks" tends to suggest that these are aberrations that have not always existed but have recently appeared as a result of changes in London, the industrial revolution perhaps. The last stanza bears a few very striking images that give further insight into people and society in London. "How the youthful harlot's curse" (line 14), refers to the rise of prostitution. It is particularly shocking to hear that it is a "youthful" harlot, it appears that even the youths of society have been corrupted and subverted, having to turn to prostitution in order to scratch a living in such desperate times. "curse" refers to the spread of venerable disease as a result of such activities. This "curse" is described as blasting "the newborn infant's tear" and blighting "with plagues the marriage hearse" (line 16). The oxymoron "marriage hearse", ends the poem with a very strong image, starkly juxtaposing the charm of marriage with the hearse, used to carry a dead person to the place of burial. Blake himself condemned the absurdity of marriage without love and this is reflected in marriage hearse because any relationship resulting out

of an encounter with the “youthful harlot” would like be a relationship without true love. Alternatively, “marriage hearse”, could refer to a social restriction as “mind-forged manacles” does, that is to say that marriage is as a man's death, once he has committed to it he no longer has the same free will to do as he please. The strong plosive constants of “but, blasts blights and plagues” emphasises the harshness of what is being described.

Wordsworth uses rich descriptions of the sights and sounds of London. He is in great admiration of the beauty of London and starts the poem with a superlative, hyperbolic tone. “Earth has not anything to show more fair” (line 1), suggesting that this is the epitome of beauty on Earth. I find the simile, “The City now doth, like a garment, wear” (line 4), particularly interesting as it indicates the morning sky appears to surround the city as a garment does a body, tending to suggest that the tranquillity of the morning is cloaking the true nature of the city which is perhaps less appealing. In ‘London’ Blake describes the grim sounds he hears in order to imbue the poem with a mood of pathos. For example in stanza two, “In every cry of every man / In every infant's cry of fear / In every voice, in every ban” (lines 5-7), the repetition of cry across the two generations is striking, and the choice of “infant” is particularly shocking. This idea can be found in Blake's poem ‘Infant Sorrow’ from ‘Songs of Experience’ which links closely with ‘London’, “Into the dangerous world I leapt / Helpless, naked, piping loud” (lines 2-3). “piping loud” corresponds with the cries of fear, “dangerous world” with idea that the suffering is universal in London. In ‘Westminster Bridge’, Wordsworth celebrates the wondrous variety of London by asyndeton, “Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie” (line 6). These images bring together the components of the Empire and variety within London, with “ships” signifying trade, “towers” business, “domes” St. Paul's, an icon of London, “theatres” entertainment, and “temples” religion. In ‘London’ however, Blake sees the same “marks” in every face, the same generic cries in every voice. As ‘Westminster Bridge’ is romantic poetry Wordsworth integrates nature and the city because the reconciliation of man and nature is a key tenet of Romanticism, as pioneered by Wordsworth himself. The features listed in line 6 are described as lying “open unto the fields and to the sky;” (line 7). This appropriation of the city in a pastoral context refers to how the rural-urban fringes of London would be more apparent in 1802 because it was a smaller city. Wordsworth is saying that the city is in truth not so far removed from nature as some may believe and in fact they can co-exist in perfect harmony. He also highlights how man and nature harmonise, “The river glideth at his own sweet will” (line 12), implies that the scene appears to conform to Wordsworth wishes, flowing past so gently in a way that completes the scene as if just to please his own wishes. In contrast “Near where the chartered Thames does flow” (line 2) in ‘London’, ravages the idea of the calm flowing Thames by associating it with “chartered”, implying that is over run by commercial usage, to satisfy the greed of wealthy city businessmen. In order to show the extent to which Wordsworth feels positively about the city, if “not anything to show more fair” (line 1), was indeed not praise enough, he compares the sight of the city to things of nature, furthering the synthesis of nature and the city. “Never did sun more beautifully steep” (line 9), gives an image of the sun glinting on the roofs of the buildings as it slowly rises over the cityscape, imbuing and saturating it with natural light, and is enhanced by the sibilance of “sun” and “steep”. In the line, “In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill; / Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!” (line 10), Wordsworth directly compares the cityscape with valleys, rocks and hills but concludes that he has never felt so touched and calmed by any of these scenes so much as he is by the calmness of the city. This is particularly notable bearing in mind that Wordsworth lived in the countryside and enjoyed nature, yet finds the conflation of the city and nature to be more beautiful than any purely natural experience. However, the idea that this is fleeting moment, “The city now doth” (line 4), reminds us that despite the fact that it looks good at this moment, it will not last. This sort of naïve expression of joy is seen in Blake's poem ‘Infant Joy’, from ‘Songs of Innocence’. “Sweet joy befall thee” (line 12), is the adult's hope for the child's wish for joy to be fulfilled but in “befall” there is a grim acknowledgement of how such joy will probably not be achieved.

Study Questions

1. Why is William Wordsworth known as poet of nature?

Wordsworth is known as poet of nature because throughout his work, nature provides the ultimate good influence on the human mind. All manifestations of the natural world—from the highest mountain to the simplest flower—elicit noble, elevated thoughts and passionate emotions in the people who observe these manifestations. Wordsworth repeatedly emphasizes the importance of nature to an individual's intellectual and spiritual development. A good relationship with nature helps individuals connect to both the spiritual and the social worlds. As Wordsworth explains in *The Prelude*, a love of nature can lead to a love of humankind. In such poems as "The World Is Too Much with Us" (1807) and "London, 1802" (1807) people become selfish and immoral when they distance themselves from nature by living in cities. Humanity's innate empathy and nobility of spirit becomes corrupted by artificial social conventions as well as by the squalor of city life. In contrast, people who spend a lot of time in nature, such as laborers and farmers, retain the purity and nobility of their souls.

2. What is the main theme of Westminster Bridge?

Wordsworth's claim that his vision of London is the best on earth is clearly an exaggeration, not to mention impossible to verify. But it's an innocent exaggeration, one that puts us "in the moment" of his passing experience. It's really not much different from an expression that many people use all the time nowadays: saying that such-and-such is the most fun *ever*, or the best movie *ever*, or the most awkward party *ever*. In other words, Wordsworth talks a little like a contemporary teenager.

What is strange about this poem is that Wordsworth, a Romantic poet who focussed so much on the beauty of Nature and the countryside, takes as his topic the city of London and treats it with a distinctly Romantic flavour. This sonnet praises the quiet and shimmering beauty of London in the light of an early morning. Throughout the poem Wordsworth uses personification to present the city and its houses and so on as humans, emphasising the peace of tranquility of his view:

This City now doth, like a garment, wear

The beauty of the morning...

The theme of this poem thus seems to be that cities can inspire similar feelings of "calm so deep" as Nature can, and in the final line, Wordsworth uses a paradox to present us with a final image of tranquility and silence:

And all that mighty heart is lying still!

Of course, hearts by their very nature never lie still, yet from his viewpoint, Wordsworth is able to imagine the "heart" of the country, London, "lying still" as he savours the peace and relaxation that the sight gives him. Such a poem allows us to see that Romanticism does not exclusively focus on Nature, and that similar themes can be found in poetry describing cities, which were normally seen as the anthesis of the simplicity and beauty to be found in nature.

3. In William Wordsworth's poem "Composed upon Westminster Bridge," how does the speaker sense the "mighty heart" of London by viewing, from a Romantic perspective, the landscape of the city?

In his poem titled "Composed upon Westminster Bridge, Sept. 3, 1802," William Wordsworth writes in a Romantic mode about the "mighty heart" of the City of London. He does so in a number of ways, including the following:

- In line 1, the speaker immediately mentions "Earth" – a fact that already helps suggest that this may be a "Romantic" poem. Whereas poets of earlier centuries often emphasized God, heaven, and the afterlife, the Romantics tended to be concerned with the visible world before them. The brief reference to God at the very end of this poem might almost seem perfunctory; certainly Christian themes are not stressed in this work as they might have been in a poem written, say, in the sixteenth or seventeenth century.
- In the rest of line 1, the speaker shows enthusiasm for beauty – another common feature of Romantic poetry.
- In line 2, the speaker posits the existence of persons whose souls are "Dull" – persons precisely the opposite of the Romantic, with their heightened sensitivity to anything sublime or lofty. A typical Romantic focus of sublimity is in fact explicitly stated when the speaker refers, in line 3, to London as

A sight so touching in its *majesty* . . . [emphasis added]

- Line 5 is typically Romantic in its double emphasis on beauty and on the calm quiet of the morning. London, in other words, is at this time of day not only beautiful but also peaceful – a trait greatly admired by the Romantics.
- Line 7 is typically Romantic in its stress on the beauty of nature, particularly the kind of nature associated with the countryside. Subsequent lines also emphasize the sheer visual beauty of nature.
- Line 8 is Romantic in its emphasis on air that is "smokeless" and thus untainted by the kind of ugliness often produced by humans living in large cities.
- Of particular interest, from a Romantic perspective, is line 12:

The river glideth at his own sweet will . . .

This line not only emphasizes the beauty of nature untrammelled by human interferences (such as locks and dams), but it also implicitly celebrates one of the most important of all Romantic values: freedom. Just as the river flows freely, so Wordsworth and other Romantics wished that human beings could live freely.

- The reference in line 14 to London's "mighty heart" can be seen as typically Romantic in its generous assessment of the citizens of London. If we think of them as the "mighty heart" of the city who are "lying still" before they awake and begin their busy days, then Wordsworth is writing with the kind of cheerful optimism we often associate with the Romantics. He is not mocking or satirizing London or its citizens here, as a poet of a hundred years earlier might have done. Instead, he is celebrating London as the heart of England – looking for the positive and finding it, as the Romantics often did. Wordsworth here also personifies London, treating it as if it were a living thing – thus reflecting the common tendency among the Romantics to use the so-called "pathetic fallacy" of treating inanimate things as if they were human beings.
- Finally, the speaker feels inspired by the beauty he sees before him and re-creates that beauty for us, so that we might feel inspired and awe-struck as he is -- a typical Romantic purpose for writing a poem.

In all these ways, the, Wordsworth extols London in fashions that seem typical of a Romantic writer.

4. Compare and contrast "London" by William Blake and "Composed upon Westminster Bridge" by William Wordsworth.

William Blake's (1757-1827) "London" written in 1792 is a devastating portrait of a society in which all souls and bodies were trapped, exploited and infected. The poem is a devastating and concise political analysis, delivered with passionate anger, revealing the complex connections between patterns of ownership and the ruling ideology, the way all human relations are inescapably bound together within a single destructive society.

William Wordsworth's (1770-1850) sonnet "Composed upon Westminster Bridge 3rd September 1802" is a 'momentary poem' written when the coach on which he and his sister Dorothy were travelling to London to board a ship to Paris paused on the Westminster Bridge across the Thames. Wordsworth describes what he sees, thinks and feels on a specific day at a specific moment. Had September 3, 1802, been a dismal day of rain, fog or overcast skies, we would not have this lyric to enjoy.

The mood and atmosphere of Blake's "London," written after he "wandered" through the streets of the metropolis, is bitter and sombre:

"How the Chimney-sweeper's cry
Every black'ning Church appalls."

However, in Wordsworth's sonnet the mood and atmosphere is radiant and peaceful and serene:

"All bright and glittering in the smokeless air."

The tone of Blake's "London" is despairingly pessimistic:

"How the youthful Harlot's curse
Blasts the new-born Infant's tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse."

whereas the tone of Wordsworth's sonnet is glowingly optimistic: "And all that mighty heart is lying still!"

Blake's poem deals with pain and misery of the inhabitants ("every Man") of London: "the new-born infant," "the chimney sweeper," "the hapless soldier" and "the youthful harlot." Blake reveals in a chilling and realistic manner the battered soul and psyche of a diseased metropolis whereas Wordsworth's sonnet on the other hand is merely a beautiful description of the physical landmarks in London city at daybreak:

"The beauty of the morning; silent, bare, Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie Open unto the fields,
and to the sky;

All bright and glittering in the smokeless air."

Blake's perspective is at the street level and narrow and restricted whereas Wordsworth's perspective is panoramic.

Blake's 16 line poem is made up of four quatrains rhyming abab, whereas Wordsworth's poem is a Petrarchan sonnet with the sestet rhyming cdcd and the rhymes being restricted to four in number.

Blake's main poetic device is the synecdoche which he uses to comprehensively describe the collective misery and pain of the entire population of London city: "the new-born infant," "the hapless soldier," "the youthful harlot." Wordsworth's main poetic device is personification which he employs to capture the radiant beauty of London city:

"This city, now doth like a garment wear,

The beauty of the morning silent, bare."

5. Discuss how the sonnet form has been used to effect the sonnet, "Composed upon Westminster Bridge."

There are two basic types of sonnets: English (two divisions here include Shakespearian and Spenserian) and Italian (Petrarchan). The types are named for the most famous authors, William Shakespeare and Edmund Spenser for the English and the Italian poet, Petrarch. The rhyme schemes differ from each author, but the line groupings for the English are 3 groups of 4 lines (quatrains) and a couplet; for the Italian, 1 group of 8 lines (octave) and 1 group of 6 lines (sestet). All sonnets have 14 lines.

This sonnet is an Italian sonnet. Every sonnet introduces a problem or situation, discusses the problem/situation and then solves the problem or makes a final comment. There is usually a TURN between the problem and the solution, which I like to call "the big BUT". The Turn is usually made obvious by a transition word like "but, yet, so" to let you know that there is a change of mood, feeling, tone, or idea. For instance, "All of time and energy is spent on loving this woman. She resists me, BUT I will continue to love her."

In Wordsworth's poem, the turn is not after the octave like usual Italian sonnets. It occurs in the sestet between lines 10 and 11, so it's not as obvious to the reader. True to his style, Wordsworth uses simple language to make the poem flow like every day conversation even within the confines of rigid sonnet format.

6. Discuss the writer's concerns and poetic methods in Composed upon Westminster Bridge

William Wordsworth had a variety of concerns which he expressed in "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge." He was a metaphysical poet and the theme he writes about in this poem is nature and its relationship to man. He has used a variety of poetic methods which have all helped to shape and enhance the poem such as rhyming couplets, simile, and personification. The main concerns he highlights in this poem are the destructive nature of man, the relationship of man and nature, and the negative impact of industrialization on nature.

Wordsworth made use of similes as one of his poetic methods. In line four of the poem he writes: "This city doth like a garment wear..." Here he compares the city to a garment as according to him figuratively the city wears the beauty of the morning. He uses this poetic method to highlight the extent to which the city exudes beauty in the early hours of the morning while all is silent and the industrial excesses of the day have not yet begun. Wordsworth in presenting the beauty and tranquility of the morning could be highlighting the negativity

that pervades when morning leaves because of man's intervention. This is all too likely as the area that Wordsworth probes in this poem is the relationship of man and nature and he clearly highlights the negative aspects of this relationship.

Wordsworth also utilizes rhyming couplets, in particular end rhymes. This is demonstrated in the following lines of the poem : "This city now doth like a garment The Beauty of the morning; silent, bare" and also in : "Ships, towers, domes, theatres and temples lie open unto the fields , and to the sky;" This has quite an interesting effect as rhythm is described as a poem's "sound system" and through the poet's crafty manipulation of the rhymes he is able to give the poem a particular rhythm which enhances its style, value and meaning and draws attention to what it projects. It is portrayed almost like a song and helps to create visual images like a painting and Wordsworth can be likened to a painter in this way. This is Wordsworth's literary skill at work and this contributes to the reader's understanding of his status in literature as one of the better if not the best metaphysical poets known to man.

Wordsworth also employs the use of personification. He says: "The river glideth at his own sweet will : Dear God! The very houses seem asleep;" The reader cannot help noticing the way in which this poet personifies the river and houses describing them as if they are alive and well and capable of exhibiting human capabilities , that of gliding gracefully and of sleeping as if tired. All of this combined with the poet's extensive use of nature imagery help to bring the subject Wordsworth writes about to life as well increasing its significance.

One of Wordsworth's main concerns in "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge" is the destructive nature of man. Wordsworth presents a vision of nature in the early hours of the morning when man has not yet begun to intervene. He presents its beauty and transcendent nature but he does not stop there. He opens with a line praising the beauty of nature: "Earth has not anything to show more fair:" but closes on a sad note: " And all that mighty is lying still!" His comment is that man's nature is destructive and due to the effect of man on nature stillness and dullness has been the result. Smoke , dust and noise have become the grim characteristics of nature due to industrialization, and the only time a "smokeless air," a beautiful atmosphere can be enjoyed is in the tranquility of the morning before industrialization continues.

The negative impact of industrialization on nature is one of the poet's concerns in the poem. In man's lustful aggrandizing efforts to make progress through industrialization negative effects have been wrought on nature. There is the problem of noise and various types of pollution and this has been caused by industrialization. The picturesque beauty of nature Wordsworth describes can only be enjoyed in the morning. For the rest of the day smoke and noise predominates. This could be Wordsworth's comment on the selfish and cruel nature of man in that through industrialization man chokes and suffocates nature in an attempt to suit his own ends.

In Conclusion, the writer has a variety of concerns and poetic methods such as man's destructive nature, simile and personification. All these concerns and poetic methods enhance the poem's structure and meaning giving it its significance in the world of metaphysical poetry.

7. What is the effect of the personification of the sun and river?
8. In what ways does the city resemble a natural space in this poem?
9. How might the speaker's appreciation of the city change if it were crowded with people?
10. Why would the sunlight be more beautiful on buildings than on natural landmarks like valleys and hills?
11. Would you guess that the speaker is native or foreign to the city? Why?

12. Do you think that the speaker is aware that he is using exaggeration in calling the vision the most beautiful that earth has to offer?
13. Do you think that the Wordsworth's sense of calm had anything to do with the fact that he was in the process of leaving the city? Why or why not?
14. How do the poem's images juxtapose the city with the countryside? Where can you tell these two regions apart?

DON JUAN

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Gordon Byron

Byron was the ideal of the Romantic poet, gaining notoriety for his scandalous private life and being described by one contemporary as 'mad, bad and dangerous to know'.

George Gordon Byron was born on January 22, 1788 in Aberdeen, Scotland, and inherited his family's English title at the age of ten, becoming Baron Byron of Rochdale. Abandoned by his father at an early age and resentful of his mother, who he blamed for his being born with a deformed foot, Byron isolated himself during his youth and was deeply unhappy. Though he was the heir to an idyllic estate, the property was run down and his family had no assets with which to care for it. As a teenager, Byron discovered that he was attracted to men as well as women, which made him all the more remote and secretive.

He studied at Aberdeen Grammar School and then Trinity College in Cambridge. During this time Byron collected and published his first volumes of poetry. The first, published anonymously and titled *Fugitive Pieces*, was printed in 1806 and contained a miscellany of poems, some of which were written when Byron was only fourteen. As a whole, the collection was considered obscene, in part because it ridiculed specific teachers by name, and in part because it contained frank, erotic verses. At the request of a friend, Byron recalled and burned all but four copies of the book, then immediately began compiling a revised version—though it was not published during his lifetime. The next year, however, Byron published his second collection, *Hours of Idleness*, which contained many of his early poems, as well as significant additions, including poems addressed to John Edelston, a younger boy whom Byron had befriended and deeply loved.

By Byron's twentieth birthday, he faced overwhelming debt. Though his second collection received an initially favorable response, a disturbingly negative review was printed in January of 1808, followed by even more scathing criticism a few months later. His response was a satire, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, which received mixed attention. Publicly humiliated and with nowhere else to turn, Byron set out on a tour of the Mediterranean, traveling with a friend to Portugal, Spain, Albania, Turkey, and finally Athens. Enjoying his new-found sexual freedom, Byron decided to stay in Greece after his friend returned to England, studying the language and working on a poem loosely based on his adventures. Inspired by the culture and climate around him, he later wrote to his sister, "If I am a poet ... the air of Greece has made me one."

Byron returned to England in the summer of 1811 having completed the opening cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, a poem which tells the story of a world-weary young man looking for meaning in the world. When the first two cantos were published in March of 1812, the expensive first printing sold out in three days. Byron reportedly said, "I awoke one morning and found myself famous."

His fame, however, was among the aristocratic intellectual class, at a time when only cultivated people read and discussed literature. The significant rise in a middle-class reading public, and with it the dominance of the novel, was still a few years away. At 24, Byron was invited to the homes of the most prestigious families and received hundreds of fan letters, many of them asking for the remaining cantos of his great poem—which eventually appeared in 1818.

An outspoken politician in the House of Lords, Byron used his popularity for public good, speaking in favor of workers' rights and social reform. He also continued to publish romantic tales in verse. His personal life, however, remained rocky. He was married and divorced, his wife Anne Isabella Milbanke having accused him of everything from incest to sodomy. A number of love affairs also followed, including one with Claire Clairmont, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's sister in law. By 1816, Byron was afraid for his life, warned that a crowd might lynch him if he were seen in public.

Forced to flee England, Byron settled in Italy and began writing his masterpiece, *Don Juan*, an epic-satire novel-in-verse loosely based on a legendary hero. He also spent much of his time engaged in the Greek fight for independence and planned to join a battle against a Turkish-held fortress when he fell ill, becoming increasingly sick with persistent colds and fevers.

When he died on April 19, 1824, at the age of 36, *Don Juan* was yet to be finished, though 17 cantos had been written. A memoir, which also hadn't been published, was burned by Byron's friends who were either afraid of being implicated in scandal or protective of his reputation.

Today, Byron's *Don Juan* is considered one of the great long poems in English written since Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The Byronic hero, characterized by passion, talent, and rebellion, pervades Byron's work and greatly influenced the work of later Romantic poets.

Major works

Hours of Idleness (1807) / *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809) / *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Cantos I & II* (1812) / *The Giaour* (1813) / *The Bride of Abydos* (1813) / *The Corsair* (1814) / *Lara, A Tale* (1814) / *Hebrew Melodies* (1815) / *The Siege of Corinth* (1816) / *Parisina* (1816) / *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816) / *The Dream* (1816) / *Prometheus* (1816) / *Darkness* (1816) / *Manfred* (1817) / *The Lament of Tasso* (1817) / *Beppo* (1818) / *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1818) / *Don Juan* (1819–1824; incomplete on Byron's death in 1824) / *Mazeppa* (1819) / *The Prophecy of Dante* (1819) / *Marino Faliero* (1820) / *Sardanapalus* (1821) / *The Two Foscari* (1821) / *Cain* (1821) / *The Vision of Judgment* (1821) / *Heaven and Earth* (1821) / *Werner* (1822) / *The Age of Bronze* (1823) / *The Island* (1823) / *The Deformed Transformed* (1824)

Major poems

The First Kiss of Love (1806) / *Thoughts Suggested by a College Examination* (1806) / *To a Beautiful Quaker* (1807) / *The Cornelian* (1807) / *Lines Addressed to a Young Lady* (1807) / *Lachin y Gair* (1807) / *Epitaph to a Dog* (1808) / *Maid of Athens, ere we part* (1810) / *She Walks in Beauty* (1814) / *My Soul is Dark* (1815) / *Monody on the Death of the Right Hon. R. B. Sheridan* (1816) / *When We Two Parted* (1817) / *Ode on Venice* (1819) / *Love's Last Adieu* / *So, we'll go no more a roving* (1830) / *Damaetas*

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POETRY OF LORD BYRON

George Gordon, Lord Byron, began writing poetry in his youth. He published his first book of verse, *Fugitive Pieces*, at age 18, and he continued to write and publish poetry until his untimely death at 36. Although a lifelong poet, Byron did not consider poetry his primary vocation; he saw himself as a man

destined to achieve greatness, primarily through helping end the oppression of various peoples, including the Spanish and especially the Greeks.

Byron was first and foremost a poet. His output, in every conceivable metre, iambs and anapaests, blank verse, hudibrastics and heroic couplets, tercians, quatrains, sixains, rime royal, spenserians and ottava rima, was enormous. His last poem is written in Sapphics, one of the most difficult forms of all. That his body of work should be so little read, when every year sees the publication of ever more prurient versions of his life, is absurd and disgraceful. Readers who lap up egregious hypotheses about Byron and fail to familiarise themselves with his works are short-changing themselves. Don Juan is by far the greatest comic poem in English. It should be as well-known in England as the Orlando Furioso is in Italy. That it isn't is partly the fault of Matthew Arnold, who sent us all off in a wild goose chase after high seriousness. We labour still under a delusion that comedy is a lower form than tragedy, and can never arrive at greatness or profundity.

The road to a poem as good as Don Juan is long. Byron set out on it in his earliest youth. Wherever he went and whatever else he did, he was reading and writing poetry. When he went from Cambridge to Nottinghamshire in the long vacations, to stay with his mother at Southwell, he took with him poems finished and unfinished. While he was getting up theatricals and partying with a small circle of friends, he was writing more poetry. In 1806 he took 28 of his poems to a firm of Newark printers and paid for their printing. No sooner had the book, Fugitive Pieces, appeared in November that year than he withdrew it. He had a revised text ready, which was published as Poems on Various Occasions only a few weeks later, in January 1807.

At the same time as he was revising and rewriting, he was writing new work for Hours of Idleness which was published in June, to be followed by an enlarged and revised version, Poems Original and Translated, in March 1808. This is an impressive work rate for any poet, even if the bulk of the work was being recycled from volume to volume.

Because Byron published under his own name, dropped the names of distinguished friends, and repeatedly reminded his readers he was not just a lord, but still under age, he was savagely mocked by the Edinburgh Review.

Byron was a natural satirist in an age without humour. His model was Pope. Though he could and would write in the exotic tale genre, and even imitate Ossian, he had no patience with literary Romanticism. His contempt for Southey, Wordsworth and Coleridge moved him to begin English Bards and Scotch Reviewers in October 1807 and he would go on lampooning them for the rest of his life, as he became more of a Romantic than any of them, unafraid of revolution or sexual liberation, and passionate in his insistence on sincerity and spontaneity. Childe Harold was meant to be a satirist, but popular taste demanded a hero more thrillingly saturnine. When Byron returned from a year-long tour that took him from Spain to Albania in June 1811, with the first two cantos of Childe Harold's Pilgrimage in his luggage, his friends removed the witty parts of the poem before presenting it to the publishers. From then on Byron was taken to be his own hero and speculation about his life of dissipation was rife.

In the months following the overnight sensation that was Childe Harold, Byron capitulated to the prevailing taste and produced the first four of his series of narrative poems, The Giaour (1813), The Bride of Abydos (1813), The Corsair (1814), and Lara (1815). In January 1815, he made the monumental mistake of marrying Anna Isabella Millbanke.

His wife's flight back to her parents after a single year of life with Byron occasioned the most repellent kind of gossip and speculation. Disgusted with England and himself Byron left for the continent.

In Switzerland he met up with the Shelleys; the life they led together is now notorious. More importantly, closeness to Shelley allowed Byron to develop the revolutionary element in his own thinking. Shelley's influence can be traced in the third Canto of *Childe Harold* (1816) and *The Prisoner of Chillon* (1816), and in the first of Byron's eight blank-verse dramas, *Manfred* (1817). Byron went on to Venice where he wrote the fourth and last canto of *Childe Harold* (1818). There he encountered the Italian *poema cavalleresco*, written in ottava rima, a highly regular form which acts as a springboard for all kinds of variations in tone and treatment, from the most touching to the downright ridiculous. The first of Byron's efforts in ottava rima, which has proved too difficult for English writers since, was *Beppo* (1817); in 1819, even as he was working on his blank verse dramas and exotic tales, Byron began to write *Don Juan*, a burlesque romance in which he created an extraordinary persona for the narrator, a figure probably closer to the engaging and engaged Byron we know from his letters than any of the self-dramatising masks he had worn before. *Don Juan* was unfinished at the end of a 16th canto when Byron left Italy to join the liberation struggle in Greece, where he died of marsh fever at Missolonghi on 19 April 1824.

Byron's poetry is characterized by the experimentation and focus on emotion common among Romantic poets. He often tempers his avant-garde selection of subjects with poetic forms which hark back to older days, such as heroic verse, Spenserian stanzas, and a rigid rhyme scheme to invoke the classical world he loved.

Byron's poetry also is intensely personal, usually filled with autobiographical references. This self-portrait is often coupled with a sense of the larger world's political, moral, historical, or even natural situation. Thus, Byron makes his internal journey either a reflection of or a cause for the external world's circumstances.

Byron was concerned not only with the traditions of poetry, but also with his legacy in the poetic world. This helps explain his extensive self-reference in his works. The reader can develop some understanding of Byron's self-concept by looking at his protagonists, who usually are outcasts (through the work of others or by self-imposed exile) who do not fit into societal norms, but who simultaneously are heroic in nature and "larger than life." Through his poetry, Byron sought to create a persona who possessed qualities he may have thought the real-world George Gordon lacked.

THE POETRY OF BYRON AND THE NATURE OF GENRE

Although his work is often classified in anthologies alongside other Romantic poets, and despite the fact that his poems do contain obvious elements that were so characteristic of Romantic writing, Lord Byron can justifiably be considered to have created a hybrid genre in which he experimented with various poetic forms to create a style that was uniquely his own. An analysis of three of his poems, "Written After Swimming from Sestos to Abydos," "Don Juan: Canto I," and "She Walks in Beauty," helps the reader to understand how romantic and neoclassical elements both complement and contradict one another in the larger body of Lord Byron's poetic works. Rather than align himself with any single poetic school, Byron was able to draw from the strengths and benefits of several styles, and his poems are all the better for having done so. These three poems by Byron, "Written after Swimming from Sestos to Abydos," "Don Juan: Canto I," and "She Walks in Beauty" demonstrate the way in which the interplay of romantic and neoclassical elements evolved over the course of Byron's poetic career.

“Written After Swimming from Sestos to Abydos” was written in 1810. Although there are many elements for analysis in “Written After Swimming from Sestos to Abydos” it is a brief poem by Byron, especially when compared to the epic length of “Don Juan,” but it is perhaps the most representative of Byron’s incorporation of neoclassical elements in his poetry. Byron clearly situates the poem “Written After Swimming from Sestos to Abydos” in a specific temporal period, which sets up a initial contrast between an idealized past and the wretched present in which he wrote. The speaker is a “degenerate modern wretch” (l. 5) who thinks “I’ve done a feat today” (l. 6), comparing himself against the figures of the past. The speaker appeals to a “fair Venus” (l. 4) and refers to the gods of the ancient past. Upon closer inspection, however, the comparison is not so idealized after all. The speaker finds the story of the old hero “doubtful” (l. 7) and concludes that it is difficult to discern “who fared the best” (l. 7), himself or the old hero, for the old hero “drown’d” and the speaker has “the ague” (l. 8). The speaker’s recollection of the idealized past has served to challenge that past as an idyllic, heroic period, though the speaker makes it clear that men still strive, if vainly, to perform heroic deeds as an effort to prove their love.

“She Walks in Beauty” was written in 1814 and represents a dramatic shift in tone compared to “Written After Swimming from Sestos to Abydos.” The ideal beauty of the ages has changed little, but there is not a single direct reference to any classic beauties of the past, nor are there comparisons. Instead, the woman who walks in beauty in the poem by Byron, “She Walks in Beauty” is judged only on her own merits. It is not only her positive qualities that are extolled, though. In addition, Byron alludes that the woman has a shadow side, which also appeals to him and which he finds worthy of mention. In fact, the poem opens with the poet comparing this beauty to a cloudless night with stars, and he openly shares that “...all that’s best of dark and bright/Meet in her aspect and her eyes” (ll. 3-4). This beauty, then, is no ordinary romantic female figure. Instead, she is complex and multi-faceted, and Byron is unafraid to search for the beautiful beyond the surface. As a matter of fact, the woman’s superficial physical beauty seems to be secondary to other kinds of beauty: “her nameless grace” (l. 8), her pure thoughts, and her peacefulness and innocence are all important characteristics the poet considers worth mentioning to the reader. This version of beauty in “She Walks in Beauty” is distinct from other romantic poems in the same period, though there are romantic elements. The nature imagery, of course, is one of the most important romantic characteristics that is found in all three of the Byron poems being analyzed here.

Finally, “Don Juan: Canto I” was composed in 1822, the year of the poet’s death. An extraordinarily lengthy poem that Byron had not finished by the time of his death, it is the most complex of the three poems analyzed here and the most sophisticated in terms of the complicated interplay of neoclassical and romantic elements. First of all, the most obvious neoclassical characteristic is Byron’s choice of a subject, Don Juan himself. This subject evokes a period of chivalrous knighthood in which men prove their love for worthy ladies. Byron’s voice is hardly veiled in the poem, and as Canto the First opens, he clearly explains his reason for selecting Don Juan as his subject: “I want a hero: an uncommon want/When every year and month sends forth a new one/Till.../The age discovers he is not the true one:.../I’ll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan...” (ll. 1-6). In this clearly articulated stanza, Byron explains that there is no contemporary hero worthy of an epic meditation—“I condemn none/But can’t find any in the present age fit for my poem...” (ll. 13-15)—and so he is compelled to reach into the past for an archetypal hero figure. He does not make any false claims about how he will treat this hero, however. Byron’s wit and sense of humor are at their sharpest in “Don Juan,” and he is unsparing in his treatment of the old hero.

Byron also explains in the opening stanzas of the Canto that he will be telling an unconventional tale, warning the reader that he will introduce his own poetic style in the interpretation of the traditional Don Juan narrative. He does not ask for apology; his statement is simply intended to inform the reader about his approach, signaling that “the usual method [is] not mine” (l. 25). Across the span of this long poem, Byron nestles various moral lessons that are intended to convey both classical and romantic ideals.

Among these lessons are: “The flesh is frail, and so the soul undone” (l. 502), “Even innocence itself has many a wile/And will not dare to trust itself with truth” (ll. 574-575), and “Love, then, but love within its proper limits” (l. 641). Byron thus defends love as the highest aspiration—“Men have all these resources, we but one,/To love again, and be again undone” (ll. 1551-1552)—but also acknowledges, unlike the other romantic poets, that love has its limits and difficulties. Thus, the reader observes how the neoclassical figure of Don Juan is appropriated by Byron to render a message that one might interpret as a reaction against the full embrace of the romantics’ position.

Lord Byron is often classified as a romantic poet, and this classification is not inaccurate, but it is not wholly correct, either. By incorporating significant and recognizable ideas and images from earlier periods, Byron explored and either admitted or contested their conclusions and their symbolic meaning, and applied his own interpretations as a way of responding to the unrestrained emotional passion of his romantic contemporaries. Byron was not simply a transitional figure who stood on the border between neoclassicism and romanticism; rather, he blended both genres to craft a style that was his own. An examination of three of his poems, “Written After Swimming from Sestos to Abydos,” “She Walks in Beauty,” and “Don Juan: Canto I,” helps the reader to comprehend how these ideas developed and crystallized over the course of his poetic career. These poems bridge the neoclassical and romantic ideologies by putting them into conversation and opposition with one another.

MAJOR THEMES IN BYRON’S POETRY

Liberty

Several of Byron’s poems, particularly those based on his travels, raise the problem of oppression throughout Europe and defend the necessity of human liberty. *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* often digresses into long tirades against oppressors. These poetic reflections bear witness to Byron’s experience with battlefields of old, such as Waterloo, and present struggles such as the Greek struggle against Ottoman/Turkish occupation. Perhaps his most powerful statement against oppression is found in “The Prisoner of Chillon,” in which he traces the eventual mental oppression of a patriot who stood against the oppression of his people. To Byron, liberty is a right of all human beings, while the denial of liberty is one of mankind’s greatest failings.

The Power of Nature

To Byron, Nature was a powerful complement to human emotion and civilization. Unlike Wordsworth, who idealized Nature and essentially deified it, Byron saw Nature more as a companion to humanity. Certainly, natural beauty was often preferable to human evil and the problems attendant upon civilization, but Byron also recognized Nature’s dangerous and harsh elements. “The Prisoner of Chillon” connects Nature to freedom, while at the same time showing Nature’s potentially deadly aspects in the harsh waves that seem to threaten to flood the dungeon. *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* looks to Nature as a refuge from human conflict, but sees there, amid the avalanches and volcanoes, the seething fury of the natural world.

The Folly of "Love"

Throughout his life, Byron sought the perfect object of his affections, which paradoxically made him a fickle and unstable lover to many women (and men). His poetry reflects this tension, although usually

with the weight being on the side of capricious love. He idealizes women he knows in his opening stanzas to the first three cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, turning them into muses who inspire their respective narratives. However, the fact that each canto has a different woman as its muse points to infidelity on the part of Byron's creative genius. "She Walks in Beauty," perhaps his most famous poem dedicated to an individual woman, extols the virtues of a woman with whom Byron was never romantically involved. This theme recurs throughout Byron's poetry: the ideal love is that which is unattainable. Finally, in *Don Juan* Byron mocks the ideal of love even as his hapless protagonist falls into various women's beds.

The Value of Classical Culture

Byron was a staunch friend of the classical world who grieved what seemed to him the desecration of its cultural achievements and traditions. His journey through Greece showed him the dilapidated state of famous ruins, some of which had been turned to more mundane uses in the recent past. He also vilified Lord Elgin of England as the chief despoiler of ancient treasures due to Lord Elgin's procurement of several marble statues from Greece to be displayed in England. Elgin became Byron's primary target and a symbol of cultural oppression, just as Napoleon and Turkey became symbols for political oppression.

Realism in Literature

Although he was a Romantic poet, Byron saw much of his best work as descriptions of reality as it exists, not how it is imagined. Thus, the subjects of many of his poems come from history and personal experience. "The Prisoner of Chillon" was inspired by the real-life imprisonment of Francois de Bonnavard, while *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is more biographical travelogue than adventure tale. Even the apocalyptic "Darkness" was written to reflect the mass hysteria that arose out of superstitious prophetic interpretations related to the natural disaster of a volcano's eruption.

The Enduring Power of Art

Even as he bewailed the loss of classical culture through the despoiling of Greek ruins, Byron saw permanence in the art created by these cultures and by his own contemporaries. In the fourth canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Byron notes that even the greatest civilizations decline, yet their art and literature remain. He also contrasted the destructive power of oppressive nations (such as Napoleon's France) with the creative power of the artist to bring into being that which had not, until that point, existed. In keeping with this theme, Byron used his poetry to demonstrate the ephemeral nature of human civilization while creating works of art that would survive long after any empire of his own day.

A Day of Reckoning

While Byron was by no means the prophet of apocalypse that his fellow Romantic poet William Blake was, Byron's poetry nonetheless returns time and again to a "day of reckoning." The most obvious example of this theme is "Darkness," a vision of a future earth nearly devoid of life and populated by creatures no longer human. More subtly, Byron insisted that the leaders of oppressive civilizations and the men who would destroy the works of the past would face their own days of judgment. This day would be hastened by Byron, who cast aspersions upon their characters in his writings, such as he did with Lord Elgin and Napoleon.

DON JUAN

Introduction: Byron's magnum opus, *Don Juan*, a poem spanning 17 cantos, ranks as one of the most important long poems published in England since John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The masterpiece, often called the epic of its time, has roots deep in literary tradition and, although regarded by early Victorians as somewhat shocking, equally involves itself with its own contemporary world at all levels — social, political, literary and ideological.

Byron published the first two cantos anonymously in 1819 after disputes with his regular publisher over the shocking nature of the poetry; by this time, he had been a famous poet for seven years, and when he self-published the beginning cantos, they were well-received in some quarters. It was then released volume by volume through his regular publishing house. By 1822, cautious acceptance by the public had turned to outrage, and Byron's publisher refused to continue to publish the works. In Canto III of *Don Juan*, Byron expresses his detestation for poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Don Juan is a satiric poem by Lord Byron, based on the legend of Don Juan, which Byron reverses, portraying Juan not as a womanizer but as someone easily seduced by women. It is a variation on the epic form. Byron himself called it an "Epic Satire" (*Don Juan*, c. xiv, st. 99). Modern critics generally consider it Byron's masterpiece, with a total of more than 16,000 lines of verse. Byron completed 16 cantos, leaving an unfinished 17th canto before his death in 1824. Byron claimed he had no ideas in his mind as to what would happen in subsequent cantos as he wrote his work.

When the first two cantos were published anonymously in 1819, the poem was criticized for its 'immoral content', though it was also immensely popular.

HISTORY

Byron was a rapid as well as a voluminous writer. Nevertheless, the composition of his great poem, *Don Juan*, was coextensive with a major part of his poetical life. He began the first canto of *Don Juan* in late 1818, and he was still at work on a seventeenth canto in early 1823. The poem was issued in parts, with intervals of unequal duration. Interruptions in the composition and publication of *Don Juan* were due to the disapproval and discouragement of friends as well as the publisher's hesitation and procrastination. Canto I. was written in September 1818; Canto II. in December–January, 1818-1819. Both were published on 15 July 1819. Cantos III. and IV. were written in the winter of 1819-1820; Canto V., after an interval of nine months, in October–November 1820, but the publication of Cantos III., IV., V. was delayed till 8 August 1821. In June 1822, Byron began to work at a sixth, and by the end of March 1823, he had completed a sixteenth canto. But the publication of these later cantos, which had been declined by John Murray, and was finally entrusted to John Hunt, was spread over a period of several months. Cantos VI., VII., VIII., with a Preface, were published on 15 July; Cantos IX., X., XI on 29 August; Cantos XII., XIII., XIV., on 17 December 1823; Cantos XV., XVI. on 26 March 1824. It has been said that the character of Donna Inez (*Don Juan's* mother) was a thinly veiled portrait of Byron's own wife, Annabella Milbanke (daughter of Sir Ralph Milbanke).

SOURCES

Byron's epic poem has a host of literary precedents. For example, John Hookham Frere's mock-heroic Arthurian tale *Prospectus and Specimen of an intended National Work* had suggested *Beppo*, and, at the same time, had prompted and provoked a sympathetic study of Frere's Italian models, Francesco

Berni and Luigi Pulci; and, again, the success of *Beppo*, and, still more, a sense of inspiration and the conviction that he had found the path to excellence, suggested another essay of the ottavarima, a humorous poem "à la Beppo" on a larger and more important scale. If Byron possessed more than a superficial knowledge of the legendary "Don Juan", he was irresponsive and unimpressed. He speaks (letter to John Murray), of "the Spanish tradition"; but there is nothing to show that he had read or heard of Tirso de Molina's *El Burlador de Sevilla y el Convidado de Piedra* (*The Deceiver of Seville and the Stone Guest*), 1626, which dramatised the "over true tale" of the actual Don Juan Tenorio; or that he was acquainted with any of the Italian (e.g. the *Convitato di Pietra* of Giacinto Andrea Cicognini or French adaptations of the legend (e.g. *Le Festin de Pierre, ou le fils criminel*, a tragicomedy of Abbé De Villiers, 1659; and Molière's *Dom Juan, ou Le Festin de Pierre*, 1665). He had seen Carlo Antonio Delpini's pantomime, which was based on Thomas Shadwell's *Libertine*, and he may have witnessed, at Milan or Venice, a performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*; but in taking Don Juan for his "hero", he took the name only, and disregarded the "terrible figure" "of the Titan of embodied evil, the likeness of sin made flesh", "as something to his purpose nothing"! But many readers have also detected echoes of eighteenth-century comic novels in *Don Juan*, pinpointing the poem's rambling, desultory style, flamboyant and distractible narrator, and heavily ironic tone—qualities that Byron may have gleaned from novels like Fielding's *Tom Jones*, as well as the writings of Tobias Smollett. Likewise, *Don Juan* belongs to the tradition of the *picaresque*, a genre of fiction (originating in Spain) that followed the adventures of roguish young men of low birth who made their way in a corrupt society via their cunning and courage. (Fielding's and Smollett's novels also belong to this genre.) Finally, Byron was probably inspired by Cervantes's *Don Quixote* and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, two works which he greatly admired and borrowed from liberally.

THE NAME AND THE MOTIVE

Many of Byron's remarks and reflections on the motive behind his poem are humorous paradoxes, provoked by advice and opposition. For instance, writing to Thomas Moore, he says, "I have finished the first canto ... of a poem in the style and manner of *Beppo*, encouraged by the good success of the same. It is ... meant to be a little quietly facetious upon everything. But I doubt whether it is not—at least as far as it has gone—too free for these very modest days." Critical opinion aligned itself with the opinion that the poem was "too free," however, a month after the two first cantos had been issued, Byron wrote to Murray, "You ask me for the plan of *Donny Johnny*; I have no plan—I had no plan; but I had or have materials.... You are too earnest and eager about a work never intended to be serious. Do you suppose that I could have any intention but to giggle and make giggle?—a playful satire, with as little poetry as could be helped, was what I meant." After the completion but before the publication of Cantos III., IV., V., in a further letter to Murray, he writes, "The Fifth is so far from being the last of *Don Juan*, that it is hardly the beginning. I meant to take him the tour of Europe, with a proper mixture of siege, battle, and adventure, and to make him finish as Anacharsis Cloots in the French Revolution.... I meant to have made him a Cavalier Servente in Italy, and a cause for a divorce in England, and a Sentimental 'Werther-faced' man in Germany, so as to show the different ridicules of the society in each of these countries, and to have displayed him gradually *gâté* and *blasé*, as he grew older, as is natural. But I had not quite fixed whether to make him end in Hell, or in an unhappy marriage, not knowing which would be the severest."

Conversely, it has been argued that Byron did not "whistle" *Don Juan* "for want of thought" – but instead he had found a thing to say, and he meant to make the world listen. He had read, albeit with angry disapproval, Coleridge's *Critique on (Charles Maturin's) Bertram*, where Coleridge describes the legendary *Don Juan* as a figure not unlike Childe Harold, or for that matter, Byron himself: "Rank, fortune, wit, talent, acquired knowledge, and liberal accomplishments, with beauty of person, vigorous health...all these advantages, elevated by the habits and sympathies of noble birth and natural character,

are...combined in Don Juan, so as to give him the means of carrying into all its practical consequences the doctrine of a godless nature... Obedience to nature is the only virtue." Again, "It is not the wickedness of Don Juan...which constitutes the character an abstraction, but the rapid succession of the correspondent acts and incidents, his intellectual superiority, and the splendid accumulation of his gifts and desirable qualities as coexistent with entire wickedness in one and the same person." It is therefore conceivable that Byron read these passages as either a suggestion or a challenge, or both.

Byron was under no delusion as to the grossness of Don Juan, though he protested that he was sheltered by the superior grossness of Ariosto and La Fontaine, of Prior and of Fielding. When Murray charges him with "approximations to indelicacy," he laughs at the euphemism, but when Hobhouse talked to him "about morality," he flames out, "I maintain that it is the most moral of poems." Ernest Hartley Coleridge concludes that Byron looked upon his great work as a whole, and he knew that the "raison d'être of his song" was not only to celebrate, but, by the white light of truth, to represent and exhibit the great things of the world—Love and War, and Death by sea and land, and Man, half-angel, half-demon—the comedy of his fortunes, and the tragedy of his passions and his fate.

During the 17th and 18th centuries, Spain experienced a quick decline from power in Europe. This fall was accompanied by what many saw as relative cultural poverty when compared to France. By Byron's time, Spanish culture was often considered both archaic and exotic. This led to a Romantic valorisation of Spanish culture. Many scholars note this work as a prime example of Spanish exoticism.

Sir Walter Scott maintained that its creator "has embraced every topic of human life, and sounded every string of the divine harp, from its slightest to its most powerful and heart-astounding tones." Goethe described Don Juan as "a work of boundless genius." Percy Bysshe Shelley, on the receipt of Cantos III, IV, V, bore testimony to his "wonder and delight:" "This poem carries with it at once the stamp of originality and defiance of imitation. Nothing has ever been written like it in English, nor, if I may venture to prophesy, will there be, unless carrying upon it the mark of a secondary and borrowed light.... You are building up a drama," he adds, "such as England has not yet seen, and the task is sufficiently noble and worthy of you." Again, of the fifth canto he writes, "Every word has the stamp of immortality.... It fulfils, in a certain degree, what I have long preached of producing—something wholly new and relative to the age, and yet surpassingly beautiful." Finally, Algernon Charles Swinburne, neither a disciple nor encomiast of Byron, pays eloquent tribute to the strength and splendour of Don Juan: "Across the stanzas ... we swim forward as over the 'broad backs of the sea;' they break and glitter, hiss and laugh, murmur and move like waves that sound or that subside. There is in them a delicious resistance, an elastic motion, which salt water has and fresh water has not. There is about them a wide wholesome air, full of vivid light and constant wind, which is only felt at sea. Life undulates and Death palpitates in the splendid verse.... This gift of life and variety is the supreme quality of Byron's chief poem".

THE DEDICATION TO ROBERT SOUTHEY

The poem is dedicated, with some scorn, to Robert Southey, then Poet Laureate - *You, Bob! are rather insolent, you know, / At being disappointed in your wish / To supersede all warblers here below, / And be the only Blackbird in the dish;* Robert Southey and William Wordsworth, who have both sold themselves to the king, would like to be considered the greatest poets of the age. Posterity will decide whether they or Walter Scott, Samuel Rogers, Thomas Campbell, Thomas Moore, and George Crabbe will enjoy the largest share of fame. As for Byron, he is not competing with them, for he does not consider himself a poet in the sense that they are. His muse is a pedestrian one. Would Milton, if he were alive, obey the "intellectual eunuch" Castlereagh, as Southey and Wordsworth do? Castlereagh is a tongue-tied

oppressor, a tool of tyranny, and a bungler. The poet dedicates *Don Juan* to Robert Southey, who sings the praises of tyrants and who is an apostate from political liberalism.

In its first publication, Byron cautions Murray: "As the Poem is to be published anonymously, omit the Dedication. I won't attack the dog in the dark. Such things are for scoundrels and renegades like himself". According to the editor of the 1833 *Works of Lord Byron*, the existence of the Dedication "became notorious" in consequence of Hobhouse's article in the *Westminster Review*, 1824. He adds, for Southey's consolation and encouragement, that "for several years the verses have been selling in the streets as a broadside," and that "it would serve no purpose to exclude them on the present occasion." But Southey was not appeased. He tells Allan Cunningham that "the new edition of Byron's works is ... one of the very worst symptoms of these bad times" .

The dedication also takes issue with the Lake Poets generally - *You—Gentlemen! by dint of long seclusion / From better company, have kept your own ... There is a narrowness in such a notion, / Which makes me wish you'd change your lakes for Ocean - and specifically - And Coleridge, too, has lately taken wing, / But like a hawk encumbered with his hood,- / - Explaining Metaphysics to the nation — / I wish he would explain his Explanation;* Wordsworth - *T is poetry-at least by his assertion,;* and Southey's predecessor as Laureate, Henry James Pye in the use of and pun on the old song *Sing a Song of Sixpence, four and twenty Blackbirds in a pye.*

STRUCTURE

The poem is in eight line iambic pentameter with the rhyme scheme ababab cc - often the last rhyming couplet is used for a humor comic line or humorous bathos. This rhyme scheme is known as ottavarima. In Italian, because of the common rhymed endings, the effect of ottavarima is often highly comedic or highly tragic. Because of its few rhymed endings, the effect of ottavarima in English is often comic, and Byron chose it for this reason

Like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Byron's *Don Juan* is an unfinished poem. How Byron might have ended it is idle speculation. It could have gone on indefinitely like a comic strip as long as the public showed an interest in its continuation. All Byron had to do was to change the locale and introduce new episodes. Byron spoke once or twice of letting Juan be killed in the French Revolution. That would have made a suitable conclusion to a drifting, aimless life just as the Greek revolution made a suitable, even immortalizing, conclusion to Byron's drifting, aimless life. He could have had Empress Catherine, or her son Paul I, transfer him as her envoy to France, perhaps as a spy, and have him blunder into the guillotine while being pursued by some beautiful goddess of reason. Such an ending would have been consistent with the personality and character of Juan, who is swept along with the current, and who does not seek but is sought out.

Don Juan is such a vast creation that it is difficult to judge it as a whole. It has something for every kind of reader and a good deal that will please no reader. There are numerous dull stanzas in it in which Byron says or does nothing of interest. To borrow a word used by Byron at the beginning of the poem, it has its *longueurs*, or tedious passages. Byron's skepticism and cynicism become tiresome. His hero, Don Juan, as sometimes happens in novels, is of less interest than several of his other characters, even though he does develop and is more mature by Canto XVI than in Canto I. But he never develops a strong moral sense. With regard to sex, he remains amoral, or so it would seem. He remains a drifter, although he becomes a better judge of human nature as the poem progresses.

But granting some weaknesses in structure, characterization, and philosophy of life, *Don Juan* is an epic carnival, as Truman Guy Steffan calls it in his *The Making of a Masterpiece*. It has scope, variety of human types and experience, common sense, much matter for laughter, clever and witty observation, ease, and fluency. It may not reveal a wealth of learning and a depth of thought and insight, but it does reveal a wide range of experience derived from books and from life. An index of the topics in *Don Juan* would be very long. In some parts it is unsurpassed by anything of a similar kind in English poetry before it, for instance, the Don Juan-Donna Julia episode, the development of the love affair between Don Juan and Haidée, and the savage, mocking indictment of war. Overall, it gives us a great deal of Byron himself, one of the most interesting personalities of English literature.

Byron started working on *Don Juan* in the fall of 1818, when he was about 30 and living in Venice. At this point in his life, he'd pretty much lived out the life of the fabled Don Juan. He was living in exile from his native England because of all of his scandalous affairs with married women (and some men too, it's rumored). Part of his problem was that he liked married women and noblewomen, which got him in huge amounts of trouble.

He starts writing this poem, and he writes it in sections that he calls **cantos**. Each canto is kind of like an episode of a TV series. It has a contained story, but it's also part of a greater whole. The first two cantos of *Don Juan* were published in 1819. The sexual content raised eyebrows, but they were a big hit - maybe they were helped by the sexual content, really; sex sells, even then. He continued working on additional cantos until he died in 1824.

When he died, there was a 17th canto that was left unfinished. Some people thought that he had an ending in mind, kind of like J.K. Rowling knew *Harry Potter* was going to be seven books (or eight movies)... I don't think we really needed that whole last book of wandering around the forest, but anyway, she at least did have it planned out. *Don Juan* was written in serialized form, so some people think that maybe it was just going to keep going on and on until people stopped reading, which, again, is more like a TV show that's open-ended - kind of like *The Simpsons*, really; it just keeps going and going.

THE OTTAVA RIMA STANZA AND STYLE

Behind the character of Don Juan lay a long tradition going back to the Renaissance. Behind the stanza used in "Prospectus" and "Beppo" also lay a long tradition going back to the Renaissance. These two traditions are combined in *Don Juan*. Chief among the Italian Renaissance writers who had combined serious and comic matter are Luigi Pulci (1432-84) and Francesco Berni (1496 ?-1535). The tradition was carried on in the eighteenth century by Giambattista Casti. After becoming acquainted with the mock-heroic manner in Frere, Byron steeped himself in its Italian practitioners. He had begun to study Italian in 1810, and was particularly fond of Casti.

Ottava rima, or eight-line stanza, was the poetic form favored by the Italian satirical writers of mock-heroic romances. The rhyme scheme of *ottava rima*, abababcc, is a demanding one and for that very reason encouraged the use of comic rhyme such as Byron employed so extensively in *Don Juan*. The concluding couplet can be used to end the stanza with a witticism or a swift fall from the lofty to the low or a surprise for the reader in the form of a pair of unexpected and clever comic rhymes. Byron, as a devoted disciple of Pope, who wrote almost exclusively in iambic pentameter couplets, was fond of couplets and for this reason alone would have found the *ottava rima* stanza attractive. In the course of writing *Don Juan* Byron became very skilled in the handling of the challenging rhyme scheme of *ottava rima*. His ability to create outrageous rhyme is unrivaled. His mastery of his stanza pattern pleases the reader, whether he is aware of it or not. *Ottava rima* helped to make Byron the great comic writer that he is.

For example, in the first stanza of Canto XIII Byron writes:

I now mean to be serious; — it is time,
Since Laughter now-a-days is deemed too serious;
A jest at Vice by Virtue's called a crime,
And critically held as deleterious:
Besides, the sad's a source of the sublime,
Although, when long, a little apt to weary us;
And therefore shall my lay soar high and solemn,
As an old temple dwindled to a column.

In this stanza Byron alternates masculine (single) with feminine (double) rhymes and concludes with feminine rhymes. The rhymes are perfect and pleasing to the ear. In addition, in his climactic concluding line he coins a simile that is both fresh and striking. Italy, where Byron wrote his *Don Juan*, is full of "old temples dwindled to a column."

THE LITERARY BACKGROUND

The character of Don Juan was contributed to world literature by the Spanish writer Gabriel Tellez (1584-1648), whose pen name was Tirso de Molina, in his play *El Burlador & Sevilla* (*The Rogue of Seville*), which appeared in the early 1630s. The character of the unscrupulous seducer became a favorite with later writers, and of all literary characters Don Juan is the one who is most used, in plays, in pantomimes, and in narrative verse. Mozart's *Don Giovanni* is an example of the use of the Don Juan character in opera. Few other literary characters approach Don Juan in popularity. Readers and lovers of the theater seem to be fascinated by the theme of the "lady-killer." The bibliography of the Don Juan theme fills a whole volume.

How Byron became acquainted with the Don Juan legend is not known, but it would have been impossible for a well-read poet like Byron not to have become acquainted with it. In the first stanza of Canto I he writes:

I want a hero.
I'll therefore take our ancient friend Don Juan —
We all have seen him, in the pantomime,
Sent to the Devil somewhat ere his time.

In Byron's day a pantomime based on the Restoration dramatist Thomas Shadwell's Don Juan play, *The Libertine*, was frequently presented on the London stage. He could also have become acquainted with the legend through Shadwell's play or through Molière's Don Juan play, *The Banquet of Stone*, or through Carlo Goldoni's play, *Don Juan Tenono*, or through Mozart. Don Juan was a familiar public figure in the early nineteenth century.

The idea of using Don Juan as a centralizing character in an episodic poem may have been suggested to Byron by his immensely successful *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, a discursive, descriptive and reflective poem that is held together by the character of Childe Harold. Byron himself was a Don Juan character and so was his spendthrift father, John Byron.

How Byron became acquainted with the *Don Juan* manner and form we know from his letters. A minor contemporary poet, John Hookham Frere, using the pseudonym Whistlecraft had written a poem which appeared in 1817 with the title "Prospectus and Specimen of an Intended National Work, by William and

Robert Whistlecraft, of Stowmarket, in Suffolk, Harness and Collar Makers, Intended to Comprise the Most Interesting Particulars Relating to King Arthur and His Round Table." The poem was expanded and appeared in 1818 with the title "The Monks and the Giants;" Byron was delighted with the mixture of the serious and the comic in the poem and resolved to write a digressive poem in a similar manner. The result was "Beppo." The public and Byron's friends were pleased with "Beppo," and as a result Byron decided to write a long poem using the style and the stanza he had used in "Beppo." The poem was *Don Juan*.

PLAN OF THE POEM

Byron made contradictory statements about his purpose in writing *Don Juan*. He told his friend Thomas Moore in 1818 that the poem was meant "to be a little quietly facetious upon every thing," and to his publisher John Murray he wrote that in *Don Juan* he intended only "to giggle and to make giggle" and had no other plan for the poem. Later, in 1820, he wrote Moore: "*Don Juan* will be known by and bye, for what it is intended, — a Satire on *abuses* of the present states of Society . . ." His purpose in writing *Don Juan* can best be deduced from a reading of the poem. It is both quietly facetious on everything and a serious satire on the hypocrisies of high society, the false glory associated with war, man's pursuit of fame, the little devices by which people try to deceive themselves, the human penchant for rationalization, and much else. In *Don Juan* Byron shows himself to be a humorist in the great tradition; he belongs in the company of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, William Congreve, Richard Sheridan, Henry Fielding, Laurence Sterne, and his contemporary Jane Austen.

STYLE OF THE POEM

In general, the style of *Don Juan* is the easy conversational or epistolary style. Byron is talking to his readers and as he talks his subject reminds him of this or that, to which a few lines or stanzas will thereupon be devoted. *Don Juan* is deliberately discursive and digressive.

Byron does not always use a conversational tone. In the stanzas on the religious feelings which twilight can arouse in him (Canto III, Sts. 102-08) Byron writes in the inflated Romantic manner. When writing about Tom's thwarted attempt to rob Don Juan, he descends to slang (Canto XI, Sts. 10-19).

THE BYRONIC HERO

The figure of the Byronic hero pervades much of his work, and Byron himself is considered to epitomise many of the characteristics of this literary figure. Scholars have traced the literary history of the Byronic hero from John Milton, and many authors and artists of the Romantic movement show Byron's influence during the 19th century and beyond, including Charlotte and Emily Brontë.

The Byronic hero presents an idealised, but flawed character whose attributes include: great talent; great passion; a distaste for society and social institutions; a lack of respect for rank and privilege (although possessing both); being thwarted in love by social constraint or death; rebellion; exile; an unsavory secret past; arrogance; overconfidence or lack of foresight; and, ultimately, a self-destructive manner. These types of characters have since become ubiquitous in literature and politics.

CANTO WISE SUMMARY OF DON JUAN

Canto I

Don Juan was born in Seville, Spain, the son of Don José, a member of the nobility, and Donna Inez, a woman of considerable learning. Juan's parents did not get along well with each other because Don José was interested in women rather than in knowledge and was unfaithful to Donna Inez. Donna Inez was on the point of suing her husband for divorce when he died of a fever. The education of Juan became the primary interest of his mother. She saw to it that he received a thorough training in the arts and sciences but took great care that he should learn nothing about the basic facts of life.

Among Donna Inez's friends is twenty three year old Donna Julia, the young and beautiful wife of Don Alfonso, a middle-aged man incapable of engaging her affections. When Juan is sixteen, Donna Julia falls in love with the handsome young man and finds opportunities to be in his company. One midsummer evening the two declare their love for each other. In November of that year Don Alfonso comes one night to the bedroom of his wife accompanied by a crowd of his friends. When he enters the room, his wife and her maid are ready for him; the bedclothes have been piled up in a heap on the bed. Don Alfonso and his followers search Donna Julia's suite for a lover but find none. While searching, Don Alfonso becomes the target of a tirade of abuse from his wife. The whole company leaves, crestfallen. Don Alfonso soon returns to apologize and happens to find a pair of men's shoes in his wife's bedroom. He leaves the room to get his sword. Don Juan, who has been hidden under the heap of bedclothes, prepares to make his escape by a back exit and runs into Don Alfonso. In the fight that ensues, Juan strikes Alfonso on the nose and makes his escape.

The sequel to these events is that Donna Julia is sent to a convent and Don Alfonso sues for divorce. Donna Inez decides that her son should spend the next four years traveling.

Canto II

Don Juan embarks on a ship bound for Leghorn, Italy, where his family has relatives. Not long after the ship leaves port, a violent storm drives it off its course. In spite of everything the crew can do, the ship finally goes down with most of its passengers. Only as many as can fit in a small cutter and a long-boat are saved. Then the cutter is swamped and the nine men in it drown. The men in the longboat, including Juan and his tutor, are reduced to eating shoe leather. At this point one of the survivors suggests cannibalism as a means of survival. The lot falls on Juan's tutor. The arrival of the boat at an island prevents the sacrifice of a second victim. The boat is driven against a reef and overturns. By this time only Juan and three others are left alive. By clinging to an oar Juan is swept to the shore and manages to crawl up on the beach, where he promptly collapses. The three others perish.

Canto III

When Juan at last opens his eyes, he sees a lovely young face peering into his. It is Haidée, the only daughter of a Greek freebooter who has made the isolated Aegean island his headquarters. Haidée and her maid help the weak and emaciated Juan to a cave, where they gradually nurse him back to health. Haidée does not dare bring Juan into her home, for she knows that her father would sell him as a slave. Inevitably Juan and Haidée fall in love and marry without benefit of clergy. A month after Juan's arrival, Lambro, Haidée's father, takes his fleet on a piratical expedition. Sometime later word is brought back that Lambro has died. Juan and Haidée move into his mansion as man and wife. But the rumor of Lambro's death is false. When he returns to his island port, and walks toward his house, he is surprised to see people idling, feasting, and entertaining themselves. He does not make his presence known immediately. At the time of his arrival, Juan and Haidée, attired in gorgeous costumes, are feasting in Lambro's dining hall and being entertained by a minstrel.

Canto IV

After dining, Juan and Haidée take their siesta. Haidée, for the first time, has an ominous nightmare. She dreams that she is in a cave and that Juan lies at her feet, wet and cold and lifeless. While she is gazing on his face, his features slowly change into those of her stern father. She awakes and there before her stands the supposedly dead Lambro. When she arises and shrieks, she awakes Juan. Clinging to him, she tells him that the intruder is her father and beseeches him to beg his forgiveness. She pleads with her father to spare Juan. Lambro quietly commands Juan to surrender the saber he has snatched from the wall. When Juan refuses, Haidée's father draws and cocks his pistol. Haidée saves Juan's life by throwing herself in front of him. Her father replaces his pistol in its holster and blows a whistle. At once twenty of his followers appear and attack Juan, who succeeds in wounding two of them before being twice wounded himself. When Haidée sees Juan cut down, a vein bursts in her body and she collapses. For days she lies in a coma. When she finally regains consciousness, she is apathetic and speechless. The singing of a harpist at last draws from her the response of tears. Then she arises and flies at all those around her as if they were foes. Soon she lapses into apathy again, and after twelve days she dies. Juan has been carried on board one of Lambro's ships, where he finds himself in the company of several other captives. Not long after, he is brought to a slave market in Constantinople.

Canto V

Juan is in the slave market. He converses with an Englishman, telling of his lost love, whereas the more experienced John says he had to run away from his third wife. A black eunuch from the seraglio, Baba, buys Juan and John, and takes the infidels to the palace. He takes them to an inner chamber, where he insists that Don Juan dress as a woman and threatens him with castration if he resists. Finally, Juan is brought into an imperial hall to meet the sultana, Gulbeyaz, a 26-year-old beauty who is the sultan's fourth, last and favourite wife. Full of stubborn pride, he refuses to kiss her foot and finally compromises by kissing her hand. She had spotted Juan at the market and had asked Baba to secretly purchase him for her, despite the risk of discovery by the sultan. She wants Juan to "love" her, and throws herself on his breast. But he still has thoughts of Haidée and spurns her advances, saying "The prisoned eagle will not pair, nor I/Serve a sultana's sensual phantasy." She is taken aback, enraged, and thinks of having him beheaded, but breaks out in tears instead. Before they can progress further in their relationship, Baba rushes in to announce that the Sultan is coming: "The sun himself has sent me like a ray/ To hint that he is coming up this way." The sultan arrives, preceded by a parade of damsels, eunuchs, etc. Looking around, he takes note of the attractive Christian woman (Juan), expressing regret that a mere Christian should be so pretty (Juan is a giaour, or non-Muslim). Byron comments on the necessity to secure the chastity of the women in these unhappy climes — that "wedlock and a padlock mean the same."

Canto VI

The sultan retires with Gulbeyaz. Juan, still dressed as a woman, is taken to the overcrowded seraglio. He is asked to share a couch with the young and lovely 17-year-old Dudù. When asked what his name is, Don Juan calls himself Juanna. She is a "kind of sleepy Venus ... very fit to murder sleep... Her talents were of the more silent class... pensive..." She gives Juanna a chaste kiss and undresses. The chamber of odalisques is asleep at 3 AM. Dudù suddenly screams, and awakens agitated, while Juanna still lies asleep and snoring. The women ask the cause of her scream, and she relates a suggestive dream of being in a wood like Dante, of dislodging a reluctant golden apple clinging tenaciously to its bough (which at last willingly falls), of almost biting into the forbidden fruit when a bee flies out from it and stings her to the heart. The matron of the seraglio decides to place Juanna with another odalisque, but Dudù begs to keep her in her own bed, hiding her face in Juanna's breast. The poet is at a loss to explain why she screamed.

In the morning, the sultana asks Baba to tell her how Don Juan passed the night. He tells of "her" stay in the seraglio, but carefully omits details about Dudù and her dream. But the sultana is suspicious nevertheless, becomes enraged, and instructs Baba to have Dudù and Juan killed in the usual manner

(drowning). Baba pleads with her that killing Juan will not cure what ails her. The sultana summons Dudù and Juan. Just before the canto ends, the narrator explains that the "Muse will take a little touch at warfare."

Canto VII

Juan and John Johnson have escaped with two women from the seraglio, and arrive during the siege of Ismail (historically 1790), a Turkish fort at the mouth of the Danube on the Black Sea. Field Marshal Suvaroff, an officer in the Russian army, is preparing for an all-out final assault against the besieged fortress. The battle rages. He has been told to "take Ismail at whatever price" by Prince Potemkin, the commander-in-chief of the Russian army. The Christian empress Catherine II is the Russian head-of-state. John Johnson appears to Suvaroff (with whom he has previously served in battle at Widdin) and introduces his friend Juan—both are ready to join the fight against the "pagan" Turks. Suvaroff is unhappy with the women the two men brought, but they state that they are the wives of other men, and that the women aided their escape. Suvaroff consents to the women staying.

Canto VIII

Juan and John join fearlessly and bravely in the savage assault on Ismail. They scale the walls of the town and charge into battle. The conquest of Ismail causes the slaughter of 40,000 Turks, among them women (a few of whom are ravished) and children. Juan nobly rescues a ten-year-old Muslim girl, from two murderous Cossacks intent on killing her, and immediately resolves to adopt her as his own child. A noble Tartar khan valiantly fights to the death beside his five sons, just as instructed by Mahomet, presumably to be rewarded with houris in heaven.

Juan is a hero and is sent to Saint Petersburg, accompanied by the Muslim girl, whom he makes a vow to protect. Her name, Leila, is only revealed in Canto X.

Canto IX

Dressed as a war hero in military uniform, Juan cuts a handsome figure in the court of Catherine II, who lusts after him. She is about 48 years old (historically, actually 61 or 62 years old) and "just now in juicy vigour". "Love is vanity,/Selfish in its beginning as its end,/Except where 'tis a mere insanity". Juan still lovingly cares for the Muslim girl he rescued.

The Empress Catherine is so much taken with the appearance of the handsome youthful lieutenant that when he presents her with his dispatch, she does not at once break the seal. When she finally does so, she is filled with joy. She falls in love at first sight with the bearer of the good news. Juan is swept off his feet by the attention he receives from Catherine. She promptly makes him a favorite and showers him with wealth. Because of the position he so quickly gains and because of his gracious demeanor, he becomes the center of attention in the Russian court.

Canto X

Juan soon finds himself quite at home in Petersburg and "Seduced by Youth and dangerous examples" grows a little dissipated. He lives "in a hurry / Of waste and haste, and glare, and gloss and glitter." He is courted by everyone. For a while all goes well; then he falls sick. The doctors conclude that the climate is too cold for him, and Catherine, much against her wishes, decides to send him on an official mission to England. His job ostensibly is that of a special envoy with the nebulous task of negotiating some treaty or other, but it is nothing more than a sinecure to justify the Empress Catherine in securing his health and loading him with money and expensive gifts. He leaves Russia for England laden with gifts and honors, taking with him his little orphan Leila.

Canto XI

Juan lands in England and eventually makes his way to London where he is found musing on the greatness of Britain as a defender of freedoms — until he is interrupted by a Cockney mugger, demanding money with menace. Juan shoots the man and, being of strong conscience, then regrets his haste and attempts to care for the dying mugger. However, his efforts fail, and after muttering some last words the mugger dies on the street.

Later, Don Juan is received into the English court with the usual wonder and admiration at his looks, dress and mien although not without the jealousy of some of the older peers.

In England Juan quickly becomes the object of as much attention as he had been in Russia. He is known to have come on an important mission; he is handsome, young, and accomplished; he knows several languages; and "Some rumour also of some strange adventures / Had gone before him, and his wars and loves." He is well received everywhere. He passes his mornings in business, his afternoons in visits, and his evenings in dancing and other forms of entertainment.

In this Canto, Byron famously makes his comment on John Keats, "who was kill'd off by one critique".

Canto XII

One of Juan's first problems to be solved in England is what to do with little Leila. He finally decides to place her in the care of Lady Pinchbeck, who is elderly, virtuous, wise in the ways of the world, and interested in the Turkish orphan. He finds one in Lady Pinchbeck, a woman not unassailed by rumours on her chastity, but generally considered a good person and an admirable wit.

Canto XIII

Lady Adeline Amundeville and her husband Lord Henry Amundeville host Juan and others. She is "the fair most fatal Juan ever met", the "queen bee, the glass of all that's fair,/Whose charms made all men speak and women dumb". Diplomatic relations often bring Juan ("the envoy of a secret Russian mission") and Lord Henry together, and he befriends Juan and makes him a frequent guest at their London mansion. The Amundevilles invite numerous distinguished guests for a party at their country estate. The landscape surrounding the estate, as well as the decor within their house is described. This is followed by a mock-catalogues of the ladies, the gentlemen and the activities that they participate in. Byron sees this whole party as English *ennui*. The canto ends with all of them retiring for the evening.

Canto XIV

Juan acquits himself well on a fox hunt. He is attractive to the ladies, including the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke, who begins to flirt with him. Lady Adeline is jealous of the Duchess (who has had many amorous exploits), and resolves to protect the "inexperienced" Juan from her enticements. Juan and Adeline are both 21 years old. Lady Adeline has a vacant heart and has a cold but proper marriage. She is not in love with Juan, but the poet will only later divulge whether they have an affair (apparently not). Lady Fitz Fulke, who has a reputation for getting involved in intrigues. Lady Adeline has a weakness of her own: Her heart is vacant. She loves her husband, or thinks she does, but that love costs her an effort. She is also of the same age as Juan, namely twenty-one. The popular saying "truth is stranger than fiction" originates from this canto: "Tis strange — but true; for truth is always strange; Stranger than fiction."

Canto XV

Lady Adeline is at risk for losing her honour over Juan. Juan has a seductive manner because he never seems anxious to seduce. He neither brooks nor claims superiority. Adeline advises Juan to get married, but he acknowledges the women he is attracted to tend to be already married. Adeline tries to deduce a suitable match for Juan, but intentionally omits mention of the 16 year old and enticing Aurora Raby (who is rich, noble, young, pretty, sincere) and a Catholic like Juan. Juan is attracted to her — she is purer than the rest, and reminds him of his lost Haidée. This omission makes Juan wonder and he brings the fact to the attention of Adeline. Lady Adeline marvels "what he saw in such a baby / As that prim, silent, cold Aurora Raby?" (Canto XV, St. 49). One evening Juan sits beside Aurora at dinner. She pays no attention to him, a phenomenon which piques him and arouses his interest in her. An elaborate dinner is described in detail. Juan is seated between Adeline and Aurora. Aurora has little to say initially, and thaws only a little during the dinner.

Canto XVI

Juan is smitten with the beautiful Aurora, and thinks of her on retiring. At night, he walks into the hall, viewing the gallery of paintings. He hears footsteps, and sees a monk in cowl and beads. He wonders if it is a ghost, or just a dream. He does not see the monk's face, though he passes and repasses several times.

The next morning in reaction to how pale Juan looks, Adeline turns pale herself, the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke looks at Juan hard, and Aurora surveys him "with a kind of calm surprise". Adeline wonders if he is ill, and Lord Henry guesses that he might have seen the "Black Friar" He relates the story of the "spirit of these walls" who used to be seen often but had not been seen of late. Lord Henry, himself, had seen the Black Friar on his honeymoon. Adeline offers to sing the story of the ghost, accompanying it on her harp. Aurora remains silent, but Lady Fitz-Fulke appears mischievous after the song. The narrator suggests that Adeline had sung this to laugh Juan out of his dismay. Juan's attempts to lift his spirits, as the house bustles in preparation for another feast. Before that, however, a pregnant country girl and other petitioners present themselves to Lord Henry in his capacity as Justice of the Peace.

At the banquet, Juan is preoccupied with his thoughts again. When he glances at Aurora, he catches a smile on her cheek, but is uncertain of its meaning, since Aurora sits pale and only a little flushed. Adeline goes about her duties as hostess, while the Duchess of Fitz-Fulke is very much at ease.

They retire for the evening. Juan thinks about Aurora, who has reawakened feelings in him which had lately been lost. After going to back to his room, he hears the tiptoe of footsteps again, after sitting around in expectation of the ghost. His doors open, and again it is the sable Friar concealed in his solemn hood. He pursues the friar up against a wall, and then suddenly notices that the "ghost" has sweet breath, a straggling curl, red lips, pearls, and a glowing bust. As the hood falls down, the "friar" is revealed to be the voluptuous Duchess of Fitz-Fulke.

Canto XVII

A Canto that Byron failed to complete but added to in the run up to his death, it lacks any narrative and only barely mentions the protagonist. It is instead a response to his critics who object to his views on the grounds that "If you are right, then everybody's wrong!". In his defense, he lists many great people who have been considered outsiders and revolutionaries including Martin Luther and Galileo.

The Canto ends on the brink of resuming the storyline from Canto The Sixteenth where Don Juan was left in a "tender moonlit situation". The following morning Juan looks "wan and worn." The Duchess Fitz-Fulke "had a sort of air rebuked — / Seemed pale and shivered . . ." (St. 14).

CANTO WISE EXPLANATION AND ANALYSIS OF DON JUAN

Canto 1

Explanation

The author begins by saying that since his own age cannot supply a suitable hero for his poem, he will use an old friend, Don Juan. Don Juan was born in Seville, Spain. His parents are Don José and Donna Inez. Donna Inez is learned and has a good memory. Her favorite science is mathematics. She has a smattering of Greek, Latin, French, English, and Hebrew. Don José has no love for learning or the learned and has a roving eye. As his wife is rigidly virtuous and as he is incautious by nature, he is forever getting into scrapes. Consequently, there are quarrels between the two. Donna Inez, with the help of druggists and doctors, tries to prove that her husband is mad. She also keeps a diary in which she notes all his faults and even searches through his trunks of books and letters looking for evidence to use against him. Their friends and relatives try to no avail to bring about a reconciliation; their lawyers recommend a divorce. But before the situation can reach a critical point, Don Jose dies.

Donna Inez makes herself responsible for the supervision of Don Juan's education. He is taught riding, fencing, gunnery, how to scale a fortress, languages, sciences, and arts. His education is to a certain degree impractical, for he is taught nothing about life and studies the classics from expurgated editions. In short, his mother sees to it that he receives an education calculated to repress all his natural instincts and keeps the facts of life from him.

Among Donna Inez's friends is Donna Julia, a beautiful, intelligent young woman with Moorish blood in her veins. She is married to Don Alfonso, a jealous man more than twice her age. Theirs is a loveless marriage. It is rumored that Donna Inez and Don Alfonso had once been lovers and that she cultivated the friendship of Donna Julia to maintain the association with the husband. Donna Julia has always been fond of Juan, but when he becomes a young man of sixteen, her feelings toward him change and become a source of embarrassment to both of them. Juan does not understand the change that is taking place in him, but the more sophisticated Julia realizes that she is falling in love with Juan. She resolves to fight her growing love and never to see Juan again but the next day finds a reason for visiting his mother. She then convinces herself that her love is only Platonic and persuades herself that it will remain that way. Juan meantime cannot understand why he is pensive and inclined to seek solitude.

One June evening Julia and Juan happen to be in a bower together. One of Julia's hands happens to fall on one of Juan's. When the sun sets and the moon rises, Juan's arm finds its way around Julia's waist. Julia strives with herself a little, "And whispering 'I will ne'er consent'-consented" (St. 117).

As Julia lies in her bed one November night, there arises a tremendous clatter. Her maid Antonia warns her that Don Alfonso is coming up the stairs with half the city at his back. The two women have barely enough time to throw the bedclothes in a heap when Don Alfonso enters the room. Julia indignantly asks Alfonso if he suspects her of wrongdoing and invites him to search the room. Alfonso and his followers do so and find nothing. While the search is going on, Donna Julia protests her innocence with angry eloquence, giving numerous examples of her virtue and pouring abuse upon her luckless husband. When no lover is found, Don Alfonso tries to excuse his behavior but only succeeds in drawing sobs and hysterics from his wife. Alfonso, shamefaced, withdraws with his followers and Julia and Antonia bolt the bedroom door.

No sooner has Alfonso gone than Juan emerges from beneath the pile of bedclothes where he has been hidden. Knowing that Alfonso would soon be back, Julia and Antonia advise Juan to go into a closet. Hardly has Juan entered his new hiding place when Alfonso returns. Alfonso makes various excuses for his conduct and begs Julia's pardon, which she half gives and half withholds. The matter might have

ended there had Alfonso not stumbled over a pair of men's shoes. He promptly goes to get his sword. Julia immediately urges Juan to leave the room and make his exit by the garden gate, the key to which she gives him. Unfortunately, on his way out he meets Alfonso and knocks him down. In the scuffle Juan loses his only garment and flees naked into the night.

Alfonso sues for divorce. Juan's mother decides that her son should leave Seville and travel to various European countries for four years. Julia is put in a convent from which she sends Juan a letter confessing her love for him and expressing no regrets.

The first episode of *Don Juan* ends at this point, but before concluding Canto I Byron adds twenty-two stanzas in which he entertains himself by giving a mocking statement of his intentions in regard to *Don Juan*, taunts his contemporaries Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, defends the morality of his story, confesses that at thirty his hair is gray and his heart has lost its freshness, comments on the evanescence of fame, and says goodbye to his readers.

Analysis

In the first few stanzas, Byron establishes the half-playful and mocking and half-serious tone that is going to pervade *Don Juan*. When that is done, he gives his readers as the chief characters in his first canto a pair of married couples. They are both unhappily married. Don José and Donna Inez are mismatched. Donna Inez is a cold and severe type of woman, although she has evidently not always been so. It was generally known that in her younger days she had had an affair with Don Alfonso. Don José is a good-natured, easy-going kind of man inclined to take his pleasures where he finds them. Byron's defense of him is that he had been badly brought up and that he was amorous by nature. In the character of Donna Inez, Byron was satirizing, against the advice of his friends, his estranged wife, Lady Byron. Donna Julia and Don Alfonso are mismatched by age as Donna Inez and Don José are mismatched by incompatibility of character and personality. Don Alfonso has nothing to offer Donna Julia except his name and station. Theirs was a marriage of convenience. Byron does not bother to devote much characterization to Don Alfonso. He merely says he was neither very lovable nor very hateable. He had a more or less negative personality, neither warm nor cold. Like any other husband, he did not care to be cuckolded.

Byron is far more interested in the wives than in the husbands and characterizes them rather extensively. Neither portrait is flattering. Donna Inez's is clearly malicious; in her Byron was attacking his estranged wife. She is not a faithless wife, but she is an intolerant and rather frigid one. Donna Julia's portrait of woman as wife is likewise unflattering; she deceives herself — and her husband. However, Byron makes the reader feel sympathetic toward her in spite of his using her to show up woman's wiles. Donna Julia and Don José, had they been closer in age, might have made a compatible pair; Donna Julia finds in Don José's son the warmth that was in the father. Donna Inez and Don Alfonso, who had been lovers at one time, might have gotten along well in marriage. Human nature and society, Byron seems to say, work against a happy marriage.

Some of Byron's contemporaries found Byron's bedroom farce immoral. It can be said in his defense that his mocking presentation neutralizes any remote occasion of sin that there might be present in his story of illicit love. Nor does he supply any provocative details. Lastly, both Donna Julia and Don Juan are made to look ridiculous, and both are punished for their guilt.

The story in Canto I is told by an "I" *persona* who is said to be a friend of Don Juan's family. Byron may have foreseen the difficulties involved in making this *persona* a witness who would be present with Don Juan in his various adventures and so decided to discard him. At any rate the "I" narrator is discarded.

before the first canto ends, and becomes Byron himself giving his opinions on various matters and communicating more or less confidentially with the reader.

Canto I of *Don Juan* is without doubt the most interesting, entertaining, and amusing of all the cantos. For anything of this kind comparable in quality and liveliness in English verse, the reader has to go all the way back to Chaucer.

Canto 2

Explanation

At Cadiz, Spain, Juan boards the ship *Trinidad* bound for Leghorn, Italy, where he is to visit relatives settled there. His suite consists of three servants and a tutor. As Juan has no experience on shipboard, he promptly becomes seasick. Hardly has the ship set sail when a storm blows up. Even though the crew takes in sail, the rough seas tear away the *Trinidad's* rudder, and the pumps have to be manned, for the ship has sprung a leak. The men try in vain to plug the leak by stuffing cloth into it. A sudden squall lays the ship over on its beam ends. The crew immediately cut away the masts and the ship rights itself. In desperation the men try to get at the liquor supply, but Juan shows his intrepidity by holding them off with a pair of pistols.

Without a rudder, masts, or sails, and leaking so badly that the pumps are useless, the ship lies rolling helplessly in the trough of the waves and at length begins settling by the head. Some of the crew manage to get the cutter and the longboat off the ship and to salvage a little food and drinking water. The other boats have been stove in during the storm. Anything that would support a man is thrown overboard. The two boats have hardly been lowered, when the ship sinks, carrying with it almost two hundred men. Only thirty-nine, Don Juan and his tutor among them, manage to save their lives. Soon the number is reduced to thirty, for the little cutter with nine men aboard is swamped by the towering waves. The men in the longboat manage to keep it afloat and even rig up a sail and mast out of two blankets and an oar. At length there comes a calm, and the bone-weary men get some sleep for the first time in three days. When they awake they are ravenous and promptly devour all of their meager supplies. When hunger begins to gnaw again, they kill and eat Juan's old spaniel, which he had rescued. Then they eat their leather caps and their shoes.

When they have been seven days in the longboat and no breeze has blown for four days, one of them whispers to his companion and the whisper goes from him to another and so all through the boat. They have decided that one of their number should be sacrificed for food. The lot falls on Pedrillo, Juan's tutor, who is thereupon bled to death. Almost all in the boat commit cannibalism except Juan and three or four others. Several of those who have partaken of human flesh drink sea water and go into convulsions. In spite of this, they might have cast lots again had they not succeeded in catching three sea birds and had it not rained for the first time since the ship sank. Later they have the good fortune to catch a turtle that is sleeping on the water.

At length, when only four are left alive, land appears but the coast is steep and rocky. The current and the prevailing wind carry the longboat swiftly toward land, and when they strike a reef the boat overturns. One of the four men is snatched away by a shark; two, unable to swim, drown; but Juan, with the help of the oar, is able to crawl up on the sand and there collapses, unconscious.

When Juan regains consciousness, the first object he sees is a lovely female face peering into his. With her is another young lady, and together they do what they can to restore his strength. After they have rubbed his cold limbs and covered him with a cape, they shelter him in a nearby cave.

The two ladies attend to Juan daily, and under their care he soon recovers his strength. The name of one is Haidée; the other, Zoe, is Haidée's maid. Haidée's father is Lambro, a Greek pirate, who has built a palatial home on the Aegean island on which Juan has been cast up.

Because Haidée's father would sell Juan as a slave, Haidée does not dare take him into her house to recuperate but keeps him in the cave and brings him clothing, furs for a couch, and a daily supply of food. When Juan has recovered his strength, Haidée gives him lessons in Greek, a language Juan knows nothing of, by pointing and repetition. Soon the two fall in love.

After Juan has stayed in the cave for a month, Lambro's fleet puts out to sea and Juan is able to leave his hideout and take daily walks with Haidée, in the meantime improving his Greek. During these walks their love for each other deepens. Soon Haidée's heart is hopelessly lost to Juan, until one night, under the stars

By their own feelings hallowed and united,
Their priest was Solitude, and they were wed:
And they were happy-for to their young eyes
Each was an angel, and earth Paradise. (St. 204)

Analysis

Canto II is divided into five general parts: (1) a transitional beginning by means of Juan's seasickness; (2) the storm and shipwreck; (3) existence in a small boat after the ship has sunk; (4) Juan's arrival on an island in the Aegean Sea and the swift development of a secret love affair between him and Haidée, the only child of a wealthy Greek pirate, smuggler, and slave trader; and (5) a "philosophical" concluding section on love, conceived of as one of the main sources of both pain and pleasure in this world.

After the cynical comic brilliance and mocking commentary on marriage in Canto I, Canto II may disappoint some readers. Byron substitutes disaster at sea for disaster in marriage, but in the end brings the canto back to the main subject of Canto I, namely, love. In the interests of variety and unity, he might have ended Canto II with Stanza 110, where Juan, who has barely escaped with his life, falls unconscious on the shore of an island. As it is, Juan, whom we saw at the close of Canto I fleeing naked, a rather ridiculous figure, from one illicit love, is thrown, almost naked, into another illicit love, in the last part of Canto II. Juan remains pretty much unchanged; he has learned nothing from experience. There is no indication that he is in the slightest concerned with the possible disastrous effects of his new love, just as he had not concerned himself with the consequences of his first love. In this respect he is in the tradition of the classical Don Juan, who goes gaily from one love to another. Byron does not condemn him, although he had made him an object of laughter in Canto I; neither does he condone his conduct with Haidée. Although Juan and Haidée merely responded to the gravitational pull of physical compatibility, they had both been brought up Christians, as Byron is careful to tell us. Finding themselves in an occasion of sin, they had yielded to nature seemingly without a struggle. Byron, however, has his eye on the reader, especially the critic, who would be quick to charge him with immorality. He provides no suggestive details, and in Canto III he shows how the wages of sin is death for Haidée and serious injury for Juan. Even with these precautions, he did not escape the charge of immorality. Robert Southey, the poet laureate, made him the leader of the Satanic school of poetry.

Byron's treatment of Haidée is quite different from his treatment of Donna Julia. He analyzes Julia's conduct with amused irony because she was a product of a sophisticated Christian society, and married besides. Haidée belongs to a more primitive society and is single. Byron explains her conduct by saying that she forgot her Christian principles in a crisis of love:

And Haidée, being devout as well as fair,
Had, doubtless, heard about the Stygian river,
And Hell and Purgatory — but forgot
Just in the very crisis she should not.(St. 193.)

No doubt Byron feels that she is more entitled to our sympathy because she did not manipulate her conscience as Donna Julia had; she did not try to convince herself that her course of conduct was other than what it was. She didn't think at all, in fact, and so as a mirror of humanity is far less interesting than Donna Julia, for whom the reader can feel pity because she was trapped in a loveless marriage. Haidée's case was not at all similar. She had had suitors; while growing to womanhood she had rejected several, as Byron informs us in Stanza 128 — and the field was still wide open. Byron seems to have forgotten these suitors and all they imply, when he writes in Stanza 190:

Haidée spoke not of scruples, asked no vows,
Nor offered any; she had never heard
Of plight and promises to be a spouse,
Or perils by a loving maid incurred;
She was all which pure ignorance allows.

The shipwreck scenes are vivid and unforgettable, with something of the realism of the eighteenth-century novelist Tobias Smollett about them in addition to a seasoning of Byronic irony. Byron's chief source for his materials in this episode was a collection of shipwreck accounts, by men who had been involved in the incidents, edited by Sir J. G. Dalrymple in 1812, entitled *Shipwrecks and Disasters at Sea*, but he used other accounts too, including Captain Bligh's account of the mutiny on the *Bounty*. From these sources he got the cutting away of the masts to right the ship, the effort of the sailors to get at the liquor supply, some of the sailors lashing themselves in their hammocks, the dog, the cannibalism, the choice of a victim by drawing lots, bleeding the victim to give him an easy death, the rain shower, the capture of the sleeping turtle, and other details. A reviewer was quick to point out Byron's indebtedness.

Byron's picture of man in the shipwreck stanzas is one which on the whole is all too true. In such circumstances principle and reason are apt to vanish. What we miss in all this is compassion for poor, miserable mankind, and Byron's occasional facetiousness is out of place and angered the reviewers. Artistically, the cannibalism incident may be a blemish. It is ugly and may have been put in to shock rather than to show how men may behave adrift in a small boat without provisions. To make it plausible Byron should have gone into much greater detail in showing how it came about. Cannibalism among shipwrecked men adrift in a small boat is so rare that the literary use of it demands an adequate background, including sufficient characterization of those who suggest it and commit it. Without this the element of probability is weakened.

The island idyll in Canto II in its realism and detailed description commands the reader's keenest interest. As a realistic presentation of a love affair between two young people whom we see gradually falling in love with each other, there is nothing quite so good as it in English literature before Byron. We are not simply told that Juan and Haidée fall in love with each other. We see the process taking place before our eyes.

Canto III

Explanation

After several stanzas on the subject of love, in which he concludes that love and marriage are incompatible, Byron returns to Haidée and Juan. Her father's long-delayed return makes her more imprudent. Having taken care of all his business, Lambro returns to his island port, which is on the opposite side of the island from his house. When he comes to the top of the hill overlooking his house, he is surprised and annoyed to see that his domestics, instead of being at work, are idling, dancing, and feasting, and that guests are entertaining themselves and being entertained. Having been out of contact with his home for some time, Lambro could not know that a report of his death has come to his island and that he has been mourned for several weeks. The period of mourning over, Haidée and Juan have moved into his home as man and wife, and entertain lavishly. The first fear that enters the mind of the stern Lambro, whom the enslavement of his country has made a formidable enemy of all mankind and for whom Haidée is his sole bond with humanity, is that she has betrayed him. He enters his house unseen by a private door, and there in his main hall sit Juan and Haidée, surrounded by slaves and feasting in the most luxurious surroundings on rare and costly food and drink. Haidée is dressed like a princess and radiantly beautiful. Juan is likewise resplendently dressed.

At the moment they are being entertained by a famous poet, a turncoat who will write verses in praise of any cause, provided he is paid for it. The song that he sings for Haidée and Juan is a lament for Greece's present state of subjection to Turkey and for her lack of patriotic ardor, the famous "The Isles of Greece."

When the song is over Byron digresses on the subject of the wide and lasting effect a poet's words may have and on the transitory nature of human fame. Great deeds owe more to the historian than to the illusion called glory, and the biographer may record acts that little redound to the glory of the one whose life he is writing. At this point Byron devotes three stanzas to excoriating Southey, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, who have abandoned their early liberalism for conservatism. He singles out Wordsworth's *Excursion*, "The Waggoner," and "Peter Bell" for special ridicule. Byron now returns to his story but only to say that Haidée and Juan's evening meal is over and to rhapsodize on the beauty of the twilight which arouses in him a spirit of devotion.

His altars, he says, are the earth, the ocean, the stars, the air. With a paean on the charms of twilight Byron closes Canto III.

Analysis

Of chief interest in Canto III are the descriptions of food, dress, and furnishings and the character of Lambro. Although Byron does not refrain from making Lambro's way of making a living a target of his mockery, he characterizes the freebooter seriously and even makes something of a hero out of him. Lambro is a patriot in his own way; it is his bitterness about the present enslaved state of Greece that makes him an enemy of the world. He has in him the rudiments of ancient Greek culture in his taste for music, architecture, and beauty. His soured patriotism makes him a misanthrope, but he has a genuinely deep and tender love for his only child, Haidée. Thus when he comes back and finds that Haidée has practically forgotten him, the only spark of humaneness in him is extinguished.

Having brought Lambro into his palatial residence, Byron creates suspense by holding off the anticipated reunion of father and daughter by descriptions of clothing and viands, a patriotic interlude, cynical stanzas on the nature of fame, the perfidy and dullness of the Lake poets, the religious atmosphere of twilight, when the Angelus bell strikes — holds it off for fifty stanzas of *ottava rima* plus a lyric of sixteen six-line stanzas. Instead of creating suspense, Byron's digressions may make some readers forget that a story is being told.

Though the canto lacks action, it is far from being uninteresting. The rich descriptions of luxurious living, the characterization of Lambro, the plea for conquered Greece, the amusing attacks on the Lake poets, all make Canto III good, if not exciting, reading.

What may be regarded as a weakness in the canto is that while Byron provides realistic descriptions of things (partly borrowed from books), he makes little attempt to give an adequate account of his setting so far as the inhabitants are concerned: How many there were, what their relations to Lambro were, what contacts they had with other islands, what they thought of Haidée's living openly with the young Spanish stranger who had appeared from nowhere. Byron chooses to ignore all this; what doesn't interest him or what doesn't seem important to him he simply omits. Yet the canto would be a better one if he had included this material; it would bring the poem closer to the realistic novel, which in many ways it parallels. *Don Juan* and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* are related works. The reader could spare at least some of the concluding stanzas with their somewhat ill-natured blows at other poets for more development of the island background of *Don Juan* and Haidée's romance. The long introductory account of the turncoat poet (who is Robert Southey, the poet laureate, whom Byron makes mincemeat of in his "The Vision of Judgment") who sings "The Isles of Greece" could have been shortened, but Byron could not resist the temptation to use an opportunity to keep alive the long-standing feud with Southey.

Canto IV

Explanation

After seven stanzas in which he complains of the difficulty of making a beginning in poetry; confesses that his imagination is weakening; that the sad truth turns what was once romantic to burlesque ("And if I laugh at any mortal thing, / 'Tis that I may not weep" — St. 4); admits that some have accused him of designs against "the creed and morals of the land"; and claims that his only intention is to be merry, Byron reintroduces Haidée and Juan. They were not meant to grow old but were meant to die in happy springtime. Whom the gods love die young. They think not of time's ravages; they find fault only with the way it speeds away from them. Their existence is a perfect one. They are like children, or like a nymph and her beloved, and are not meant to fill a place in a real world. They are perfectly happy.

This particular evening a tremor sweeps over them, they know not why, and a tear appears in Haidée's eye, but she dismisses the omen with a kiss when Juan questions her. Later, while they are taking their siesta, Haidée dreams that she is chained to a rock. Then in her dream she is released and begins to pursue something in a sheet which keeps eluding her. Her dream changes; she is in a cave and at her feet lies Juan lifeless. As she gazes, she thinks his features change into her father's. She awakes with a start and sees her father's eyes fixed on her and Juan. Shrieking, she arises and falls. Juan springs up at her shriek and grabs his saber off the wall. Lambro now speaks for the first time, scornfully commanding Juan to put away his foolish sword, for with a word he can summon a thousand scimitars. Haidée begs her father to spare Juan. Once more Lambro commands Juan to surrender his sword. When Juan refuses, Lambro draws his pistol and cocks it. Haidée then throws herself before Juan and begs her father to shoot her first. Her father replaces his pistol in its holster and blows a whistle. At once twenty of his men appear. With a quick movement Lambro grasps his daughter and pulls her away from before Juan. "Arrest or kill the Frank," he commands his men. The pirates push forward, and though Juan fights valiantly, wounding two of them, he is soon on the ground, bleeding from the arm and head. Lambro then gives his men orders to carry Juan to one of his ships.

When she sees Juan on the floor and bleeding, Haidée collapses in her father's arms and blood flows from her mouth from a vein which has burst. For several days she is in a coma. When she finally regains

consciousness, she recognizes no one. The attendants try rousing her with harp music. The music succeeds in making her weep. She arises and flies at everyone in sight as at a foe. For twelve days she refuses food, clothing, and change of surroundings. On the twelfth day she dies, and with her dies Juan's unborn child, "a fair and sinless child of sin."

When Juan comes to, he finds that he is at sea, and a slave. With him are some fellow captives of an Italian opera company who had been on their way to Sicily and who have been sold into slavery by their impresario. Juan learns that he and his new friends are bound for the slave market in Constantinople.

Byron brings the canto to a close with the buffo's malicious description of the other members of the troupe, some remarks on fame, an appeal to his lady readers not to abandon him, and a brief description of the slave auction.

Analysis

Byron shows narrative skill in holding off his big scene in Canto IV as long as he reasonably can. In his seven introductory stanzas, besides commenting on a number of other matters, he prepares us for, while postponing, his major action, by giving us his opinion that it is better that the happy young should die while they are still young rather than that they should live on until they have lost their happiness and have to endure the miseries of aging. He is giving his readers a hint that Haidée is going to die. He can't, of course, let Don Juan die without bringing his story to an end. Then he uses two technical narrative devices to prepare us for the death of Haidée, namely, a feeling of foreboding and Haidée's ominously significant dream, from which she awakes to see the face of her father before her. Awakening from bad dreams usually brings relief; in Haidée's case consciousness brings her face to face with the father she thought was dead. The nightmare of her dreams becomes the much worse nightmare of actual fact. Her father has risen from the dead, so it seems to her, and knowing him she knows what will happen to Juan and to her happiness.

The effect on her is literally shattering. She has what is obviously a severe hemorrhage. The long postponed confrontation comes in a completely unexpected and dramatically effective way. It has to be admitted that Byron draws out the pathos of Haidée's ending, but he could say in his own defense that death is not ordinarily merciful and quick. In the father-daughter encounter Byron is careful to keep facetiousness to an absolute minimum. His instinct was right in telling him that here jokes were out of place. In the Haidée-Don Juan episode he created one of the great love stories of all time by description, skillful manipulation of action, and tight control of the comic vein that was part of the general design of *Don Juan*. When Byron writes, in ending Haidée's story, that ". . . no dirge, except the hollow sea's / Mourns o'er the Beauty of the Cyclades" (St. 72), the reader is moved not only by the beauty of the words but by the fate of Byron's fictional "beauty of the Cyclades."

Byron again shows his realization of the emotional requirements of good storytelling when he turns almost abruptly from the pathos of Haidée's brief but happy experience of love to a sardonic description of the opera company whose treacherous impresario had sold them as a group into slavery. Island idylls are few and brief, Byron is telling his readers, but misfortune of one kind or another is the common lot of man and may be expected momentarily.

The contrast between Byron's briefly happy pair of lovers and the wretched group of singers and dancers is very effectively made with a minimum of characterization. Byron is very possibly enjoying a little bit of "getting even" for having been subjected to some poor musical performances during his Italian period. The prima donna looks haggard from dissipation. The tenor's wife has a mediocre voice. The dancers eke out their income by prostitution. One of them is a slut, one a spendthrift, and one a poor dancer. Among

the other singers, the tenor's "voice is spoilt by affectation," the bass can only bellow, and the conceited baritone has a "voice of no great compass." Byron satirizes his characterizer by the name he gives him, Raucocanti, "hoarsesong." It is difficult for the reader to feel pity for their fate when the buffo is through with them.

Canto V

Explanation

In the slave market of Constantinople, Don Juan meets Johnson, an Englishman who had been a mercenary in the Russian army and who had been wounded and captured by the Turks. Johnson freely tells Juan about his wife trouble, just as Byron would tell casual visitors about his own marital troubles. Johnson's first wife had died, his second wife had left him, and he had left the third. Juan tells Johnson that his present troubles are related to his having fallen in love.

The pair are bought by a black eunuch who brings them by boat to a palace. There he has Johnson dress as a Turkish gentleman and has Juan put on woman's garb. Juan objects and Baba, the eunuch, threatens. Four slaves then lead Johnson off to dinner, but Juan is commanded to follow Baba to an apartment in which a lady reclines under a canopy. The lady, Gulbeyaz, who is the sultan's fourth wife, dismisses her attendants. Baba tells Juan to kiss the sultana's foot, but Juan refuses. He "could not stoop / To any shoe, unless it shod the Pope" (St. 102). Baba then proposes that Juan kiss her hand, and that he is willing to do. The sultana now dismisses Baba and addresses Juan. "Christian, canst thou love?" Her words bring the thought of Haidée to Juan's mind, and he bursts into tears.

Surprised by his tears, Gulbeyaz lays her hand on his and looks into his eyes but finds no sign of love there. Then she throws herself on Juan's breast, but Juan gently disengages himself. He tells her that he does not love her, that love is only for the free. His rejection of her embrace and his words surprise, humiliate, and anger her, and for a moment she thinks of killing him but instead begins to cry. Juan, who was prepared to die, regrets that he has hurt the beautiful young sultana and begins to "stammer some excuses." At this crucial moment Baba returns to announce that the sultan is coming to visit his favorite wife. The sultana's attendants are summoned, Juan joins them, and the sultan enters. The sultan notices the new lady-in-waiting and remarks that it is a pity that a mere Christian should be so pretty. The compliment draws all eyes to Juan. "There was a general whisper, toss, and wriggle" (St. 156), and the canto comes to an end with a promise by Byron that the sixth canto will "have a touch of the sublime."

Analysis

The fifth canto introduces a number of new characters into the story. Johnson, the English soldier of fortune, is a cheerful stoic and cynic. He believes that life brings only illusion and disappointment. Love, ambition, avarice, vengeance, glory only draw us on to folly. Johnson is, in part, Byron self-portraiture, but he is less prone to melancholy than Byron. He has a good sense of humor and is practical. Byron does not tell us why Baba buys him.

The other chief characters are Baba, the eunuch; Gulbeyaz, one of the sultan's wives, and the most beautiful of the four; and the sultan. Baba is a rather conventional character. He is the chief servant of the pampered Gulbeyaz and carries out her commands with prudence and efficiency. In Canto V he must cater to a whim of the sultana, which is to buy Don Juan, whom she had seen on his way to the slave market and whom she immediately wished to acquire. Byron amusingly makes Baba a proselytizer for Mohammedanism: he suggests to Johnson and Juan that they be circumcised, but he would leave the matter up to them. Johnson

. . . thanking him for this excess
Of goodness, in thus leaving them a voice
In such a trifle, scarcely could express"
Sufficiently" (he said) "his approbation
Of all the customs of this polished nation.
"For his own share — he saw but small objection
To so respectable an ancient rite;
And, after swallowing down a slight refection
For which he owned a present appetite,
He doubted not a few hours of reflection
Would reconcile him to the business quite." (Sts. 70-71)

Juan is not so diplomatic as Johnson:

"Will it?" said Juan, sharply: "Strike me dead,
But they as soon shall circumcise my head!"(St. 71)

The sultan is of no special interest. He is merely an all-powerful Mohammedan potentate with a large harem and a large family who holds other people's lives cheap. Byron characterizes him satirically.

Gulbeyaz is, of course, the character of chief interest in the canto. She is a very special type of woman representing, in the society Byron knew, the wife who because of her means and power could buy herself a lover. Besides wealth and power she also has beauty and youth. She is twenty-six, just three years older than Donna Julia, and like Donna Julia she is love-starved and not disposed to remain so if she can help it. Not having had the experience of having her whims thwarted by anyone less than a sultan, she adopts the wrong approach to Don Juan: she commands him to be her lover. Juan can still be moved to tears by the memory of his lost Haidée, a fact which puts a barrier, at least a temporary one, between him and Gulbeyaz, and he has had no experience in being commanded to love by a queen. Besides, he has his pride. Donna Julia had seduced him, or at any rate encouraged him to seduce her; Haidée had won him from the sea, and she and Juan were on the same footing so far as youth, rank, and freedom to love were concerned; but being bought by a woman and told to love her, even though she is a beautiful young woman, arouses his stubbornness. Gulbeyaz uses the wrong technique, but because of her harem background she knows no other. Juan's proud refusal rouses her anger, and her frustration and shame reduce her to tears. Her tears move Juan to pity and are far more potent to overcome his will (not very strong when it came to women), than her commands. But the situation does not allow very much time. Gulbeyaz must act quickly, and the sultan's coming makes her gambit of no avail. She has loved and lost in a matter of minutes. Byron cleverly teases the reader by leading him to expect another affair and then abruptly shuts off the canto.

In Canto V Byron has moved his hero eastward into an entirely new environment out of which he may spin numerous stanzas and present a mode of life on which he may comment freely. In Canto V Byron is back in the mood with which the poem began, the mood of comic irony.

There is much that is entertaining in the canto. The admission in Stanza 4 of his love for the name of Mary reminds us that at sixteen Byron had fallen in love with Mary Chaworth and perhaps never quite recovered from the affair. The slave market is interestingly presented. The reader welcomes the appearance on the scene of Johnson, the practical acceptor of life as it comes, who tells Juan (when the latter proposes that they knock out Baba and escape) that he is hungry and would like to eat first

The stanzas (33-39) on the murder of a military commandant in Ravenna, which was brought to Byron's attention in the way he describes while he was living in Ravenna, tell us something about Byron's religious problems. The long walk through the sultan's palace; Byron's comments on how huge rooms and huge houses dwarf men; Juan's natural reluctance to don ladies' clothing and his transformation into a girl; the comment of Juan, who has shown no great piety, when told to kiss the sultana's foot that that act of homage was reserved for the pope; the interview between Gulbeyaz and Juan; and Byron's introduction of the sultan into the story, all contribute to make Canto V an interesting and amusing if not an exciting one.

Canto VI

Explanation

Canto VI is a continuation of the story of Juan in the harem. Since there is no bed available for Juan at the moment, the "Mother of the Maids," who is in charge of the harem, decides that "Juanna" will have to share the bed of Dudji, a pretty odalisque of seventeen. In the middle of the night, when all the harem is asleep, Dudji screams so loudly that she awakens all her companions, who hurry to see what is wrong. Dudji, with some embarrassment, explains that she dreamt that she was walking in a wood and came to a tree on which hung a golden apple. After she had tried in vain to get the apple, it fell down of its own accord at her feet. When she picked it up to bite into it, a bee flew out of it and stung her. At this point in her strange dream she awoke with a loud scream. Dudji is extremely apologetic for the disturbance she has caused, and the harem finally settles down to sleep again.

When the sultana awakes the following morning, she sends for Baba to find out what disposition has been made of Juan. Baba tries to keep the truth from her, but her close questioning forces him to confess that Juan has shared the couch of Dudji. When the sultana learns this, she is infuriated and commands Baba to summon the two and to prepare to dispose of them in the usual way: tie them in sacks and drop them into the sea. Baba tries to get her to change her mind, but he soon sees that she is inflexible.

Analysis

Canto VI is considerably less interesting than the preceding cantos. The story element is small, and the random comments on love and women slow down the pace to a crawl. That is not to say that the canto is dull. There is interest of some kind in every stanza that helps to make up for the dearth of narrative material. If the hundreds of stanzas of *Don Juan* may be compared to diamonds, there are none of them that do not have at least one good facet, a thought, a pun, a well expressed phrase or line, or an ingenious rhyme. The reader is entertained by Byron's skill in expressing himself, by what he has to say, and by the cleverness shown in finishing off a stanza with a witticism.

Byron's inventiveness seems to have failed him once he had decided to let Juan spend a night in the harem. His problem was to get him out of the harem and into the war episode he had promised his readers in Canto I, Stanza 200. An attack on war must have been part of his design in bringing Juan to Turkey, which had been at war with its neighbors off and on since the establishment of the Turkish Empire. It was too soon to have Juan involved in a third love affair, and so Byron used the convenient arrival of the sultan to break off his Gulbeyaz-Juan scene just when Juan was on the point of succumbing to the appeal to tears on the part of the sultana.

The dream sequence in Canto VI is innuendo of a not very subtle kind, and Dudji's dream of a golden apple out of which flies a bee that stings her is scarcely absorbing. Byron's Pegasus has slowed down to a walk. His customary cleverness has failed him in this instance, and Dudji's dream, while it may serve to wake up a harem, doesn't capture the reader's interest. It serves Byron's purpose, however, which is to get

Juan out of the seraglio in a plausible way. Had Dudji not screamed, Gulbeyaz would have had no reason for getting rid of Juan. It got Byron off the hook. The question may be raised whether Gulbeyaz, who was in intention unfaithful to her fifty-nine-year-old husband and who had to share him with some fifteen hundred other women, would have condemned Juan to death on the suspicion that he was unfaithful to her when she had no claim on his affections. She had merely bought his person, not his fidelity or loyalty.

The answer to this question may lie in the kind of character and personality Byron gives Gulbeyaz. She is a creature of whims and emotion who makes almost no use of her reason. She bought Juan to satisfy her lust; she condemns him to death to satisfy her craving for vengeance. It might not even occur to such a woman that a live Juan would serve her purposes even though he had fallen under suspicion of philandering.

In Canto VI Byron sacrificed an excellent opportunity to satirize the human phenomenon of polygamy. In *Don Juan* he satirizes any number of human failings, but in the case of the institution of the harem he confines himself to remarking that

Polygamy may well be held in dread,
Not only as a sin, but as a *bore*:
Most wise men with *one* moderate woman wed,
Will scarcely find philosophy for more;
And all (except Mahometans) forbear
To make the nuptial couch a "Bed of Ware." (St. 12)

Instead of satirizing he sentimentalizes over his vision of fifteen hundred imprisoned beauties longing for love. (In Canto V the number is a thousand; in Canto VI Byron raised it to fifteen hundred.)

Canto VII

Explanation

Canto VII, one of the shortest in *Don Juan*, is primarily an introduction to Canto VIII, in which Byron describes the Battle of Ismail. In the first seven stanzas Byron defends himself against those critics of *Don Juan* who accuse the poet of "A tendency to under-rate and scoff / At human power and virtue . . ." (St. 3). In holding up the nothingness of life he only does what writers like Solomon, Dante, Swift, and others have done. He laughs at all things, for all things are merely a show. He will now tell his readers about the siege of Ismail.

Ismail is a Turkish fortress at the mouth of the Danube, defensible against attack by land but not by water. The Russians arrive by water, set up their artillery on an islet in the Danube and begin firing on the city. When their cannonading does not bring about the surrender of the city, the commander of the Russian flotilla decides to withdraw. At this point a courier arrives with the news that Marshal Suvaroff (Suwarrow) has been put in command of the Russian troops.

The arrival of Marshal Suvaroff raises the spirits of the discouraged Russians. He immediately begins preparations for a fresh assault. He even teaches the raw recruits how to use the bayonet. He is everywhere, "Surveying, drilling, ordering, jesting, pondering" (St. 55).

In the midst of his preparations, some Cossack soldiers bring before him a group dressed in Turkish clothing. They are Don Juan, Johnson, a eunuch, and two women. Suvaroff knows Johnson by reputation

and commands him to report to his old regiment Juan is to serve with the marshal, and the women are sent to the baggage wagons. Meanwhile the work of preparation for an attack the following day goes on.

Analysis

The general background of Canto VII is one of the several wars waged between Russia and Turkey. During this war Catherine the Great was czarina of Russia. The immediate background is the siege and capture of a Turkish stronghold on the Danube, now part of Rumania, by one of Catherine's generals, Aleksandr Vasilievich Suvorov, in 1790. The details of the siege of Ismail Byron found in a French work, *An Essay on the Ancient and Modern History of New Russia*, by the Marquis Gabriel de Castelnau, as he acknowledged in the Preface to Cantos VI, VII, and VIII, which were published as one volume. The war ended with the defeat of the Turks by Russia.

The freshness of a new subject in *Don Juan* and Byron's strong feelings about war make Cantos VII and VIII two of the most absorbing and liveliest books in the poem. The most interesting character in Canto VII is, of course, General Suvorov, or Suwarrow, as Byron calls him, the Russian general whose chief achievements were his part in defeating the French Revolutionary armies in 1799 in northern Italy. Byron shows good narrative technique in introducing him dramatically in Stanza 43 just when the Russians, who had bungled the attack on Ismail, are about to retreat. The sixty-year-old general by word and example restores the sagging morale of the Russian troops. While Byron seems to admire the spirit and efficiency of Suvorov, he by no means idealizes him. He is "the greatest Chief / That ever peopled Hell with heroes slain, / Or plunged a province or a realm in grief" (St. 68). Suvorov is a professional soldier who cares little for human lives or women's tears. His business is leading armies, winning victories, and gaining glory. It makes little difference to him who the enemy is or whose blood is shed. Freedom means nothing to him.

Byron brings Don Juan back into the story in a similarly dramatic way in the middle of the canto on the day before Suwarrow is to make his attack on Ismail. With him are Johnson, a eunuch, and two women. Byron does not bother telling the reader how Johnson and Don Juan got together again, nor how the party of five escaped from the harem. Nor does he identify the three companions of Juan and Johnson. The eunuch, however, is probably Baba, and one of the women may be Dudu. The other may be Lolah or Katinka, who might have offended the sultana by asking the Mother of the Maids to let Juanna share their beds (Canto VI, Sts. 47-49). Here once more Byron is teasing the reader and leaving him to his own devices. The eunuch and the two women are introduced into Canto VII and we never hear of them again.

Byron's sympathies in the canto are neither with the Russians, who are as interested in material gain as in defeating the infidel, nor with the Turks, but with those who are to be killed or wounded in the attack, and his scorn is for all who confuse glory and bloodshed. He is, he feels, presenting truth, an unwelcome and unpleasant commodity generally — when it concerns man's behavior. In all this he has time to play with the difficulty of pronouncing and spelling Russian names and to ridicule the blunders of Turks and Russians alike, to comment on the accidental nature of fame, man's bloodthirstiness, and to defend himself against his critics.

The last two stanzas, which soberly anticipate the slaughter of the morrow, make a very effective conclusion to the canto, and the line with which he ends, "The death-cry drowning in the Battle's roar" strike the keynote of Canto VIII.

Canto VIII

Explanation

The storming of Ismail begins with a Russian artillery barrage, which is soon answered from within the fortress. The Russian columns are ordered to attack and the slaughter commences. Instead of attempting to describe the battle in detail, Byron concentrates on the fortunes of Juan and Johnson, who are fighting in the same unit. They begin their march forward "dead bodies trampling o'erl Firing, and thrusting, slashing, sweating, glowing," wallowing "in the bloody mire / Of dead and dying thousands" (St. 19), sometimes gaining ground, sometimes being forced to yield ground. Byron's excuse for Juan's part in the attack is that he is a creature of impulse and is fascinated by the honor to be gained in battle.

By chance Juan becomes separated from his unit As he rushes along he finds himself in General Lascy's second column. Johnson, who had "retreated," makes a reappearance. Favored by accident and blunder they and their companions find themselves inside the walls of Ismail and Juan is commended by General Lascy himself. In spite of fierce resistance from the Turks, the Russian forces advance and succeed in closing in on the Turkish commander-in-chief, to whom they offer quarter. He refuses and is killed. The whole city is then captured but only part by part, for the Turks refuse to surrender:

The bayonet pierces and the sabre cleaves,
And human lives are lavished everywhere,
As the year closing whirls the scarlet leaves
When the stripped forest bows to the bleak air,
And groans, and thus the peopled city grieves,
Shorn of its best and loveliest, and left bare;
But still it falls in vast and awful splinters,
As oaks blown down with all their thousand winters. (St. 88)

Juan shows his humanity by saving the life of a Turkish girl of ten trying to hide in a pile of slaughtered women. Two Cossacks are about to put her to the sword when Juan arrives and by slashing the hip of one and the shoulder of the other saves the wounded little girl. When Juan insists that he will advance no farther until he has put the girl in a place of safety, Johnson commands a number of his followers to guard the girl.

Among the last of the Turks to yield are a Tartar Khan and his five sons. He rejects an opportunity to surrender and sees his sons killed one by one before his eyes. Even then he will not yield and joins his sons in death.

When the whole of the city is under the control of the Russians, crimes of every description are committed:

All that the mind would shrink from of excesses —
All that the body perpetrates of bad;
All that we read-hear-dream, of man's distresses —
All that the Devil would do if run stark mad;
All that defies the worst which pen expresses, —
All by which Hell is peopled, or as sad
As Hell — mere mortals, who their power abuse —
Was here (as heretofore and since) let loose. (St. 123)

After the battle Suwarrow pens a message for Queen Catherine: "Glory to *God* and to the Empress! . . . Ismail's ours" (St. 133).

Analysis

In his attack on war and its false glory through his account of the capture of Ismail, Byron's general method is to stress the bloodshed and loss of life involved. The soldiers have to march over the bodies of the dead and wounded in order to advance; they must wallow "in the bloody mire / Of dead and dying thousands" (St. 20). The Russians "fell as thick as harvests beneath hail, / Grass before scythes, or corn before the sickle" (St. 43). They slide "knee-deep in lately frozen mud, / Now thawed into a marsh of human blood" (St. 73). "The city's taken — only part by part — / And Death is drunk with gore" (St. 82). "Upon a taken bastion, where they lay / Thousands of slaughtered men, a yet warm group / Of murdered women . . ." (St. 91) may be seen. ". . . the glow / Of burning streets like moonlight on the water, / Was imaged back in blood, the sea of slaughter" (St. 122).

In addition to showing the horrors of war, Byron subjects war to a continuous blistering attack of satirical comment. The combination of the two methods is calculated to make the reader strongly anti-war. War is hell, says Byron. Here he becomes involved in a dilemma, because he defends wars of liberation, wars in defense of freedom. (Sts. 4-5) If war is hell, there can be no exception for in wars in defense of liberty as much blood may be spilled as in wars of aggression. The dilemma is inescapable when war is condemned by showing its horrors. The battles fought by Leonidas and Washington (St. 5) can result in as much bloodshed as battles fought by tyrants.

Even though Byron does not escape from the dilemma in which his vividly concrete and hyperbolic method of condemning war involves him, he shows that war is not all horror by having Don Juan save the life of a ten-year-old Turkish girl by the somewhat incongruous method of wounding two of his allies in the process. Furthermore, quarter is offered to the enemy by the Russians on more than one occasion.

Byron, on the whole, is sympathetic toward his very human and imperfect hero, Don Juan. Why then does he allow Juan to commit the major crime of enthusiastically waging war against the inhabitants of a city that had done him no injury? Byron does not excuse him; he makes sarcastic comments on his behavior in Stanzas 24 and 25, calling his valor "a thing of impulse." It might be added that Juan as killer is a victim of the plot of *Don Juan*, in which, among many other things, Byron wants to attack war — specifically, aggressive war.

Byron himself becomes a victim of the "noble savage" legend of the eighteenth century in Stanzas 61-67 of Canto VIII. In these stanzas he digresses to deliver a panegyric on Daniel Boone, whose fame had come to his ears. Daniel, he says, was the happiest of mortals who, killing nothing but a buck or bear spent "the lonely, vigorous, harmless days / Of his old age in wilds of deepest maze" (St. 61). Byron says nothing or knows nothing of the number of Indians that Boone had killed in his time. To Byron, Boone was not the only one of his kind, for around him grew up a race of tall, strong, cheerful, incorrupt people of the woods. But the poet does not mention that Boone and his followers took, by force, the place of another incorrupt people of the woods. He ignores this fact, and boldly asserts that these kindly folk are the product of Nature. What goes on at Ismail is the product of Civilization. (St. 68).

Canto IX

Explanation

The first ten stanzas are an attack on Wellington, who has won the Battle of Waterloo and has been richly rewarded by England for his victory. He should not have accepted the gifts his country lavished on him, Byron thinks; he should have been satisfied with thanks, like Epaminondas, who saved Thebes, and Washington, who freed his country. He could have freed Europe from the tyrannical kings who rule her and he did not. "Never had mortal man such opportunity, Except Napoleon, or abused it more" (St. 9).

Returning to the narration, we find that Don Juan has been chosen by Suwarrow to carry the news of the capture of Ismail to the Empress Catherine in Petersburg. As he kneels before the queen with his dispatch, his youthful good looks make such an impression on her that for some moments she forgets to break the seal. She falls in love with him even as she gazes on him. Then she opens the dispatch and "great joy is hers."

The attention of the whole court is drawn to Juan when they see that he has won the favor of the empress. Catherine's love for Juan is returned. Although she is much older than he is, "he was of that delighted age / Which makes all female ages equal" (St. 69).

Analysis

The attack on England's military savior, prompted by Byron's subject matter in Canto VIII, seems both strange as well as intemperate and ungrateful. Byron was a Whig, a liberal, and Wellington was a Tory. His feeling toward Wellington was rooted in politics, but went beyond mere party differences. Wellington had thrown his great influence on the side of the *status quo* and reaction, and for Byron that meant an alliance with tyranny, an attack on freedom.

The attack on a man who had saved his country from defeat by Napoleon, no matter what else, he may or may not have done, shows a pettiness and lack of sense of propriety on Byron's part. Byron is altogether too eager to show that he is not a flatterer (St. 5), but there is genuine indignation present too.

Canto IX is more of a patchwork than any previous canto and contains less narrative. From Wellington Byron turns to the subject of death, which laughs at man, and to the impossibility of arriving at certitude about life. He turns to the subject of his politics: He wishes men to be free of any kind of tyranny, of mobs as well as of kings. And so he rambles on, as he says (St. 42) "now and then narrating, / Now pondering . . ." There is not much narrating, but Juan finally arrives in Petersburg, the capital of Russia, with his ten-year-old Turkish orphan. Juan is himself about seventeen or eighteen.

Byron makes Catherine the Great seem much younger than she was. He speaks of "Her prime of life, just now in juicy vigour" (St. 72). In 1790, when Ismail was taken, Catherine, born in 1729, would be sixty-one and hardly in the prime of life; she died in 1796. Byron has to make her seem much younger than she is in order to make Juan one of her succession of lovers. Juan had, after all, refused a beautiful sultana of twenty six. Byron knows how old Catherine really is, as he shows in Canto VIII, Stanza 88.

Byron, who is interested in Catherine mainly for Juan's sake, completely fails to do justice to her powerful personality, will, and intellect. If he had done as much for Catherine as he had for Marshal Suvorov, Canto IX would be much more interesting than it is.

Canto X

Explanation

In Russia Juan becomes a polished Russian courtier and in the process also becomes a little dissipated. He lives "in a hurry / Of waste, and haste, and glare, and gloss, and glitter" (St. 26). He writes to relatives in Spain about his present circumstances. They answer promptly, impressed by his good fortune. A number of them prepare to emigrate to Russia. His mother writes that she has remarried and Juan now has a baby brother. She gives him a lot of good advice on how to conduct himself in Russia.

Life in Russia, however, does not continue to agree with Juan. He falls sick. The physicians, unable to determine the exact cause of his illness, recommend a change of climate. It happens that at the time the Empress Catherine is involved in negotiations with the English and decides that Juan will handle them. With his ward Leila and an entourage of valets and secretaries, he sets out across Europe, passing through Poland, Germany, and Holland. Eventually the party arrives in London.

Their arrival in England is an invitation to Byron to make some scathing remarks about his native land, whose sons have "butchered half the earth, and bullied t'other" (St. 81). He ends the canto with a promise of telling his fellow countrymen some unpleasant truths about themselves which, he says, they will not believe.

Analysis

Canto X is as devoid of narrative or incident as Canto IX, nor does Byron make up for dearth of incident by introducing an interesting character, as he had done in Canto VII in the person of General Suvorov. There is, however, an abundance of lively comment on a multitude of matters, and in Stanza 41 Byron performs a tour de force in turning a prescription with all its medical Latin and symbols into rhyme, a paraphrase of which can be found in the fourth volume of the Steffan-Pratt variorum edition of *Don Juan*.

England was hardly the country for a man who falls ill because of the rigors of the Russian climate. Spain would have been much better, but Byron had obviously decided that he was going to use Don Juan to satirize the country and the class that had ostracized him. Byron devotes the last six cantos of his poem to this task. Possibly it was for this reason that Byron carried Don Juan to Russia, which Byron had never visited. His own travels had brought him only as far as Turkey, Russia's neighbor. In addition to enabling him to introduce Catherine the Great, one of the most colorful figures of the eighteenth century, into his poem, it enabled him to spin out some stanzas on courts and courtiers, which in his mind were synonymous with depravity, waste, venality, and every form of corruption. Putting Don Juan in a court atmosphere, moreover, helped to prepare him for living in high aristocratic circles in England. The Russian court helped to mature Juan, gave him poise and knowledge of the ways of the upper-class world. Juan arrived in Russia a boy and left it as a self-assured young man. Juan had also arrived at Ismail penniless, and if Byron at this time planned to send him to England to circulate in high society, he had to have money. So he sent him to the generous Catherine, who gave him a fortune. He came to England "rich in rubles, diamonds, cash, and credit" (St. 70). A Don Juan without wealth would have been a figure of very limited interest and influence in the fashionable society of England where there was no Catherine to make him her favorite. No aristocrat knew the value of money better than Byron, who was always having trouble with it.

Canto XI

CANTO THE ELEVENTH

When Bishop Berkeley said 'there was no matter,'
And proved it—'t was no matter what he said:
They say his system 't is in vain to batter,
Too subtle for the airiest human head;
And yet who can believe it? I would shatter
Gladly all matters down to stone or lead,
Or adamant, to find the world a spirit,

And wear my head, denying that I wear it.

What a sublime discovery 't was to make the
Universe universal egotism,
That all 's ideal—all ourselves: I 'll stake the
World (be it what you will) that that 's no schism.
O Doubt!—if thou be'st Doubt, for which some take thee;
But which I doubt extremely—thou sole prism
Of the Truth's rays, spoil not my draught of spirit!
Heaven's brandy, though our brain can hardly bear it.

For ever and anon comes Indigestion,
(Not the most 'dainty Ariel') and perplexes
Our soarings with another sort of question:
And that which after all my spirit vexes,
Is, that I find no spot where man can rest eye on,
Without confusion of the sorts and sexes,
Of beings, stars, and this unriddled wonder,
The world, which at the worst 's a glorious blunder—

If it be chance; or if it be according
To the old text, still better:—lest it should
Turn out so, we 'll say nothing 'gainst the wording,
As several people think such hazards rude.
They 're right; our days are too brief for affording
Space to dispute what no one ever could
Decide, and every body one day will
Know very clearly—or at least lie still.

And therefore will I leave off metaphysical
Discussion, which is neither here nor there:
If I agree that what is, is; then this I call
Being quite perspicuous and extremely fair;
The truth is, I 've grown lately rather phthisical:
I don't know what the reason is—the air
Perhaps; but as I suffer from the shocks
Of illness, I grow much more orthodox.

The first attack at once proved the Divinity
(But that I never doubted, nor the Devil);
The next, the Virgin's mystical virginity;
The third, the usual Origin of Evil;
The fourth at once establish'd the whole Trinity
On so uncontrovertible a level,
That I devoutly wish'd the three were four,
On purpose to believe so much the more.

To our Theme.—The man who has stood on the Acropolis,
And look'd down over Attica; or he

Who has sail'd where picturesque Constantinople is,
Or seen Timbuctoo, or hath taken tea
In small-eyed China's crockery-ware metropolis,
Or sat amidst the bricks of Nineveh,
May not think much of London's first appearance—
But ask him what he thinks of it a year hence?

Don Juan had got out on Shooter's Hill;
Sunset the time, the place the same declivity
Which looks along that vale of good and ill
Where London streets ferment in full activity;
While every thing around was calm and still,
Except the creak of wheels, which on their pivot he
Heard,—and that bee-like, bubbling, busy hum
Of cities, that boil over with their scum:—

I say, Don Juan, wrapt in contemplation,
Walk'd on behind his carriage, o'er the summit,
And lost in wonder of so great a nation,
Gave way to 't, since he could not overcome it.
'And here,' he cried, 'is Freedom's chosen station;
Here peals the people's voice, nor can entomb it
Racks, prisons, inquisitions; resurrection
Awaits it, each new meeting or election.

'Here are chaste wives, pure lives; here people pay
But what they please; and if that things be dear,
'T is only that they love to throw away
Their cash, to show how much they have a-year.
Here laws are all inviolate; none lay
Traps for the traveller; every highway 's clear:
Here-' he was interrupted by a knife,
With,—'Damn your eyes! your money or your life!'

These freeborn sounds proceeded from four pads
In ambush laid, who had perceived him loiter
Behind his carriage; and, like handy lads,
Had seized the lucky hour to reconnoitre,
In which the heedless gentleman who gads
Upon the road, unless he prove a fighter,
May find himself within that isle of riches
Exposed to lose his life as well as breeches.

Juan, who did not understand a word
Of English, save their shibboleth, 'God damn!'
And even that he had so rarely heard,
He sometimes thought 't was only their 'Salam,'
Or 'God be with you!'—and 't is not absurd
To think so: for half English as I am

(To my misfortune), never can I say
I heard them wish 'God with you,' save that way;—

Juan yet quickly understood their gesture,
And being somewhat choleric and sudden,
Drew forth a pocket pistol from his vesture,
And fired it into one assailant's pudding—
Who fell, as rolls an ox o'er in his pasture,
And roar'd out, as he writhed his native mud in,
Unto his nearest follower or henchman,
'Oh Jack! I 'm floor'd by that 'ere bloody Frenchman!'

On which Jack and his train set off at speed,
And Juan's suite, late scatter'd at a distance,
Came up, all marvelling at such a deed,
And offering, as usual, late assistance.
Juan, who saw the moon's late minion bleed
As if his veins would pour out his existence,
Stood calling out for bandages and lint,
And wish'd he had been less hasty with his flint.

'Perhaps,' thought he, 'it is the country's wont
To welcome foreigners in this way: now
I recollect some innkeepers who don't
Differ, except in robbing with a bow,
In lieu of a bare blade and brazen front.
But what is to be done? I can't allow
The fellow to lie groaning on the road:
So take him up; I 'll help you with the load.'

But ere they could perform this pious duty,
The dying man cried, 'Hold! I 've got my gruel!
O for a glass of max! We 've miss'd our booty;
Let me die where I am!' And as the fuel
Of life shrunk in his heart, and thick and sooty
The drops fell from his death-wound, and he drew ill
His breath,—he from his swelling throat untied
A kerchief, crying, 'Give Sal that!'—and died.

The cravat stain'd with bloody drops fell down
Before Don Juan's feet: he could not tell
Exactly why it was before him thrown,
Nor what the meaning of the man's farewell.
Poor Tom was once a kiddy upon town,
A thorough varmint, and a real swell,
Full flash, all fancy, until fairly diddled,
His pockets first and then his body riddled.

Don Juan, having done the best he could

In all the circumstances of the case,
As soon as 'Crown's quest' allow'd, pursued
His travels to the capital apace;—
Esteeming it a little hard he should
In twelve hours' time, and very little space,
Have been obliged to slay a freeborn native
In self-defence: this made him meditative.

He from the world had cut off a great man,
Who in his time had made heroic bustle.
Who in a row like Tom could lead the van,
Booze in the ken, or at the spellken hustle?
Who queer a flat? Who (spite of Bow Street's ban)
On the high toby-spice so flash the muzzle?
Who on a lark, with black-eyed Sal (his blowing),
So prime, so swell, so nutty, and so knowing?

But Tom's no more—and so no more of Tom.
Heroes must die; and by God's blessing 't is
Not long before the most of them go home.
Hail! Thamis, Hail! Upon thy verge it is
That Juan's chariot, rolling like a drum
In thunder, holds the way it can't well miss,
Through Kennington and all the other 'tons,'
Which makes us wish ourselves in town at once;—

Through Groves, so call'd as being void of trees
(Like lucus from no light); through prospects named
Mount Pleasant, as containing nought to please,
Nor much to climb; through little boxes framed
Of bricks, to let the dust in at your ease,
With 'To be let' upon their doors proclaim'd;
Through 'Rows' most modestly call'd 'Paradise,'
Which Eve might quit without much sacrifice;—

Through coaches, drays, choked turnpikes, and a whirl
Of wheels, and roar of voices, and confusion;
Here taverns wooing to a pint of 'purl,'
There mails fast flying off like a delusion;
There barbers' blocks with periwigs in curl
In windows; here the lamplighter's infusion
Slowly distill'd into the glimmering glass
(For in those days we had not got to gas);—

Through this, and much, and more, is the approach
Of travellers to mighty Babylon:
Whether they come by horse, or chaise, or coach,
With slight exceptions, all the ways seem one.
I could say more, but do not choose to encroach

Upon the Guide-book's privilege. The sun
Had set some time, and night was on the ridge
Of twilight, as the party cross'd the bridge,—

That 's rather fine. The gentle sound of Thamis—
Who vindicates a moment, too, his stream,
Though hardly heard through multifarious 'damme's'-
The lamps of Westminster's more regular gleam,
The breadth of pavement, and yon shrine where fame is
A spectral resident—whose pallid beam
In shape of moonshine hovers o'er the pile—
Make this a sacred part of Albion's isle.

The Druids' groves are gone—so much the better:
Stone-Henge is not—but what the devil is it?—
But Bedlam still exists with its sage fetter,
That madmen may not bite you on a visit;
The Bench too seats or suits full many a debtor;
The Mansion House too (though some people quiz it)
To me appears a stiff yet grand erection;
But then the Abbey 's worth the whole collection.

The line of lights, too, up to Charing Cross,
Pall Mall, and so forth, have a coruscation
Like gold as in comparison to dross,
Match'd with the Continent's illumination,
Whose cities Night by no means deigns to gloss.
The French were not yet a lamp-lighting nation,
And when they grew so—on their new-found lantern,
Instead of wicks, they made a wicked man turn.

A row of gentlemen along the streets
Suspended may illuminate mankind,
As also bonfires made of country seats;
But the old way is best for the purblind:
The other looks like phosphorus on sheets,
A sort of ignis fatuus to the mind,
Which, though 't is certain to perplex and frighten,
Must burn more mildly ere it can enlighten.

But London 's so well lit, that if Diogenes
Could recommence to hunt his honest man,
And found him not amidst the various progenies
Of this enormous city's spreading span,
'T were not for want of lamps to aid his dodging his
Yet undiscover'd treasure. What I can,
I 've done to find the same throughout life's journey,
But see the world is only one attorney.

Over the stones still rattling up Pall Mall,
Through crowds and carriages, but waxing thinner
As thunder'd knockers broke the long seal'd spell
Of doors 'gainst duns, and to an early dinner
Admitted a small party as night fell,—
Don Juan, our young diplomatic sinner,
Pursued his path, and drove past some hotels,
St. James's Palace and St. James's 'Hells.'

They reach'd the hotel: forth stream'd from the front door
A tide of well-clad waiters, and around
The mob stood, and as usual several score
Of those pedestrian Paphians who abound
In decent London when the daylight 's o'er;
Commodious but immoral, they are found
Useful, like Malthus, in promoting marriage.-
But Juan now is stepping from his carriage

Into one of the sweetest of hotels,
Especially for foreigners—and mostly
For those whom favour or whom fortune swells,
And cannot find a bill's small items costly.
There many an envoy either dwelt or dwells
(The den of many a diplomatic lost lie),
Until to some conspicuous square they pass,
And blazon o'er the door their names in brass.

Juan, whose was a delicate commission,
Private, though publicly important, bore
No title to point out with due precision
The exact affair on which he was sent o'er.
'T was merely known, that on a secret mission
A foreigner of rank had graced our shore,
Young, handsome, and accomplish'd, who was said
(In whispers) to have turn'd his sovereign's head.

Some rumour also of some strange adventures
Had gone before him, and his wars and loves;
And as romantic heads are pretty painters,
And, above all, an Englishwoman's roves
Into the excursive, breaking the indentures
Of sober reason wheresoe'er it moves,
He found himself extremely in the fashion,
Which serves our thinking people for a passion.

I don't mean that they are passionless, but quite
The contrary; but then 't is in the head;
Yet as the consequences are as bright
As if they acted with the heart instead,

What after all can signify the site
Of ladies' lucubrations? So they lead
In safety to the place for which you start,
What matters if the road be head or heart?

Juan presented in the proper place,
To proper placemen, every Russ credential;
And was received with all the due grimace
By those who govern in the mood potential,
Who, seeing a handsome stripling with smooth face,
Thought (what in state affairs is most essential)
That they as easily might do the youngster,
As hawks may pounce upon a woodland songster.

They err'd, as aged men will do; but by
And by we 'll talk of that; and if we don't,
'T will be because our notion is not high
Of politicians and their double front,
Who live by lies, yet dare not boldly lie:—
Now what I love in women is, they won't
Or can't do otherwise than lie, but do it
So well, the very truth seems falsehood to it.

And, after all, what is a lie? 'T is but
The truth in masquerade; and I defy
Historians, heroes, lawyers, priests, to put
A fact without some leaven of a lie.
The very shadow of true Truth would shut
Up annals, revelations, poesy,
And prophecy—except it should be dated
Some years before the incidents related.

Praised be all liars and all lies! Who now
Can tax my mild Muse with misanthropy?
She rings the world's 'Te Deum,' and her brow
Blushes for those who will not:—but to sigh
Is idle; let us like most others bow,
Kiss hands, feet, any part of majesty,
After the good example of 'Green Erin,'
Whose shamrock now seems rather worse for wearing.

Don Juan was presented, and his dress
And mien excited general admiration—
I don't know which was more admired or less:
One monstrous diamond drew much observation,
Which Catherine in a moment of 'ivresse'
(In love or brandy's fervent fermentation)
Bestow'd upon him, as the public learn'd;
And, to say truth, it had been fairly earn'd.

Besides the ministers and underlings,
Who must be courteous to the accredited
Diplomatists of rather wavering kings,
Until their royal riddle 's fully read,
The very clerks,—those somewhat dirty springs
Of office, or the house of office, fed
By foul corruption into streams,—even they
Were hardly rude enough to earn their pay:

And insolence no doubt is what they are
Employ'd for, since it is their daily labour,
In the dear offices of peace or war;
And should you doubt, pray ask of your next neighbour,
When for a passport, or some other bar
To freedom, he applied (a grief and a bore),
If he found not his spawn of taxborn riches,

But Juan was received with much 'empressement':-
These phrases of refinement I must borrow
From our next neighbours' land, where, like a chessman,
There is a move set down for joy or sorrow
Not only in mere talking, but the press. Man
In islands is, it seems, downright and thorough,
More than on continents—as if the sea
(See Billingsgate) made even the tongue more free.

And yet the British 'Damme' 's rather Attic:
Your continental oaths are but incontinent,
And turn on things which no aristocratic
Spirit would name, and therefore even I won't anent
This subject quote; as it would be schismatic
In politesse, and have a sound affronting in 't:—
But 'Damme' 's quite ethereal, though too daring—
Platonic blasphemy, the soul of swearing.

For downright rudeness, ye may stay at home;
For true or false politeness (and scarce that
Now) you may cross the blue deep and white foam—
The first the emblem (rarely though) of what
You leave behind, the next of much you come
To meet. However, 't is no time to chat
On general topics: poems must confine
Themselves to unity, like this of mine.

In the great world,—which, being interpreted,
Meaneth the west or worst end of a city,
And about twice two thousand people bred
By no means to be very wise or witty,

But to sit up while others lie in bed,
And look down on the universe with pity,—
Juan, as an inveterate patrician,
Was well received by persons of condition.

He was a bachelor, which is a matter
Of import both to virgin and to bride,
The former's hymeneal hopes to flatter;
And (should she not hold fast by love or pride)
'T is also of some moment to the latter:
A rib 's a thorn in a wed gallant's side,
Requires decorum, and is apt to double
The horrid sin—and what 's still worse, the trouble.

But Juan was a bachelor—of arts,
And parts, and hearts: he danced and sung, and had
An air as sentimental as Mozart's
Softest of melodies; and could be sad
Or cheerful, without any 'flaws or starts,'
Just at the proper time; and though a lad,
Had seen the world—which is a curious sight,
And very much unlike what people write.

Fair virgins blush'd upon him; wedded dames
Bloom'd also in less transitory hues;
For both commodities dwell by the Thames,
The painting and the painted; youth, ceruse,
Against his heart preferr'd their usual claims,
Such as no gentleman can quite refuse:
Daughters admired his dress, and pious mothers
Inquired his income, and if he had brothers.

The milliners who furnish 'drapery Misses'
Throughout the season, upon speculation
Of payment ere the honey-moon's last kisses
Have waned into a crescent's coruscation,
Thought such an opportunity as this is,
Of a rich foreigner's initiation,
Not to be overlook'd—and gave such credit,
That future bridegrooms swore, and sigh'd, and paid it.

The Blues, that tender tribe who sigh o'er sonnets,
And with the pages of the last Review
Line the interior of their heads or bonnets,
Advanced in all their azure's highest hue:
They talk'd bad French or Spanish, and upon its
Late authors ask'd him for a hint or two;
And which was softest, Russian or Castilian?
And whether in his travels he saw Ilion?

Juan, who was a little superficial,
And not in literature a great Drawcansir,
Examined by this learned and especial
Jury of matrons, scarce knew what to answer:
His duties warlike, loving or official,
His steady application as a dancer,
Had kept him from the brink of Hippocrene,
Which now he found was blue instead of green.

However, he replied at hazard, with
A modest confidence and calm assurance,
Which lent his learned lucubrations pith,
And pass'd for arguments of good endurance.
That prodigy, Miss Araminta Smith
(Who at sixteen translated 'Hercules Furens'
Into as furious English), with her best look,
Set down his sayings in her common-place book.

Juan knew several languages—as well
He might—and brought them up with skill, in time
To save his fame with each accomplish'd belle,
Who still regretted that he did not rhyme.
There wanted but this requisite to swell
His qualities (with them) into sublime:
Lady Fitz-Frisky, and Miss Maevia Mannish,
Both long'd extremely to be sung in Spanish.

However, he did pretty well, and was
Admitted as an aspirant to all
The coteries, and, as in Banquo's glass,
At great assemblies or in parties small,
He saw ten thousand living authors pass,
That being about their average numeral;
Also the eighty 'greatest living poets,'
As every paltry magazine can show its.

In twice five years the 'greatest living poet,'
Like to the champion in the fisty ring,
Is call'd on to support his claim, or show it,
Although 't is an imaginary thing.
Even I—albeit I 'm sure I did not know it,
Nor sought of foolscap subjects to be king—
Was reckon'd a considerable time,
The grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme.

But Juan was my Moscow, and Faliero
My Leipsic, and my Mount Saint Jean seems Cain:
'La Belle Alliance' of dunces down at zero,

Now that the Lion 's fall'n, may rise again:
But I will fall at least as fell my hero;
Nor reign at all, or as a monarch reign;
Or to some lonely isle of gaolers go,
With turncoat Southey for my turnkey Lowe.

Sir Walter reign'd before me; Moore and Campbell
Before and after; but now grown more holy,
The Muses upon Sion's hill must ramble
With poets almost clergymen, or wholly;
And Pegasus hath a psalmodic amble
Beneath the very Reverend Rowley Powley,
Who shoes the glorious animal with stilts,
A modern Ancient Pistol—by the hilts?

Then there 's my gentle Euphues, who, they say,
Sets up for being a sort of moral me;
He 'll find it rather difficult some day
To turn out both, or either, it may be.
Some persons think that Coleridge hath the sway;
And Wordsworth has supporters, two or three;
And that deep-mouth'd Boeotian 'Savage Landor'
Has taken for a swan rogue Southey's gander.

John Keats, who was kill'd off by one critique,
Just as he really promised something great,
If not intelligible, without Greek
Contrived to talk about the gods of late,
Much as they might have been supposed to speak.
Poor fellow! His was an untoward fate;
'T is strange the mind, that very fiery particle,
Should let itself be snuff'd out by an article.

The list grows long of live and dead pretenders
To that which none will gain—or none will know
The conqueror at least; who, ere Time renders
His last award, will have the long grass grow
Above his burnt-out brain, and sapless cinders.
If I might augur, I should rate but low
Their chances; they 're too numerous, like the thirty
Mock tyrants, when Rome's annals wax'd but dirty.

This is the literary lower empire,
Where the praetorian bands take up the matter;—
A 'dreadful trade,' like his who 'gathers samphire,'
The insolent soldiery to soothe and flatter,
With the same feelings as you 'd coax a vampire.
Now, were I once at home, and in good satire,
I 'd try conclusions with those Janizaries,

And show them what an intellectual war is.

I think I know a trick or two, would turn
Their flanks;—but it is hardly worth my while
With such small gear to give myself concern:
Indeed I 've not the necessary bile;
My natural temper 's really aught but stern,
And even my Muse's worst reproof 's a smile;
And then she drops a brief and modern curtsy,
And glides away, assured she never hurts ye.

My Juan, whom I left in deadly peril
Amongst live poets and blue ladies, past
With some small profit through that field so sterile,
Being tired in time, and, neither least nor last,
Left it before he had been treated very ill;
And henceforth found himself more gaily class'd
Amongst the higher spirits of the day,
The sun's true son, no vapour, but a ray.

His morns he pass'd in business—which, dissected,
Was like all business a laborious nothing
That leads to lassitude, the most infected
And Centaur Nessus garb of mortal clothing,
And on our sofas makes us lie dejected,
And talk in tender horrors of our loathing
All kinds of toil, save for our country's good—
Which grows no better, though 't is time it should.

His afternoons he pass'd in visits, luncheons,
Lounging and boxing; and the twilight hour
In riding round those vegetable puncheons
Call'd 'Parks,' where there is neither fruit nor flower
Enough to gratify a bee's slight munchings;
But after all it is the only 'bower'
(In Moore's phrase), where the fashionable fair
Can form a slight acquaintance with fresh air.

Then dress, then dinner, then awakes the world!
Then glare the lamps, then whirl the wheels, then roar
Through street and square fast flashing chariots hurl'd
Like harness'd meteors; then along the floor
Chalk mimics painting; then festoons are twirl'd;
Then roll the brazen thunders of the door,
Which opens to the thousand happy few
An earthly paradise of 'Or Molu.'

There stands the noble hostess, nor shall sink
With the three-thousandth curtsy; there the waltz,

The only dance which teaches girls to think,
Makes one in love even with its very faults.
Saloon, room, hall, o'erflow beyond their brink,
And long the latest of arrivals halts,
'Midst royal dukes and dames condemn'd to climb,
And gain an inch of staircase at a time.

Thrice happy he who, after a survey
Of the good company, can win a corner,
A door that's in or boudoir out of the way,
Where he may fix himself like small 'Jack Horner,'
And let the Babel round run as it may,
And look on as a mourner, or a scorner,
Or an approver, or a mere spectator,
Yawning a little as the night grows later.

But this won't do, save by and by; and he
Who, like Don Juan, takes an active share,
Must steer with care through all that glittering sea
Of gems and plumes and pearls and silks, to where
He deems it is his proper place to be;
Dissolving in the waltz to some soft air,
Or prouder prancing with mercurial skill
Where Science marshals forth her own quadrille.

Or, if he dance not, but hath higher views
Upon an heiress or his neighbour's bride,
Let him take care that that which he pursues
Is not at once too palpably descried.
Full many an eager gentleman oft rues
His haste: impatience is a blundering guide,
Amongst a people famous for reflection,
Who like to play the fool with circumspection.

But, if you can contrive, get next at supper;
Or, if forestalled, get opposite and ogle:—
O, ye ambrosial moments! always upper
In mind, a sort of sentimental bogle,
Which sits for ever upon memory's crupper,
The ghost of vanish'd pleasures once in vogue! Ill
Can tender souls relate the rise and fall
Of hopes and fears which shake a single ball.

But these precautionary hints can touch
Only the common run, who must pursue,
And watch, and ward; whose plans a word too much
Or little overturns; and not the few
Or many (for the number's sometimes such)
Whom a good mien, especially if new,

Or fame, or name, for wit, war, sense, or nonsense,
Permits whate'er they please, or did not long since.

Our hero, as a hero, young and handsome,
Noble, rich, celebrated, and a stranger,
Like other slaves of course must pay his ransom,
Before he can escape from so much danger
As will environ a conspicuous man. Some
Talk about poetry, and 'rack and manger,'
And ugliness, disease, as toil and trouble;—
I wish they knew the life of a young noble.

They are young, but know not youth—it is anticipated;
Handsome but wasted, rich without a sou;
Their vigour in a thousand arms is dissipated;
Their cash comes from, their wealth goes to a Jew;
Both senates see their nightly votes participated
Between the tyrant's and the tribunes' crew;
And having voted, dined, drunk, gamed, and whored,
The family vault receives another lord.

'Where is the world?' cries Young, at eighty—'Where
The world in which a man was born? 'Alas!
Where is the world of eight years past? 'T was there—
I look for it—'t is gone, a globe of glass!
Crack'd, shiver'd, vanish'd, scarcely gazed on, ere
A silent change dissolves the glittering mass.
Statesmen, chiefs, orators, queens, patriots, kings,
And dandies, all are gone on the wind's wings.

Where is Napoleon the Grand? God knows.
Where little Castlereagh? The devil can tell:
Where Grattan, Curran, Sheridan, all those
Who bound the bar or senate in their spell?
Where is the unhappy Queen, with all her woes?
And where the Daughter, whom the Isles loved well?
Where are those martyr'd saints the Five per Cents?
And where—oh, where the devil are the rents?

Where 's Brummel? Dish'd. Where 's Long Pole Wellesley? Diddled.
Where 's Whitbread? Romilly? Where 's George the Third?
Where is his will? (That 's not so soon unriddled.)
And where is 'Fum' the Fourth, our 'royal bird?'
Gone down, it seems, to Scotland to be fiddled
Unto by Sawney's violin, we have heard:
'Caw me, caw thee'—for six months hath been hatching
This scene of royal itch and loyal scratching.

Where is Lord This? And where my Lady That?

The Honourable Mistresses and Misses?
Some laid aside like an old Opera hat,
Married, unmarried, and remarried (this is
An evolution oft performed of late).
Where are the Dublin shouts—and London hisses?
Where are the Grenvilles? Turn'd as usual. Where
My friends the Whigs? Exactly where they were.

Where are the Lady Carolines and Franceses?
Divorced or doing thereanent. Ye annals
So brilliant, where the list of routs and dances is,—
Thou Morning Post, sole record of the panels
Broken in carriages, and all the phantasies
Of fashion,—say what streams now fill those channels?
Some die, some fly, some languish on the Continent,
Because the times have hardly left them one tenant.

Some who once set their caps at cautious dukes,
Have taken up at length with younger brothers:
Some heiresses have bit at sharpers' hooks:
Some maids have been made wives, some merely mothers;
Others have lost their fresh and fairy looks:
In short, the list of alterations bothers.
There 's little strange in this, but something strange is
The unusual quickness of these common changes.

Talk not of seventy years as age; in seven
I have seen more changes, down from monarchs to
The humblest individual under heaven,
Than might suffice a moderate century through.
I knew that nought was lasting, but now even
Change grows too changeable, without being new:
Nought 's permanent among the human race,
Except the Whigs not getting into place.

I have seen Napoleon, who seem'd quite a Jupiter,
Shrink to a Saturn. I have seen a Duke
(No matter which) turn politician stupider,
If that can well be, than his wooden look.
But it is time that I should hoist my 'blue Peter,'
And sail for a new theme:—I have seen—and shook
To see it—the king hiss'd, and then caress'd;
But don't pretend to settle which was best.

I have seen the Landholders without a rap—
I have seen Joanna Southcote—I have seen—
The House of Commons turn'd to a tax-trap—
I have seen that sad affair of the late Queen—
I have seen crowns worn instead of a fool's cap—

I have seen a Congress doing all that 's mean—
I have seen some nations like o'erloaded asses
Kick off their burthens, meaning the high classes.

I have seen small poets, and great proser, and
Interminable—not eternal—speakers—
I have seen the funds at war with house and land—
I have seen the country gentlemen turn squeakers—
I have seen the people ridden o'er like sand
By slaves on horseback—I have seen malt liquors
Exchanged for 'thin potations' by John Bull—
I have seen john half detect himself a fool.-

But 'carpe diem,' Juan, 'carpe, carpe!'
To-morrow sees another race as gay
And transient, and devour'd by the same harpy.
'Life 's a poor player,'—then 'play out the play,
Ye villains!' above all keep a sharp eye
Much less on what you do than what you say:
Be hypocritical, be cautious, be
Not what you seem, but always what you see.

But how shall I relate in other cantos
Of what befell our hero in the land,
Which 't is the common cry and lie to vaunt as
A moral country? But I hold my hand—
For I disdain to write an Atalantis;
But 't is as well at once to understand,
You are not a moral people, and you know it
Without the aid of too sincere a poet.

What Juan saw and underwent shall be
My topic, with of course the due restriction
Which is required by proper courtesy;
And recollect the work is only fiction,
And that I sing of neither mine nor me,
Though every scribe, in some slight turn of diction,
Will hint allusions never meant. Ne'er doubt
This—when I speak, I don't hint, but speak out.

Whether he married with the third or fourth
Offspring of some sage husband-hunting countess,
Or whether with some virgin of more worth
(I mean in Fortune's matrimonial bounties)
He took to regularly peopling Earth,
Of which your lawful awful wedlock fount is,—
Or whether he was taken in for damages,
For being too excursive in his homages,—

Is yet within the unread events of time.
Thus far, go forth, thou lay, which I will back
Against the same given quantity of rhyme,
For being as much the subject of attack
As ever yet was any work sublime,
By those who love to say that white is black.
So much the better!—I may stand alone,
But would not change my free thoughts for a throne.

Explanation

Don Juan gets out of his carriage and walks behind it in order to get a general view of London. As he meditates on what a law-abiding city London is, a knife is flashed in his face and a voice cries, "Your money or your life." Impulsively, he draws his pistol and mortally wounds the robber. This is Juan's introduction to life in England.

After he settles down and presents his credentials in the proper places, Juan is accepted by the class of society to which he belongs by birth. He becomes an object of romantic interest to unmarried and married young ladies. The bluestockings want to talk about literature with him. At parties large and small he meets the leading English writers of the time. He devotes his mornings to business, his afternoons to visits and luncheons, and his evenings to going to parties. As a young, rich, and handsome noble, Juan is very much in demand.

Analysis

There is little action in Canto XI and a great deal of satirizing. Byron's main purpose in placing Don Juan in the aristocratic world of early nineteenth-century England is to expose the shallowness, hypocrisy, and self-interest of that world. There is no genuine virtue in this society; there is only the appearance of virtue, according to Byron. It is interested in young men of Juan's class only for the sake of what it may get out of them. In the canto Byron's main purpose is to give a general, unfavorable, picture of this society and so let the readers of *Don Juan* know what perils their hero is exposed to. Later, he will concern himself with action and character. The broad outline is given first; the details will come later. Byron effectively establishes the tone of his social analysis at the beginning of the canto by having Juan held up by a robber with a knife just as Juan is meditating on how much virtue there must be in so vast a city as London. Even though it seems rather unlikely that Juan should look down on London from Shooter's Hill with such thoughts in his mind, the ironic incident serves its purpose very well. Juan's illusions are promptly shattered. He will not be deceived by appearances again during his sojourn in England.

Byron's purpose in having Juan mortally wound the would-be robber may be to keep Juan a realistic character and not let him become a mere device to achieve a piece of dramatic irony. Juan is prompt to act in war and love; his act of shooting Tom is characteristic of him; so too is his wish that "he had been less hasty with his flint" (St. 14) and his wish to help the wounded robber to his feet. It is also characteristic of Byron that he should expand the incident into ten stanzas and use it to show off his knowledge of low-life slang.

In demonstrating that Juan is well received in England because he is a foreigner of rank-young, handsome, and accomplished-Byron ridicules the bluestockings, a name given to women who were, or affected to be, interested in learning and literature. They were a favorite target of Byron's satire.

Juan, who was a little superficial,
And not in literature a great Drawcansir,
Examined by his learned and especial
Jury of matrons, scarce knew what to answer:
His duties warlike, loving or official,
His steady application as a dancer,
Had kept him from the brink of Hippocrene,
Which now he found was blue instead of green. (St. 51)

Juan got out of his literary difficulties by replying at random "with / A modest confidence and calm assurance" (St. 52). In addition,

Juan knew several languages — as well
He might-and brought them up with skill, in time
To save his fame with each accomplished belle,
Who still regretted that he did not rhyme. (St. 53)

The bluestockings, Byron implies, are shallow and easily taken in by a superficial parade of knowledge that is not apropos.

The English poets of the time are also swept into Byron's satirical net. Southey receives one more blow, and Keats, the reader is told, "was killed off by one critique" (St. 60). In bringing up the subject of other poets, Byron grows truculent and promises that if he were in England and "in good satire" he would show up the long list of pretenders to poetry. While Byron is devoting nine stanzas to his fellow poets, Don Juan is temporarily shelved.

A third block of stanzas in Canto XI is 76-85, in which Byron develops his own variation of the "Where are the snows of yesteryear?" theme. Byron is looking back over a period of eight years, and in five stanzas beginning with the word "Where" he asks what has become of various persons, some known to history, like Napoleon, others known only to Byron, the friends or associates of earlier years. All have changed, not for the better, or have died. In the last three stanzas of this section of the canto, each of which begins with the words "I have seen" Byron reports other changes that have occurred, none of them good. The section ends with a piece of cynical advice to Don Juan: *Carpe diem*, get all you can out of each day in the way of pleasure and profit for you.

Canto XII

Explanation

Canto XII begins with a fourteen-stanza meditation on the misery of middle age (Byron is now thirty-five, he tells the reader in Stanza 2) and the pleasures of money, which Byron ironically sings the praises of. Money rules the world and even rules love. This meditation is followed by a boast about his youthful success as a writer and literary lion, of which he has lately paid the penalty, a comment on the passing nature of fame, and a tongue-in-cheek plea for procreation, which the Malthusians are currently opposed to.

In Stanza 23, he turns to Juan, at least by name, but it is Juan's ward Leila he takes up. The dowagers in Juan's set have decided that her education had better be taken out of Juan's management and put into that of one of themselves. At this point Byron stops to devote a few amusing stanzas to the young "fortune" who has just made her debut and the stir made about her by other females who wish to arrange a match

for her with one of their relatives. This is followed by the admission that the lady who got *him* (Byron) didn't do so well.

Finally Lady Pinchbeck is chosen by Juan as a guardian for Leila. The author agrees that she is a good choice. She knows the world, she is witty, and her reputation is now safe.

Olden she was — but had been very young;
Virtuous she was — and had been, I believe. (St. 43)

Once again Byron returns to Juan and then leaves him to descant upon the perils of high society for a young unmarried man. If he talks six times with the same single lady, her brother wants to know what his intentions are, and soon he is married. Then there are perils from the coquette, and from the wife who merely wants to be friendly. Such friendships end in lawsuits in England; abroad the consequences are less serious.

But Juan is no novice, and furthermore he is somewhat tired of love. And at first he didn't find the English women pretty. Here Byron stops to analyze the English woman. She has some ice in her and hides half her attractions. She glides into the heart and once there holds on. She does not have as many external graces as the Continental woman, nor is she quite so ready with her smile, but when she is taken with a *grande passion*, it is a very serious thing indeed, and if there is a disaster she is cast out by society and will not be allowed to return.

Analysis

Canto XII is, on the whole, amusing and no earlier canto is more brilliantly written. Byron is at his poetic best here; the stanzas flow on with the smoothness of a wide river. There is no faltering or stumbling. The rhymes are as smooth as ever and the expression nowhere superior in the whole poem. Whatever subject Byron takes up, and in this canto he takes up quite a number, he has something worth reading to say about it. In spite of the diversity of topics, the canto has a unity of theme — not Don Juan, for he is almost left out altogether — but the English woman of high society. In talking of her Byron is politely cynical and avoids sentimentalism scrupulously. He writes as the uninvolved, experienced commentator who understands the ways and wiles of English woman. In Canto XII and the remaining cantos Byron is more at home with his subject.

Canto XIII

Explanation

Among the friends made by Don Juan are Lord Henry Amundeville and his wife Lady Adeline. Lady Adeline is highborn, wealthy in her own right, and beautiful. She is

The *fair* most fatal Juan ever met,
Although she was not evil nor meant ill;
But Destiny and Passion spread the net
(Fate is a good excuse for our own will),
And caught them . . . (St. 12)

She is chaste, enjoys a good reputation, and gets along well with her husband. She is polite to all; she has a calm patrician polish in her manner that checks rash enthusiasm. But she is not indifferent; like a volcano, she has heat within.

Her husband, Lord Henry, is reserved, cautious, proud, and discerning when it comes to judging people. He is a great debater in the House of Lords and thinks of himself as being well informed politically. He is a patriot and at the same time knows how to provide for himself.

Like all members of the aristocracy, the Amundevilles have a town residence and a country house. At the end of the winter season they leave London for their country mansion, Norman Abbey, the "Gothic Babel of a thousand years" (St. 50). Norman Abbey was once a monastery. Only one wall of the original Gothic church remains. Norman Abbey lies in a valley, above which are woodlands full of game. There is a lake in front of the mansion. In the court there is a Gothic fountain. Inside, there are "Huge halls, long galleries, spacious chambers" (St. 67), in which hang portraits of eminent Amundevilles as well as works by Titian, Rembrandt, Caravaggio, and other famous painters.

When September comes the Amundevilles invite to Norman Abbey for the hunting season a large group of friends and acquaintances, among them the Countess Crabby, Lady Scilly, Miss O'Tabby, the Duke of Dash, General Fireface, Sir Henry Silvercup, and Don Juan.

The great event of the day is dinner. Until that event comes the guests are left to themselves to fight off boredom as best they can. The young and middle-aged men engage in hunting and shooting, and the elderly spend their time turning over books in the library, walking in the gardens, reading the paper, or horseback riding. The women take walks, ride, read, write letters, sing, or practice the latest dance.

Analysis

Juan has no part in Canto XIII; he is mentioned only by name and in connection with Lady Adeline. Byron hints that an affair will develop between them (St. 12). In Canto XIII Byron gives the reader the setting for the affair hinted at and at the same time satirizes the English upper classes. The canto falls into five well defined parts, two of which are detailed characterizations of Lord Henry and Lady Adeline. Lady Adeline has been called the most complex character created by Byron up to this point in his literary career. The claim is well justified. The characterization of Lady Adeline alone would make the canto one of the best in the poem.

The third part of the canto, the description of Norman Abbey, to which Byron devotes seventeen stanzas, is a loving and nostalgic description of his own baronial home, Newstead Abbey, which he had sold in 1818, having decided at that time that he would never again live in England. The description of Norman Abbey fits Newstead Abbey, even down to the statue of the Virgin and Child in a niche of the facade which is the sole remnant of the medieval abbey church. The facade with its "grand arch," which was once a stained glass window, and the Blessed Virgin in her niche are still parts of Newstead Abbey.

The characterizations which form the fourth part of the canto are caricatures in the tradition of Restoration and eighteenth-century satire. Byron even mentions Congreve, the best of the Restoration comic dramatists, and he alludes to Fielding, the greatest of the eighteenth-century satirical novelists, in the canto. Byron's caricatures compare favorably with those of his models in brevity and pungency.

The last part of the canto wittily and cleverly describes the day's activities of the Amundevilles' guests and the difficulties they experience in getting through a day in the country.

Canto XIII, although it is devoid of narrative, is rich in good characterization and for that reason alone is one of the best cantos in *Don Juan*. The admirable structure of the canto reduces a large mass of varied material to an ordered sequence that makes the canto a pleasure to read. Digression is kept to a minimum. We must accept digression in *Don Juan* because it is an essential part of Byron's design, but random

thoughts, though given a witty and striking form, are of less interest than good narrative and memorable characters.

Canto XIV

Explanation

Canto XIV begins with some "editorializing" on Byron's part. Man has no certainties in life, a fact which is proved by the proliferation of philosophical systems, which contradict each other. But what is the purpose of these skeptical speculations, he hears the reader ask him. His only excuse is, he answers, it's his way. He writes poetry as a form of play. The narrative in this poem, he says, is actually just a catch-all device. There is pleasure in publishing for him; it's a form of gambling. There is pleasure in waiting to see if the work is going to succeed or not. In addition, Byron says, what he publishes is of value to society, for he deals in facts, not fiction. It is an exposure of the hypocrisy, dullness, and boredom of high society. Following these stanzas is a set on women, whose lot, at best, Byron asserts, is an unhappy one.

With Stanza 31 Byron proceeds with his narrative. Juan in his new environment is a very adaptable young man and gets along well with all sorts of people:

Born with that happy soul which seldom faints,
And mingling modestly in toils or sports." (St. 31)

In fox hunting he shows a natural skill and conducts himself in such a way as to win the admiration of all. In conversation he remains alert, is a lively talker and a good listener. He avoids argument and humors the group he is a part of:

Now grave, now gay, but never dull or pert;
And smiling but in secret — cunning rogue. (St. 37)

He is an excellent dancer. It is no marvel that he is a general favorite:

A full-grown Cupid, very much admired;
A little spoilt, but by no means so quite;
At least he kept his vanity retired. (St. 41)

The women among the company show special interest in him. One of them is the Duchess Fitz-Fulke,

. . . a fine and somewhat full-blown blonde,
Desirable, distinguished, celebrated
For several winters in the grand, *grand Monde*: (St. 42)

where she has been the heroine of a number of exploits which the narrator could tell but won't. Currently, she has an admirer in Lord Augustus Fitz-Plantagenet. Her husband is not in the present company; in fact, she and the duke get along by keeping out of each other's way:

Theirs was that best of unions, past all doubt,
Which never meets, and therefore can't fall out. (St. 45)

It disturbs her good friend Lady Adeline greatly to see the duchess showing so much interest in Don Juan, or as Byron puts it, "to see her friend's fragility." She is also disturbed for Juan's sake, Byron says ironically; his inexperience moves her to pity. She is forty days older than he is; they are both twenty-one. (Sts. 42 and 44)

Lady Adeline therefore resolves to take such measures as are necessary. She is not concerned about the duke's making trouble; she is afraid the duchess will succeed and that she will have a quarrel with Lord Fitz-Plantagenet, who is aware of what is going on. So Lady Adeline consults with her husband, but his comments are not very helpful: He never interferes in anyone's business but the king's; he never judges from appearances; Juan is no fool and good rarely comes from good advice. He advises his wife to leave the parties to themselves. Having said this, he goes into his office — he is a member of the Privy Council — and as he leaves he calmly kisses his wife, "Less like a young wife than an aged sister" (St. 69). Lord Henry is "a cold, good, honourable man" who, Byron says, lacks *soul* or an indefinable *je ne sais quoi*. As for Adeline, belonging to high society she does not have enough to do. "Her heart was vacant, though a splendid mansion" (St. 85). She loves her Lord Henry, of course, but that love costs her an effort; at least she *thinks* she loves him. There is considerable disparity of temperament between them. Adeline is not easily impressionable, but once she identifies herself with some object, she will be carried away. Byron hints that the object may be Don Juan. "She knows not her own heart" (St. 91), and she has never really been in love. But Byron does not want the reader to make rash assumptions and warns him not to take it for granted that there will be an affair between Juan and Adeline. It's doubtful that Byron planned his story line very carefully in composing *Don Juan*; he seems to have relied on the spur of the moment.

In Canto XIII, Stanza 12, he promised the reader that there would be an affair between Juan and Adeline. Later, he seems to have changed his mind, and in Canto XIV, Stanza 99, he warns the reader not to assume that there will be an affair between the two:

Above all, I beg all men to forbear
Anticipating aught about the matter:
They'll only make mistakes about the fair,
And Juan, too, especially the latter.
And I shall take a much more serious air
Than I have yet done, in this Epic Satire
.It is not clear that Adeline and Juan
Will fall; but if they do, 't will be their ruin.

Analysis

Byron sketches a situation and amplifies characterization in Canto XIV. There is Lady Fitz-Fulke, the mischief maker, an intrigante, who is out to trap Juan. Opposed to her is Adeline, who is eager to save Juan from the duchess and who is, of course, as Byron makes clear enough by innuendo, in danger of falling in love with Juan. Adeline is a kind of English Donna Julia. She is not the wife of a man who is more than twice her age, but she is married to a husband who is cold by nature and who is more interested in business than he is in her. She has a child, but her child is not enough to occupy her time. She is idle, lacks an object in life. The elegant high society she lives in encourages idleness in its women. She is frustrated without quite realizing it.

Lady Adeline is a more complex figure than Donna Julia and less passionate, but like Donna Julia, she is presented as a woman who does not know herself and who is going to rationalize. She and Donna Julia

are sisters under the skin, deprived of satisfaction in the life of the affections, and not really willing to discipline themselves. But first they must find reasons for doing what they are going to do anyway.

Donna Julia lived in quite different circumstances; she did not move in the same kind of society as Lady Adeline. Although she belonged to the aristocracy, it does not seem to have been a very active aristocracy. Lady Adeline lives in an active society which she understands very well and which she can cope with. She is, in a way, a political figure in that her husband is a political figure. In this society she has a rival, whereas Julia had none, and that rival is at the present time her guest. As a character, she is more interesting, because less simple, than Donna Julia.

In Canto XIV the reader gets the first indication he has had of Juan's age since he left home at sixteen or seventeen. He was sixteen when he and Donna Julia fell in love. We are not told how many months have passed since that time and the time he embarks on the *Trinidad*. Obviously, we are to think of him as having been away from home between four and five years, since he is now twenty-one (Sts. 52 and 54). His mother intended him to be away four years altogether. Chronology doesn't mean much to Byron in *Don Juan*. Juan is twenty-one in England and that is all we need to know. Byron wants him to be twenty-one; he doesn't want to show us how he got to be twenty-one. As he says in stanza 54, "My Muse despises reference . . ." We don't know how much time he spent on the island in the Cyclades or in Russia. Juan has not merely grown older; he has matured (Sts. 31-41).

In Canto XIV for the first time Byron uses his hero Don Juan as an agent of satire. When Byron tells us that Juan smiles "in secret — cunning rogue!" at something that has been said, as he does in stanza 38, Juan is outside of his society and superior to it. Up to this point Don Juan has been identified with his society and is satirized with that society. In Russia, for instance, he is not superior to Russian society nor does he seem to see the weakness of it. In Russia, he is corrupted by a corrupt environment

Canto XV

Explanation

After five stanzas on the author's poor opinion of life, Byron provides some more characterization of Don Juan, or at least reinforces what he had already provided. Juan's manner is natural; he makes no attempt to make an impression. There is nothing studied or artificial in his conduct. He is without pretense and his demeanor suggests sincerity. There is gentleness about him that attracts and that wards off suspicion.

There is even a certain aloofness about him. He is serene, accomplished, cheerful, quiet, observant, and self-confident. Such are the personality and character of Don Juan at the age of twenty-one. He is obviously a source of danger to the prudent Lady Adeline, who wouldn't spare a look for an ogling, handsome dandy or a sophisticated seducer. The appearance of virtue in a Don Juan is her chief enemy; she is "no deep judge of character," and she is apt to transfer what is good in her own character to a man she feels attracted to.

'Tis thus the Good will amiably err,
And eke the Wise, as has been often shown.

After his characterization of Don Juan, Byron stops to deliver some apology for what he is doing. He confesses he has no high aim or art:

And never straining hard to versify, I rattle on exactly as I'd talk
With any body in a ride or walk." (St. 19)

He claims at least

. . . a conversational facility,
Which may round off an hour upon a time. (St. 20)

But he has his pride and independence; he will not court the critics and so writes as he does. If he wanted to please them he would be more comic. But he was born for opposition he cannot help being on the side of the underdog, and he would not have written poetry at all if someone (Henry Brougham in the *Edinburgh Review*, reviewing Byron's *Hours of Idleness*, advised the author to abandon poetry) had not told him *not* to write verse. He also has a difficult task, namely, to give a natural picture of manners that are artificial.

Having explained his poetic manner and task, Byron returns to Adeline, but he soon feels that he must generalize upon the particular. Adeline decides that, if Juan's soul is to be saved, he must marry. That calls for several ironic comments on matchmaking and the ironies of the married state. Adeline suggests several good matches, including Miss Millpond, "smooth as summer's sea," an obvious, sarcastic reference to the Miss Milbanke who become Lady Byron.

One good prospect whom Adeline does not mention, a fact which puzzles Don Juan, is the sixteen-year-old Aurora Raby. She is a Catholic, an orphan, wealthy, noble, pious, and virtuous. Byron contrasts her with Haidée, the product of nature rather than of society:

. . . the difference in them
Was such as lies between a flower and gem. (St. 58)

She is a perfect creature in a generally corrupt society. She has become what she is in spite of that society.

The marriage conference between Adeline and Juan terminates indecisively, brought to an end by the sound of the dinner bell. The dinner menu is described in some detail.

Juan is placed, "by some odd chance," between Aurora and Lady Adeline. Aurora, for some reason that Byron pretends not to know, pays little attention to Juan's gay conversation. Her aloofness causes Juan to exert himself all the more, and he finally succeeds in arousing her interest. Juan "had the art of drawing people out," (St. 82) and, "then he had good looks" (St. 84).

The canto concludes with the author's promise that a ghost will be introduced in the following canto.

Analysis

In Canto XV narrative interest is maintained by Adeline's determination to get Juan married. Byron does not explain exactly why Adeline wants Juan married, but in his characterization of Adeline he has given enough hints for the reader to draw his own conclusions. Adeline may not even be aware of the reasons herself. She cannot marry Juan herself but she may be able to marry him to one of a carefully selected list of young ladies over whom she could exercise some control and so keep up a special relationship of a kind she would never admit, even to herself. Aurora Raby is not in that list because Adeline knows instinctively that she could exercise no control over Aurora.

In the character of Aurora (Aurora was the Roman goddess of the dawn; the name connotes the freshness and purity of the dawn) Byron creates one of the most interesting of the *dramatis personae* of *Don Juan*. Byron gives a touch of pathos to his bright candle lit in a naughty world:

Early in years, and yet more infantine
In figure, she had something of Sublime
In eyes which sadly shone, as Seraphs' shine.
All Youth-but with an aspect beyond Time;
Radiant and grave-as pitying Man's decline;
Mournful-but mournful of another's crime,
She looked as if she sat by Eden's door,
And grieved for those who could return no more. (St. 45)

She is a kind of sad seraph mourning for man's fall, for his irrevocable exclusion from the Garden of Paradise, for the sin that came into the world with the Fall. She is also a figure by which the world in which she moves by birth and position can be judged, she is in such contrast to it. She is the Ideal to its Real:

She gazed upon a World she scarcely knew,
As seeking not to know it; silent, lone,
As grows a flower, thus quietly she grew,
And kept her heart serene within its zone.
There was awe in the homage which she drew;
Her Spirit seemed as seated on a throne
Apart from the surrounding world, and strong
In its own strength-most strange in one so young! (St. 47)

Working together with Byron's mockery, she exposes Regency high society. One may ask whether she is not elevated above all nature. One answer to such a question is that there is the touch of nature in her that makes her susceptible to Juan's charm. The reader may wonder, however, what such a woman, married and a mother, would have done in such a society. Would she have remained aloof by necessity and so without influence, or, being what she was, could she have acted as a leavening force?

In Canto III Byron describes the hundred-dish Oriental dinner menu of Don Juan, Haidée, and their guests in two stanzas (62 and 63). In Canto XV he devotes thirteen stanzas to the Amundeville dinner menu. The menu versified is among the more interesting bits of miscellanea in *Don Juan*. No doubt Byron felt proud of his little tour de force here.

In devoting the concluding stanzas of the canto to the ghost he is going to introduce, Byron shows that he is not indifferent to the requisites of good narrative. His announcement of the ghost to come and his insistence that the existence of ghosts cannot be cavalierly dismissed, since we know so little about this world and nothing about the next, is a good suspense device.

Canto XVI

Explanation

Canto XVI is divided into four sections. The first section is a ghost episode. On the night of the great supper, Juan, after he has gone to bed, feels "restless, and perplexed, and compromised." His mind is filled with thoughts of the sixteen-year-old Aurora and her cool unworldliness. In addition, there is a full moon. He walks out into a gallery hung with pictures. The pictures add to his pensive mood.

But by dim lights the portraits of the dead
Have something ghastly, desolate and dread. (St. 17)

Among them are portraits of once lovely women:

And the pale smile of Beauties in the grave,
The charms of other days, in starlight gleams,
Glimmer on high; their buried locks still wave
Along the canvas; their eyes glance like dreams
On ours, or spars within some dusky cave,
But Death is imaged in their shadowy beams.
A picture is the past; even ere its frame
Be gilt, who sate hath ceased to be the same. (St. 19)

Juan's state of mind, influenced by meditation on the pathos of the death of beauty, makes him succumb to paralyzing fear when "a monk, arrayed / In cowl and beads, and dusky garb" (St. 21) silently walks by him three times.

In the morning he still shows the effects of the fright he has had. He is pensive, distraught, and pale. Both Adeline and Aurora notice the change in him. Lord Henry remarks that he looks as if he had seen the ghost of the Black Friar. Adeline then takes her harp and sings a ballad of her own composition on the Black Friar (the Black Friars are the Dominicans, an order founded by St. Dominic, a thirteenth-century Italian) who haunts the house of the Amundevilles. Why she does this, Byron pretends he does not know:

Perhaps she merely had the simple project
To laugh him out of his supposed dismay;
Perhaps she might wish to confirm him in it,
Though why I cannot say—at least this minute. (St. 51)

The effect of the song is to bring back Juan somewhat to his former self.

In Stanza 55 the narrative turns away from the ghost of the Black Friar to the business of a typical day at Lord Henry's, which forms the second section of the canto. There is a race between greyhounds and a young race horse for the guests to watch. A picture dealer comes to Lord Henry to get his opinion on a Titian, for Lord Henry is a connoisseur and the friend of artists, if not of art. An architect comes with plans for the restoration of Norman Abbey; two lawyers come on Lord Henry's business; two poachers caught in a steel trap have to be taken care of; and a young unmarried pregnant country girl must be cross-examined, for Lord Henry is a justice, and justices of the peace, says Byron, must

. . . keep the game
And morals of the country from caprices
Of those who have not a license for the same. (St. 63)

The third section of the canto describes one of Lord Henry's public days, which he has either once a week or twice a month, to keep his political fences mended. The public day is an open house for the local squirearchy, who may drop in without a formal invitation. There is a great banquet for them at Lord Henry's. There is

Great plenty, much formality, small cheer, —
And everybody out of their own sphere. (St. 78)

At the banquet Juan is again confused and distracted, and he blunders "cost his host three votes." Moreover, he notices that Aurora is looking at him:

And something like a smile upon her cheek . . .
Indicative of some surprise and pity. (Sts. 92-93)

In the meantime Adeline is busy "playing her grand role" and Juan

. . . began to feel
Some doubt how much of Adeline was real; . . .
So well she acted all and every part
By turns . . . (Sts. 96-97)

After the last of the local guests have gone, Lady Adeline and her friends entertain themselves by making fun of those who have departed. Aurora and Juan do not take part in the game, Juan because he is still in a state of reverie. His silence is interpreted by Aurora as motivated by charity, and raises him in her esteem. Aurora has, in fact, renewed

In him some feelings he had lately lost,
Or hardened . . .
The love of higher things and better days;
The unbounded hope, and heavenly ignorance
Of what is called the World, and the World's ways. (Sts. 107-08)

These feelings seem to be chiefly associated with young love untainted by the world.

The last section of the canto is the resolution of the ghost episode. The feelings aroused in Juan by Aurora and the thoughts associated with them keep Juan awake that night and apprehensive of his spectral guest. As he sits in his bed, the door opens, and the ghost of the Black Friar enters his room. His first emotion is fear, which is soon succeeded by anger. He advances toward the ghost, reaches out a hand, and touches warm flesh. The ghost throws back its cowl and reveals the face of the Duchess Fitz-Fulke.

Analysis

In the first section of Canto XV we have a new Juan, or at least a Juan behaving in a way we have not seen him behave before. Never before has he shown any signs of fear, either in storm or in war, when taken by surprise or even when robbed indeed, in any situation created by man or by physical nature. But Juan had never encountered a ghost before. Furthermore, Don Juan is a Roman Catholic and a man like Byron, who had had a Protestant upbringing, would be likely to think of all Catholics as being superstitious because of their belief in a state of Purgatory, relics, miracles, and so on. Possibly Byron is influenced by the Don Juan of the legend here. In Tirso de Molina's play, *The Rogue of Seville*, which had put the legend in literary circulation, the ghost of Don Gonzalo, whom Don Juan had killed in the first act, appears to Don Juan and invites him to dine with him beside his tomb. When Don Gonzalo's ghost disappears, Don Juan, who had just exclaimed, "What! Me afraid?" is covered with sweat and admits that his very heart seems frozen. There was, moreover, the legend of a ghost of a black monk at Newstead Abbey. Thomas Moore, in his life of his friend, said that Byron claimed he had seen the ghost himself. In Canto XV and in Stanzas 3-7 of Canto XVI, Byron seriously tried to persuade the reader that there might be such creatures as ghosts. Skeptical as Byron was, there was a vein of genuine religious belief in him.

The ghost section that concludes Canto XVI is entertaining, but we are apt to feel that Byron has merely tricked us, that he is working in a ghost to no great purpose because there was a ghost legend connected with Newstead Abbey and therefore with Norman Abbey. What did her frolic Grace Fitz-Fulke expect to gain by masquerading as a ghost that she would not have gained otherwise-in her own seductive person?

If she had decided on a conquest of Don Juan, there was little to be gained by frightening him, as she had, and then entering his room. She had reason to believe that she had more to gain by simply dropping in on him, since she was charming and he no woman-hater. Why indulge in a foolish prank that might have frightened other Amundeville guests if they happened to meet her in her masquerade and might have resulted in injury or humiliation to herself? Byron has not motivated her act sufficiently, but he might have supplied the motivation in Canto XVII, had he lived to finish it.

Canto XVI, which Byron wrote between March 29 and May 6, 1823, almost a full year before his death on April 19, 1824, shows no diminution in imaginative power. It is as good in its own way as any other canto in *Don Juan*. There are relatively few non-narrative and non-descriptive stanzas in it. The ghost episode is not without interest; the account of Lord Henry's business day in the country is concise, pointed, and witty. The assembly of country guests shows nicely the landed politician at work feeding and flattering those who can be useful to him in the way of furnishing votes. The concluding line of the canto shows that Byron knew the value of and could create climax. The construction is good. The canto begins with the first part of the ghost episode and ends with its conclusion. Between the two parts Byron carries out his satiric purpose by showing Lord Henry in different roles.

In the English cantos, which amount to more than a third of *Don Juan*, his narrative is rather thin, but Byron has created some of the most interesting people in *Don Juan*, and through and around them he held up the mirror to English aristocratic life in the early nineteenth century. The reflection is obviously a distorted one, but nevertheless it is factual as far as it goes, for Byron knew this society well at firsthand. He shows its members engaged in intrigue among themselves, maintaining a polite front while ceaselessly trying to win selfish advantages for themselves. Its women have no serious aim in life and its men are dull, pretentious, and unhappily married. They are all bored and spend their time in social activities of various kinds in the town or in the country. They are all other than what they seem to be.

Canto XVII (Unfinished)

Explanation

There are three kinds of orphans: (1) the children who have lost their parents; (2) the children who receive no love from their parents; and (3) children who have no brothers or sisters. Of the three the most unfortunate are those who have lost their parents and are wealthy.

People should be tolerant of free discussion of all things, and the author, for one, will be among these.

Whether Juan gave in to the Duchess Fitz-Fulke the night before, or resisted her charms, the author refuses to say. When Juan comes to breakfast, he looks wan and worn. The duchess "had a sort of air rebuked — / Seemed pale and shivered" (St. 14). She looked as if she had not slept.

Analysis

The fourteen stanzas of Canto XVII introduce the question of possible moral development in Juan. He had developed in all other respects. Is he still amoral in matters of love? What went on between Juan and the ghostly Lady Fitz-Fulke? Did virtue or vice prevail in the case of Juan? Stanza 12 makes it clear that a conflict had taken place in Juan's soul. On the morning after, both Juan and the duchess looked tired, as if neither had slept. If virtue did not prevail in Juan's conscience, why should Byron say that the duchess had "a sort of air rebuked"?

Juan yielded to Donna Julia; he yielded to Haidée; he refused Gulbeyaz because she had used the wrong approach, but he was on the point of yielding when the coming of the sultan was announced; and he

yielded to Catherine — and in each case the woman had been, so to speak, the aggressor. Has he yielded to the Duchess Fitz-Fulke or has he shown her the error of her wayward ways? If he has yielded, why should the duchess have "a sort of air rebuked"? Moreover, Aurora, by what she is, has shown Juan an ideal of purity and virtue that has not left him unmoved. She stands between him, as it were, and Fitz-Fulke duchesses. The question is a pertinent one but not easily solvable. Byron supplies us with only the single word *rebuked* to help us arrive at an answer. If it could be shown that Juan had said "no" to the duchess, it would mean that Byron was moving Juan toward an ideal of purity (and sexual immorality is practically the only moral weakness of Don Juan) represented in the flesh by Leila ("For like a day-dawn she was young and pure" — Canto XII, St. 61) and by Aurora, whose name means "day-dawn." Unfortunately, the language of the three last stanzas of *Don Juan* can be interpreted in two different ways, and when the poem comes to an end the reader is left with a problem that he must solve for himself.

DON JUAN: CRITICAL APPRECIATION

Don Juan is a vast creation and it is not always interesting; there are many dull stanzas in which Byron says nothing interesting. But despite some weaknesses in structure, characterization, and philosophy of life, Don Juan is an 'epic carnival'. It has scope, variety of human experience, common sense, much matter for laughter, clever and witty observation, ease and fluency; that is why Walter Scott said the "it has the variety of Shakespeare".

Don Juan was intended as a satire on abuses of the 'present states of society.' It is a quietly mocking satire on everything, and a serious satire on the hypocrisies of high society, the false glory associated with war, man's pursuit of fame, the little devices by which people try to deceive themselves, the human penchant for rationalization, It ridicules things in a unique tongue-in-cheek manner that strikes, without seeming to, everything on its way. In general, the style, of Don Juan is the easy conversational or epistolary style.

Byron has written this poem in the Italian ottava rima, or eight-line stanza, the poetic form favoured by the Italian satirical writers of mock-heroic romances. The rhyme scheme of 'ottava rima' is abababcc. But Byron used a lot of a new comic rhyme, forcing slant and unusual rhymes to hint at the incongruity and satires beneath. He has also used the concluding couplet to round off the whole stanza by giving a sudden twist or commentary on the preceding lines themselves. The witticism and the anti-climax, or a swift fall from the lofty-sounding idea to the low, that surprises the reader are also other features in Don Juan. The style of Don Juan is the antithesis of the grand style. It has the easy going laxity of ordinary conversation. In fact, Don Juan has not one style but a "multiplicity of styles" or tones, the "medley" style: grave, gay, serious, ludicrous, sentimental, laughing, ironic cynical, urbanely, naughty, wittily outrageous, unexpectedly twisting familiar figures of speech and infusing them with fresh vitality, and accomplishing all these along with the most ingenious poetic devices of rhythm and rhyme imaginable. It stands in debt to the Italian comic-epic poets for its ottava rima verse form, its manner and mood, deliberate lack of coherent construction, length determined by the will of whimsy of the poet, variety of incidents and digressions, and for the startling alternations of mood and pervasive modernity of spirit. The rapid movement from romantic seriousness to burlesque suggests a Chaucerian quality, the same movement between romance and burlesque, chivalry and bawdry, ideal and real. Perhaps the most conspicuous characteristic of the Junoesque style is the conversational and colloquial tone. What the poem most frequently attacks, in love religion, and social relations, are very considerable vices-sham, hypocrisy, complacency, oppression, greed, and lust. Furthermore, the satire constantly though silently assumes as more all positives the qualities of courage, loyalty, generosity and above all, total candor, it merely implies that these virtues are excessively rare, and that the modern world is not constituted to reward to

encourage, or even to recognize them when they make their appearance. The 'society' and 'civilization' represented by Don Juan's mother, Julia and their community is the most important object of satire in Canto I. They believe in the 'morality' of exhibition; if they appear moral. It doesn't matter what they do! They suppress in all possible ways the natural impulses of the 'natural' child or man. This issue brings us to another crucial thematic concern of Don Juan: Juan's mother, like a typical 'civilized' person tires (though hypocritically and unsuccessfully) to thwart all the natural desires of the child while she tries to teach him all the dead languages, religious sermons that he can't understand, the art of war to the child (riding, fencing, gunnery and how to climb a fortress – or a nunnery), expurgated classics (which posed problem with filthy loves of the gods and goddesses who roamed in public without proper bodices), and the likes. But one should note that his mother used to read all the filthy stories herself. But a few stanzas later we find that his mother doesn't care when Juan begins to have immoral relations with her neighbor Julia, because she was angry with Julia's old husband who had rejected her love in her youth. Where then does a good education go (beyond a hypocritical theory) in this scheme of things in a 'civilized' society? Don Juan's mother is afraid to see him grow up into an adolescent! This tells us how our societies reject the natural processes of life and the realities of natural impulses, and seeming to be better than the nature itself, destroy all potential good in man.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Don Juan: The son of an easygoing father and a strict mother who is doted on by his parents. At the age of sixteen he has an affair with Donna Julia.

Don José Juan's father, who is unfaithful to his wife and careless of his reputation.

Donna Inez: Juan's mother, a learned woman plagued by the infidelity of her husband. One of her chief interests is the education of her son.

The Narrator: A friend of Don Juan's family. He is dismissed from the story in the first canto and his place is taken by the omniscient author.

Donna Julia: The wife of Don Alfonso and a friend of Don Juan's family. She is twenty-three and unhappily married.

Don Alfonso: The husband of Donna Julia. He is fifty and fails to provide his wife with the love she yearns for.

Antonia: Donna Julia's maidservant who helps her in her intrigue with Don Juan.

Pedrillo: Juan's tutor, the victim of cannibalism by the survivors of the wreck of the *Trinidad*.

Haidée: The beautiful seventeen-year-old daughter of Lambro, a Greek smuggler, pirate, and slave trader, and of a Moroccan mother who has died before the story opens.

Lambro: A sternly inflexible and completely self-controlled man who, because his native country is not free, preys upon the commerce of all countries. Haidée is his most treasured possession.

Zoe: Haidée's faithful maidservant and companion. She is "wiser than Haidée by a year or two."

Raucocanti: A member of an Italian operatic troupe sold into slavery by their treacherous manager. On the slave ship carrying them to Constantinople, he entertains Juan with malicious character sketches of the other members of the troupe.

John Johnson: A cynical but practical English soldier of fortune captured by the Turks while fighting with the Russians. Like Juan, he is sold as a slave.

Baba: A eunuch in the harem of the Sultan of Turkey who is the trusted servant of the sultana. He is shrewd and reliable.

Gulbeyaz: The twenty-six-year-old fourth (and favorite) wife of the Turkish sultan. She has seen the handsome Juan on his way to the slave market and sends Baba to buy him.

The Sultan: The ruler of the Turkish Empire who has four wives and 1,500 concubines. He is fifty-nine, solemn, cruel, unscrupulous, lazy, and ignorant. He has fifty daughters and forty-eight sons.

The Mother of the Maids: The woman who is responsible for maintaining discipline in the sultan's harem.

Lolah: A dusky beauty who is a concubine in the sultan's harem.

Katinka: A harem beauty from Russian Georgia. Both she and Lolah volunteer to share their beds with "Juanna."

Dudu: A "kind of sleepy Venus," a "large, and languishing, and lazy" beauty. Since there is no bed in the harem for Juan (dressed as a girl by Baba), Dudji has to share her bed with "Juanna."

Suwarrow: Byron's name for General Suvorov (or Suvaroff), a historical character, one of the ablest generals in the armies of Catherine the Great. He is in charge of the Russian forces that capture Ismail from the Turks.

Leila: A ten-year-old Turkish orphan whose parents have been killed during the assault on the Turkish fortress of Ismail.

Catherine the Great: The sixty-one-year-old Czarina of Russia who falls in love with Don Juan.

Tom: The English robber who in a holdup attempt on Don Juan is mortally wounded by him.

Lady Pinchbeck: The woman selected by Don Juan to supervise the upbringing of his orphan ward Leila.

Lord Henry Amundeville: A wealthy young English nobleman who is a member of the Privy Council and who becomes a friend of Don Juan.

Lady Adeline Amundeville: The socially efficient twenty-one-year-old wife of Lord Henry who decides that she must get Don Juan married to save him from designing females like the Duchess Fitz-Fulke.

The Duchess Fitz-Fulke: A voluptuous, intriguing, fun-loving friend of the Amundevilles. She and her husband get along by never spending any time together.

Aurora Raby: A sixteen-year-old orphan heiress and friend of the Amundevilles. She is the only Roman Catholic in her social circle. She is pious, austere, sincere, and charitable. Like other young ladies, she becomes interested in the handsome Don Juan. She is the last character introduced into *Don Juan*.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Don Juan

At the age of sixteen Don Juan has completed his formal education and is ready to set out on the "grand tour" which, in England, often followed graduation from the university. Byron himself had made a grand tour in the Near East after he received his degree from Cambridge. Juan was the product of an experiment in education which was arranged for him by his mother. He had received instruction from tutors only and had not attended schools. He was taught the classics from expurgated editions and as a consequence had to learn the basic facts of life from experience. He had not been taught "natural history." His education had not prepared him for Donna Julias and Haidées. Since he belonged to the nobility, he was given instruction in the arts of war: riding, fencing, gunnery, and the techniques to be used in assaulting a fortress. His education also included an abundance of religious and moral instruction.

Juan is by nature kind, friendly, impulsive, courteous, courageous, and sensuous. He has all the virtues a boy of sixteen can reasonably be expected to have — except self-control in matters of sex. Sex education had not been a part of his formal instruction. His mother's system was therefore indirectly responsible for his fall from grace in Canto I.

By the time he is twenty-one, in Canto XVI, Juan has lost some of his impulsiveness and naiveté. Experience had been his teacher after he left his home at sixteen or seventeen. He still has all his good qualities, but he has acquired a knowledge of the ways of the world and is able to analyze and judge that world. He is no longer at the mercy of impulse. Heart and head now work together.

Donna Julia

Donna Julia is a young woman of twenty-three who is married to a man of fifty. The personality of her husband is neither attractive nor repulsive; it is neutral. He is incapable of giving his wife the affection and comradeship that she needs. These she finds in Don Juan and therefore is powerfully attracted to him. She is not basically hypocritical but she is desperately in need of love. She does not know herself well, and when she begins to find in Don Juan what is lacking in her life, nature takes over and cooperates with her frustrations. She falls in love with Juan as she had not been able to fall in love with her husband. Her eyes are gradually opened to what is happening in her, but by this time love is so firmly rooted in her that she becomes a hypocrite both in regard to herself and in regard to her husband. She knows she should avoid Juan and she tries to resolve the conflict in herself by rationalizing. She tries to persuade herself that her love is only friendship. Her conscience becomes warped in the process. Once she falls, her conscience ceases to bother her, and it is Donna Julia the hardened sinner who tries to turn the tables on her husband in her brilliant invective when he bursts into her room in search of her lover.

Haidée

Haidée is an ardent, beautiful and sensuous young woman in search of perfect love. She is all heart, and her mind has received little, if any, formal training. She has had religious instruction, however; Byron tells us that she is pious and has been taught the tenets of the Greek Orthodox Church. She is also not without experience in courtship. By the time she is seventeen she has had a number of marriage offers.

She has turned down her suitors because none of them is exactly what she is looking for. Haidée is not entirely nature's child, as Byron once says she is. She has had some formal instruction in religion and she has had experience in the arts of courtship. She knows the difference between right and wrong, but her ardent nature is her enemy in moments of crisis. The pull of the flesh is strong in her. When she finds Juan lying unconscious on the shore of her island, she

deemed herself in common pity bound,
As far as in her lay, "to take him in,
A stranger" dying-with so white a skin. (Canto II, St. 129)

She possesses some of the courage and stubbornness of her father, as she shows when her father commands Juan to surrender.

Lambro

Lambro has become rich by smuggling piracy and slave trading. He has become hardened by the kind of life he had chosen to live. The only soft spot in his heart is his love for his motherless daughter and his love for his enslaved homeland. He is a man of inflexible will and rigid self control. Externally he is calm and has the manners of a gentleman. There is a contradiction between what he is in appearance and what he is within greedy, cruel, merciless, and passionate:

Not that he was not sometimes rash or so,
But never in his real and serious mood;
Then calm, concentrated, and still, and slow,
He lay coiled like the Boa in the wood;
With him it never was a word and blow,
His angry word once o'er, he shed no blood,
But in his silence there was much to rue,
And his *one* blow left little work for *two*.(Canto III, St. 48)

John Johnson

John Johnson is a practical man of the world who, like George Bernard Shaw's Bluntschli in *Arms and the Man*, has neither ideals nor illusions and who makes his living as a mercenary soldier. He believes that it is better to run away or surrender than to fight to the death. He is no martyr nor is he a coward. He will fight as long as he has a chance of winning. If he runs away or surrenders, he will return to fight again when the opportunity offers.

He takes life as it comes and believes in making the most of the present moment. When Juan suggests that he and Johnson overpower Baba and make their escape, Johnson recommends that they eat first and then weigh their chances of escaping. When Baba tries to persuade Johnson and Juan to be circumcised and become Moslems, Johnson replies that he will consider the proposition on a full stomach. His philosophy is a combination of common sense, stoicism, and opportunism.

Gulbeyaz

Like Donna Julia, the Sultana Gulbeyaz is a frustrated wife. She has to share her husband with three other wives and fifteen hundred concubines. Moreover, she is twenty-six and he is fifty-nine. Like Donna Julia she wants love and cannot get it. She has little self-control and is a creature of whims. When she sees the handsome Juan on his way to the slave market, she recklessly decides to buy him, even though by doing

so she runs the risk of losing her own life. She lives in a culture in which life is cheap and is bought and sold. The punishment for infidelity is a quick death. That fact does not deter her. As the favorite wife of the sultan, she is accustomed to getting her way. When crossed or displeased her instinct is to punish and punish harshly. When she learns that Juan, as "Juanna," has shared the bed of the concubine Dudù, she resolves to destroy both of them, even though by doing so she is eliminating the one who might give her the love she so passionately desires.

Suwarrow

Suwarrow is a professional soldier and a man of limited outlook. He is completely devoted to his chosen occupation and does whatever is necessary to win battles. He has no false pride and no false notions of what is becoming to an officer. He is not a spit-and-polish general. He believes in putting first things first. If his men need training in the use of the bayonet, he will shed his general's jacket and train them himself. He is efficient and sees immediately what needs to be done. He is concerned with making his men good soldiers, not with their lives. He is not interested in saving lives but in winning victories. He spares neither himself, nor his men, nor the enemy. He is a general's general, brave, brilliant, and successful. He respects military courage in others and is not immune to appeals to his rather limited supply of mercy and justice.

Catherine the Great

In *Don Juan* the reader sees only a few aspects of the complex woman who was Catherine the Great. He sees her chiefly as sensualist and as an absolute sovereign who is extravagantly generous to her lovers. He does not see her as the woman who did much to Westernize Russia and who was keenly interested in raising the level of culture in Russia. Nor does he see her as the shrewd and unscrupulous diplomat that she was, nor as the czarina who added thousands of square miles to Russian territory. He does not see her as a foreign woman of obscure family who came to Russia as a czar's wife and who by dint of her talents became one of the greatest sovereigns in the history of Russia.

Lord Henry Amundeville

Lord Henry is a politician and man of the world. He courts the good opinion and the friendship of those who can help him. He is a member of the Privy Council and as such a capable and faithful servant of his country; at the same time he manages to serve his own interests. He combines patriotism and self-interest in such a way as to make the two identical. He is cautious, reserved, and proud. He is slow to judge men but once he has made up his mind about them, nothing will make him change it.

He likes the feeling of superiority, and for this reason deliberately seeks out the acquaintance of people he can feel superior to.

He is a somewhat cold-blooded individual and is unable to give his wife the kind of love she would like to have. He is not much older than she is; there is no disparity of age between them. What keeps their union from being an ideal one is a matter of temperament. At heart he is more interested in matters of business than he is in people. He is, however, proud of his beautiful and charming wife.

Lady Adeline Amundeville

On the surface Lady Adeline seems to be a somewhat frigid young woman, but at heart she is deeply passionate. This frustration of her strong feelings is a source of potential danger for her marriage. She loves her husband but her love for him costs her an effort. She is thoroughly at home in her high social

circle. She is, nevertheless, "no deep judge of character." Her beauty and her charming manners win the admiration of all. Her reputation is secure. She is the ideal politician's wife. She knows all the arts of pleasing those whose votes her husband needs. She moves among his constituents with an ease that astonishes a foreigner like Juan. Her courtesy and tact when she is among them is, however, only a mask. As soon as she is out of their company she joins with her friends in making fun of them.

She is drawn to Juan because she finds in him a warmth that is lacking in her husband. Like many women she is a matchmaker, at least in Juan's case. She wants him to marry one of a number of good "catches" whom she lists. Such a marriage would be a loveless one, and that fact quite possibly would assure room for herself in Juan's heart.

Aurora Raby

Young beautiful, and noble, Aurora Raby is an outsider in the aristocratic society to which she belongs by birth. She is a Roman Catholic in a social class that is overwhelmingly Protestant. Unlike Juan, who is also a Roman Catholic, she is a believer who practices her faith. Don Juan's Roman Catholic faith seems to be limited to a willingness to kiss the pope's foot, and his morals are flexible in spite of the fact that he has been educated mainly by clergymen. Aurora's faith and morals are firmly grounded. She is innocent and, in contrast to Lady Adeline she is charitable. She is sincere, austere "As far as her own gentle heart allowed" (Canto XV, St. 46), unworldly, and free from envy.

MAJOR THEMES IN DON JUAN

Although the style of Don Juan is personal and subjective, the themes are universal and handled objectively— playfully, on the surface, as Byron freely confesses, but with an underlying seriousness. The grand theme, implicit in the story and the satire, is **Nature vs. Civilization**, or as Byron might have defined it, if anyone had pinned him down with a question: **Truth and Feigning, or Reality and Appearance**. In Byron's mind, it runs through everything, from natural and political history to metaphysics. Byron's preoccupation with it is typically romantic.

Byron uses a multitude of themes from time to time in the course of the poem. The best summary of these themes appears at the end of Canto VIII—**"Love—Tempest— Travel—War."** In Canto XIV, after many preliminary hints in Cantos X—XIII he adds:

"A bird's eye view too of that wild Society;

A slight glance thrown on men of every station"

He remarked to Medwin that Don Juan is about **Love, War and Religion**, the classic subjects of the epic. One might append to the list. Also, the topics for digression, — what Byron calls his "lubrications"— on metaphysics, freedom, education, literary criticism, his personal confessions and a host of lesser subjects.

"At the outset, we must note that the principal substance of Byron's thought is conveyed in his story. It is easy in reading Don Juan to be too much diverted by the digressions and to regard the story as comparatively trivial, a thread of interest barely strong enough to hold the poem together and keep the reader's curiosity alive from canto to canto. Byron writes as if he were himself very little concerned with it and was being forced only by convention to return to it and keep it spinning." (E.F. Boyd). As Byron turned over "all the adventures that he had undergone, seen, heard of or imagined, with his reflections on life and manners." The epic theme of love naturally occupied a very large position in his thoughts. For all

his too well known amours, strange to say Byron has been accused of exhibiting very little knowledge of the female heart because he made the women in his verse tales stereotyped romantic dolls. As a matter of fact, he was a very accurate reader of feminine character, aided, perhaps by the feminine traits of his own mind.

Byron chose the famous legend of Don Juan and set about retelling it in the light of truth. Love is the most important theme in the poem, viewed from the standpoint, of the general theme: Nature vs Civilization to the first mention of love in Canto I the digression on the sweetness of first love. Byron instantly appends the corollary of wonder at Man, the inscrutable creation.

In the story of Don Juan, Byron rejects the simple diabolism of the Spanish legend. Fundamentally, he says, the nature of man is good; and love is one of his most beautiful and sublime instincts. If Don Juan becomes a libertine monster, a man worthy of Hell, the fault lies in society, which has wrecked his primal nobility and twisted his good impulses to evil ends. This is Byron's Rousseauism.

It has been suggested that Byron shared Pope's rather cynical view in Moral Essay on the Characters of Women, that women are mere pretty animals who possess but two ruling passions—the love of pleasure and the love of sway. But though Byron did not like to see a woman eat, he was not so contemptuous as that. In Don Juan, he assigns as woman's ruling passion the need to love and to be loved:

"Man's love is of man's life thing apart.

'T is a woman's whole existence; " (I- 194)

So Julia from the convent where she has been shut .up, writes her farewell letter to Juan as he is setting forth on his adventures. This truism, by the way, first met Byron's attention in Mine, de Stael's Corinne. It stands as a text for the fates of all the heroines of Don Juan, from gentle Julia and innocent Haidee, to the great whore Catherine II who was at least "three parts woman."

Pity for the sad lot of women is a keynote in many passages. Women, Byron thinks, can really love but once, and that love is invariably betrayed. The simplicity of this Byronic view of woman, however true to nature and to the condition of women in Byron's day, belies somewhat the subtlety and the effect of infinite variety in the portraits of individual women in Don Juan. Byron's observation and dramatic characterization in this particular are more comprehensive than his philosophizing. The women, fundamentally mere lovers and objects of love, like the earlier Byronic heroines, are now endowed with complete personalities, and exhibited at every age and at every stage of their careers. In the earlier tales, the predominant importance of the Byronic hero relegated the heroines to the background. Where they show only in silhouette, in Don Juan they are set forth "in the round." Byron recognized their loyalty and capacity for friendship. He understood the spiritual craving in love experienced by the good and sensitive woman. Lady Adeline, for example, found something lacking in her noble husband. Lord Henry:

"A something all-sufficient for the heart

Is that for which the sex are always seeking: 1 But how to fill up that same vacant part?

There lies the rub"

(XIV. 74)

On the whole, he admitted the potential humanity of women, but thought it criminally stifled by the prevailing conditions of society.

"Byron's view of marriage is uncompromisingly unfavourable: some of the bitterest verses of Don Juan are reserved to condemn this, to him, uncomfortable and artificial state of being. Love is an institution of nature, but marriage of society, and the two are rarely compatible. This romantic view,

hallowed by the ages, was no conventional pose with Byron. His own experience of unhappy marriage confirmed what he read in Pope's *Eloisa* and Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*. Especially in England, he says, where marriages depend upon money, no matter what hypocritical society may declare to the contrary, matrimony is the opposite of love. He takes up Scott's phrase and proves that Love is not the rules of Camp, Court, and Grove, but that Money is. (XII. 1:3—16)." (E.F. Boyd)

Byron is at pains to condemn the hypocrisy of society and individuals toward love. He begins in Canto I attacking the hypocrisy of parents and husbands toward love and marriage, and in the last cantos he is still spurring to the charge. All hypocrisy in love is wicked and one of the prime evil effects occasioned by love, especially the hypocrisy of "Platonics" and other forms of self-deception. As a literary critic, he condemned the hypocrisy of romantic amatory writing. He thought the duty of the poet is to speak out plainly and with full responsibility, and he tried in the various and successive love episodes of *Don Juan* to exemplify his conception of the truth about love.

Byron's purpose in the first canto, the Julia episode, is to present a picture of first love, callow-, dreamy, and naively sweet, against a background of gross hypocrisy. The effect is to be bitter sweet, and is to be accomplished by a lightness of touch typifying adolescent calf love seen in retrospective. The style and attitude must be comic, brushing with laughter even the humiliation of Juan escaping naked through the dark streets, and the tragic fate of Julia buried alive in the convent. First love, as far as man is concerned Byron seems to suggest, is light love, and thoughtless and unreal, in both its animal and its sentimental aspects, and therefore good material for farce comedy. This is Juan's first love in the civilized world, and it is debased by hypocrisy. Byron tries to make it quite clear that the reason Donna Inez was not prompt to separate Juan and Julia, when the fact that they were falling in love became obvious, was that Inez, now a widow, had once been courted by Julia's husband. Don Alfonso and that she was consequently jealous of Julia and wanted to destroy her reputation and even her marriage. Using Juan as an unwitting tool, she succeeded in separating Julia from Don Alfonso by divorce and getting her locked up in a convent. In Canto X we learn from Inez's letter to Juan that Inez is married and Juan already has a little brother. The suggestion is that she married Don Alfonso. The jealous hypocrisy of Inez and Alfonso is clearly sketched. Byron's ridicule of the romantic love reaches its peak when we learn. "Romantic love can survive violent ills, fever and wounds but a cold in the head or an attack of seasickness is invariably too much for it."

In Canto II we are introduced to the second love-episode, a passionate, naturalistic pastoral. The contrast to the stuffy civilization of Seville is intense; in the sea-washed island under "all the stars that crowded the blue space." Juan and Haidee

"form a group that's quite antique Half naked. loving, natural, and Greek."

Shocked and awakened by his severance from all familiar surroundings and by the terrible experience of sufferings and death at sea, Juan finds real romance for the first and the last time. He and Haidee are children of nature, and their love is the real, natural passion. But it is attended by youthful inexperience and recklessness which are bound to prove its undoing. Headlong passion in a natural state of innocence collides with the cruel passion of Lambro,"who typifies the barbaric civilization of the Orient. The final ending of the Haidee episode, brought about by the extravagant passions of all three actors—Juan, Haidee, and Lambro—is Byron's comment on the fragility of natural love in an unnatural world. Byron says that they were lucky to have their happiness interrupted by violence, and not slowly diminished by age and care and indifference.

Juan's reactions to each new situation are physical reflexes. Gulbeyaz's fatuous love-making causes him to burst into tears with the memory of Haidee and with pride injured by his fall into slavery. Then at Gulbeyaz's humiliated weeping, he automatically unbends and begins to yield. Under the soldier Johnson's influence, he forgets love-making and sorrow for the glories of military action. But in the heat

of the carnage of Ismail, he is swept by a wave of self-gratifying pity and devotion for the orphan Leila. From glitter to blood and back again to glitter, Juan is hurried along to the overripe civilization of the Empress Catherine's court. The pace of events and sensations is so swift, thought unfortunately not Byron's pace in relating them, that Juan has no time to pause and take stock. The result is an illness that affects both his body and his spirits. He is hopelessly entangled in the contradictions that the world and his own behaviour have presented to him.

The relationship between Juan and Leila, though left in an unfinished state, is clearly meant to illustrate yet another type of love. We can only speculate on what role Leila would have played in the English episode perhaps she was to remind Juan of Haidee and to disturb him with the recollection of oriental love when he is deeply embroiled with the English "gem" Aurora, and the ladies of Amundeville and of Fitz-Fulke. Byron is at some pains to explain the curious affection between Juan and his ward; it was neither parental nor fraternal and still less a sensual love. In contrast to Juan's unselfish love for Leila, his love for Catherine was purely selfish and sensual. Byron is careful to explain how a youth hitherto described as naturally generous and pure-hearted could be suddenly perverted by temptation. The weakness was his vanity—that "imperious passion, Self-love." Catherine's favour flattered his vanity both in his male physical prowess and in his sudden elevation thereby to be a sort of King. In yielding to this impulse, Juan fell still further into the inevitable consequences of dissipation. His fever and ennui were not only the reaction from all his past experiences but a speedy repayment for his errors." (E.F. Boyd).

Still convalescent Juan arrives in England and enjoys a period of indifference to womankind resulting from his physical and psychic reactions. However, a short time is sufficient for youth to recover at least outwardly most of its elasticity. Inwardly his experiences have left corroding deposits which produce in him a comparative soberness, a more worldly circumspection, and a tendency to brood in melancholy fashion when he is alone. He feels "restless, and perplexed, and compromised" by Lady Adeline's machinations and advice; he "feels somewhat pensive, and disposed for contemplation rather than his pillow;" he "muses on Mutability, or on his Mistress—terms synonymous." In this mood, he sees a ghost. The poem leaves him surrounded by more or less consciously predatory women, his mind perplexed by a mingling of sorrow-tinged nostalgia, disenchantment, longings, and metaphysical speculation. He has reached the last stage of adolescence and begins to contemplate life with the tear-dazzled doubt and wonder proper to romantic youth:

"Between two words Life hovers like a star, 'Twixt Night and Morn, upon the horizon's verge."

Without condemning any individual in this story as utterly black, Byron is going to show the rottenness of the social system to which they belong. They will wreck Juan with their scheming, contriving, and cross interests, and then, herding together hypocritically, they will expel him with all the blame concentrated upon him.

Travel is another important aspect of Don Juan. For Byron, the ocean stood for escape and liberation. But for Don Juan, who experiences the sea at its most impersonally cruel and tedious, the wreck and the sufferings in the long boat and the final exhausting efforts of swimming were meant to intensify the naturally purifying effect of a sea voyage."

The important objects of travel in Don Juan are modern societies and modern people and their effect on the unfolding consciousness of the hero. Don Juan is not a travelogue, but a Wanderjahr. The reader sees the world, now through the eyes of Byron, and now through those of Juan, but the different angles of vision are trained on the present, on the modern, actual world. Childe Harold is a passive contemplative travelogue: Don Juan is the travels of a man of action."

The educative influences of contact with rude nature and personal experience of distance and physical hardship, Byron adds firsthand acquaintance with a wide variety of peoples, places, and manners. But he

makes another use of travel, as the technical device for conveying satire. He uses the technique of travel and the eyes of a voyager from another civilization to give the utmost point to the satire on his own. Travel in Don Juan serves a double purpose. It fosters and chastizes the hero, educating him as no mother or book learning in Seville could do; and it educates the reader, by juxtaposing view after view of the modern real world.

Juan's itinerary is dictated partly by the legend and by Byron's own experience, but also by the purposes of satire and use of the travel theme to illustrate Nature vs. Civilization. The story necessarily starts in Spain, in keeping with the legend, and the Spanish civilization is even more pointedly ripe for satire than the English. It goes to England inevitably, since English society and English responsibility in continental politics are principal butts of the satire. But what is the significance of Greece and of Russia? Greece enslaved under Turkey, and Russia, tyrannical and treacherous, the remote corners of Europe, provide contrasts to the homelands of both Juan and Byron, and give unparalleled opportunities for reflection on the themes of nature and civilization, war, tyranny, and freedom.

"In a travel story, whose hero is to die as a champion of freedom, it is highly appropriate that Juan should find his highest emotional satisfaction and his first brutal acquaintance with tyranny and slavery in Greece, the cradle of beauty and freedom, and the most downtrodden of modern slave nations. Catherine and Russia are to represent a superficial civilization actualities are worse than barbaric Greece or Turkey, and lest the reader of 1822 should miss the satiric point. Byron has already reminded him by way of an apostrophe to Catherine's grandson, the "grand legitimate Alexander," in canto V, that the present Russian member of the Holy Alliance belongs to this tradition of tyranny:'

War: All wars, thought Byron, are terrible, hells upon earth. but wars in support of freedom are justifiable, even praiseworthy. He had indeed perceived that "Revolution alone can save the earth from hell's pollution." War, however, embodies every human crime conceivable, but the worst is that it breeds a colossal hypocrisy, a blindness of ignorance and party prejudice. War hypocrisy induces hero worship or a general, a "butcher in large business," who has enriched himself by war. while it forgets the miseries and murders of untold anonymous millions. It allows a poet, who should know better, to call "Carnage God's daughter." "War cuts up not only branch, but root." It destroys in one hour, at the command of one mad leader what nature can scarcely rebuild in thirty years. The pursuit of the hollow glory of individual fame, alive only in the throat of quickly forgetful mobs, is the worst folly and hypocrisy of all. This is the will-o'-the-wisp that keeps up the spirit of militarism and glorifies martial prowess.

In the introduction of the theme of war Byron's 'epic satire' departs widely from the simple unity of the Don Juan legend, but it is still concerned with the central moral problems of the legend, honour and the ends for which men live. Nowhere else in Don Juan did Byron deal a stronger blow for progressive liberal thought than in Cantos VII-VIII condemning wars of conquest. With the entire Napoleonic world, he had been meditating furiously on war and conquest through the whole span of his adult life. This was the period when the ideas of isolated philosophers, poets, and groups, who for centuries past had inveighed against war began under the stress of current events, to spread to the multitudes and to take shape in political and social organizations for world peace, and the outlawing of war.

History, Byron thought, ought to be written to divest war of its charm. The public should be let in on the facts behind the headlines in their morning papers, behind the long casualty lists, where names as often as not are misspelled:

"History can only take things in the gross but could we know them in detail

"And why?—because it brings self-approbation..."

(VIII, 3-4)

From the public standpoint, war is wasteful; and from the private, war does not give the individual the need of honour and glory he is seeking. The momentary fame of military glory is "nothing but a child of Murder's rattles."

Byron uses his theme of war in civilized Europe to illustrate again his general theme of nature and civilization. One extra-ordinary digression occurs in Canto VIII at the height of the battle, when Ismail had been entered but not taken.—the stanzas on Daniel Boone, 61-67:

"God made the country, and manmade the town. So Cowper says—and I begin to be of his opinion, when I see cast down Rome—Babylon—Tyre—Carthage—Nineveh—

In the broad sense, all of Byron's *Don Juan* deals with society, the modern European world both east and west. But the last six cantos are especially concerned with the state of society in England, and the field of thought embraces both society at large and the huge monde of London's West End. In general, Byron condemns English society for its materialism, its selfish irresponsibility, its frigidity, and its unnaturalness. He deals in Canto XII with the power of money, as it is specifically exercised in "the marriage mart." He ridicules abstract theorists, like Malthus, who set up new philosophical codes for an already artificial society, living by unnatural conventions.

QUESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. *Don Juan* has sometimes been called an epic. Look up some definitions of epic and decide whether *Don Juan* may properly be called an epic or not.
2. What is the controlling idea of Byron's *Don Juan*?
3. Look up some definitions of picaresque novel and write an essay on *Don Juan* as picaresque novel.
4. Judging from *Don Juan*, what are Byron's views on man? Provide evidence.
5. Determine the kind and amount of realism in *Don Juan*.
6. Judging from what he says about himself in *Don Juan*, what is Byron's philosophy of life?
7. Read the chapters on the history of the realistic novel in a standard history of the novel and decide whether or not *Don Juan* can be considered a realistic novel in verse.
8. Is *Don Juan* an interesting main character for a narrative poem? Supply evidence in support of your opinion.
9. Is it true that *Don Juan* is merely a character to whom things happen?
10. Discuss Byron's use of digression in *Don Juan*. Is it a welcome addition to his narrative or does it weaken *Don Juan* as a poem? Compare Henry Fielding's use of digression in *Tom Jones* with Byron's use of digression in *Don Juan*.
11. Keeping in mind the total narrative content of *Don Juan*, sketch a suitable conclusion for the poem that will be consistent with the character of *Don Juan*.

12. Write an essay on the male characters in *Don Juan*. Decide which of them is the most interesting and give the reasons why.
13. Write an essay on the female characters in *Don Juan*. Decide which of them is the most interesting and give the reasons why.
14. In your opinion, is Byron more successful in creating female characters than he is in creating male characters? Supply evidence.
15. Would Byron's *Don Juan* be more interesting and entertaining if written in prose?
16. What is the best episode in *Don Juan* from every point of view? Supply evidence to support your opinion.
17. What image of Byron as an individual emerges from a reading of *Don Juan*? Is this image consistent with that to be found in any good biography of Byron?
18. Compare and contrast Byron's *Don Juan* with his *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*.
19. Discuss the part played by Donna Inez in the formation of Don Juan's character.
20. Compare and contrast Byron's Don Juan-Haidée episode with any earlier love story in verse.
21. What is the value of dialogue in narrative? How much dialogue does Byron use in *Don Juan*? Which canto contains the most dialogue? Compare that canto in literary quality with the others.
22. Make a list of the people satirized in *Don Juan*. For what faults does Byron satirize them?

ODE TO THE WEST WIND

ABOUT THE POET

Percy Bysshe Shelley

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born in 1792, into a wealthy Sussex family which eventually attained minor noble rank—the poet’s grandfather, a wealthy businessman, received a baronetcy in 1806. Timothy Shelley, the poet’s father, was a Member of Parliament and a country gentleman. The young Shelley entered Eton, a prestigious school for boys, at the age of twelve. While he was there, he discovered the works of a philosopher named William Godwin, which he consumed passionately and in which he became a fervent believer; the young man wholeheartedly embraced the ideals of liberty and equality espoused by the French Revolution, and devoted his considerable passion and persuasive power to convincing others of the rightness of his beliefs. Entering Oxford in 1810, Shelley was expelled the following spring for his part in authoring a pamphlet entitled *The Necessity of Atheism*—atheism being an outrageous idea in religiously conservative nineteenth-century England.

Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote "Ode to the West Wind" in 1819 while living in Florence, Italy. To be exact, when he published the poem with his un-performable play *Prometheus Unbound* in 1820, he claimed in a footnote to have written "Ode to the West Wind" while sitting in the woods near the Arno River on a windy day in October. Lucky man, we say, but although he loved Italy, he was feeling depressed about being detached from the political and social scene back in his native England. Many critics have suggested that this poem relates to that sense of powerlessness.

At the age of nineteen, Shelley eloped with Harriet Westbrook, the sixteen-year-old daughter of a tavern keeper, whom he married despite his inherent dislike for the tavern. Not long after, he made the personal acquaintance of William Godwin in London, and promptly fell in love with Godwin’s daughter Mary Wollstonecraft, whom he was eventually able to marry, and who is now remembered primarily as the author of *Frankenstein*. In 1816, the Shelleys traveled to Switzerland to meet Lord Byron, the most famous, celebrated, and controversial poet of the era; the two men became close friends. After a time, they formed a circle of English expatriates in Pisa, traveling throughout Italy; during this time Shelley wrote most of his finest lyric poetry, including the immortal “Ode to the West Wind” and “To a Skylark.” In 1822, Shelley drowned while sailing in a storm off the Italian coast. He was not yet thirty years old.

Works

A Letter to Lord Ellenborough (1812)

A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the Kingdom, as The Hermit of Marlow (1817)

A Refutation of Deism: in a Dialogue (1814)

Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats, Author of Endymion, Hyperion etc. (1821)

Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude; and Other Poems (1816)

An Address, to the Irish People (1812)

Epipsychidion (1821)

Hellas: A Lyrical Drama (1822)

Laon and Cythna; or, The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century (1818)

Original Poetry (1810)

Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson (1810)

Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1824)

Prometheus Unbound. A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts, With Other Poems (1820)

Proposals for An Association of those Philanthropists (1812)
Queen Mab; a Philosophical Poem: with Notes (1813)
Rosalind and Helen, A Modern Eclogue; with Other Poems (1819)
St. Irvyne; or, The Rosicrucian. A Romance, as a Gentleman of the University of Oxford (1811)
The Masque of Anarchy. A Poem (1832)
The Necessity of Atheism (1811)
Zastrozzi (1810)

An Introduction to Shelly's Poetry

The spirit of revolution and the power of free thought were Percy Shelley's biggest passions in life. After being sent away to boarding school at the age of ten, he attended a lecture on science which piqued his interest in the properties of electricity, magnetism, chemistry and telescopes. On return trips home, he would try to cure his sisters' chilblains by passing electric currents through them. He also hinted of a mysterious "alchemist" living in a hidden room in the attic.

While attending the Eton school from 1804 to 1810, the quiet, odd and reflective boy was taunted relentlessly by schoolmates. This generated in him extremes of anger, once even driving him to stab another boy with a fork. Shelley detested the practice of younger boys buying protection (through doing menial tasks) from older bullies. He was ever the visionary and daydreamer, often forgetting to tie his shoelaces or to wear a hat. His odd behavior eventually earned him the nickname of "Mad Shelley".

At school, Shelley became intrigued with the revolutionary political and philosophical ideas of Thomas Paine and William Godwin. Throughout his life, he emphatically expressed his political and religious views in a struggle against social injustice, often to the point where it got him into trouble or mired in controversy. Later, in Geneva with Byron, he would often write "*democrat, great lover of mankind, and atheist*" in Greek after his signature in hotel ledgers. Upon finding one of these signatures, Lord Byron remarked: "Do you not think I shall do Shelley a service by scratching this out?" which he promptly did. Shelley detested the monarchy and aristocracy. He was a great believer in the idea of the power of the human mind to change circumstances for the better in a non-violent way.

Shelley attended University College, Oxford in 1810. His friend, Thomas Jefferson Hogg describes Shelley's college rooms as such:

Books, boots, papers, shoes, philosophical instruments, clothes, pistols, linen, crockery, ammunition, and phials innumerable, with money, stockings, prints, crucibles, bags, and boxes were scattered on the floor and in every place. . . . The tables, and especially the carpet, were already stained with large spots of various hues, which frequently proclaimed the agency of fire. An electrical machine, an air pump, the galvanic trough, a solar microscope, and large glass jars and receivers, were conspicuous amidst the mass of matter.

The young Shelley was often seen indulging in his habit of sailing paper boats on the water of any nearby pond, lake or river, or reading with a book held right up to his eyes, lying very close to the fire.

"... insanity hung as by a hair suspended over the head of Shelley ..." ~ Shelley's cousin Medwin ~

In 1811 Shelley wrote and distributed to various bishops and heads of colleges a short pamphlet he wrote on *The Necessity of Atheism*. One of these he sent to a poetry professor along with a letter signed "Jeremiah Stukley". The professor then brought the letter and essay, which proposed free inquiry into religious belief and suggested that the existence of God remained unproven by physical evidence or

reason, to the University College master. Shelley and his friend Hogg were both subsequently expelled from Oxford. This incident greatly upset Shelley's father and grandfather. His relationship with them and his closeness to the rest of his family was never completely mended.

Although he intellectually disliked the institution of marriage, stating that it was not necessary if two people loved each other, he eloped to Scotland in 1811 and married sixteen year-old Harriet Westbrook, the daughter of a London merchant and a school friend of his sister. Shelley's father immediately cut off his monetary allowance upon hearing the news, but was eventually persuaded to restart it. Meanwhile, Shelley continued to write political pamphlets, often sending them out in bottles or homemade paper boats over the water, or inside fire balloons into the sky.

At the beginning of 1812 Shelley started to suffer from "nervous attacks" for which he took doses of laudanum. He also started to sleepwalk when life became difficult or stressful. One evening he was either attacked, or imagined he was attacked, outside the door of his cottage. His wife and a neighbor found him lying senseless at the foot of the entryway. It was also in 1812 that he met and became friends with William Godwin and his family.

Harriet bore Shelley's first child, Elizabeth Ianthe, in June of 1813 and by the end of the year was pregnant again. But by 1814, Shelley had fallen in love with Mary Godwin, which upset both Harriet and Mary's father, William. When the two persuaded Mary to stop seeing Shelley for a little while, he showed up distraught and hysterical at her house with laudanum and a pistol, threatening to commit suicide. Soon reconciled, Shelley and Mary later traveled around Europe with Mary's sister Jane (later Claire) Clairmont. By the time they returned to London, Mary was pregnant. Harriet gave birth to Charles, Shelley's first-born son in November of 1814, but she was by now painfully aware that Shelley did not love her anymore.

*“Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow”~ Shelley in 'To A Skylark' ~*

Mary gave birth to a tiny girl in February of 1815, but the baby died within a few weeks. She was soon pregnant again, and gave birth to a son, William, in early 1816. Mary, Shelley and Claire spent the summer of 1816 at Lake Geneva at a residence near Byron's. The famous "ghost story contest" which spawned Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* took place during this period.

Tragedy struck twice near the end of 1816 after Mary and Shelley had returned to London. Depressed, Mary's sister Fanny committed suicide in October. Later, Harriet's body was found one November morning, drowned in Hyde Park's Serpentine. She had presumably killed herself. She was several months pregnant from an affair with a military officer who had later been sent abroad, and assumedly despondent about Shelley leaving her for Mary. Shelley had had no contact with Harriet since the spring. He soon proposed to Mary and they were married on December 30, 1816.

The newlyweds eventually moved to Great Marlow, where Mary finished her work on *Frankenstein* while pregnant, and Shelley provided help to the poor -- a habit which made the local aristocrats call him "mad". In a bout of hypochondria, Shelley also imagined for weeks that he was developing elephantiasis after sitting next to a woman with fat legs on a coach.

In 1817 daughter Clara was born, and in 1818 Shelley left England for good to seek warmer climes for his health, not to mention that he also wanted to escape his persecutors in the press and within his own family. While in Italy, Claire Clairmont became pregnant again (after having had Byron's daughter

Allegra in 1817), but the identity of the father remains uncertain. Many speculate that Shelley himself was the father, as it is obvious from letters and accounts that he felt a great love for both Claire and Mary; and after all, he was a great proponent of the completely radical idea of "free love" as put forth in his essay *On Love* and the poem *Epipsychidion*:

I never was attached to that great sect,
Whose doctrine is, that each one should select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend,
And all the rest, though fair and wise, commend
To cold oblivion, though it is in the code
Of modern morals....

A baby (Elena Adelaide), born in late 1818 was listed as Shelley and Mary's, but scholars are convinced that it was most likely Claire's. Nonetheless, the child was sent off to foster care, and later died at the age of two.

Tragedy struck the Shelleys again and again in Italy. Baby Clara died in 1818 in Mary's arms while she waited in the hall of an inn for Shelley to find a doctor. Depressed and bitter in December of 1818, in failing health and with a marriage that was falling apart, Shelley composed his *Stanzas written in Dejection, near Naples*, where he writes:

Alas! I have nor hope nor health,
Nor peace within nor calm around,
Nor that content surpassing wealth
The sage in meditation found,
And walked with inward glory crowned--
Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure.
Others I see whom these surround--
Smiling they live, and call life pleasure;
To me that cup has been dealt in another measure.

Little William became ill in late May of 1819, and although watched over agonizingly by his parents and loved ones, he died on June 7. This pain was mixed with the joy of the birth of son Percy Florence in November of the same year. Stress took its toll, as Shelley's cousin Medwin, during a visit in 1820, described the twenty-eight-year old poet as "tall, emaciated, stooping, with grey streaks in his hair."

"You were all brutally mistaken about Shelley, who was without exception the best and least selfish man I ever knew."~ Byron, upon Shelley's death ~

Percy Shelley could not swim, and even though he had recently been involved in a boating accident in a canal one night in which he was nearly drowned, he and several friends decided to spend the summer of 1822 sailing on the Bay of Lerici. A boat was ordered and built for this purpose -- named *Don Juan* by Byron, but renamed *Ariel* by Shelley. Meanwhile, the pregnant Mary, who was expecting in December, suffered another miscarriage in June. Shelley himself suffered from disturbing recurring nightmares and hallucinations during the summer. One vision was of a naked child rising out of the sea and clapping its hands; another was an encounter with his own doppelganger on the terrace, who then asked him "How long do you mean to be content?"; and the most terrifying was of his good friends Jane and Edward Williams coming into his room one night, bloody and mangled, to tell him that the house was falling down -- and when he rushed to Mary's room to warn her, he found himself strangling her. Shelley wrote

to a friend and asked him to send a lethal dose of prussic acid, not to use immediately, but as comfort to hold "that golden key to the chamber of perpetual rest."

On July 7, after a long trip of sailing out to visit several different friends, a sudden afternoon storm sunk the *Ariel* ten miles from any land. The bodies of Shelley, Williams and the boat's sailor washed up ten days later and were treated and cremated on the beach because of quarantine laws to protect against the plague. Shelley's ashes were buried in the Protestant cemetery at Rome. His heart was first given to a friend, then to Mary, and eventually buried in Bournemouth. Shelley's final, unfinished poem was, perhaps ironically, titled *The Triumph of Life*.

Shelley belongs to the younger generation of English Romantic poets, the generation that came to prominence while William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were settling into middle age. Where the older generation was marked by simple ideals and a reverence for nature, the poets of the younger generation (which also included John Keats and the infamous Lord Byron) came to be known for their sensuous aestheticism, their explorations of intense passions, their political radicalism, and their tragically short lives.

Shelley died when he was twenty-nine, Byron when he was thirty-six, and Keats when he was only twenty-six years old. To an extent, the intensity of feeling emphasized by Romanticism meant that the movement was always associated with youth, and because Byron, Keats, and Shelley died young (and never had the opportunity to sink into conservatism and complacency as Wordsworth did), they have attained iconic status as the representative tragic Romantic artists. Shelley's life and his poetry certainly support such an understanding, but it is important not to indulge in stereotypes to the extent that they obscure a poet's individual character. Shelley's joy, his magnanimity, his faith in humanity, and his optimism are unique among the Romantics; his expression of those feelings makes him one of the early nineteenth century's most significant writers in English.

As a political, religious, and literary radical, Shelley was heavily invested in his own ability to influence society. Some poets need solitude and privacy and a retreat in the woods to do their best work, but Shelley needed stimulating arguments and social action. "Ode to the West Wind" is one of the poems in which he considers the role and power of the poet or philosopher to spread new ideas and effect change. It's also, though you might find this difficult to believe, one of Shelley's more accessible poems. Its brevity, smooth tone, and straightforward use of natural imagery present his abstract ideas about philosophy and poetry in a compact way. Think of it as Shelley's own summary of himself – or at least one aspect of himself. He's probably the most difficult of the Romantic poets to fall in love with. Luckily, he's not the most difficult poet. He's hard to love, but not *too* hard to understand.

The life and works of Percy Bysshe Shelley exemplify Romanticism in both its extremes of joyous ecstasy and brooding despair. The major themes are there in Shelley's dramatic if short life and in his works, enigmatic, inspiring, and lasting: the restlessness and brooding, the rebellion against authority, the interchange with nature, the power of the visionary imagination and of poetry, the pursuit of ideal love, and the untamed spirit ever in search of freedom—all of these Shelley exemplified in the way he lived his life and live on in the substantial body of work that he left the world after his legendary death by drowning at age twenty-nine. While Shelley shares many basic themes and symbols with his great contemporaries, he has left his peculiar stamp on Romanticism: the creation of powerful symbols in his visionary pursuit of the ideal, at the same time tempered by a deep skepticism. His thought is characterized by an insistence on taking the controversial side of issues, even at the risk of being unpopular and ridiculed. From the very beginning of his career as a published writer at the precocious age of seventeen, throughout his life, and even to the present day the very name of Shelley has evoked either

the strongest vehemence or the warmest praise, bordering on worship. More than any other English Romantic writer, with the possible exception of his friend George Gordon, Lord Byron, Shelley's life and reputation have had a history and life of their own apart from the reputation of his various works.

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Understanding Romanticism

The romantic period is a term applied to the literature of approximately the first third of the nineteenth century. During this time, literature began to move in channels that were not entirely new but were in strong contrast to the standard literary practice of the eighteenth century.

How the word *romantic* came to be applied to this period is something of a puzzle. Originally the word was applied to the Latin or Roman dialects used in the Roman provinces, especially France, and to the stories written in these dialects. *Romantic* is a derivative of *romant*, which was borrowed from the French *romaunt* in the sixteenth century. At first it meant only "like the old romances" but gradually it began to carry a certain taint. *Romantic*, according to L. P. Smith in his *Words and Idioms*, connoted "false and fictitious beings and feelings, without real existence in fact or in human nature"; it also suggested "old castles, mountains and forests, pastoral plains, waste and solitary places" and a "love for wild nature, for mountains and moors."

The word passed from England to France and Germany late in the seventeenth century and became a critical term for certain poets who scorned and rejected the models of the past; they prided themselves on their freedom from eighteenth-century poetic codes. In Germany, especially, the word was used in strong opposition to the term *classical*.

The grouping together of the so-called Lake poets (Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey) with Scott, Byron, Keats, and Shelley as the romantic poets is late Victorian, apparently as late as the middle 1880s. And it should be noted that these poets did not recognize themselves as "romantic," although they were familiar with the word and recognized that their practice differed from that of the eighteenth century.

According to René Wellek in his essay "The Concept of Romanticism" (*Comparative Literature*, Volume I), the widespread application of the word *romantic* to these writers was probably owing to Alois Brandl's *Coleridge und die romantische Schule in England* (*Coleridge and the Romantic School in*

England, translated into English in 1887) and to Walter Pater's essay "Romanticism" in his *Appreciations* in 1889.

The reaction to the standard literary practice and critical norms of the eighteenth century occurred in many areas and in varying degrees. Reason no longer held the high place it had held in the eighteenth century; its place was taken by imagination, emotion, and individual sensibility. The eccentric and the singular took the place of the accepted conventions of the age. A concentration on the individual and the minute replaced the eighteenth-century insistence on the universal and the general. Individualism replaced objective subject matter; probably at no other time has the writer used himself as the subject of his literary works to such an extent as during the romantic period. Writers tended to regard themselves as the most interesting subject for literary creation; interest in urban life was replaced by an interest in nature, particularly in untamed nature and in solitude. Classical literature quickly lost the esteem which poets like Pope had given it. The romantic writers turned back to their own native traditions. The Medieval and Renaissance periods were ransacked for new subject matter and for literary genres that had fallen into disuse. The standard eighteenth-century heroic couplet was replaced by a variety of forms such as the ballad, the metrical romance, the sonnet, ottava rima, blank verse, and the Spenserian stanza, all of which were forms that had been neglected since Renaissance times. The romantic writers responded strongly to the impact of new forces, particularly the French Revolution and its promise of liberty, equality, and fraternity. The humanitarianism that had been developing during the eighteenth century was taken up enthusiastically by the romantic writers. Wordsworth, the great champion of the spiritual and moral values of physical nature, tried to show the natural dignity, goodness, and the worth of the common man.

The combination of new interests, new attitudes, and fresh forms produced a body of literature that was strikingly different from the literature of the eighteenth century, but that is not to say that the eighteenth century had no influence on the romantic movement. Practically all of the seeds of the new literary crop had been sown in the preceding century.

The romantic period includes the work of two generations of writers. The first generation was born during the thirty and twenty years preceding 1800; the second generation was born in the last decade of the 1800s. The chief writers of the first generation were Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Southey, Blake, Lamb, and Hazlitt. The essayist Thomas De Quincey, born in 1785, falls between the two generations.

Keats and Shelley belong to the second generation, along with Byron, who was older than they were by a few years. All three were influenced by the work of the writers of the first generation and, ironically, the careers of all three were cut short by death so that the writers of the first generation were still on the literary scene after the writers of the second generation had disappeared. The major writers of the second romantic generation were primarily poets; they produced little prose, outside of their letters. Another striking difference between the two generations is that the writers of the first generation, with the exception of Blake, all gained literary reputations during their lifetime. Of the writers of the second generation, only Byron enjoyed fame while he was alive, more fame than any of the other romantic writers, with perhaps the exception of Scott, but Keats and Shelley had relatively few readers while they were alive. It was not until the Victorian era that Keats and Shelley became recognized as major romantic poets.

Recurring Themes in Shelly's Poetry

The central thematic concerns of Shelley's poetry are largely the same themes that defined Romanticism, especially among the younger English poets of Shelley's era: beauty, the passions, nature, political liberty, creativity, and the sanctity of the imagination. What makes Shelley's treatment of these themes

unique is his philosophical relationship to his subject matter—which was better developed and articulated than that of any other Romantic poet with the possible exception of Wordsworth—and his temperament, which was extraordinarily sensitive and responsive even for a Romantic poet, and which possessed an extraordinary capacity for joy, love, and hope. Shelley fervently believed in the possibility of realizing an ideal of human happiness as based on beauty, and his moments of darkness and despair (he had many, particularly in book-length poems such as the monumental *Queen Mab*) almost always stem from his disappointment at seeing that ideal sacrificed to human weakness.

Shelley's intense feelings about beauty and expression are documented in poems such as "Ode to the West Wind" and "To a Skylark," in which he invokes metaphors from nature to characterize his relationship to his art. The center of his aesthetic philosophy can be found in his important essay *A Defence of Poetry*, in which he argues that poetry brings about moral good. Poetry, Shelley argues, exercises and expands the imagination, and the imagination is the source of sympathy, compassion, and love, which rest on the ability to project oneself into the position of another person. He writes:

A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others. The pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void forever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.

No other English poet of the early nineteenth century so emphasized the connection between beauty and goodness, or believed so avidly in the power of art's sensual pleasures to improve society. Byron's pose was one of amoral sensuousness, or of controversial rebelliousness; Keats believed in beauty and aesthetics for their own sake. But Shelley was able to believe that poetry makes people and society *better*; his poetry is suffused with this kind of inspired moral optimism, which he hoped would affect his readers sensuously, spiritually, and morally, all at the same time.

Symbolism in Shelly's Poetry

The Power of Nature

Like many of the romantic poets, especially William Wordsworth, Shelley demonstrates a great reverence for the beauty of nature, and he feels closely connected to nature's power. In his early poetry, Shelley shares the romantic interest in pantheism—the belief that God, or a divine, unifying spirit, runs through everything in the universe. He refers to this unifying natural force in many poems, describing it as the "spirit of beauty" in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and identifying it with Mont Blanc and the Arve River in "Mont Blanc." This force is the cause of all human joy, faith, goodness, and pleasure, and it is also the source of poetic inspiration and divine truth. Shelley asserts several times that this force can influence people to change the world for the better. However, Shelley simultaneously recognizes that nature's power is not wholly positive. Nature destroys as often as it inspires or creates, and it destroys cruelly and indiscriminately. For this reason, Shelley's delight in nature is mitigated by an awareness of its dark side.

The Power of the Human Mind

Shelley uses nature as his primary source of poetic inspiration. In such poems as "The Mask of Anarchy Written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester" (1819) and "Ode to the West Wind," Shelley

suggests that the natural world holds a sublime power over his imagination. This power seems to come from a stranger, more mystical place than simply his appreciation for nature's beauty or grandeur. At the same time, although nature has creative power over Shelley because it provides inspiration, he feels that his imagination has creative power over nature. It is the imagination—or our ability to form sensory perceptions—that allows us to describe nature in different, original ways, which help to shape how nature appears and, therefore, how it exists. Thus, the power of the human mind becomes equal to the power of nature, and the experience of beauty in the natural world becomes a kind of collaboration between the perceiver and the perceived. Because Shelley cannot be sure that the sublime powers he senses in nature are only the result of his gifted imagination, he finds it difficult to attribute nature's power to God: the human role in shaping nature damages Shelley's ability to believe that nature's beauty comes solely from a divine source.

Recurring Motifs in Shelly's Poetry

Autumn

Shelley sets many of his poems in autumn, including "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and "Ode to the West Wind." Fall is a time of beauty and death, and so it shows both the creative and destructive powers of nature, a favorite Shelley theme. As a time of change, autumn is a fitting backdrop for Shelley's vision of political and social revolution. In "Ode to the West Wind," autumn's brilliant colors and violent winds emphasize the passionate, intense nature of the poet, while the decay and death inherent in the season suggest the sacrifice and martyrdom of the Christ-like poet.

Ghosts and Spirits

Shelley's interest in the supernatural repeatedly appears in his work. The ghosts and spirits in his poems suggest the possibility of glimpsing a world beyond the one in which we live. In "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," the speaker searches for ghosts and explains that ghosts are one of the ways men have tried to interpret the world beyond. The speaker of "Mont Blanc" encounters ghosts and shadows of real natural objects in the cave of "Poesy." Ghosts are inadequate in both poems: the speaker finds no ghosts in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," and the ghosts of Poesy in "Mont Blanc" are not the real thing, a discovery that emphasizes the elusiveness and mystery of supernatural forces.

Christ

From his days at Oxford, Shelley felt deeply doubtful about organized religion, particularly Christianity. Yet, in his poetry, he often represents the poet as a Christ-like figure and thus sets the poet up as a secular replacement for Christ. Martyred by society and conventional values, the Christ figure is resurrected by the power of nature and his own imagination and spreads his prophetic visions over the earth. Shelley further separates his Christ figures from traditional Christian values in *Adonais*, in which he compares the same character to Christ, as well as Cain, whom the Bible portrays as the world's first murderer. For Shelley, Christ and Cain are both outcasts and rebels, like romantic poets and like himself.

Mont Blanc

For Shelley, Mont Blanc—the highest peak in the Alps—represents the eternal power of nature. Mont Blanc has existed forever, and it will last forever, an idea he explores in "Mont Blanc." The mountain fills the poet with inspiration, but its coldness and inaccessibility are terrifying. Ultimately, though, Shelley wonders if the mountain's power might be meaningless, an invention of the more powerful human imagination.

The West Wind

Shelley uses the West Wind to symbolize the power of nature and of the imagination inspired by nature. Unlike Mont Blanc, however, the West Wind is active and dynamic in poems, such as “Ode to the West Wind.” While Mont Blanc is immobile, the West Wind is an agent for change. Even as it destroys, the wind encourages new life on earth and social progress among humanity.

The Statue of Ozymandias

In Shelley’s work, the statue of the ancient Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II, or Ozymandias, symbolizes political tyranny. In “Ozymandias,” (1817) the statue is broken into pieces and stranded in an empty desert, which suggests that tyranny is temporary and also that no political leader, particularly an unjust one, can hope to have lasting power or real influence. The broken monument also represents the decay of civilization and culture: the statue is, after all, a human construction, a piece of art made by a creator, and now it—and its creator—have been destroyed, as all living things are eventually destroyed.

Ode to the West Wind

Ode to the West Wind is an ode written by Percy Bysshe Shelley in 1819 near Florence, Italy. It was published in 1820 (see 1820 in poetry) by Charles and James Ollier in London as part of the Prometheus Unbound, A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts, With Other Poems collection. Some have interpreted the poem as the speaker lamenting his inability to directly help those in England owing to his being in Italy. At the same time, the poem expresses the hope that its words will inspire and influence those who read or hear it. Perhaps more than anything else, Shelley wanted his message of reform and revolution spread, and the wind becomes the trope for spreading the word of change through the poet-prophet figure. Some also believe that the poem is due to the loss of his son, William in 1819 (to Mary Shelley). His son Charles (to Harriet Shelley) died in 1826, after "Ode to the West Wind" was written and published. The ensuing pain influenced Shelley. The poem allegorises the role of the poet as the voice of change and revolution. At the time of composing this poem, Shelley without doubt had the Peterloo Massacre of August 1819 in mind. His other poems written at the same time—"The Mask of Anarchy," "Prometheus Unbound," and "England in 1819"—take up these same problems of political change, revolution, and role of the poet.

The poem begins with three cantos describing the wind's effects upon earth, air, and ocean. The last two cantos are Shelley speaking directly to the wind, asking for its power, to lift him like a leaf, a cloud or a wave and make him its companion in its wanderings. He asks the wind to take his thoughts and spread them all over the world so that the youth are awoken with his ideas. The poem ends with an optimistic note which is that if winter days are here then spring is not very far.

Interpretation of the poem

The poem *Ode to the West Wind* can be divided in two parts: the first three cantos are about the qualities of the ‘Wind’ and each end with the invocation ‘Oh hear!’. The last two cantos give a relation between the ‘Wind’ and the speaker.

First Canto

The first stanza begins with the alliteration 'wild West Wind' (l.1). The form of the apostrophe makes the wind also a personification. However, one must not think of this 'Ode' as an optimistic praise of the wind; it is clearly associated with autumn. The first few lines contain sinister elements, such as 'leaves dead' (l. 2), the aspect of death being highlighted by the inversion which puts 'dead' (l. 2) at the end of the line. These leaves haunt as 'ghosts' (l. 3) that flee from something that panics them.

'chariotest' (l. 6) is the second person singular. The 'corpse within its grave' (l. 8) in the next line is in contrast to the 'azure sister of the Spring' (l. 9) – a reference to the east wind – whose 'living hues and odours' (l.12) evoke a strong contrast to the colours of the fourth line of the poem that evoke death. In the last line of this canto the west wind is considered the 'Destroyer' (l. 14) because it drives the last signs of life from the trees, and the 'Preserver' (l.14) for scattering the seeds which will come to life in the spring.

Second Canto

The second canto of the poem is much more fluid than the first one. The sky's 'clouds' (l. 16) are 'like earth's decaying leaves' (l. 16). They are a reference to the second line of the first canto ('leaves dead', l. 2). They also are numerous in number like the dead leaves. Through this reference the landscape is recalled again. The 'clouds' (l. 16) are 'Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean' (l. 17). This probably refers to the fact that the line between the sky and the stormy sea is indistinguishable and the whole space from the horizon to the zenith is covered with trailing storm clouds. The 'clouds' can also be seen as 'Angels of rain' (l. 18). In a biblical way, they may be messengers that bring a message from heaven down to earth through rain and lightning. These two natural phenomena with their "fertilizing and illuminating power" bring a change.

Line 21 begins with 'Of some fierce Maenad ...' (l. 21) and again the west wind is part of the second canto of the poem; here he is two things at once: first he is 'dirge/Of the dying year' (l. 23f) and second he is "a prophet of tumult whose prediction is decisive"; a prophet who does not only bring 'black rain, and fire, and hail' (l. 28), but who 'will burst' (l. 28) it. The 'locks of the approaching storm' (l. 23) are the messengers of this bursting: the 'clouds'.

Shelley also mentions that when the West Wind blows, it seems to be singing a funeral song about the year coming to an end and that the sky covered with a dome of clouds looks like a 'sepulchre' i.e. a burial chamber or grave for the dying year or the year which is coming to an end.

Shelley in this canto "expands his vision from the earthly scene with the leaves before him to take in the vaster commotion of the skies". This means that the wind is now no longer at the horizon and therefore far away, but he is exactly above us. The clouds now reflect the image of the swirling leaves; this is a parallelism that gives evidence that we lifted "our attention from the finite world into the macrocosm". The 'clouds' can also be compared with the leaves; but the clouds are more unstable and bigger than the leaves and they can be seen as messengers of rain and lightning as it was mentioned above.

Third Canto

This refers to the effect of west wind in the water. The question that comes up when reading the third canto at first is what the subject of the verb 'saw' (l. 33) could be. On the one hand there is the 'blue Mediterranean' (l. 30). With the 'Mediterranean' as subject of the canto, the "syntactical movement" is continued and there is no break in the fluency of the poem; it is said that 'he lay, / Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams, / Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay, / And saw in sleep old palaces and towers' (l. 30–33). On the other hand it is also possible that the lines of this canto refer to the 'wind' again. Then the verb that belongs to the 'wind' as subject is not 'lay', but the previous line of this canto, that says 'Thou who didst waken ... And saw' (l. 29, 33). But whoever – the 'Mediterranean' or the 'wind' – 'saw' (l. 33) the question remains whether the city one of them saw, is real and therefore a reflection on the water of a

city that really exists on the coast; or the city is just an illusion. Pirie is not sure of that either. He says that it might be “a creative you interpretation of the billowing seaweed; or of the glimmering sky reflected on the heaving surface”. Both possibilities seem to be logical. To explain the appearance of an underwater world, it might be easier to explain it by something that is realistic; and that might be that the wind is able to produce illusions on the water. With its pressure, the wind “would waken the appearance of a city”. From what is known of the ‘wind’ from the last two cantos, it became clear that the ‘wind’ is something that plays the role of a Creator. Whether the wind creates real things or illusions does not seem to be that important.

Baiae's bay (at the northern end of the Gulf of Naples) actually contains visible Roman ruins underwater (that have been shifted due to earthquakes.) Obviously the moss and flowers are seaweed.

It appears as if the third canto shows – in comparison with the previous cantos – a turning-point. Whereas Shelley had accepted death and changes in life in the first and second canto, he now turns to “wistful reminiscence [, recalls] an alternative possibility of transcendence”. From line 26 to line 36 he gives an image of nature. But if we look closer at line 36, we realise that the sentence is not what it appears to be at first sight, because it obviously means 'so sweet that one feels faint in describing them'. This shows that the idyllic picture is not what it seems to be and that the harmony will certainly soon be destroyed. A few lines later, Shelley suddenly talks about ‘fear’ (l. 41). This again shows the influence of the west wind which announces the change of the season.

Fourth Canto

Whereas the cantos one to three began with ‘*O wild West Wind*’ (l. 1) and ‘*Thou...*’ (l. 15, 29) and were clearly directed to the wind, there is a change in the fourth canto. The focus is no more on the ‘wind’, but on the speaker who says ‘*If I...*’ (l. 43f). Until this part, the poem has appeared very anonymous and was only concentrated on the ‘wind’ and its forces so that the author of the poem was more or less forgotten. Pirie calls this "the suppression of personality" which finally vanishes at that part of the poem. It becomes more and more clear that what the author talks about now is himself. That this must be true, shows the frequency of the author's use of the first-person pronouns ‘*I*’ (l. 43, 44, 48, 51, 54), ‘*my*’ (l. 48, 52) and ‘*me*’ (l. 53). These pronouns appear nine times in the fourth canto. Certainly the author wants to dramatise the atmosphere so that the reader recalls the situation of canto one to three. He achieves this by using the same pictures of the previous cantos in this one. Whereas these pictures, such as ‘*leaf*’, ‘*cloud*’ and ‘*wave*’ have existed only together with the ‘wind’, they are now existing with the author. The author thinks about being one of them and says ‘*If I were a ...*’ (l. 43ff). Shelley here identifies himself with the wind, although he knows that he cannot do that, because it is impossible for someone to put all the things he has learned from life aside and enter a "world of innocence". That Shelley is deeply aware of his closedness in life and his identity shows his command in line 53. There he says ‘*Oh, lift me up as a wave, a leaf, a cloud*’ (l. 53). He knows that this is something impossible to achieve, but he does not stop praying for it. The only chance Shelley sees to make his prayer and wish for a new identity with the Wind come true is by pain or death, as death leads to rebirth. So, he wants to ‘*fall upon the thorns of life*’ and ‘*bleed*’ (l. 54).

At the end of the canto the poet tells us that ‘*a heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd*’ (l. 55). This may be a reference to the years that have passed and ‘*chained and bowed*’ (l. 55) the hope of the people who fought for freedom and were literally imprisoned. With this knowledge, the West Wind becomes a different meaning. The wind is the ‘*uncontrollable*’ (l. 47) who is ‘*tameless*’ (l. 56).

One more thing that one should mention is that this canto sounds like a kind of prayer or confession of the poet. This confession does not address God and therefore sounds very impersonal.

Shelley also changes his use of metaphors in this canto. In the first cantos the wind was a metaphor explained at full length. Now the metaphors are only weakly presented – ‘*the thorns of life*’ (l. 54).

Shelley also leaves out the fourth element: the fire. In the previous cantos he wrote about the earth, the air and the water. The reader now expects the fire – but it is not there. This leads to a break in the symmetry.

Fifth Canto

Again the wind is very important in this last canto. At the beginning of the poem the ‘wind’ was only capable of blowing the leaves from the trees. In the previous canto the poet identified himself with the leaves. In this canto the ‘wind’ is now capable of using both of these things mentioned before.

Everything that had been said before was part of the elements – wind, earth and water. Now the fourth element comes in: the fire.

There is also a confrontation in this canto: whereas in line 57 Shelley writes ‘*me thy*’, there is ‘*thou me*’ in line 62. This “signals a restored confidence, if not in the poet’s own abilities, at least in his capacity to communicate with [...] the Wind”.

It is also necessary to mention that the first-person pronouns again appear in a great frequency; but the possessive pronoun ‘*my*’ predominates. Unlike the frequent use of the ‘*I*’ in the previous canto that made the canto sound self-conscious, this canto might now sound self-possessed. The canto is no more a request or a prayer as it had been in the fourth canto – it is a demand. The poet becomes the wind's instrument – his ‘*lyrce*’ (l. 57). This is a symbol of the poet's own passivity towards the wind; he becomes his musician and the wind's breath becomes his breath. The poet's attitude towards the wind has changed: in the first canto the wind has been an ‘*enchanter*’ (l. 3), now the wind has become an ‘*incantation*’ (l. 65).

And there is another contrast between the two last cantos: in the fourth canto the poet had articulated himself in singular: ‘*a leaf*’ (l. 43, 53), ‘*a cloud*’ (l. 44, 53), ‘*A wave*’ (l. 45, 53) and ‘*One too like thee*’ (l. 56). In this canto, the “sense of personality as vulnerably individualised led to self-doubt” and the greatest fear was that what was ‘*tameless, and swift, and proud*’ (l. 56) will stay ‘*chain'd and bow'd*’ (l. 55). The last canto differs from that. The poet in this canto uses plural forms, for example, ‘*my leaves*’ (l. 58, 64), ‘*thy harmonies*’ (l. 59), ‘*my thoughts*’ (l. 63), ‘*ashes and sparks*’ (l. 67) and ‘*my lips*’ (l. 68). By the use of the plural, the poet is able to show that there is some kind of peace and pride in his words. It even seems as if he has redefined himself because the uncertainty of the previous canto has been blown away. The ‘*leaves*’ merge with those of an entire forest and ‘*Will*’ become components in a whole tumult of mighty harmonies. The use of this ‘*Will*’ (l. 60) is certainly a reference to the future. Through the future meaning, the poem itself does not only sound as something that might have happened in the past, but it may even be a kind of ‘*prophecy*’ (l. 69) for what might come – the future.

At last, Shelley again calls the Wind in a kind of prayer and even wants him to be ‘*his*’ Spirit: he says: ‘*My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!*’ (l. 62). Like the leaves of the trees in a forest, his leaves will fall and decay and will perhaps soon flourish again when the spring comes. That may be why he is looking forward to the spring and asks at the end of the last canto ‘*If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?*’ (l. 70). This is of course a rhetorical question because spring does come after winter, but the “if” suggests that it might not come if the rebirth is strong and extensive enough, and if it is not, another renewal—spring—will come anyway. Thus the question has a deeper meaning and does not only mean the change of seasons, but is a reference to death and rebirth as well. It also indicates that after the struggles and problems in life, there would always be a solution. It shows us the optimistic view of the poet about life which he would like the world to know. It is an interpretation of his saying ‘If you are suffering now, there will be good times ahead.’ But the most powerful call to the Wind are the lines: “Drive my dead thoughts over the universe/like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!” Here Shelley is imploring—or really chanting to—the Wind to blow away all of his useless thoughts so that he can be a vessel for the Wind and, as a result, awaken the Earth.

Conclusion

This poem is a highly controlled text about the role of the poet as the agent of political and moral change. This was a subject Shelley wrote a great deal about, especially around 1819, with this strongest version of it articulated the last famous lines of his "Defence of Poetry": "Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present; the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire; the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world."

Ode to the West Wind: Introduction

In Shelley's poetry, the figure of the poet (and, to some extent, the figure of Shelley himself) is not simply a talented entertainer or even a perceptive moralist but a grand, tragic, prophetic hero. The poet has a deep, mystic appreciation for nature, as in the poem "To Wordsworth" (1816), and this intense connection with the natural world gives him access to profound cosmic truths, as in "Alastor; or, The Spirit of Solitude" (1816). He has the power—and the duty—to translate these truths, through the use of his imagination, into poetry, but only a kind of poetry that the public can understand. Thus, his poetry becomes a kind of prophecy, and through his words, a poet has the ability to change the world for the better and to bring about political, social, and spiritual change. Shelley's poet is a near-divine savior, comparable to Prometheus, who stole divine fire and gave it to humans in Greek mythology, and to Christ. Like Prometheus and Christ, figures of the poets in Shelley's work are often doomed to suffer: because their visionary power isolates them from other men, because they are misunderstood by critics, because they are persecuted by a tyrannical government, or because they are suffocated by conventional religion and middle-class values. In the end, however, the poet triumphs because his art is immortal, outlasting the tyranny of government, religion, and society and living on to inspire new generations.

The speaker invokes the "wild West Wind" of autumn, which scatters the dead leaves and spreads seeds so that they may be nurtured by the spring, and asks that the wind, a "destroyer and preserver," hear him. The speaker calls the wind the "dirge / Of the dying year," and describes how it stirs up violent storms, and again implores it to hear him. The speaker says that the wind stirs the Mediterranean from "his summer dreams," and cleaves the Atlantic into choppy chasms, making the "sapless foliage" of the ocean tremble, and asks for a third time that it hear him.

The speaker says that if he were a dead leaf that the wind could bear, or a cloud it could carry, or a wave it could push, or even if he were, as a boy, "the comrade" of the wind's "wandering over heaven," then he would never have needed to pray to the wind and invoke its powers. He pleads with the wind to lift him "as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!"—for though he is like the wind at heart, untamable and proud—he is now chained and bowed with the weight of his hours upon the earth.

The speaker asks the wind to "make me thy lyre," to be his own Spirit, and to drive his thoughts across the universe, "like withered leaves, to quicken a new birth." He asks the wind, by the incantation of this verse, to scatter his words among mankind, to be the "trumpet of a prophecy." Speaking both in regard to the season and in regard to the effect upon mankind that he hopes his words to have, the speaker asks: "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

The Poem

I

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and Preserver; hear, O hear!

II

Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like Earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: O hear!

III

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: O hear!

IV

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O Uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

V

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened Earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Summary of the Poem

The speaker of the poem appeals to the West Wind to infuse him with a new spirit and a new power to spread his ideas. In order to invoke the West Wind, he lists a series of things the wind has done that illustrate its power: driving away the autumn leaves, placing seeds in the earth, bringing thunderstorms and the cyclical "death" of the natural world, and stirring up the seas and oceans.

The speaker wishes that the wind could affect him the way it does leaves and clouds and waves. Because it can't, he asks the wind to play him like an instrument, bringing out his sadness in its own musical lament. Maybe the wind can even help him to send his ideas all over the world; even if they're not powerful in their own right, his ideas might inspire others. The sad music that the wind will play on him will become a prophecy. The West Wind of autumn brings on a cold, barren period of winter, but isn't winter always followed by a spring?

The speaker says that the shadow of an invisible Power floats among human beings, occasionally visiting human hearts—manifested in summer winds, or moonbeams, or the memory of music, or anything that is precious for its mysterious grace. Addressing this Spirit of Beauty, the speaker asks where it has gone, and why it leaves the world so desolate when it goes—why human hearts can feel such hope and love when it is present, and such despair and hatred when it is gone. He asserts that religious and superstitious notions—"Demon, Ghost, and Heaven"—are nothing more than the attempts of mortal poets and wise men to explain and express their responses to the Spirit of Beauty, which alone, the speaker says, can give "grace and truth to life's unquiet dream." Love, Hope, and Self-Esteem come and go at the whim of the Spirit, and if it would only stay in the human heart forever, instead of coming and going unpredictably, man would be "immortal and omnipotent." The Spirit inspires lovers and nourishes thought; and the speaker implores the spirit to remain even after his life has ended, fearing that without it death will be "a dark reality."

The speaker recalls that when he was a boy, he "sought for ghosts," and traveled through caves and forests looking for "the departed dead"; but only when the Spirit's shadow fell across him—as he mused "deeply on the lot / Of life" outdoors in the spring—did he experience transcendence. At that moment, he says, "I shrieked, and clasped my hands in ecstasy!" He then vowed that he would dedicate his life to the Spirit of Beauty; now he asserts that he has kept his vow—every joy he has ever had has been linked to the hope that the "awful Loveliness" would free the world from slavery, and complete the articulation of his words.

The speaker observes that after noon the day becomes "more solemn and serene," and in autumn there is a "lustre in the sky" which cannot be found in summer. The speaker asks the Spirit, whose power descended upon his youth like that truth of nature, to supply "calm" to his "onward life"—the life of a man who worships the Spirit and every form that contains it, and who is bound by the spells of the Spirit to "fear himself, and love all humankind."

Form

The poem *Ode to the West Wind* consists of five cantos written in terza rima. Each canto consists of four tercets (ABA, BCB, CDC, DED) and a rhyming couplet (EE). The Ode is written in iambic pentameter.

Each of the seven long stanzas of the “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” follows the same, highly regular scheme. Each line has an iambic rhythm; the first four lines of each stanza are written in pentameter, the fifth line in hexameter, the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh lines in tetrameter, and the twelfth line in pentameter. (The syllable pattern for each stanza, then, is 555564444445.) Each stanza is rhymed ABBAACCBDDDEE.

Commentary

This lyric hymn, written in 1816, is Shelley’s earliest focused attempt to incorporate the Romantic ideal of communion with nature into his own aesthetic philosophy. The “Intellectual Beauty” of the poem’s title does not refer to the beauty of the mind or of the working intellect, but rather to the intellectual idea of beauty, abstracted in this poem to the “Spirit of Beauty,” whose shadow comes and goes over human hearts. The poem is the poet’s exploration both of the qualities of beauty (here it always resides in nature, for example), and of the qualities of the human being’s response to it (“Love, Hope, and Self-esteem”).

The poem’s process is doubly figurative or associative, in that, once the poet abstracts the metaphor of the Spirit from the particulars of natural beauty, he then explains the workings of this Spirit by comparing it back to the very particulars of natural beauty from which it was abstracted in the first place: “Thy light alone, *like* mist o’er mountains driven”; “Love, Hope, and Self-esteem, *like* clouds depart...” This is an inspired technique, for it enables Shelley to illustrate the stunning experience of natural beauty time and again as the poem progresses, but to push the particulars into the background, so that the focus of the poem is always on the Spirit, the abstract intellectual ideal that the speaker claims to serve.

Analysis

The speaker invokes the “wild West Wind” of autumn, which scatters the dead leaves and spreads seeds so that they may be nurtured by the spring, and asks that the wind, a “destroyer and preserver,” hear him. The speaker calls the wind the “dirge / Of the dying year,” and describes how it stirs up violent storms, and again implores it to hear him. The speaker says that the wind stirs the Mediterranean from “his summer dreams,” and cleaves the Atlantic into choppy chasms, making the “sapless foliage” of the ocean tremble, and asks for a third time that it hear him.

The speaker says that if he were a dead leaf that the wind could bear, or a cloud it could carry, or a wave it could push, or even if he were, as a boy, “the comrade” of the wind’s “wandering over heaven,” then he would never have needed to pray to the wind and invoke its powers. He pleads with the wind to lift him “as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!”—for though he is like the wind at heart, untamable and proud—he is now chained and bowed with the weight of his hours upon the earth.

The speaker asks the wind to “make me thy lyre,” to be his own Spirit, and to drive his thoughts across the universe, “like withered leaves, to quicken a new birth.” He asks the wind, by the incantation of this verse, to scatter his words among mankind, to be the “trumpet of a prophecy.” Speaking both in regard to the season and in regard to the effect upon mankind that he hopes his words to have, the speaker asks: “If winter comes, can spring be far behind?”

The wispy, fluid *terza rima* of “Ode to the West Wind” finds Shelley taking a long thematic leap beyond the scope of “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” and incorporating his own art into his meditation on beauty and the natural world. Shelley invokes the wind magically, describing its power and its role as both “destroyer and preserver,” and asks the wind to sweep him out of his torpor “as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!” In the fifth section, the poet then takes a remarkable turn, transforming the wind into a metaphor for his own art, the expressive capacity that drives “dead thoughts” like “withered leaves” over the universe, to “quicken a new birth”—that is, to quicken the coming of the spring. Here the spring season is a metaphor for a “spring” of human consciousness, imagination, liberty, or morality—all the things Shelley hoped his art could help to bring about in the human mind. Shelley asks the wind to be his spirit, and in the same movement he makes it his metaphorical spirit, his poetic faculty, which will play him like a musical instrument, the way the wind strums the leaves of the trees. The thematic implication is significant: whereas the older generation of Romantic poets viewed nature as a source of truth and authentic experience, the younger generation largely viewed nature as a source of beauty and aesthetic experience. In this poem, Shelley explicitly links nature with art by finding powerful natural metaphors with which to express his ideas about the power, import, quality, and ultimate effect of aesthetic expression.

Ode to the West Wind

Ode to the west wind by Percy Bysshe Shelley is the poet’s appeal to this strong element of nature to make the poet as swift, powerful and free as itself. In this ode he has manifested the power of the West Wind through a series of bold imageries and metaphors which makes it one of the most creative pieces of poetry written in the Romantic Age. Go through the following to understand **Ode to the West Wind Analysis**.

Summary of Ode to The West Wind – Stanza One

In this **Ode to West Wind summary** we will discuss how Shelley observes the West Wind as a destroyer and a preserver. The poet sketches the picture of the West Wind as the breath of the season of autumn which flows through the trees and rustles away its dead leaves. These dead leaves in their colors of black and hectic red, look like disease stricken ghosts trying to escape the spells of an enchanter.

Apart from dead leaves, the West Wind also carries winged seeds with itself to bury them within the ground in their “dark wintry bed” like corpses within their grave. In doing so they make it possible for the seeds to regenerate and come to life again when the West Wind’s sister, The East Wind infuses life in them during spring time making them paint the face of earth with a lot of cheerful colors. Here Shelley compares the East Wind to a shepherd who drives its flocks of seeds to bloom in fresh air. By fusing death and birth together in the first canto, the poet explains why he calls the West Wind a “Destroyer and Preserver”!

Analysis of Ode to The West Wind – Stanza Two

In the **summary of Ode to the West Wind**’s second stanza we will get a picture of the fierce storm which the West Wind brings along with it. The poet describes the West Wind as a stream on which the clouds are strewn across like dead leaves of the imaginary tree which has its roots and boughs in the oceans of Earth and heaven respectively.

These dead leaves or clouds after being plucked cover the blue surface of this fierce wind with rain and lighting. These clouds because of their fierce look during the storm have been compared to the disheveled hair of Maenad who is the crazy worshipper of the God of Vine, Bacchus. The fierce storm with its lightning

and thundershowers seem to be the funeral song of the dying year with the vapors being the dome atop its grave!

Explanation of Ode to the West Wind – Stanza Three

In the third canto the poet gives us an insight into the tremendous strength of the West Wind by describing the effect which this element of nature has on the otherwise peaceful Mediterranean and the Atlantic. The West Wind wakes the sleeping Mediterranean from its summer sleep where it dreams about moss covered castles and towers submerged within its depths.

The West Wind carves chasms on the surface of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic through which it enters the ocean and makes the vegetation below the ocean turn gray with fear as they tremble and shake under the powerful impact of this fierce wind.

Explanation of Ode to the West Wind – Stanza Four

Ode to the west wind analysis of the fourth verse is Shelley's appeal to this strong wind from which he derives his inspiration to see him through the struggles of life. The poet wishes from the deepest corners of his heart to be turned into a dead leaf or a cloud which the West Wind can carry with it such that he could experience the wind's swiftness and freedom!

He urges the West Wind to take him back to his boyhood days when he used to look up the Wind as his accomplice and had the potential to out-speed the Wind with his spirit and vivacity. But now times have changed and the poet is tied down by the miseries of life making him need the West Wind's help more than ever! The poet calls out to the West Wind and requests it to lift him with itself and set him free from his pains.

Explanation of Ode to the West Wind – Stanza Five

In the fifth canto the poet expresses the desire to mingle with his fierce source of inspiration. He appeals to the West Wind to make him his lyre upon which the West Wind could play its songs full of life. He wants his lips to be the trumpet through which the West Wind awakens the earth such that the West Wind and the poet become one. The poet portrays himself as an extinguished hearth and requests the Wind to scatter his sparks and ashes. He wants the West Wind to carry his dead thoughts all over the world just like it carries the dead leaves, so that the poet can be heard.

The poet ends this canto on a note which adds a hint of optimism to the poem. He ends it with the question "If winter comes can spring be far behind?" which takes this ode to a whole different level in the world of poetry. By this ending question, the poet, in spite of reeling under worldly miseries infuses hope in his poetry by hinting that the darkest hours are always followed by the light of good times.

Critical Summary

Stanza 1: The opening stanza describes the activities of the West Wind on land. The West Wind drives the dead leaves before it just as the magician drives away a ghost by his approach. The West Wind scatters the seeds far and near and covers them with dust so that they are buried underground where they remain, like dead bodies in their graves, till the coming of spring when they sprout into plants which bear

flowers filling the valley with sweet smells and attractive colours. The poet addresses the West Wind as a 'wild spirit' moving everywhere, and a destroyer (of dead leaves) and a preserver (of living seeds).

"Wild spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, Oh, hear!"

Stanza 2: The second stanza describes the activities of the West Wind in the air. The West Wind carries on its surface loose clouds which seems to have fallen from the sky just as withered leaves fall from the trees in autumn. The clouds floating on the surface of the West Wind are messengers of rain and lightening. The locks of the approaching storm are spread on the airy surface of the West Wind like the bright hair uplifted from the head of a frenzied Bacchante. Furthermore, the West Wind is the dirge of the dying year for which the closing night will be the dome of a big tomb vaulted with all the aggregated strength of the West Wind as seen in rain, lightning and hailstorm. The poet calls upon the West Wind to listen to him. This stanza is an example of the abstract imagery which characterises much of Shelley's poetry. It is remarkable also for its various similes and metaphors.

Stanza 3: The third stanza describes the effects of the West Wind on water. The West Wind awakens from sleep the blue Mediterranean which was dreaming of old palaces and towers which once stood on its shores. When the West Wind blows on the Atlantic, the waves rise on both sides to prepare a sort of passage for the West Wind, while far below, the plants growing at the bottom of the ocean tremble with fear and shed their leaves. The stanza is remarkable for its vivid imagery and for the manner in which the two oceans ____ the Mediterranean and the Atlantic _____ are personified. The phenomena alluded to in lines 36-42 is well known to naturalists. In a note, Shelley pointed out that the vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers, and of lakes, sympathises with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce that change.

Stanza 4: The poet here establishes a link between his own personality and the personality of the West Wind. He recalls his boyhood when he was a swift, energetic and uncontrollable as the West Wind. In his boyhood he could excel the speed of the West Wind and could accompany it on its wanderings over the sky. But now the misfortunes of life have crushed him. He is bleeding on the thorns of life helplessly. He wishes that he were a leaf, a wave, a cloud, so that the West Wind could lift him. He makes a pathetic appeal to the West Wind to come to his help:

"Oh, lift me as a wave, leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless and Swift and Proud."

Stanza 5: The final stanza includes the whole universe in its sweep. The poet appeals to the West Wind to treat him as a lyre and to blow on him as it blows on the forest. Like the forest, he too is passing through the autumn of his life. The West Wind blowing on him and on the forest will produce a sad but sweet music. Addressing the West Wind as 'Spirit fierce' and as 'impetuous one', he appeals to it to become one with him and to scatter his dead thoughts over the universe in order that these thoughts may bring about a new period in human history. He would like the West Wind to broadcast over the whole world his prophecy about the coming of the Golden Age: "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" In this stanza we find a clear expression of Shelley's idealism, his belief in the perfectibility of human nature and his belief in the golden age of mankind.

Critical Appreciation

“Thunder is good; thunder is impressive. But it is lightning that does the work.”

The poem ‘Ode to the West Wind’ was written in the autumn of 1819, in the beautiful Cascine Gardens outside Florence and was published with ‘Prometheus Unbound’ in 1820. The poet is himself in a mood of despondency and misery and says that he falls upon the thorns of life and is bleeding. He is seeking reawakening also through the poem and wants the wind to carry his dead thoughts and ideas like it has taken the leaves and wants fresh ideas to take birth. This is possible only if he first gets rid of stale ideas and thoughts and learns to replace them with new ones. In that sense even the poet is feeling a sort of intellectual deaths and is desirous of being given a new lease of life. “This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once wild and animating, was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions.”

Nothing can surpass Shelley’s poetic description of himself in ‘Adonais’, as a ‘frail form’, ‘a phantom among men’, ‘companionless’ as ‘the last cloud of an expiring storm’-

“The weight of the superincumbent hour,
It is a dying lamp, a falling shower;
A breaking billow;”

The life of Shelley lays worlds apart from that of Byron. His treatment of Harriet apart, his private life was not vicious, but on the contrary in many respects exemplary. As far as the ideas, which he sang, were capable of application to life, he applied them in his own conduct. He preached the equality of man and he proved that he was willing to practice it. He was generous and benevolent to a fault.

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”

Shelley holds a unique place in English literature by virtue of his power of making myths out of the objects and forces of Nature. Clutton-Brock has discussed in detail Shelley’s myth-making power as revealed in the Ode to the West Wind: “It has been said that Shelley was a myth-maker. His myths were not to him mere caprices of fancy. They expressed by the only means which human language provides for the expression of such things, that sense which he possessed, of a more intense reality in nature than is felt by other men. To most of us, the forces of nature have little meanings. But for Shelley, these forces had as much reality as human beings. Have for most of us, and he found the same kind of intense significance in their manifestations of beauty that we find in the beauty of human beings or of great works of art. The nature of this significance, he could not explain; but he could express it with enormous power in his art, and with a precision of statement which seems miraculous where the nature of the subject matter is considered... to Shelley, the West Wind was still a wind, and the cloud a cloud, however intense a reality they might have for him. ...we are not wrought upon to feel anything human in the wind’s power; but if we are susceptible to Shelley’s magic, we are filled with a new sense of the life and significance and reality of nature.”

Shelley started writing very early, but his first major work came in 1811. This was Queen Mab, along poem. It is a revolutionary poem, but there is much confusion in the development of the story. The next great poem ‘Alastor’ came in 1815. In the same year he produced Mount Blanc and Hymn to Intellectual Beauty. These poems expressed the poet’s idealism. In the latter of the two poems, the poet expresses his feeling of the presence of a spirit in nature. In 1818-19, came the great drama, Prometheus Unbound. This

is a major poem. As a drama it is not much of a success, but both in theme and in its individual songs it achieves greatness. In 1819, came another great play, *The Cenci*. This play portrays absolute evil as Prometheus Unbound portrays absolute goodness. This was followed by 'The Witch of Atlas' and 'Epipsychidion'. In the same year published 'Adonais', a lament on the death of the poet Keats. In the last year of his life (1822) Shelley wrote *Hellas*. Shelley left an unfinished poem, *Triumph of Life*. In addition to these long poems, Shelley wrote a large number of lyrics. The most well-known of these are 'Ode to the West Wind', 'To a Skylark' and 'The Cloud'. It is in these lyrics that we often find Shelley at his best. 'Ode to the West Wind' is a great achievement—a poem in which great thought is combined with great art. Most of his lyrics are love poems. Many of them express the poet's deep joy in life as well as his deep sorrow.

Shelley sets up a humanity glorified through love; he worships in the sanctuary left vacant by "the great absence of God" (His youthful atheism lacked warmth and in the end he turned to a type of pantheism). Love, as exemplified in his personal life, is a passionate kind of sensuality which becomes his simple moral code with no duty, blame, or obligation attached. The reign of love when no authority was necessary was his millennium. Most of Shelley's poems are sad in tone and as such he is regarded as "the singer of endless sorrows", but this is not true of all his poems. Whenever he writes of the future of mankind, he turns ecstatically optimistic.

"A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share
The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable!"

Shelley believed in a soul of the Universe, a Spirit in which all things live and move and have their being. His most passionate desire was for the mystical fusion of his own personality with his spirit. Spontaneity and fluidity are the proof of his wealth of imagination. There is no effect of laborious artistry about Shelley's style at any time. According to Bradley, "The language is poetical through and through, not, as sometimes with Wordsworth, only half-poetical, and yet it seems to drop from Shelley's lips. It is not wrought and kneaded; it flows."

In 'Ode to West Wind', the poet begins his invocation in a buoyant mood. He looks upon the Wind as the destroyer of the present order and usherer of a new one. In the course of the poem, Shelley's pessimism reaches its peak. He suddenly remembers his own plight:

"I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!"

The subsequent thought of the future at once turns his melancholy into ecstatic rapture and he ends the poem with one of the most optimistic and memorable prophecies about the future of mankind. The ecstasy arises out of his ardent belief in the imminent regeneration of mankind and the end of all evils. He hopes that all forms of tyranny and oppression will be replaced, in the millennium to come, by all-round happiness. The joyous rapture is born of an intense feeling of optimism:

"Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! be thou me, impetuous one!
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,
Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth;"

Most of Shelley's poetry is symbolic. Shelley makes use of symbolism by means of his normal use of images including the personified forces of life and nature. He looks upon the West Wind as a personified

force of nature and finds in it various symbolic meanings to suit the purpose of the poem. The West Wind drives the last signs of life from the trees and also scatters the seeds which will come to life in spring. In this way the Wind appears to the poet as a destroyer of the old order and a preserver of the new, i.e., a symbol of change. The Wind also symbolizes Shelley's own personality. When he was a boy he was one like the Wind: "tameless, and swift, and proud." He still possesses these qualities but they lie suppressed under "a heavy weight of hours."

"Ideals are like stars. We never reach them but, like mariners on the sea, we chart our course by them."

Shelley's sky-lyrics-'Ode to the West Wind', 'The Cloud' and 'To A Skylark'-have all been interpreted as having symbolic significance. The West Wind drives away the old, pale; hectic-red leaves and scatters fresh seeds over the ground. Shelley thus looks upon the Wind as a destroyer of the old order and the usherer of a new one i.e., as a symbol of the forces that will end all evil and bring about the golden millennium in which there will be nothing but peace and happiness for mankind. In the poem The Cloud, the brief life of a Cloud has also been constructed by such critics as a symbol of the immortality of the soul. However, there is no doubt that his concept of the Skylark is entirely symbolic. Shelley's Skylark, is not just a bird but an embodiment of this ideal, the poet can hear its song but the bird ever remains invisible. The skylark, by its very nature, also symbolizes Shelley's own poetic spirit.

"Poetry is like a perfume which on evaporation leaves in our soul essence of beauty."

Among the Romantic poets, Shelley is marveled for his inimitable abstract ideas, but he is less of an artist. He was aiming not at the poetry of art, but at the poetry of rapture. Keats advised him to be "more an artist" and to "load every rift with ore", but Shelley was aiming at a different effect from that of Keats's richly decorated and highly finished poetry. The poem "Ode to the West Wind" is universally accepted as one of the best poems in English Literature. The poem is remarkable for its theme, range of thought, spontaneity, poetic beauty, lyrical quality, and quick movement similar to that of the wind itself. This poem along with the "The Cloud" and "The Skylark", mark an abiding monument to Shelley's passion for the sky. Shelley himself writes:

"I take great delight in watching the change in the atmosphere."

The west wind wakes the Mediterranean up from its summer dreams and even manages to shake up the otherwise quite calm Atlantic Ocean. For its path the ocean starts to create cracks and the might of the west wind is so great that even the moss and flowers under the sea begin to tremble with fear. Thus, the west wind acquires the quality of being fearful and creating terror. The clouds are carried by the wind to a tomb and are locked there. During this season, the strong wind does not let the clouds gather easily since it blows them away. Shelley imagines that the wind gathers the clouds in a sepulcher till they have enough strength to burst forth and bring rain. Again the idea of destroyer and preserver is implicit. The clouds are destroyed and without rain the earth becomes barren but then clouds burst bringing rain which brings earth back to life. There is greenery everywhere and earth is rejuvenated.

"The difference between ordinary and extraordinary is that little extra."

Shelley calls the west wind the 'dirge of the dying year' and in these words is hidden the idea of rebirth. The west wind once again brings winter and December but the end of the year implies the birth of a new one since December is followed by January and the new year with new hopes and resolutions. The poet is himself in a mood of despondency and misery and says that he falls upon the thorns of life and is bleeding. He is seeking reawakening also through the poem and wants the wind to carry his dead thoughts

and ideas like it has taken the leaves and wants fresh ideas to take birth. This is possible only if he first gets rid of stale ideas and thoughts and learns to replace them with new ones. In that sense even the poet is feeling a sort of intellectual deaths and is desirous of being given a new lease of life.

”Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere-
Destroyer and Preserver-hear, O hear!”

Shelley’s idea of the Islands of Delight as expressed in ‘Lines Written among the Euganean Hills’, is merely a product of an unfounded optimism and has no logical bearing. Shelley’s faith is no doubt genuine and intense, but it comes from his abstract visions, not from sound logical reasoning. He is ever haunted by the Eternal Mind. He constantly endeavours to look beyond the evil of life and chases the invisible and impalpable. He gives various names to this unattainable thing. In his Hymn To Intellectual Beauty, he describes it as the spirit of Beauty pervading the universe. He speaks of it as an “unseen power” that rarely visits human hearts as an ‘awful loveliness’ that can free this world from tyranny and oppression. Thus, a profound note of yearning for the unattainable is another feature of Shelley’s poetry. According to Cazamian, “The tone of Shelley’s poetry is that of a keen aspiration, in which mystical desire, with its anguished pangs and spiritual raptures, transcends the joys and sufferings of ordinary mankind.”

Shelley is pessimistic about the present but optimistic about the future. He believes that regeneration always follows destruction and that a new and utopian order is certain to come when the present degenerate system is ended. His optimism about the imminent dawn of a golden age is genuine and firm and his prophecy of that millennium underlies most of his poems. In Ode to West Wind also this prophetic note is present and present with the greatest intensity of expression.

“And, by the incarnation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!”

Shelley had a deep interest in ancient Greeks. His enthusiasm for the wisdom of the Greek philosophers is implicit in many of his poems. This gives Shelley a sharper appreciation of natural forms and the theory that artists and poets must try to remove the worldly cover from objects and expose the underlying ideal prototype. Platonism appeals to him most because the guiding power behind the ideal forms serves him in lieu of a religion. In ‘Adonais’, Shelley’s Platonism has found the most elaborate expression. Like the other Romantic poets, Shelley too was an ardent lover of Nature. Like Wordsworth, Shelley conceives of Nature as one spirit, the Supreme Power working through all things “The one spirit’s plastic distress/ Sweeps through the dull dense world.” Again he personifies each object of nature as an individual life, a part of that Supreme Power, Nature. He celebrates nature in most of his poems as his main theme such as ‘The Cloud’, ‘To a Skylark’, and ‘To the Moon’. ‘Ode to the West Wind’, ‘A Dream of the Unknown’. The tone of pessimism set in the beginning with ‘dead’, ‘ghosts’, ‘corpse in grave’ reaches its climax with ‘I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed’. In the last stanzas the poet moves from the natural to the human misery and the mention of the hearth combines the two because hearth is seen as the centre of the earth where the natural world and the human one merge. The poet is seeking transcendence into the sublime as did Wordsworth in Tintern Abbey. The affinity of temper between them prompts the poet to appeal to the Wind to save him from his present plight. At this hour of distress the poet can look upon the Wind as a competent savior, a symbol of aid and relief. Finally, the West Wind is treated by the poet as representing the forces that can help bring about the golden millennium, when the miseries and agonies of mankind will be replaced by all round happiness.

“The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness.”

Shelley shows no sense of history and cannot put forth the cause and remedies of the evils he finds in human society. He has an intense belief that regeneration of mankind is imminent but cannot tell us why and how it is coming. His West Wind is a symbol of the forces that will bring about this regeneration: it is nothing more. He has never told us what these forces symbolized by the wind are in reality. Shelley belongs to the younger generation of Romantic poets. Like the other two poets of his generation, he died young. His poetry divided itself into two distinct moods. In one he is the violent reformer seeking to overthrow the present institutions’ in order to bring about the Golden Age.

“Vaulted with all thy congregated might
Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst:-O hear!”

Sometimes Shelley becomes pantheistic in his concept of nature when he seems to believe that every aspect of nature is a manifestation of only one and invisible soul or spirit and that after the end of the earthly existence, everything is reunited with that one soul.

“...that sustaining love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea.”

Shelley’s lyrics are surpassingly musical and sweet. Swinburne was ecstatic in his tribute to this aspect of Shelley’s lyricism. Shelley out sang all poets on record, but some two or three throughout all time; his depths and heights of inner and outer music are as diverse as nature’s and not sooner exhaustible. He was alone the perfect singing God; his thoughts words and deeds all sang together. Arnold, one of the worst critics of Shelley, admired his music and remarked: “the right sphere of Shelley’s genius was the sphere of music.” Shelley’s careful handling of diction fitting into the sense of his lines enhances the musical quality keeping with the swift, of his lyrics. The rhythm of Ode to the West Wind is thus exactly in gusty march of the wind itself: “O wild West Wind, thou breathe of Autumn’s being.” Shelley never allows morbidity to overcome the enjoyment in his lyrics. Self-pity is no doubt his favorite theme, but in his lyrics, he presents this self-pity, not as something to be feared, but as an essential part of life. Shelley’s readers are never depressed because they are constantly reminded that sufferings lie only in the present and that in future all sufferings will be replaced by pure happiness. His despondency is soon replaced by an ecstatic rapture of joy when he comes to think of the future happiness of mankind, of the millennium to come:

“If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?”

Shelley calls the west wind a destroyer and a preserver at the same time. It is a destroyer because it makes the trees shed their leaves making them bare. The west wind is called a preserver since it carries the seeds to places where they lie in hibernation during the winter and when the sister of west wind, the east wind blows in spring time, they start to germinate and blossom into many different colored flowers. Winter is often seen as death since plants die and many animals hide themselves for the season. The earth looks barren and appears lifeless but spring is a time of rejuvenation, flowers blossom and insects and animals begin to start life again. The poet gives the credit of carrying the seeds to a safer place in winter to the

west wind. This way it becomes the destroyer and the preserver.

“(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in the air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill-
Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere-
Destroyer and Preserver –hear, O hear!”

This co-existence of pessimism and optimism-the swift replacement of one by the other-is a major attractive feature of Shelley’s lyric poetry. This poem is considered to be one of the finest lyrics in English poetry because of its sentiments and the perfect technical construction. The poet touches on the four elements- earth, sky, weather and fire and the transition from the wind to himself is very smooth one and does not feel enforced. It is a complex poem because of the number of similes and they do not appear to be enforced or excessive in any way. The movement of the wind from earth to sky and water is observed minutely by the poet keeping scientific facts in mind. The symbolism of destroyer and preserver is carried through the poem; first with the wind driving the dead leaves away to make place for new ones, secondly with the mention of pumice isle which was built with the lava from a volcano. Volcano is both a destroyer and a preserver since while it erupts it pours forth fire but once it subsides it leaves behind valuable minerals and fertile material. Finally, the poet’s own thoughts are dead leaves to be driven away so that new ones can take their place. The theme of rebirth is thus an integral part of the poem.

“A deep resolute mind rises above all difficulties”

The poet then describes how the wind carries loose clouds on its stream and spreads them from horizon to the height of the skies. The wind is the funeral song of the passing year because soon after autumn comes winter when the year ends and a new one begins. Winter is often seen as death since plants die and many animals hide themselves for the season. The earth looks barren and appears lifeless but spring is a time of rejuvenation, flowers blossom and insects and animals begin to start life again. The poet gives the credit of carrying the seeds to a safer place in winter to the west wind. This way it becomes the destroyer and the preserver.

“Each like a corpse, within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
Her clarion o’er the dreaming earth,”

In his treatment of nature, he describes the things in nature as they are and never colours it. It is true, he gives them human life through his personifications, but he does it unintentionally for he felt they are living beings capable of doing the work of human beings. His mythopoeia power had made him the best romanticist of his age. In Ode to the West Wind, he personifies Nature as the Destroyer and the Preserver, and in “The Cloud”, the cloud is a possessor of mighty powers.

“Thou on whose stream, ‘mid the steep sky’s commotion,
Loose clouds like earth’s decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,
Angels of rain and lightening!”

Shelley holds a unique place in English literature by virtue of his power of making myths out of the objects and forces of Nature. Beauty, to Shelley, is an ideal in itself and a microcosm of the beauty of Nature and he calls it ‘Intellectual Beauty’. He celebrates Beauty as a mysterious power. In the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, he says that when Intellectual Beauty departs, this world becomes a “dim vast vale of

tears, vacant and desolate” and if human heart is its temple, then man would become immortal and omnipotent:

“Man were immortal and omnipotent
Did'st thou, unknown and awful as thou art
Keep with thy glorious train firm state
Within his heart.”

The West Wind is the breath of Autumn. Dead leaves, black, yellow and red in colour, fly before the wind, as the ghosts fly before a magician. The West Wind scatters the flying seeds. The seeds lie under the ground and when Spring comes, they grow into flowers of different colours and fragrance. The West Wind destroys dead leaves and preserves useful seeds.

“Make me thy lyre, ev'n as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!”

The spirit of the west wind is described as ‘uncontrollable’. The west wind is unstoppable and it affects everything that falls in its path. It affects the earth, the water in the oceans and the clouds of the sky. It is responsible for carrying them and locking them up in a sepulcher till they burst forth in fury of rain and hail. The poet thinks that the west wind has a free spirit and wanders as and where it pleases. He admires it for its freedom and wishes the wind would carry him along like a leaf or a cloud. Shelley then sums up the spirit of the west wind as ‘tameless, swift and proud.’ It cannot be kept in check so it is ‘tameless’, the speed of the west wind is formidable and it is proud because it would not listen to any one. Finally, the poet refers the west wind as ‘Spirit fierce’ and ‘impetuous one’ that acts on the impulse of the moment.

“The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know
Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear
And tremble and despoil themselves: ----- O hear!”

The Wind blows through the jungle and produces music out of the dead leaves. Shelley requests it to create music out of his heart and to inspire him to write great poetry, which may create a revolution in the hearts of men. He wants the Wind to scatter his revolutionary message in the world, just as it scatters ashes and sparks from a burning fire. His thoughts may not be as fiery as they once were, but they still have the power to inspire men. He tells the Wind to take the message to the sleeping world that if winter comes, spring cannot be far behind. In optimistic note he declares that bad days are followed by good days.

“Thou who didst waken from his summer-dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams,
Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers,”

Idealism is a part and parcel of Shelley's temperament. He is a rebel, like Byron, against the age-old customs, traditions, conventions and institutions, sanctioned only by practice and not by reason. Unlike Byron, but, he is not only a rebel but also a reformer. He wants to reconstitute society in keeping with his ideals of good, truth and beauty. According to Compton- Rickett, “To renovate the world, to bring about utopia, is his constant aim, and for this reason we may regard Shelley as emphatically the poet of eager,

sensitive youth; not the animal youth of Byron, but the spiritual youth of the visionary and reformer.” Poetry is the expression of the poet’s mind. This is absolutely true of Shelley’s poetry. A study of Shelley’s poetry is the easiest and shortest way to his mind and personality. The fourth Stanza of Ode to the West Wind is entirely personal and autobiographical. An analogy with the West Wind helps the poet describe his own spirit:”tameless, and swift, and proud.” The poet narrates the change, he has undergone in the course of his life. He was full of energy, enthusiasm and speed in his boyhood, but the agonies and bitterness of life-“A heavy weight of hours”-has repressed his qualities and has put him in an unbearable state. The expression of his sufferings “I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!”is intensely genuine, heart-rending, and possibly the most spontaneous of Shelley’s emotional outbursts through his poems. The calm Mediterranean was sleeping. The music of the glassy waves lulled the ocean to sleep. It was dreaming of towers and palaces reflected in its water. The West Wind creates furrows on the smooth waters of the Atlantic Ocean. At the bottom of the Atlantic grow plants and vegetation. These plants are dry, without sap though they live in water. When the West Wind blows in autumn, the plants on the land wither; the plants at the bottom of the ocean also fade and die.

“Quivering within the wave’s intenser day,”

Shelley is describing the approach of the terrible West Wind. In the regions of the sky. Shelley’s emotional ecstasy fires his brain to that kind of superb conception which made the ancient Greeks fill the earth, the air and the water with gods and goddesses who were but personifications of the forces of nature.

“Flowers always make people better, happier and more helpful; they are sunshine, food and medicine to the soul.”

The cloud form on the horizon, gather up in the sky and then darken the space. The sky is at first blue, but it assumes a dark appearance on the approach of the vaporous clouds. From the distant and dim horizon to the highest point in the sky, the whole visible space is filled by the movements of the air. The clouds are up and spread themselves. The scattered and disorderly clouds look like the locks of the mighty West Wind personified, as seen approaching through the sky; these locks resemble the dishevelled and erect hair on the heads of intoxicated and frenzied female worshippers of the wine-god who used to dance madly about.

“The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seem’ d a vision,-“

These lines are very touching and highly characteristic of Shelley. Shelley was a rebel and a revolutionary. He had a restless temperament which was even at war with something. In the West Wind, Shelley finds a kindred spirit. Looking at it, he is reminded of his youth when he too was free and uncontrollable. At that time, he did not think it an impossibility to vie with the West Wind in its speed, but the worries and mysteries of this life have proved too much for him and have made him tame and weak. He had lost his old vigour and force, and he appeals to the West Wind to lend him some strength and lift his dejected spirit as it lifts a cloud, wave or a leaf. He was very much oppressed by the hardships of the world and he wants somebody to support him through his struggle for existence in this world. He was indeed tameless and wild like the West Wind at one time, but now he is bowed down by the worries and care, and calls for help. Next, Shelley describes the agitated surface of the ocean cuts a thousand deep passages on itself for the march of the terrific wind; while the rush and tumult on the surface reach the vegetable world at the bottom of the ocean, the leaves, the flowers, the sapless forests there tremble with

fear and are shaken loose pell-mell at the awful roar of the mighty wind.

Desmond King-Hele remarks: "The verse technique and structure of the Ode to West Wind could scarcely be improved: it is the most fully orchestrated of Shelley's poems, and consequently the most difficult to read aloud. The ever fluctuating tempo and the artfully random pauses in the long lines reflect the lawless surging of the wind and its uneasy silences. This device is not overworked: the wonder is that Shelley could use it at all when grappling with the problems of the terza rima and operating within a rigid structural framework. In conformity with this framework, which seemed to be in the style of Calderon, the first three stanzas are designed to show the wind's power in three spheres of Nature, in preparation for the prayer to the Wind, as pseudo-god, in stanzas 4 and 5.

The keynote of the first three stanzas is balanced. Their settings, land, sky and sea, give equal emphasis to the three states of matter, solid, gaseous and liquid. Each of the four seasons has its appointed place, and there is a full range of colours- red, yellow, blue, grey and black explicitly, white and green implicitly. Turmoil is balanced against calm, life against death, detail against generalization, cold against calm, life against death, detail against generalization, cold against warmth, plain against hill, and so on. The varied evidence of stanzas 1-3 is assembled in support of the narrow, one-track theme in the last two stanzas: the plan is sound, but in points of detail it falls short of perfection. For Shelley harps on his prayer rather too long. His defeatism becomes a trifle depressing, unless when reading the poem we happen to be in the same mood as he was...the note of self-pity is overlaid in the last two stanzas; and this must be counted a blemish in what is otherwise a nearly faultless poem."

"Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulcher,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might
Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst:-O hear!"

Ode to the West Wind: Information

Type of Work and Year of Publication

....."Ode to the West Wind" is a lyric poem that addresses the west wind as a powerful force and asks it to scatter the poet's words throughout the world. (A lyric poem presents the deep feelings and emotions of the poet rather than telling a story or presenting a witty observation. An ode is a lyric poem that uses lofty, dignified language to address a person or thing.) Charles and Edmund Ollier published the poem in London in 1820 in a volume entitled *Prometheus Unbound: a Lyrical Drama in Four Acts With Other Poems*. *Prometheus Unbound* is a four-act play (intended to be read but not performed) that was the featured work in the volume.

Setting and Background Information

.....The time is autumn of 1819. The place is western Italy, from the Mediterranean coast inland to Florence. Shelley makes a specific reference in the poem to the city of Baiae (Italian, *Baia*), called Aqua Cumanae by ancient Romans. Its favorable climate attracted vacationing Roman

dignitaries to the city, including Julius Caesar and Nero, who constructed villas there. Volcanic eruptions plunged part of the ancient site into the sea, as alluded to in the poem in lines 32 and 33. Shelley wrote the poem inland, in a forest on the Arno River near Florence. His notes on the poem explain that he received the inspiration for it one fall day when the strong west wind swept down from the Atlantic and through the Tuscan landscape of west-central Italy:

This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapors which pour down the autumnal rains. They begin, as I foresaw, at sunset, with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions. (Shelley 239).

Ode to the West Wind

Summary, Stanza 1

Addressing the west wind as a human, the poet describes its activities: It drives dead leaves away as if they were ghosts fleeing a wizard. The leaves are yellow and black, pale and red, as if they had died of an infectious disease. The west wind carries seeds in its chariot and deposits them in the earth, where they lie until the spring wind awakens them by blowing on a trumpet (clarion). When they form buds, the spring wind spreads them over plains and on hills. In a paradox, the poet addresses the west wind as a destroyer and a preserver, then asks it to listen to what he says.

Notes, Stanza 1

1. The accent over the *e* in *wingèd* (line 7) causes the word to be pronounced in two syllables—the first stressed....and the second unstressed—enabling the poet to maintain the metric scheme (iambic pentameter).
2. clarion: Trumpet.

Summary, Stanza 2

The poet says the west wind drives clouds along just as it does dead leaves after it shakes the clouds free of the sky and the oceans. These clouds erupt with rain and lightning. Against the sky, the lightning appears as a bright shaft of hair from the head of a Mænad. The poet compares the west wind to a funeral song sung at the death of a year and says the night will become a dome erected over the year's tomb with all of the wind's gathered might. From that dome will come black rain, fire, and hail. Again the poet asks the west wind to continue to listen to what he has to say.

Notes, Stanza 2

3. Mænad: Wildly emotional woman who took part in the orgies of ...Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and revelry.
4. dirge: Funeral song.
5. congregated: Gathered, mustered.

Summary, Stanza 3

At the beginning of autumn, the poet says, the the west wind awakened the Mediterranean Sea—lulled by the sound of the clear streams flowing into it—from summer slumber near an island formed from pumice (hardened lava). The island is in a bay at Baiae, a city in western Italy about ten miles west of Naples. While sleeping at this locale, the Mediterranean saw old palaces and towers that had collapsed into the sea during an earthquake and became overgrown with moss and flowers. To create a path for the west wind, the powers of the mighty Atlantic Ocean divide (cleave) themselves and flow through chasms. Deep beneath the ocean surface, flowers and foliage, upon hearing the west wind, quake in fear and despoil themselves. (In autumn, ocean plants decay like land plants. See Shelley's note on this subject.) Once more, the poet asks the west wind to continue to listen to what he has to say.

Notes, Stanza 3

6. The accent over the *a* in *crystàlline* shifts the stress to the second syllable, making *crystàl* an iamb.
7. In his notes, Shelley commented on lines 38-42:

The phenomenon alluded to at the end of the third stanza is well known to naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers, and of lakes, sympathizes with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds announce it. (Shelley 239)

Summary, Stanza 4

The poet says that if he were a dead leaf (like the ones in the first stanza) or a cloud (like the ones in the second stanza) or an ocean wave that rides the power of the Atlantic but is less free than the uncontrollable west wind—or if even he were as strong and vigorous as he was when he was a boy and could accompany the wandering wind in the heavens and could only dream of traveling faster—well, then, he would never have prayed to the west wind as he is doing now in his hour of need.

.....Referring again to imagery in the first three stanzas, the poet asks the wind to lift him as

it would a wave, a leaf, or a cloud; for here on earth he is experiencing troubles that prick him like thorns and cause him to bleed. He is now carrying a heavy burden that—though he is proud and tameless and swift like the west wind—has immobilized him in chains and bowed him down.

Notes, Stanza 4

8. *Skiey* is a neologism (coined word) whose two syllables maintain iambic pentameter. The *s* in *skiey* alliterates with the *s* in *speed*, *...scarce*, *seem'd*, and *striven*.

Summary, Stanza 5

The poet asks the west wind to turn him into a lyre (a stringed instrument) in the same way that the west wind's mighty currents turn the forest into a lyre. And if the poet's leaves blow in the wind like those from the forest trees, there will be heard a deep autumnal tone that is both sweet and sad. Be "my spirit," the poet implores the wind. "Be thou me" and drive my dead thoughts (like the dead leaves) across the universe in order to prepare the way for new birth in the spring. The poet asks the wind to scatter his words around the world, as if they were ashes from a burning fire. To the unawakened earth, they will become blasts from a trumpet of prophecy. In other words, the poet wants the wind to help him disseminate his views on politics, philosophy, literature, and so on. The poet is encouraged that, although winter will soon arrive, spring and rebirth will follow it.

Examples of Figures of Speech and Rhetorical Devices

Stanza 1

Alliteration: *wild West Wind* (line 1).

Apostrophe, Personification: Throughout the poem, the poet addresses the west wind as if it were a person.

Metaphor: Comparison of the west wind to *breath of Autumn's being* (line 1).

Metaphor: Comparison of autumn to a living, breathing creature (line 1).

Anastrophe: *leaves dead* (line 2). Anastrophe is inversion of the normal word order, as in *a man forgotten* (instead of *a forgotten man*) or as in the opening lines of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Kahn": *In Xanadu did Kubla Kahn / A stately pleasure dome decree* (instead of *In Xanadu, Kubla Kahn decreed a stately pleasure dome*). Here is another example, made up to demonstrate the inverted word order of anastrophe:

In the garden green and dewy
A rose I plucked for Huey

Simile: Comparison of dead leaves to ghosts.

Anastrophe: *enchanter fleeing* (line 3).

Alliteration: Pestilence-stricken multitudes (line 5).
 Alliteration: Pestilence-stricken multitudes (line 5).
 Alliteration: chariotest to (line 6).
 Alliteration: **The** wingèd seeds, **where they** (line 7).
 Metaphor: Comparison of seeds to flying creatures (line 7).
 Simile: Comparison of each seed to a corpse (lines 7-8).
 Alliteration: **sister of the Spring** (line 9).
 Personification: Comparison of spring wind to a person (lines 9-10).
 Metaphor, Personification: Comparison of earth to a dreamer (line 10).
 Alliteration: **flocks to feed**
 Simile: Comparison of buds to flocks (line 11).
 Anastrophe: *fill / . . . With living hues and odours plain and hill* (lines 10, 12).
 Alliteration: **Wild Spirit, which** (line 13).
 Paradox: Destroyer and preserver (line 14).
 Alliteration: **hear, O hear** (line 14).

Stanza 8

Apostrophe, Personification: The poet addresses the west wind as if it were a person.
 Metaphor: Comparison of the poet and the forest to a lyre, a stringed musical instrument (line 57).
 Metaphor: Comparison of the poet to a forest (line 58).
 Alliteration: **The** tumult of **thy** mighty harmonies (line 59).
 Alliteration: **Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,** (line 61).
 Metaphor: Comparison of the poet to the wind (line 62).
 Alliteration: **Drive my dead** thoughts over the universe (line 63).
 Simile: Comparison of thoughts to withered leaves (lines 63-64).
 Alliteration: **the** incantation of **this** (line 65).
 Simile: Comparison of words to ashes and sparks (66-67).
 Alliteration: **my** words **among** mankind (67).
 Metaphor: Comparison of the poet's voice to the wind as a trumpet of a prophecy (lines 68-69).
 Alliteration: **trumpet** of a **prophecy** (lines 68-69).
 Alliteration: **O Wind, / If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?**

.....

Structure and Rhyme Scheme

.....The poem contains five stanzas of fourteen lines each. Each stanza has three tercets and a closing couplet. In poetry, a tercet is a unit of three lines that usually contain end rhyme; a couplet is a two-line unit that usually contains end rhyme. Shelley wrote the tercets in a verse form called *terza rima*, invented by Dante Alighieri. In this format, line 2 of one tercet rhymes with lines 1 and 3 of the next tercet. In regard to the latter, consider the first three tercets of the second stanza of "Ode to the West Wind." Notice that *shed* (second line, first tercet) rhymes with *spread* and *head* (first and third lines, second tercet) and that *surge* (second line, second tercet) rhymes with *verge* and *dirge* (first and third lines, third tercet).

.....All of the couplets in the poem rhyme, but the last couplet (lines 69-70) is an imperfect rhyme called eye rhyme. Eye rhyme occurs when the pronunciation of the last syllable of one line is different from the pronunciation of the last syllable of another line even though both syllables are identical in spelling except for a preceding consonant. For example, the following end-of-line word pairs would constitute eye rhyme: cough, rough; cow, mow; daughter, laughter; rummaging, raging. In Shelley's poem, wind and behind form eye rhyme.

.....Shelley unifies the content of the poem by focusing the first three stanzas on the powers of the wind and the last two stanzas on the poet's desire to use these powers to spread his words throughout the world.

.....

Meter

.....Most of the lines in the poem are in iambic pentameter, although some of the pentameter lines have an extra syllable (catalexis). The following tercet from the first stanza demonstrates the iambic-pentameter format, with the stressed syllables in capitals:

.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5
The WING|.èd SEEDS,|.where THEY|.lie COLD|.and LOW,
.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5
Each LIKE|.a CORPSE|.with IN|.its GRAVE,|.un TIL
.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5
Thine AZ|.ure SIS|.ter OF|.the SPRING|.shall BLOW

Here is a line with catalexis:

.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....
Of SOME|.fierce MAE|.nad, E|.ven FROM|.the DIM|.verge

.....

And here is a line that does not follow the format. It is in iambic hexameter:

.....1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6
Shook FROM|.the TANG|.gled BOUGHS|.of HEA|.ven AND|.o CEAN

Theme and Historical Background

Irresistible Power

.....The poet desires the irresistible power of the wind to scatter the words he has written about his ideals and causes, one of which was opposition to Britain's monarchical government as a form of tyranny. Believing firmly in democracy and individual rights, he supported movements to reform government. In 1819, England's nobility feared that working-class citizens—besieged by economic problems, including high food prices—would imitate the rebels of the French Revolution and attempt to overthrow the established order. On August 16, agitators attracted

tens of thousands of people to a rally in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, to urge parliamentary reform and to protest laws designed to inflate the cost of corn and wheat. Nervous public officials mismanaged the unarmed crowd and ended up killing 11 protesters and injuring more than 500 others. In reaction to this incident, Shelley wrote *The Masque of Anarchy* in the fall of 1819 to urge further nonviolent action against the government. This work was not published during his lifetime. However, "Ode to the West Wind," also written in the fall of 1819, was published a year later. The poem obliquely refers to his desire to spread his reformist ideas when it says, "Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth / Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!" Shelley believed that the poetry he wrote had the power bring about political reform: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World," he wrote in another work, *A Defence of Poetry*.

An Analysis of Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' by Geethika Raman

Percy Shelley was, and is, one of the poets who represented the Romantics beautifully – he was a passionate, wild soul, who blended an admiration for natural beauty with incisive political observations. Romanticism is characterised by a deep appreciation of nature, emphasis on emotion over rationality, close examination of the human condition, and the prioritisation of the writer's creative spirit over literary and formal conventions.

In his 1819 poem, 'Ode to the West Wind', Shelley uses natural allegory to express a political opinion, and his hopes and fears for Europe's future. He also makes reference to his personal tragedies alongside the more general fears prevalent in Europe, thus creating a poem that is simultaneously broad and very personal.

'Ode to the West Wind' is a poem in five cantos of four tercets (three lines of verse) each. The first canto summons the West Wind, referring to it as a kind of transformer of the world and as an invisible enchanter from whom ghostly dead leaves scurry. Herein, Shelley alludes to his dead son William, as well to the poorer parts of British society. Shelley speaks of autumn leaves as 'pestilence-stricken multitudes' that the wind blows to their 'dark wintry bed' (graves). Intermixed with those driven leaves are the 'winged seeds' that will soon be awakened from a death-like sleep by the West Wind's 'azure sister of the Spring'. This wind from the warm south will open the buds whose flowers feed on the sweet springtime air as a flock of sheep feeds on pasture grass. With the words 'Destroyer and Preserver', the poet portrays the wind as something that at once preserves the world from destruction and destroys the existing order that is waging war against humanity.

Canto 2 begins with a continuation of the speaker's sense of awe at the wind's might; he hails the wind as the creator of the clouds—a 'living stream' in the sky that moves the 'trees' of heaven and ocean. In stanza 2, the poet delineates a vision of angels that flow with the wind and that are like the 'bright hair' streaming 'from the head of some fierce Maenad'. Instilling in his readers a sense of vertigo, Shelley takes them to the height of the skies and to the distant horizon, where they see 'the locks of the approaching storm', a storm that will bring about changes on the earth.

In canto 3, the poem's voice furthers the notion of things changing instantly from sweetness to darkness and cold through the action of the West Wind. He asks readers to envision a Mediterranean Sea suddenly being awakened from deep summer sleep 'Beneath a pumice isle in Baiae's Bay', a place 'All overgrown with azure moss, and flowers/ So sweet, the sense faints picturing them!' Below the surface of the sea, floating in great ocean depths, the realisation occurs that profound change is happening in the world, and the sea's denizens

'tremble and despoil themselves' out of panic. The palpable fear expressed by the powers of the ocean is the fear felt by the European establishment, who will out of fear 'grow grey' when catastrophic change finally comes.

The poet's voice becomes more personal from canto four onwards. Shelley praises, contrasts himself with, and longs to be one with the west wind. His yearnings for oneness with this spirit of nature have the intensity of heartfelt prayer. The poet would choose to be a dead leaf blown about by the wind, or a flying cloud, or a wave on the sea being pushed to shore rather than stay in his present despairing condition. Hoping to share in the West Wind's power in order to be freed from the bonds of earth, he calls upon the 'uncontrollable' wind to control him, to be for him a strong friend who would lead him just as an older, stronger adult would mentor a child, saying, 'if even/ I were as in my boyhood, and could be/ The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven'.

The fourth line in the fourth stanza is another prayer to the wind; Shelley asks it to 'lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud' because, as he exclaims in one of the most memorable phrases of the poem, 'I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!' The speaker feels weighed down by time and life's circumstances, and he suffers unmercifully. He cries out for the release that his reigning West Wind can provide.

Canto 5 ends 'Ode to the West Wind' with the persona's most passionate pleas. In the first stanza, he petitions the wind to let him be its lyre, asking that, if his own leaves are falling as those in nature, the wind should use them to help create a melancholy tone befitting the autumn season. Then he asks the wind for the ultimate favour—to be one with it: 'Be thou, Spirit fierce,/ My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!' He compares his thoughts to those dead leaves the wind blows, asking that those thoughts, like leaves, be whirled through the world to 'quicken a new birth'.

Finally, when the poet's persona prays for the wind to 'Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth/ Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!', he makes clear that he now sees himself as the wind's agent, doing its bidding by prophesying through his written words. The prediction he makes is subtle and—on the surface—even pedestrian, with its commonsensical observation, 'If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?'

Shelley wrote this ode shortly after the Peterloo Massacre, in which royal soldiers attacked and killed working class protestors at a rally in the St. Peter's Field area of Manchester. Together with other works written in 1819, such as 'England in 1819', 'Ode to the West Wind' did much to generate Shelley's reputation as radical thinker. In fact, 'England in 1819' and *The Mask of Anarchy*, written in the same year, are strong criticisms of the state of affairs in England at the time, and we can see that even though Shelley had been resident in continental Europe for some years, he was no less concerned for the country of his birth.

Percy B. Shelley and 'The Ode to the West Wind' by Jinny Ahn

At his time, Shelley was known more for his radical philosophical and political views than for his poetry. While his political and philosophical views were determined before he was twenty, it is his poetry that he is most remembered for; his beautiful, elegiac lyrical poetry and lines make him a scion of the Romantics. During his life, Shelley seemed to have been torn between following his poetical pursuits or his philosophical ones; his wife, Mary Shelley, writes that her husband "deliberated at one time whether he should dedicate himself to poetry or metaphysics, and he resolved on the former," (Tetreault, 38). However, Shelley found an equilibrium in which he was able to incorporate both. His poems seldom do not represent some sort of philosophical ideology.

'Ode to the West Wind' is Shelley's most famous short poem. It is an invocation for an unseen force to take control and revive life. It was first composed on October 19, 1819, inspired by a walk in woodland near Florence, and it was first published in August, 1920 with *Prometheus Unbound*. 'Ode' is unique in its structure and its use of the complicated *terza rima*, which has a rhyme scheme of *aba - bcb - cdc ded - ee*. Each of the five stanzas of the poem is composed of fourteen lines; four tercets and a couplet. This gives each stanza a compactness and solidarity unto itself. At the time that the poem was written, Shelley was recovering from the death of his young son William, who died in June, and reeling from bad reviews of a work he had just published, "The Revolt of Islam." These personal conflicts explain the imagery of death and decay in the first stanza of the poem. The poem calls for a mythical power to inspire and induce change or "a new Birth" (line 64). It is about the regenerative powers of Nature to bring forth not only new life but also poetic inspiration. The call for inspiration comes in the form like a prayer, not to a Christian God, but to an unseen spiritual force which has the same omnipresence and power as a god.

'Ode' does not have a complex publication history, however, its creation is of more interest to explain Shelley as a poet. 'Ode' was not completed in one draft, but was written in several drafts and over a period of a week. Its completion came through a fragmentary process. While Blake was known for his printing and engraving process that gave his work a permanency in its creative process, Shelley's creative process has a translucent and tangible quality about it.

Shelley's Notebooks

The Bodleian Collection is the complete collection of Shelley's 28 notebooks and manuscripts. They were compiled in 1946 from the notebooks that Lady Shelley presented in 1893 and of other notebooks presented by Shelley's heirs. After Shelley's tragic and early death, it was his wife, Mary Shelley, who remained his chief and best editor. Shelley had a tiny audience in his time and his works were often published at his own expense. Shelley would often complain to his publisher, Ollier, of neglect (Bradley, 78). Even after his death, other forces worked against him to keep him from being published and read. Shelley's own father fought the publication of Shelley's verse and prose (82) and it was due largely to Mary Shelley that he continued to be published. Her first edit of her husband's work was in 1839.

Shelley's notebooks are infamous for their intricacy and complexity. His writing was often illegible, and his wife had to decipher them after his death. When writing, Shelley would often turn his notebook upside down or sideways, and sometimes he would write in reverse. His writing was characteristically layered with different drafts on the same page written in pencil and ink. Shelley would also often write the beginning of a poem in one notebook and then complete it in another. Such was the writing of 'Ode,' which was actually scattered through several notebooks (Rogers, 13). One notebook contains a pencil draft of the first three stanzas of 'Ode,' and the last two stanzas were written five days later in another notebook. Also, over the pencil draft of the first three stanzas, Shelley had written in ink the beginning of his Italian prose story, "Una Favola." Due to this overlapping of different poems it has been difficult to recover Shelley's works. Fragments of phrases and quotes were also scattered through his notebooks. Notably, on the same draft that bears the last two stanzas of the 'Ode,' Shelley inscribed below it a quote in Greek, "By virtue, I, a mortal vanquish thee a mighty God." Some critics argue that this quote was an act of defiance against his critics and an assertion of his atheism. But it also shows how influenced Shelley was by Greek elegy and the classics. The poem's mention of the lyre and clarion, both Greek instruments, show the classical elements in the poem.

Shelley's original drafts of 'Ode' had marked differences from the way readers see it today. The notebooks show that the original last line to the poem ended not in a question but in an assertion, "When Winter comes,

Spring lags not far behind!" (Rogers, 228). However, Shelley later changed this statement into a rhetorical question, "O Wind/ If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" By ending with a question, Shelley draws in the reader to develop their thoughts on the creative process and of political change. The last line shows Shelley's optimism about Spring and regeneration.

Shelley and Politics

Unfortunately, one cannot get a complete picture of Shelley as a poet without considering the political and philosophical aspects of his life. Shelley wrote multiple political pamphlets, especially in his youth, expounding his liberal ideology. He produced and paid for these pamphlets himself and would distribute them freely; sending them to coffee houses, flinging them from his balcony onto the street, and even sending his servant out to pass them out in the street (Rogers). Shelley received little support for his ideas and was persecuted by authorities. Thus his disillusionment of the political state is evident in 'Ode' by the prophetic decay of living things in Nature in the first stanza. Ultimately however, in the last stanza, Shelley hopes for a new political reformation and for a re-birth of the creative process.

Ashes and Sparks: Reading Shelley Today

Shelley's line in 'Ode' about ashes and sparks is of course where the title of this course originated. His calling the Wind to scatter his "words among mankind" is more plausible hypertextually today, then during his own time and limited publication (only 250 copies of *Queen Mab* were first published). Like the dead leaves scattered by the wind in 'Ode', hypertext does not remain fixed or centered to a singular authority or organization. Just as 'Ode' resists "oppression by Church and state" (Rogers, 241), so does hypertext resist institutionalization and being bound by structure and rules. Shelley calls for a freedom of thought and re-birth through the words of the poet and with hypertext this goal is closer to being achieved with the larger audience Shelley can receive. The different layers and fragments in Shelley's writings with their inter-notebook span is much like the different links and intertextuality that hypertext provides. Shelley's notebooks ultimately are a model for the hypertext paradigm.

Temporal Dislocations and Visions of Interpretation in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" by Patrick Mooney

Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" has a difficult time gathering control over its ability to shape its own reception. In its exploration of the nature of prophecy, the relation of prophecy to poetry, and the relation of the poet to both, Shelley's particular inspirational force -- the West Wind -- requires him to work within the traditional mythological structure of the change of the seasons and the events associated with this change. Shelley's use of this mythological structure, in turn, forces him to attune himself to the natural progression of the seasons in order to fully control the creative force that he invokes. Until this occurs -- very late in the poem -- the poet remains most immediately concerned with his relationship to these forces, and the way that his poem will be received remains a secondary concern.

This can be seen from the building tension in the poem between the natural temporal progression of one season into another and the temporal progression of the poet's concept of his inspirational force. A close examination of the clues to the seasonal and temporal associations of Shelley's references will show that as long as Shelley fails to conceptualize the time-frame of the nature of his intended inspirational force in the same way that it operates naturally, he is unable to relate to it in a productive manner.

The natural temporal progression of one season into another needs no detailed explanation for those of us in temperate locales. Spring brings the growth of new life, then progresses into summer; summer progresses into autumn; autumn brings the slowing down of life and preparation for and progress into the metaphoric sleep and/or death of winter; and winter turns back into spring, beginning a new year and beginning again the cycle of growth and decay.

The temporal progress of the poet's conception of his intended inspirational force, on the other hand, is much more complex. The poem's present is in the autumn of a year -- presumably the year in which it was composed, but there is no particular indication of this; in fact, the poem's refusal to give details that would locate it in a specific time give it a temporally universal character -- but the poet's thought ranges forward and backward in time throughout the course of the poem.

The poem's present is located in autumn, as is shown by the fact that the poem is an address to the West Wind, which is the "breath of autumn's being." (Shelley 1) This can also be seen from the image of the dead leaves driven by the wind. (2-5) Shelley's imagery in the first five lines of the poem picks up and uses the traditional mythological association of death with winter and applies it to associate the fall of the autumn leaves with disease and approaching death: He speaks of "leaves dead" which are compared to "ghosts ... fleeing"; the leaves are described as "hectic," a word associated in Shelley's time with the flush of pestilence; and the leaves are described as "pestilence-stricken multitudes." (2-5)

Shelley quickly shifts the temporal location of his thought to winter in line six, where he describes the wind as carrying "winged seeds" to "their dark wintry bed." (7,6) Here winter is explicitly and unequivocally associated with death: These "winged seeds" are described as "Each like a corpse within its grave." (8)

The temporal focus of Shelley's thoughts shifts again, this time to the spring, in line nine. Spring is described as a reawakening of life: Shelley tells us that the spring wind shall fill "the dreaming earth" with "living hues and odours plain and hill." (10,12) After describing the effects of spring's "clarion" on the earth, the focus of the narrator's thought snaps back to the poetic present in the last two lines of the first stanza, and he explicitly invokes the autumn wind, asking it to "hear, oh hear!" (14) The poet's thought during the first stanza, then, ranges in time through most of the seasonal cycle of the year, then returns to the present in a discontinuous jump.

Shelley fluctuates between using death and sleep as metaphors for winter in the first stanza. He first explicitly associates winter with death, as described above, and then describes spring as a reawakening, not a resurrection -- the spring wind's trumpet affects "the dreaming earth" in line 10, not a "dead earth." This dual metaphoric nature is maintained throughout the poem -- for instance, Shelley refers to the coming winter as both "night" (implying sleep) and the "dying year" (implying death) in line 24; he refers to ashes (dead sparks) in line 67 and to an "unawakened earth" (implying sleep) in line 68. The fact that Shelley employs two different metaphors, however, is not problematic, simply because both sleep and death are adequate and traditional metaphors for the state of the earth in winter. Autumn is described both with the oncoming sleep of winter (for instance, in the "night" of line 24) and with the oncoming death of winter (for instance, in the "pestilence" of line five) in mind.

After the quickly moving temporal changes of the first stanza, Shelley continues the autumnal theme of the first stanza's last two lines in the second stanza. The fact that the second stanza refers only to autumn can be seen from a variety of pieces of evidence: the reference to "decaying leaves" in line 16; the "dying [not 'dead'] year" of line 24; the reference in line 25 to the fact that the year will (but does not yet) have a "sepulchre"; the storm mentioned in lines 18-23, which seems to have an autumnal character; and the present tense of all of the

verbs that are used to describe (rather than predict) the present situation, which references the poem's present, in the autumn.

Shelley stays with the autumnal theme in the second stanza after snapping back to it at the end of the first, but this shift in the temporal locale of the poet's thought from spring (ll. 9-12) to autumn (ll. 13-28) at the end of the first stanza is significant. It is disturbing because it is unnatural in two ways: it is a reversal of the natural passing of one season into another (spring is expected to flow forward into summer, not backward into autumn), and it is discontinuous (spring passes into autumn without passing through either summer or winter, the seasons which normally separate spring and autumn from each other). This unnatural shift in temporal locale fails to parallel the natural passage of seasons, and this failure to make a parallel in thought with the natural passage of time is repeated in the transition from autumn (the poem's present) to summer (the poem's past) between the second and third stanzas.

That the third stanza of the poem describes events of a summer is apparent from an examination of Shelley's language: the "summer dreams" of line 29 and the calm ("lulled") Mediterranean of lines 31-32 demonstrate this. That summer is the poem's past is apparent from the past-tense verbs used in the main clauses of Shelley's constructions throughout most of the stanza: it is demonstrated by the "didst" of line 29, the "lay" of line 30, and the "saw" of line 33. Most of the main verbs not in the past tense in the third stanza indicate an action that is still occurring (and can be expected to have been occurring during the poetic past, as well -- the cleaving of the sea by the wind of lines 36-38 and the knowing of the seasons by the sea-vegetation in lines 39-41 provide good examples of this). Those verbs in the third stanza not in the present tense that do not indicate a still-occurring action come in the last two lines of the stanza ("grow," "tremble," "despoil") serve an important function: They anticipate the coming autumn.

By anticipating the coming autumn, Shelley fundamentally reverses the unnatural relationship that his thoughts have had, so far in the poem, to time. He describes a poetic past of a tranquil summer, provides a bridge to the poetic present of the autumn (by describing the seasonal change in lines 39-42), and then moves into the poetic present in the fourth stanza. By doing all of this, he provides a continuous jump from one season to another for the first time since he unnaturally jumped from spring to autumn between lines 12 and 13 in the first stanza. Furthermore, this is the first time since that jump from spring back to autumn that he has jumped *forward* in time, in accordance with the natural progression of the seasons.

This mental shift to accord with the natural seasonal progression has immediate benefits for the poet. Previously, in the first three stanzas, the speaker in the poem was only able to attempt to invoke the creative force, which he saw as something alien which was to "hear, oh hear" him. (14) Although the fourth stanza also takes the form of a series of invocations, these are shorter and less formal. Some are only one line long -- for instance, the invocations in lines 43 and 44 -- instead of being the the elaborate, fourteen-line invocations of the first three stanzas. The poet's conception of the creative force also changes: Rather than seeing it as something alien, he begins to see it as something which is capable of working through him; he wishes that he could be lifted as "a wave, a leaf a cloud!" by the inspirational Wind. (53) Throughout the stanza, the poet's conception of his relation to this inspirational force changes. At first, he sees himself as something that the wind could, conceivably, work through ("thou mightest bear"); he pleads the wind to work through him later in the stanza ("Oh lift me" is the clearest expression of this desire); at the end, he identifies himself with the West Wind's inspirational force, saying that he is "one too like thee." (43;53;56)

In the fourth stanza, and in the transition from the third to the fourth stanza, Shelley finally began to align his process of thought to the natural seasonal progression demanded by the nature of his inspirational force; he completes the process of attenuation in the last part of the fourth stanza and the beginning of the fifth stanza. The fourth stanza proceeds in a continuous manner from the third, and in the proper order; but most of the

fourth stanza is simply a group of static statements that all describe a single emotion at a single point in time. A static thought is not completely attuned to the temporal nature of the progression of the seasons that Shelley's inspirational force demands simply because it *is* static. Shelley spends lines 43-52 listing metaphors that describe a relation he *would* have with the inspirational West Wind; this intended relationship does not begin to develop -- grow over time -- until the "Oh lift me" of line 53. It undergoes another fundamental shift in lines 55-6, when he not only pleads with the wind, but identifies with it.

This forward temporal movement takes a different form in the fifth stanza. The narrator's thoughts are now turned outward and encompass events in the natural world, and events in the natural world show the progression of time. The "leaves ... falling" of line 58, indicating early autumn, become "withered leaves," indicating late autumn or early winter, in line 64. This late autumn/early winter time frame naturally accounts for the "unawakened [sleeping] earth" of line 68. The winter itself is tensed with anticipation for the coming spring, for the awakening of earth promised by the "clarion" call of the "trumpet of prophecy" and for the "[quicken] new birth" of the "sweet buds" and the "winged seeds" that have spent the winter in their "wintry bed." (10,69; 64,11,7,6)

It is only at this late point that the poem begins to shape its own reception. Now that the poet has attuned his mind to the seasonal operation of his inspirational force and bridged the conceptual gap between him and it, he is able to take full advantage of its creative power to influence its interpretation. Shelley first describes his own developing relationship to his inspirational force. At first, he is to be the "lyre" played by the West Wind, and the Wind will take from him, as from the forest, a "deep autumnal tone,/ Sweet though in sadness." (57, 59-61) He then modifies this concept of his relationship to the Wind, which is a concept that still conceives of the poet and the inspirational force as different entities (although entities that work closely together), by making a statement of complete identity with his inspirational force: "Be thou, spirit fierce,/ My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!" (61-2)

At this point, Shelley is in control of his relationship to his inspirational force, and can use his control of this force to shape the reception of the poem. Only in the last eight lines of the last stanza does he make a statement of how the poem is to be received.

All of the images Shelley now uses to shape the poem's interpretation -- "dead thoughts" blown like "withered leaves" by the Wind, words scattered like "Ashes and sparks ... among mankind," the "trumpet of a prophecy" -- involve the dispersion of something (an object or a sound) from a central source over a large distance. (63-4,67,69) Shelley, then, is not particularly concerned with the reception of his ideas -- or the poem -- among individuals, but rather the general reception of the poem and his ideas among "mankind." The poem is not meant to influence individual parts of society, but to influence the organic whole.

The images Shelley uses to describe the effects of the poem are all particularly indicative in light of this large-scale model of dispersion. "Withered [dead] leaves" from the fall can serve to provide the soil with nutrients to allow for the growth of new life in the spring, and "Ashes and sparks" can transfer a fire from one place to another, or ignite a new fire from an old one; both of these are images of a new birth from dead material. A trumpet call can allow one individual to rally a large number of others. All of these models allow for Shelley to spread his influence, not only to single other individuals, but to the population in general. All of these images, which build on or are related to images from earlier in the poem ("ashes and sparks" suggests "winged seeds" in terms of a method of dispersion, for instance), show that Shelley, once he has harnessed the inspirational power of the force he invokes, has a clear conception of how the poem is to be received.

Figures one and two, above, are complimentary. Figure one shows the natural cycle of seasons, to which Shelley's narrator needs to attune himself to make full use of the prophetic and inspirational powers of the

West Wind. Figure two shows the course of temporal thought that this narrator engages in throughout the course of the poem. In this second figure, the stanzas are represented by concentric arcs: the first stanza by the inmost arc, the second stanza by the next arc outward, and so forth. The temporal discontinuities in thought -- the occasion when Shelley's narrator's thought jumps from the future back to the present between lines 12 and 13 and the occasion when the narrator's thought jumps from the present back to the past between the second and third stanzas -- are represented by dashed lines. Natural progressions in time between stanzas -- when Shelley's narrator's thought remains in a single time period between stanzas one and two or stanzas four and five, or when the narrator intentionally bridges from one season to the next between stanzas between stanzas three and four -- are shown with solid lines between the arcs representing the stanzas. When a single stanza progresses naturally through more than one season, as in stanza five and the first twelve lines of stanza one, the curve of the arc sweeps through the spaces representing the seasons without a discontinuity.

A comparison of the two diagrams shows the gap between the method of thought that Shelley's narrator needs to achieve and the reality of the situation over the course of the poem. At first, as noted in the text above, the narrator's thought is uncontrolled, disjointed, and out of tune with the processes of thought needed to relate to his inspirational force. Gradually, however, Shelley's narrator brings his patterns of thought into line with the natural pattern required by his inspirational force.

This attunement is required because the narrator becomes the "lyre" played by his inspirational force, the West Wind, and so is required to harmonize with it in his patterns of thought, and because he then begins to identify himself with this inspirational force. For this reason, the poem is not immediately concerned with its own reception for most of its length: It needs to establish enough control over itself and the creative force driving it before it can attempt to shape its interpretation. Once this has been accomplished, however, the poem turns immediately to shape its own reception in the minds of readers with a group of symbolic allusions that develop from -- and lend a coherence to -- the already-existing imagery of the struggle for control over and identification with the inspirational force of the poem.

Percy Shelley and Ode to the West Wind

Shelley, like John Keats, was a "high romantic," meaning one of the romantic poets in the generation following Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge. Like Keats, Shelley crafts himself into the artist who burns with his creative spirit, allowing his poetry to consume him. Shelley, more than any of the British romantics, desires art to consume him as much as he wishes to consume art. In many ways, Shelley represents everything you either love or hate about romanticism.

The Poet as a Prophet

He is a master of lyricism, his poetry moving like passionate music that can become at times — for me, at least — overbearingly operatic. A consummate believer in the Self, he takes the poetry as a worship of selfhood to dizzying heights. The poet, for Shelley, is a visionary, one who does not just speak for the gods, but as a god. Accordingly, Shelley harbored a religious sense of the great artist as martyred for his vision. The great poet is destined to suffer and to die upon the pyre of his own creation. For Shelley, the great figure of mythology is Prometheus, chained to the side of a mountain by the gods as punishment for usurping godly power in his invention of fire. Shelley's great poem is his epic *Promethues Unbound*, which you thankfully do not need to read for my class (although it is required reading for anyone who wishes to specialize in British romanticism).

"Ode to the West Wind"

Whether you find Shelley's poetry wonderful or sickening, "Ode to the West Wind" is a lyrical masterpiece, and encapsulates Shelley's vision of himself as a poet and the creative process. Like so many romantics, Shelley suffers from the tragic attempt to reconcile being with nature. Part of the "romantic agony" involves the desire of the poet to not only represent nature in a poem, but to become nature itself. Like the epic struggle with time, the struggle to unite with nature becomes doomed to failure for the human. One hundred years later, Yeats would famously write of his desire to become one with the eternity of nature by freezing himself into a mosaic in "Sailing to Byzantium." Yeats is one of the few famous heirs to the romantic tradition in the twentieth century, along with Wallace Stevens, who builds upon Walt Whitman and John Keats, and William Carlos Williams, who *Paterson* continues almost too facilely Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.

In "Ode to the West Wind," Shelley imagines himself one of the infinite leaves blowing in the west wind of autumn that precedes the winter. The leaves of autumn that fall to the ground, mixing with the frozen dormancy of winter, grow to new life in the spring. Shelley yearns for his poetry to take part of the same natural cycle of death and life, life and resurrection. The image that runs through the poem is that his poetry is like the leaves blowing and falling upon the entire world, and growing into new creation that will summon mankind—like Christ's resurrection—to see his vision. Hence, there are rampant religious analogies in the poem, yet Shelley uses them to reject a classic Christian vision for one that almost returns the poet to a pagan visionary. At the climax of the poem, line 54, Shelley cries out, "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" The poet at the end may be spent after the act of poetry, as Shelley says to the wind, "Drive my dead thoughts over the universe" (line 63), but his vision is "Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!" Like the spring, his poetry will rise again, "And by the incantation of this verse" in order to become revelation for the world.

Sactter, as from an unextinguished hearth

Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

Be through my lips to unawakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy!

The Image of "Leaves" and "Wind"

Shelley structures the poem around crafty and various meanings of the words / images LEAVES and WIND. In renaissance sonnets, "leaves" refer to the pages of a book. Metonymically, "leaves" for Shakespeare, or Sidney, or Spencer, can come to mean books, or poetry, or writing itself. So the image of leaves blowing across the landscape in the autumn turns into a metaphor of the poet disseminating his work and his vision. WIND has an extremely interesting etymological history that Shelley uses to a great extent. The word "spirit" comes from the word "wind." When the Hebrew Bible portrays God breathing into the dust to give life to humankind in Genesis, the Judaic tradition bestows upon wind an image of God's eternal life. Therefore, "spirit" transforms into the mysterious force of the divine—we have come now to equate that which is spiritual as being holy, or filled with a religious sense, or sacred. Yet we also derive from spirit the notion of lively, or full of life, resembling the enlivening aspect of wind / God's breath—such as filled with spirit, or describing a person as having a lively spirit.

So Shelley utilizes the ambiguity of WIND / SPIRIT to create both a religious and a secular connotation in his poem. Like the breath of God the breathes life into dust—like the west wind the blows the leaves of autumn which will eventually become spring—Shelley desire his "leaves" (his words, his poems, his vision) to circulate amongst the world and to bring revelation to mankind.

Ode to the West Wind: English Literature Essay

An Ode to the West Wind is a poem by Percy Bushy Shelley that shows the correspondence between the inner and the outer world of the poet. It is among his famous poems. The major theme of the poem is the poet's intention to become a force that may bring the change and rejuvenation in man's life. This theme is metaphorically shown by the rejuvenation of nature through the west wind as an agent. It is described through his excellent use of imagery in it. One may examine the excellence in the usage of imagery through the way it progresses from the beginning till the end. Poem commences with the imagery of the earth, shifting its attention to the air, then moving towards the water, and finally ending at the fire. Thus, wind affects all the four elements of the universe: earth, air, fire and ocean. My purpose here is to identify the progressive development of these four conceptual images which triggers the remarkable artistry of the ode and how all these images are conjured up in one thing-the poet-prophet figure.

Before discussing these four imageries, it is necessary, at first, to discuss the symbol of the west wind itself. The west wind symbolizes a force, may be of the God or Christ like figure or of any powerful might that could dominant even the most powerful things-earth, air, fire, and water. Speaker wants to be both the west wind itself and the objects the west wind spreads.

To evaluate, since west wind is a force that brings the change in the natural world, poet wants himself to be that force so that he may bring some revolution among the mankind.

Poet says:

“...Be thou, Spirit fierce,

My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!”

Also, the way west wind carries leaves, seeds, ashes and sparks, he wants himself and his thoughts to be the objects to be spread.

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;

If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;

A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free

Than thou, O uncontrollable!

This unique technique of the structure of the imagery used makes the poem Shelley's masterpiece.

At first, there comes the imagery of the earth. The earth is mostly associated with the femininity-fertility, rebirth, and stability. The juxtaposing of west wind blowing over the entire earth represents speaker's desire to recreate and scatter his words. The major imageries related to this theme are the 'dead leaves' and the 'winged seeds'. Both the dead leaves and the winged seeds together show the cyclicity of life on earth. At the outset, the power of west wind stirs the earth by blowing its leaves. They are shown to scatter in such a way as if they are escaping from an enchanter 'like ghosts'. This symbolizes speaker's in ability to control his

emotions that carry his message of reform and revolution. Further, the leaves are not the simple leaves but the 'dead leaves' with different colors like "Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red". This is a visual imagery to arouse the sensual expression of these emotions in reader. Poet's thoughts are like the leaves with different ideologies, beliefs and, ideas. The leaves are shown dead because poet's thoughts have become dead due to his growing age. By showing this imagery the poet wants to say that his thoughts too have become pale and dead and need some force that may derive them like the leaves.

After that this imagery of leaves evolves to the imagery of seeds the 'winged seeds'. Since his thoughts have become pale and hectic red due to the growing age, he wants the rebirth of his emotions just like the winged seeds. West wind plants seeds in the ground during autumn and when the spring comes the buds grow out of them. They are buried like a corpse into the grave. His thoughts have become the corpse. Now it is the time of their fertility. Thus, we may note Shelley's skill in showing the birth, life, and decay of his thoughts like the leaves that now need the rebirth like seeds.

The poem then progresses to the imagery of second element the air. The air is the source of communication because it carries away thoughts far away. The wind shows its power over the air, too. Due to the west wind air becomes more powerful which shakes the clouds. As a result the rain and lightening is produced. They are the symbol of inspiration and creativity. Even as they destroy, they encourage new life and hope as well. Thus, all these details and descriptions of the imagery of air create a sensory experience of poet's inspiration for the creation of such a poetry that may go far beyond his reach and bring the change and revolution far and wide.

Afterwards, poet describes the imagery of third element the fire. The fire is usually the image of hopelessness, destruction and death. This is the reason most of the people interpret the poem as the speaker's lamentation over his inability to directly reach people. However, it works as the preserver as well. The fire is immediate in its action thus represents action orientation. There are only three images related to the fire-hearth, ashes and sparks. Since hearth is a controllable fire, it might be the case that the poet wanted West Wind or his emotions to be controlled not fleeing 'like ghosts'. Poet compares his thoughts to the ashes and sparks of hearth.

Finally, the imagery evolves to the fourth element the water. Water is associated with the ability to feel and intuition to know. He wants to be closely connected to west wind's power over water as well. The West Wind awakens sea that itself is highly violent. Sea has destroyed many great civilizations with its power. But still the west wind dominates it as well. It influences the water not only at its surface level but also deep inside the sea. Like west wind's power over the deep see the speaker requests his thoughts to be found not superficially but deep in the hearts of people. Thus, Shelley uses water as his primary source of poetic inspiration.

In most of the cultures, there is the fifth element as well which describes something which is beyond the material world. Shelley employs this fifth element as well in his ode. This fifth element for Shelley is the soul, or the spirit of a poet-prophet figure here metaphorically described as the 'West Wind'. The west wind is the fifth element that dominates other four elements-earth, air, fire and water.

Conclusively, Shelley shows the representation of natural power versus human power, natural mortality versus human mortality, natural freedom versus human freedom, and natural transformation versus human transformation. The poet's purpose of describing such imagery is to show, what Eliot calls, the 'objective correlative', or 'objective equivalence' of his emotions. It is through the powers of west wind that he is capable of describing the emotions in a more pictorial form.

Evolution of Thought in the Poem 'Ode to the West Wind'

Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' is a perfect lyric which combines in itself lofty thoughts and strong passion. In this poem, 'Shelley's ardent desire for the regeneration of mankind and the establishment of a new world order is vehemently expressed. The West Wind which is a destroyer and preserver sweeps away the old and useless ideas and fosters fresh and modern ones. The West Wind for the poet is not merely a natural phenomenon. It is for him a tempestuous spirit destroying what has to die and preserving the seeds of a new life. The West Wind symbolizes the free spirit of man – "tameless, and swift, and proud". It also symbolizes poetic inspiration and becomes 'the trumpet of a prophecy' ushering in a grand and glorious regeneration of mankind. The West Wind is the very symbol of the Law of Life itself, containing within it the power to destroy and the power to preserve. The poem harmonises and fuses these images to a remarkable degree. Shelley has also been successful in charging his ode with speed, force and energy like the tempestuous wind itself.

The first three stanzas are in the form of a prayer and describe the activities of the West Wind on land, in the sky and in the ocean. The West Wind, which is 'the breath of autumn's being, scatters the dead and sickly leaves ('pestilence-stricken multitudes') like a magician driving away ghosts. The West Wind is not only Destroyer but is also a Preserver. The Wind also carries and scatters the seeds and buries them under the soil, where they lie dormant all through winter. When the warm spring breeze blows, the seeds will sprout, filling the whole earth with a new life.

The powerful West Wind shakes and pushes the thin clouds, which are like leaves of 'the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean'. The fast moving dark clouds herald the approach of a rain-storm. The sky looks fierce like a mad and intoxicated Maenad and the clouds appear to be her streaming hair. The West Wind gathers black clouds and are transformed into the dark solid dome of a tomb from which fire and hail will burst. The lines carry the suggestion of birth and growth along with death. The leaf image is maintained throughout.

The West Wind wakes up the beautiful, blue and clam Mediterranean who is pictured as sleeping, lying by the side a pumice isle in Baiae's bay and dreaming of moss-grown palaces, ruined towers and gardens. The smooth waves of the Atlantic cleave themselves into deep furrows. The plants sense the approach of the West Wind and become pale and shed their leaves.

A strong personal note is struck in the fourth stanza of the poem. He is in dire need of the West Wind as he no more retains his carefree innocence and tamelessness of his boyhood. He has fallen 'on the thorns of life' and he bleeds. He is fettered by the claims and responsibilities and is full of the cares of life. "A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed. One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud" he laments. The poet is in a mood of impotent dejection and appeals to the wind to lift him 'as a wave, a leaf, a cloud to escape from this burden of life. Fortunately, the poem does not end here. The poet in the next stanza recovers his

balance and goes beyond his personal sorrows. He wants to identify himself with the fierce spirit of the Wind. He calls upon the Wind to 'drive my dead thoughts over the universe, like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!' He appeals to the Wind to scatter his poems, which are like sparks from a smouldering fire, to kindle a new fire in the hearts and minds of men. He also appeals to the West Wind to inspire him so that his poems, which have been born out of sorrow and hope, will prove to be the bringer of joy of humanity – the new spring time for mankind. The poem closes on a note of ardent hope. He wants the West Wind to blow through his lips the prophecy that a brave new world – a world of love, beauty and goodness – will soon emerge in place of the existing world of misery and suffering. "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" the poem ends with this optimistic question.

On Shelley and Nature by M. Kennedy

It is apparent in Percy Shelley's writings that he was influenced by the nature around him immensely. In both "Ode to the West Wind" and "To a Sky-Lark" the focus is on nature and its beauty. It is this focus on the natural world that defines these two poems and many of his others. Shelley uses his admiration and curiosity of the natural world around him as a vehicle for his prose. His intricate and enthusiastic descriptions of the stars of his poems, the West Wind and Skylark, almost force the reader to long for nature and admire it as he does. He uses nature to capture the heart of the reader, perhaps stimulating a memory of nature long forgotten or a desire to be outside among Shelley's influences. Shelley's inspiration is clearly the world around him in both poems, but similarly, he involves his desires to be a successful poet in both.

Shelley's focuses on the natural world in "Ode to the West Wind", particularly on the main character of the poem, the wind itself. After remarking on its many admirable qualities, he expresses his desire that it should help spread his prose; "Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth / Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!" (66-67) This quote is interesting as he seems to be playing with the reader. They are indeed reading his poem about the West Wind, so really, the wind did in fact spread his word, just not in the physical sense one might visualize from the poem.

In "To a Sky-Lark" Shelley again speaks of his desire to capture an aspect of his subject to use to his advantage. Like the wind, he wishes for an attribute of the Skylark, its happiness. He reasons that granted even half the gladness of a sky-lark, that; "Such harmonious madness / From my lips would flow / The world should listen then – as I am listening now." (103-105) Shelley obviously admires the subject of his stories, but is he perhaps almost jealous of the ease in which they succeed at their purposes? The West Wind flows through with ease, and the skylark seems endlessly happy, singing its beautiful songs. Shelley also compares the song of the skylark to that of a poet; "Like a Poet hidden / In the light of thought" (36-37). Perhaps he sees some of himself in his subjects, and nature itself.

Ode to the West Wind by Ashley Kannan

Shelley embraces much in way of Romantic thought in his alignment of natural images and political agendas. In writing the closing to his "Defence of Poetry," Shelley argues that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." This sentiment that the poet's voice, driven by nature and subjectivity, can become

an agent of political change and advocacy. Such an idea is evident in the employment of natural imagery in "Ode to the West Wind."

Within "images drawn from the seasonal cycle," Shelley advocates political change and "a sense of social renewal." One such example is in the opening of the poem: "O Wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being/ Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead,/ Are driven like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing." The natural imagery is one where change is inevitable. Consistent with Romanticism, Shelley seems to be calling upon the natural forces of change in order to facilitate a moral and political evolution. "Leaves dead" and being "driven like ghosts" are akin to images of tyranny and forces of social and political oppression that animated Shelley's belief in freedom. His zealous defense of individual liberty is evident in the opening lines' employment of natural imagery.

This trend of equating natural imagery with political change is evident throughout the poem. The "swift cloud" and "the wave's intenser days" are natural images that brim with freedom and individual identity apart from a controlling entity. In these images, Shelley is able to articulate a realm of individual freedom and autonomy that exists apart from external dominance. Consistent with a political stand against authority and tyranny, these images are ways in which the Romantic belief in nature aligns with the advocacy of specific political values. "The trumpet of a prophecy" is another natural image that hearkens out to a force of change that transforms the Status Quo. Here again, is the Romantic tendency to equate the truth of nature with the universality of political values that embrace the natural setting. The closing line of the poem also emphasizes this condition of being: "If Winter Comes, can Spring be far behind?" In this line, Shelley makes the argument that tyranny and the political silencing of voice will always give way to the condition of freedom and individual expression. In making this Romantic dialectic a natural one, Shelley argues that temporality will succumb to transcendental notions of identity. The natural images end up endorsing Shelley's political stance.

Ode to the West Wind: The Most Pretentious Poem Ever

Let me start by saying that I love the English Romantic poets and I also really like Shelley's works. That said, I'd be lying if I failed to confess that I find "Ode to the West Wind" to be the most pretentious poem I have ever read.

Before I slam this poem, let me state what I like about this poem. I think the concept of the poem is great. Essentially, Shelley is expressing the importance of suffering and experiencing life as a way to draw inspiration in the creation of poetry. I get that and I am in complete agreement. So the main idea is fine, it's the language that Shelley uses that I have an issue with.

The first three sections of the poem end with the phrase "O hear!" I understand that he is using this as a refrain and a way to encourage people to listen to the poetic muse, but it just makes me cringe. It seems pompous to me, almost like he's preaching from upon a dais to those uneducated folk who don't quite understand the transcendent power of poetry. How different the tone would be if he had quietly encouraged readers to "Listen" instead.

The fourth section contains a line that for me is the epitome pretentious poetry: "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" I am so glad that this was not the first poem I read, because if it was, I don't think I would have ever read poetry again. I would venture to assert that this line could ruin anyone's interest in poetry.

The fifth and final section begins with the following stanza:

*Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own?
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies*

While I like this final section the best, I am also annoyed by the fact that Shelley seems to be borrowing ideas from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, specifically from the poem "The Eolian Harp." (Click [here](#) to read my review of that poem.) Not only did Coleridge employ the metaphor first, he did it much better, in my opinion. It's a shame that this poem seems to be a part of every English class that covers the Romantic period, because Shelley wrote much better poems. In fact, "Ozymandias" is one of my all-time favorites. Still, I guess it does kind of sum up the ideologies that influenced the writers of that period.

Shelley as a Revolutionary Poet by Md. Rajibul Hasan

"For the Romantic poet, the idea of revolution has a special interest, and a special affinity. For Romanticism seeks to effect in poetry what revolution aspires to achieve in politics: innovation, transformation, defamiliarisation" (David Duff, p. 26) Revolution is a dominant spirit in almost all the romantic poets. Percy Bysshe Shelley, a Romantic poet, is also called rebel for his idea of revolution in his poetry. As The French Revolution dominated all politics in those years, unlike Wordsworth or Coleridge, Shelley never abandoned the ideals of the revolution, though he was appalled by the dictatorship of Napoleon. Shelley only experienced the revolution at second hand through the books of various writers and was influenced by Rousseau, William Godwin etc. When he looked back, all he could see was the flame of revolution still flickering in spite of the terror, war and disease. His long poem, The Revolt of Islam, written at the height of his powers, is clear on one matter above all else- that the ideas of progress, which inspired the revolution, will triumph once again.

In the "Ode to The West Wind" Shelley is seen as a rebel and he wants revolution. He desires a social change and the West Wind is to his symbol of change. This poem, written in iambic pentameter, begins with three stanzas describing the wind's effects upon earth, air and ocean. The last two stanzas are Shelley speaking directly to the wind, asking for its power, to lift him like a leaf, or a cloud and make him his companion in its wanderings. He asks the wind to take his thoughts and spread them all over the world so that the youth are awoken with his ideas.

In the first stanza of this poem, Shelley says that the West Wind drives away the last sign of life in trees and also helps to rejuvenate the world by allowing the seeds to grow in the spring. In this way the West Wind acts as a destroyer and preserver. Shelley says, "Wild spirit, which art moving everywhere;/ Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!" Actually the West Wind acts as a driving force for change and rejuvenation in the human and natural world. And it is the symbol of revolution. Shelley begins his poem by addressing the Wild West Wind. He quickly introduces the theme of death and compares the dead leaves to ghosts. The imagery of "Pestilence-stricken multitudes" makes the reader aware that Shelley is addressing more than a pile of leaves. His claustrophobic mood becomes evident when he talks of the wintry bed and

The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low/
Each like a corpse within its grave, until/
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow"

Although the West Wind symbolizes his own personality and in the middle of the poem he seems somehow pessimistic when he says, "Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!/ I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!", at the end of the poem he is seen very much optimistic when he says that his revolutionary ideas must bring a change and the new order will be established.

The wind blows through the jungle and produces music out of the dead leaves. Shelley requests it to create music out of his heart and to inspire him to write great poetry, which may create a revolution in the hearts of men. He wants the Wind to scatter his revolutionary message in the world, just as it scatters cries and sparks from a burning fire. His thoughts may not be as fiery as they once were, but they still have the power to inspire men. He tells the Wind to take message to sleeping world, that if winter comes, spring cannot be far behind. After bad days come good days. Here he says, "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

We also find Shelley's revolutionary zeal in ode "To A Skylark". According to Shelley, the bird, Skylark, that pours spontaneous melody from heaven and soars higher and higher can never be a bird. It is for the poet, a joyful spirit that begins its upward flight at sunrise and becomes invisible at evening like the stars of the sky that become invisible in day light. Moreover, it is compared with the beams of the moon whose presence is rather felt than seen. It's a heavenly bird and by singing it spreads its influence through the world.

In the opening stanza, the bird is seen as a "blithe spirit" that "pourest thy full heart/ In profuse strains of unpremeditated art." The words "Pourest thy full heart" mean that the bird pours out its heart in song and with "In profuse strains of unpremeditated art", Shelley refers to the spontaneous flow of music which comes from the Skylark. There is nothing artificial in its music, it overflows profusely from its heart. And Shelley says as a spirit of revolution it spreads its revolutionary message as the moon spreads its beam. He says,

"All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As, when might is bare,
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains on her beams, and Heaven is overflowed."

As in the beginning of the poem, the poet says the bird is a heavenly bird and it is a joyful spirit, its life is not sorrowful like that of human being. The life of human being is full of sorrow, suffering and it is rare to find ecstasy without pain. Our happiness is often marred by memories of past affections and sorrows, and the painful uncertainty of what is to come in the future. Man is a creature that looks "before and after". He is subject to weariness and satiety, so that he can never enjoy happiness perennially. But the Skylark knows no satiety. It is the very embodiment of perennial delight, ever fresh and full of zest and unwearied in its enjoyment of happiness. Human life, on the other hand, is subject to recurrent spells of frustration and pain. As he says,

“We look before and after,
And shun for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught:
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.”

So the poet wants to experience half the gaiety of the bird and then he would sing with such excellent poetic ecstasy via the people of the world listen to him. He says,

"Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The world should listen then-as I am listening now."

In the concluding part it can be said that Shelley is a true revolutionary poet whose message bears the ideas of revolution.....

Shelley's Aesthetic of Creation and Destruction in his 'Ode to the West Wind'

Similar to other Romantics, Shelley also believed that the seeds of destruction and creation are contained each within the other. One cannot create something without destroying something else. Likewise, destruction leads to the creation of something new. As in *The Rime of Ancient Mariner*, after his destructive act, the Mariner gradually comes to realize the enormous consequences of his act and struggles to accept responsibility for it.

Ode to the West Wind by Shelley is a poem addressed to the west wind. It is personified both as a "Destroyer" and a "Preserver". It is seen as a great power of nature that destroys in order to create, that kills the unhealthy and the decaying to make way for the new and the fresh. Shelley believes that without destruction, life can not continue. The personification of the wind as both "preserver" and "destroyer" furthers this hypothesis.

Shelley creates a nature-myth in *Ode to the West Wind*. He envisions the West Wind as a devastating force that has the strength to destroy the evils of the existing society and preserves the good thing of it. He sees it as a symbol of destruction and preservation, decay and regeneration, death and resurrection. He invokes the West Wind to free his "dead thoughts" in order to prophesy a Renaissance among humanity "to quicken a new birth".

In the beginning of the poem we find the destructive loon of the West wind.

In the first stanza of the poem the poet addresses the west wind as "Wild" and the "Breath of Autumn's Being." It is a powerful force which drives the dead leaves which are yellow, black, pale and hectic red, to distant places like ghosts from an enchanter. The west wind carries winged seeds to their dark wintry beds underground.

“Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead

Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,”

The first movement of the poem is the clearing of the leaves of the previous year's growth by mighty West Wind. The second movement of the poem is the West Wind's preserving function, to clear the seeds to their wintry bed. Along with the dead leaves the West Wind scatters the seeds and covers them with dust. When the spring comes, the scattered seeds beget new plants. The new plants with their luxuriant foliage and flowers of bring colors and odors fill the landscape. Thus the nature gets a new life and a new look. Hence, the West Wind is a destroyer as well as a preserver. Symbolically, the dead leaves are the old customs and beliefs. The West Wind preserves the new ways of thoughts and new patterns of life that flourish in the new generation.

The attitude of Shelley's mind is reflected in such characterization of the West Wind. In practical life he was keenly dissatisfied with the existing order of society. He uses four kinds of colors namely "yellow", "black", "pale" and "hectic red" in order to characterize the "leaves dead." The colors are the colors of human diseases. "The leaves dead" also symbolize all the aged practices, customs, traditions, institutions, rites and rituals. Shelley wants the destruction of the old mode of thoughts like the dead leaves and preservation of new ideas and patterns. He logically finds a resemblance between his own nature and that of the West Wind.

Shelley further develops his idea in the forthcoming stanzas. He envisions that the invisible West Wind scatters the clouds in the sky. These clouds are the signals of the coming rain. Rain carries away all the evils from the nature and brings a new look change. Shelley hopes that his "rain" of thoughts would cause a regeneration among mankind sweeping away all the unjust. Thus, Shelley's great passion for the regeneration of mankind and rebirth of a new world finds a fitting expression in the West Wind.

By the expression "the dome of a vast sepulchre" Shelley here refers to the closing night which will serve as the dome of a vast tomb, in which the closing year will be buried. The accumulated water vapors also make the roof over the dying year and the atmosphere seems to be solid because of thick layers of dense clouds. The point is that Wind operates with the same and single point agenda: it destroys the dead and preserves the living.

In the third stanza the realm of the ruling West Wind is the sea, both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, and both the surface and the vegetation beneath. Shelley here has personified the Mediterranean, which perhaps in its sleep is dreaming of destruction of the palaces. During summer the Mediterranean and the Roman palaces and, the towers which remain submerged, are all quiet as if they seem to be sleeping because no storms appear to ruffle the surface of the sea in that season. But the wind agitates the sea and the palaces seem to quiver on account of the tremendous motion of the waves.

Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,

And tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!

This may be easily taken for allusions to Shelley's hope for political change in Italy, for the collapse of the kings and kingdoms. Shelley here must have tried to bring home a political philosophy. The old palaces and towers symbolize corrupt, degenerate and old power, old order and institutions. All these should be destroyed, the poet dreams along with the sea, in order to make way for new beginning.

As the scene shifts to the Atlantic, "the somnolent summer yields to the ruthless autumn". The reader is taken not only to the Atlantic, where its smooth surface has turned into a deep waves, but under it, where woods and foliage are forced to dispossess themselves of foliage upon hearing the Wind's voice.

As an idealist and as an extremely sensitive soul, Shelley was in much distress to see mankind exploited and being dehumanized by the corrupt, degenerate and old political powers and institutions. He wanted to see mankind reach an ideal state of life based on fraternity, equality and democracy. And that is why he was seeking revolution, which he refers to as his "sore need". He wishes that if he were a leaf rather than a human being the West Wind or the revolutionary force could carry him like dead leaves. The West Wind is uncontrollable and possesses unlimited freedom though he is not as free as the West Wind. The poet says:-

"Oh! Lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!

I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!"

His revolt is against the bond of human existence which makes life helpless, weak and miserable. The poet feels suffocated with the burden of life and desires relief from it. He appeals to the West Wind to raise him as wave, a leaf or a cloud. He thinks that the West Wind has the power to bring a revolutionary spirit in the poet. He prays to the West Wind to lift him out of his social bondage and urges it to scatter revolutionary usage for a better social change in the world.

Again, the poet worships the West Wind to treat him as its lyre just as it treats the forest, which means that the poet wants to bring a harmonious tune in the course of human life. The poet thinks that his life has become gray, dull and barren. He appeals to the West Wind to be his spirit and drive away all dead thoughts. He also wants to announce the invitation to build the world in new form and design. Only the West Wind can do this by the poet. Shelly expresses the hope that his dead thoughts will quicken a new birth and bring about a new condition of human life. Thus the poem ends with a note of hope and optimism: -

O Wind,

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

It becomes clear that the poet invokes the example of the operations of the west wind in nature because, in turn, he wants to spread his message of resurrection through this poem. Thus Shelley's West Wind is a "spirit" "the Breath of autumn's beings" which on earth, sky and sea destroys in the autumn to revivify in the spring.

The West Wind as a Symbol of Life and Death by Nikita

Shelley composed the "Ode to the West Wind" while in Florence, Italy in the year 1819. It was published in the year 1820. The gist of the poem is that Shelley considers himself as a poet prophet campaigning for reform and revolution using the "wild west wind" to destroy everything that is old and defunct and plant new and progressive, liberal and democratic ideals in its stead. The poem describes a storm arising in the autumn season in the Mediterranean Sea and being driven towards the land by 'the west wind.'

In *Canto 1*, Shelley addresses the west wind directly as the "*breath of autumn's being*" and the sight of it driving away all the fallen leaves is compared to a magician or an enchanter driving away all the evil spirits. At the same time it carries with it the fallen seeds to deposit them in a different place where they will blossom in the spring season after being safely preserved during the cold winter season. The west wind is thus both 'destroyer' and 'preserver':

***Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!***

In *Canto 2* Shelley vividly describes the meteorological process of the gathering storm in the distant horizon of the Mediterranean Sea.

In the first stanza Shelley compares the storm clouds which are being formed at the horizon ("tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean") and being driven inland by the west wind to decaying leaves shed by the trees during autumn.

In the next two stanzas, the storm clouds are compared to "angels" which carry the rain inland. They announce their arrival by fiery flashes of dazzling lightning which reach up into the sky from the ocean at the horizon. The flashes of lightning are compared to the bright hair of the maenad (the maenad is a frenzied spirit which attends on the Greek God Dionysus).

In *Canto 3* Shelley describes the action of the west wind on the Mediterranean Sea and on the Atlantic Ocean. The west wind announces to the Mediterranean Sea that summer is over and autumn has arrived. The clear view on a bright summer day of the under water palaces and towers in Baiae's Bay off the coast of Naples near the island made up of volcanic rock is disturbed by the west wind which blows across it. Similarly the west wind creates deep valleys as it blows across the level Atlantic Ocean and reminds the underwater vegetation deep below that it is autumn and that they too must disintegrate like the vegetation on the earth above.

Canto 4 is an earnest plea by Shelley to the west wind to infuse him with its raw power and liberate him from the bout of depression which has temporarily overwhelmed him - most probably caused by the death of his son William in 1819. Shelley tells the west wind that when he was a boy he was also as "uncontrollable" as the west wind is now, and he would have easily matched the west wind in its speed. But now, he is depressed and weighed down by the cares and anxieties of life and prays to the west wind to liberate him. He pleads with the west wind that just like how it lifts up the leaves on the earth and the clouds on the sky and the waves on the sea it should free him also from the "thorns of life" on which he has fallen.

In *Canto 5*, Shelley the poet directly and explicitly asks the west wind to make him an instrument and tool of political and moral change: "make me thy lyre" and "drive my dead thoughts over the universe":

*Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!*

The poem ends optimistically with Shelley echoing the popular saying "*if Winter comes can Spring be far behind?*"

QUESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. How does Shelley's treatment of nature differ from that of the earlier Romantic poets? What connections does he make between nature and art, and how does he illustrate those connections?

Whereas older Romantic poets looked at nature as a realm of communion with pure existence and with a truth preceding human experience, the later Romantics looked at nature primarily as a realm of overwhelming beauty and aesthetic pleasure. While Wordsworth and Coleridge often write about nature in itself, Shelley tends to invoke nature as a sort of supreme metaphor for beauty, creativity, and expression. This means that most of Shelley's poems about art rely on metaphors of nature as their means of expression: the West Wind in "Ode to the West Wind" becomes a symbol of the poetic faculty spreading Shelley's words like leaves among mankind, and the skylark in "To a Skylark" becomes a

symbol of the purest, most joyful, and most inspired creative impulse. The skylark is not a bird, it is a “poet hidden.”

2. How and why does Shelley believe poetry to be an instrument of moral good? What impact does this belief have on his poems, if any?

As Shelley explains in his essay *A Defence of Poetry*, he believes that poetry expands and nurtures the imagination, and that the imagination enables sympathy, and that sympathy, or an understanding of another human being’s situation, is the basis of moral behavior. His belief that poetry can contribute to the moral and social improvement of mankind impacts his poems in several ways. Shelley writes his poems in fulfillment of the responsibility to exercise the imagination and provide it with beauty and pleasure; thus his poems become whimsically imaginative in content and manner. The sense of this “responsibility” also adds urgency to Shelley’s poetic product, and makes the widespread reading of the poems a central and explicit goal: thus Shelley’s speaker makes declarations such as those in “Ode to the West Wind” and “To a Skylark”, expressing his desire that his words will spread amongst humanity.

3. Many of Shelley’s poems include a climactic moment, an instant when the poet’s feelings overwhelm him and overwhelm his poem. What are some of these moments? How do they relate to the poems as wholes? How are they typical of the poetic personality Shelley brings to his writing?

The most obvious example of such a climactic moment is the speaker’s collapse at the beginning of the third stanza of “The Indian Serenade”; one might also include the poet’s cry “I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!” in “Ode to the West Wind,” and “To a Skylark” as accounts of such moments sustained for an entire poem and distilled from all feelings of lesser intensity. These moments show both the power of the outside world to affect Shelley’s inner feelings, and the power of these feelings in and of themselves—Shelley responded very intensely to the world, and in his poems the world is a place to which one can respond only intensely.

4. Think about Shelley’s use of the sonnet form in “England in 1819” and “Ozymandias.” How does he shape the form to his own purposes? How does his use of the sonnet form break from the established traditions of the early 1800s?

5. Shelley was a political radical who never shied away from expressing his opinions about oppression and injustice—he was expelled from Oxford in 1811 for applying his radicalism to religion and arguing for the necessity of atheism. What do we learn about Shelley’s ideal vision of the human condition, as based on his political poems? With particular attention to “Ode to the West Wind,” how might a sense of his social hopes emerge from even a non-political poem?

6. In some ways Shelley is a creature of contradictions: he was an atheist who wrote hymns, a scandalous and controversial figure who argued for ethical behavior, an educated aristocrat who argued for the liberation of humankind, and a sensuous Romantic poet whose fondest hope was that his poems would exert a moral influence over the human imagination. How can one resolve these contradictions? (Are they even resolvable?) How do they manifest themselves in his poetry?

7. Shelley lived a fascinating and turbulent life among fascinating and turbulent people, from Lord Byron, the most famous, controversial, and popular poet of the era, to his wife Mary, the author of *Frankenstein*. How does a knowledge of Shelley’s biography (and early death) affect your appreciation of his poetry? Or does it affect it at all? Is it necessary to know about Shelley’s life and times in order to fully understand the poetry?

8. Why is Nature more powerful than Man in "Ode to the West Wind"? Why must the speaker turn to the West Wind to help him?
9. What does the speaker want the West Wind to do for him? What relationship does he want to establish between the wind and himself?
10. Why are wind and water the most commonly described parts of the natural world here? Why is the poem more concerned with seas, oceans, bays, and breezes than, say, fields and mountains and wildfires?
11. Dead leaves get mentioned, not once, not twice, but five times in this poem. Why is this speaker so obsessed with dead leaves? (Hint: maybe there's a pun on the word "leaf.")

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

ABOUT THE POET

John Keats

"If Poetry comes not as naturally as Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all." – John Keats

Born in London, England, on October 31, 1795, John Keats devoted his short life to the perfection of poetry marked by vivid imagery, great sensuous appeal and an attempt to express a philosophy through classical legend. In 1818 he went on a walking tour in the Lake District. His exposure and overexertion on that trip brought on the first symptoms of the tuberculosis, which ended his life.

Early Years

A revered English poet whose short life spanned just 25 years, John Keats was the oldest of Thomas and Frances Keats' four children.

Keats lost his parents at an early age. He was eight years old when his father, a livery stable-keeper, was killed after being trampled by a horse.

His father's death had a profound effect on the young boy's life. In a more abstract sense, it shaped Keats' understanding for the human condition, both its suffering and its loss. This tragedy and others helped ground Keats' later poetry—one that found its beauty and grandeur from the human experience.

In a more mundane sense, Keats' father's death greatly disrupted the family's financial security. His mother, Frances, seemed to have launched a series of missteps and mistakes after her husband's death; she quickly remarried and just as quickly lost a good portion of the family's wealth. After her second marriage fell apart, Frances left the family, leaving her children in the care of her mother.

She eventually returned to her children's life, but her life was in tatters. In early 1810, she died of tuberculosis.

During this period, Keats found solace and comfort in art and literature. At Enfield Academy, where he started shortly before his father's passing, Keats proved to be a voracious reader. He also became close to the school's headmaster, John Clarke, who served as a sort of a father figure to the orphaned student and encouraged Keats' interest in literature.

Back home, Keats' maternal grandmother turned over control of the family's finances, which was considerable at the time, to a London merchant named Richard Abbey. Overzealous in protecting the family's money, Abbey showed himself to be reluctant to let the Keats children spend much of it. He refused to be forthcoming about how much money the family actually had and in some cases was downright deceitful.

There is some debate as to whose decision it was to pull Keats out of Enfield, but in the fall of 1810, Keats left the school for studies to become a surgeon. He eventually studied medicine at a London hospital and became a licensed apothecary in 1816.

Early Poetry

But Keats' career in medicine never truly took off. Even as he studied medicine, Keats' devotion to literature and the arts never ceased. Through his friend, Cowden Clarke, whose father was the headmaster at Enfield, Keats met publisher, Leigh Hunt of *The Examiner*.

Hunt's radicalism and biting pen had landed him in prison in 1813 for libeling Prince Regent.

Hunt, though, had an eye for talent and was an early supporter of Keats poetry and became his first publisher. Through Hunt, Keats was introduced to a world of politics that was new to him and had greatly influenced what he put on the page. In honor of Hunt, Keats wrote the sonnet, "Written on the Day that Mr. Leigh Hunt Left Prison."

In addition to affirming Keats' standing as a poet, Hunt also introduced the young poet to a group of other English poets, including Percy Bysshe Shelley and Williams Wordsworth.

In 1817 Keats leveraged his new friendships to publish his first volume of poetry, *Poems by John Keats*. The following year, Keats published "Endymion," a mammoth four-thousand line poem based on the Greek myth of the same name.

Keats had written the poem in the summer and fall of 1817, committing himself to at least 40 lines a day. He completed the work in November of that year and it was published in April 1818.

Keats' daring and bold style earned him nothing but criticism from two of England's more revered publications, *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Quarterly Review*. The attacks were an extension of heavy criticism lobbed at Hunt and his cadre of young poets. The most damning of those pieces had come from Blackwood's, whose piece, "On the Cockney School of Poetry," shook Keats and made him nervous to publish "Endymion."

Keats' hesitation was warranted. Upon its publication the lengthy poem received a lashing from the more conventional poetry community. One critic called the work, the "imperturbable drivelling idiocy of Endymion." Others found the four-book structure and its general flow hard to follow and confusing.

The Recovering Poet

How much of an effect this criticism had on Keats is uncertain, but it is clear that he did take notice of it. But Shelley's later accounts of how the criticism destroyed the young poet and led to his declining health, however, have been refuted.

Keats in fact, had already moved beyond "Endymion" even before it was published. By the end of 1817, he was re-examining poetry's role in society. In lengthy letters to friends, Keats outlined his vision of a kind of poetry that drew its beauty from real world human experience rather than some mythical grandeur.

Keats was also formulating the thinking behind his most famous doctrine, *Negative Capability*, which is the idea that humans are capable of transcending intellectual or social constraints and far exceed, creatively or intellectually, what human nature is thought to allow.

In effect Keats was responding to his critics, and conventional thinking in general, which sought to

squeeze the human experience into a closed system with tidy labels and rational relationships. Keats saw a world more chaotic, more creative than what others he felt, would permit.

The Mature Poet

In the summer of 1818, Keats took a walking tour in Northern England and Scotland. He returned home later that year to care for his brother, Tom, who'd fallen deeply ill with tuberculosis. Keats, who around this time fell in love with a woman named Fanny Brawne, continued to write. He'd proven prolific for much of the past year. His work included his first Shakespearean sonnet, "When I have fears that I may cease to be," which was published in January 1818.

Two months later, Keats published "Isabella," a poem that tells the story of a woman who falls in love with a man beneath her social standing, instead of the man her family has chosen her to marry. The work was based on a story from Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio, and it's one Keats himself would grow to dislike.

His work also included the beautiful "To Autumn," a sensuous work published in 1820 that describes ripening fruit, sleepy workers, and a maturing sun. The poem, and others, demonstrated a style Keats himself had crafted all his own, one that was filled with more sensualities than any contemporary Romantic poetry.

Keats' writing also revolved around a poem he called "Hyperion," an ambitious Romantic piece inspired by Greek myth that told the story of the Titans' despondency after their losses to the Olympians.

But the death of Keats' brother halted his writing. He finally returned to the work in late 1819, rewriting his unfinished poem with a new title, "The Fall of Hyperion," which would go unpublished until more than three decades after Keats' death.

This, of course, speaks to the small audience for Keats' poetry during his lifetime. In all, the poet published three volumes of poetry during his life but managed to sell just a combined 200 copies of his work by the time of his death in 1821. His third and final volume of poetry, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems*, was published in July 1820.

Only with the help of his friends, who pushed hard to secure Keats' legacy, and the work and style of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, the Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom during the latter half of the 19th century, did Keats' stock rise considerably.

Final Years

In 1819 Keats contracted tuberculosis. His health deteriorated quickly. Soon after his last volume of poetry was published, he ventured off to Italy with his close friend, the painter Joseph Severn, on the advice of his doctor, who had told him he needed to be in a warmer climate for the winter.

The trip marked the end of his romance with Fanny Brawne. His health issues and his own dreams of becoming a successful writer had stifled their chances of ever getting married.

Keats arrived in Rome in November of that year and for a brief time started to feel better. But within a month, he was back in bed, suffering from a high temperature. The last few months of his life proved particularly painful for the poet.

His doctor in Rome placed Keats on a strict diet that consisted of a single anchovy and a piece of bread per day in order to limit the flow of blood to the stomach. He also induced heavy bleeding, resulting in Keats suffering from both a lack of oxygen and a lack of food.

Keats' agony was so severe that at one point he pressed his doctor and asked him, "How long is this posthumous existence of mine to go on?"

Keats' death came on February 23, 1821. It's believed he was clutching the hand of his friend, Joseph Severn, at the time of his passing.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF KEATS' POETRY

With a pure poet, the pursuit of beauty overcomes every other consideration. The poetry of Keats is an unending pursuit of beauty. He pursued truth indeed, but truth for him was beauty. He never intellectualized his poetry. He was gifted with extraordinary sensibility and had an ardent passion for the beauty of the visible world. He therefore cried, "O for a life of sensation rather than of thought" (It may be mentioned here that Keats uses the word 'thought' in the sense of abstract reasoning or speculation.) His entire being was thrilled by the beauty of the world; nothing gave him greater delight than the excitement of his sense, produced by 'a thing of beauty'.

All his poetry is full of the sensuous appeal of beautiful things. To Wordsworth nature is a living being with power to influence the human mind, and carrying a spiritual message. Shelley, though not a moralist, is an idealist—"The poet of the sky and the sea and the cloud—the gold of dawn and the gloom of earthquake and eclipse." The world that he depicts and makes symbolic of human passions—is rarely the world that we know, but it is a world that he has intensely imagined. His grand description, of the effects of the west wind, is a great poetry.

O Wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being.

But the beauty and grandeur of the west wind goes beyond our actual experience. When we turn to Keats's Ode to Autumn, we are brought into imaginative contact with beauty that we know. Autumn is represented by Keats by its familiar qualities: "mist and mellow fruitfulness". Realism and truth inform every detail of the poem. Keats neither attributes moral life to nature, nor attempts to pass beyond her familiar manifestations. He, the pure poet that he is, sees and presents nature as she is, and his presentation has that magic quality with which his imagination has supremely endowed him.

Spontaneity and Concentration of Thought and Feeling

Keats was a pure poet in the sense that in his poetry he was a poet and nothing else—not a teacher, not a preacher, not a conscious carrier of any humanitarian or spiritual message. His ambition was to become a poet, pure and simple and his ambition was fulfilled. Poetry came naturally to him, as leaves come to a tree; it was the spontaneous utterance of his powerful feeling. The poetry of Keats was based on his actual experience of life, and therefore it is marked by spontaneity and intensity.

What he experienced and felt upon his pulse he expressed. He actually listened to the song of a nightingale, and the music of the song actually transported him to the world of imagination. He attained the realisation of eternity and truth in the beauty of the song, and he wrote the famous line, "thou wast not born for death, immortal bird". Much has been written about the logical fallacy of the line, but what did the poet in Keats care? What he felt he wrote. Keats genuinely felt the thought that a beautiful thing also

pleases, and so he wrote, 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever'. And because he felt the truth of what he wrote, it carries an instant conviction and is in itself a joy forever. In fact, the power of Keats's poetry is due to intense concentration of thought and feeling.

Submission to the Truth of Life and Experience

Keats possessed what Bradley calls "the Shakespeare on strain", and submitted to the truth of life. He knew that the cold wind and the hot sun were as essential as the fresh blown rose. The poetry of Shakespeare reveals the beauty of life; truth is beauty, it says. It accepts the world of men and women and accepts them as they are. This is also true of Keats. He accepted life as it is, joy and sorrow, happiness and melancholy—both exist side by side; if there is discord in life, it has its music too. A pure poet always submits to life, so that life is glorified through him. "Keats submitted himself" says Middleton Murry, "Steadily, persistently, unflinchingly to life" and had "the capacity to see and to feel what life is."

A pure poet feels and expresses his joy in beauty, but when he feels this joy, he realises also a new aspect of beauty, which is truth. In this identity of Beauty and Truth lies the secret harmony of the universe. Keats realises this harmony when he emphatically says,

Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty,—that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Beauty transcends individuals, time and space. For Keats, Beauty is truth. He arrived at this truth through 'negative capability' and through realisation of the necessity of pain and sorrow. A pure poet like Keats loves foul and fair, joy and sorrow, mean and elevated alike. He turns unflinchingly to life and human experiences, and by an act of imagination transmutes the bitterest human experience into beauty which is truth.

We may in conclusion quote a few lines from T.S. Eliot to show the contrast between Wordsworth and Shelley on the one hand and Keats:

Wordsworth had a very delicate sensibility to social life and social change. Wordsworth and Shelley both theorise. Keats had no theory, and to have one was irrelevant to his interests, and alien to his mind. If we take either Wordsworth or Shelley as representative of his age, as being a voice of the age, we cannot so take Keats. But we cannot accuse Keats of any withdrawal or refusal; he was merely about his business." His business was that of a pure poet.

Pursuit of Truth

But Keats's aestheticism was not only sensuous—it had an intellectual element. He was constantly endeavouring to reach truth through beauty; he had a conviction that "for his progress towards truth, thought, knowledge and philosophy were indispensable. But he felt also that "a poet will never be able to rest in thoughts and reasonings, which do not also satisfy imagination and give a truth which is also beauty". But in so far as they fail to do this, in so far as they are thoughts and reasonings, they are no more than a means to an end, which end is beauty—that beauty which is also truth. This alone is the poet's end and therefore his law." (Bradley). Keats was led to this conviction by the poetic instinct in him. He was more than Wordsworth or Coleridge or Shelley, a poet pure and simple.

Negative Capability

Keats has an impulse to interest himself in anything he saw or heard. He accepted it and identified himself with it "If a sparrow comes before my window," say Keats, "I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel." A poet, he says, has no identity. He is continually in, for and filling some other body. "Of the poetic character," Keats says, "it has no self; it is everything and nothing. It enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago or Imogen.

What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the chameleon poet." This is the spirit of Shakespeare. Though Keats did not fully achieve this ideal, he was growing towards it. For Keats, the necessary quality of poetry is a submission to things as they are, without any effort to intellectualise them into something else. Keats and the nightingale are merged into one—it is his soul that sings in the bird. He was wholly in the place and in the time and with the things of which he wrote. He could be absorbed wholly in the loveliness of the hour and the joy of the moment. (He is fully thrilled by the beauty of autumn. He does not complain.

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?

Think not of them, thou hast thy music too.

This joy in the present, this absorption in the beauty of the hour—is one of the chief marks of his genius as a pure poet.

No Moral Teaching or Didacticism

Keats often says that the poet must not live for himself, but must feel for others, and must do good but he must do so by being a poet—not by being a teacher or moralist. He must have a purpose of doing good by his poetry, but he must not obtrude it in his poetry—that is, he must not show that he has palpable design upon us. Keats says: "We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive—a thing which enters into one's soul and does not startle it". To make beauty, says Bradley, is his (poet's) philanthropy. He must be unselfish; by refusing, that is, to be diverted from his poetic way of helping by his desire to help in another way. Hence there is no didacticism in Keats as there is in Wordsworth. There is no moralising in *The Eve of St. Agnes* as there is none in *King Lear*; in both, the poets leave their works to speak for themselves.

Keat's Poetical Achievement

Keats's influence has been very strong from Tennyson to the present time. His emphasis upon craftsmanship has had excellent following. Many a poet has been led through the example of Keats to perfect verse that might otherwise have been carelessly written. Keats also turned attention to richness of verse, unlike the simplicity of Wordsworth. Again, he taught a new use of the classics. Instead of finding in the classics models for restraint he found a highly coloured romanticism. Restraint of form he did emphasize, but for his material he chose the legends of Endymion and Lamia rather than the tales of Greeks and Romans of inspiring deeds.

Keats's greatest achievement, however, is in his presentation of pure beauty. Beauty itself was his interest, not beauty to point a moral or to carry a message. Keats had no lesson to teach. He did not want to call his readers' attentions to social wrongs as Shelley did; to the corrupt state of society as Byron did, to nature as a great moral teacher as Wordsworth did. Because of this lack of bias, his poems have an objective beauty which is especially attractive to young people. But to readers of all ages Keats sings enduring music.

The underlying principle of all Keats's poetic thought is this : "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty". In one of his letters he says : "I have loved the principle of beauty in all things". But his "passion for the beautiful" was not that of the sensuous or sentimental man, it was an intellectual and spiritual passion. There was a deep melancholy about him, too ; pain and beauty were the two intensest experiences of his mind. "Do you not see", he writes, "how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school are intelligence and make it a soul?" Keats studied the Elizabethans, mid "caught their turn of thought, and really saw things with their sovereign eye. He rediscovered the delight and wonder that lay enchanted in a dictionary" (Lowell). "There is something of the innermost soul of poetry in almost everything he wrote". (Tennyson).

No less individual and unique than the poetry of Byron and Shelley is that of the third member of this group, John Keats, who is, in a wholesome way, the most conspicuous great representative in English poetry since Chaucer of the spirit of 'Art for Art's sake.' Keats was born in London in 1795, the first son of a livery-stable keeper. Romantic emotion and passionate-ness were among his chief traits from the start; but he was equally distinguished by a generous spirit, physical vigour (though he was very short in build), and courage. His younger brothers he loved intensely and fought fiercely. At boarding-school, however, he turned from headstrong play to enthusiastic reading of Spenser and other great English and Latin poets and of dictionaries of Greek and Roman mythology and life. An orphan at fourteen, the mismanagement of his guardians kept him always in financial difficulties, and he was taken from school and apprenticed to a suburban surgeon. After five years of study and hospital practice the call of poetry proved too strong, and he abandoned his profession to revel in Spenser, Shakespeare, and the Italian epic authors. He now became an enthusiastic disciple of the literary and political radical, Leigh Hunt, in whose home at Hampstead he spent much time. Hunt was a great poetic stimulus to Keats, but he is largely responsible for the flippant jauntiness and formlessness of Keats' earlier poetry, and the connection brought on Keats from the outset the relentless hostility of the literary critics, who had dubbed Hunt and his friends 'The Cockney [i.e., Vulgar] School of Poetry.'

Keats' first little volume of verse, published in 1817, when he was twenty-one,-contained some delightful poems and clearly displayed most of his chief tendencies. It was followed the next year by his longest poem, 'Endymion,' where he uses, one of the vaguely beautiful Greek myths as the basis for the expression of his own delight in the glory of the world and of youthful sensations. As a narrative the poem is wandering, almost chaotic; that it is immature Keats himself frankly admitted in his preface; but in luxuriant loveliness of sensuous imagination it is unsurpassed. Its theme, and indeed the theme of all Keats' poetry, may be said to be found in its famous first line--'A thing of beauty is a joy forever.' The remaining three years of Keats' life were mostly tragic. 'Endymion' and its author were brutally attacked in 'The Quarterly Review' and 'Blackwood's Magazine.' The sickness and death, from consumption, of one of Keats' dearly-loved brothers was followed by his infatuation with a certain Fanny Brawne, a commonplace girl seven years younger than himself. This infatuation thenceforth divided his life with poetry and helped to create in him a restless impatience that led him, among other things, to an unhappy effort to force his genius, in the hope of gain, into the very unsuitable channel of play-writing. But restlessness did not weaken his genuine and maturing poetic power; his third and last volume, published in 1820, and including 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' 'Isabella,' 'Lamia,' the fragmentary 'Hyperion,' and his half dozen great odes, probably contains more poetry of the highest order than any other book of original verse, of so small a size, ever sent from the press. By this time, however, Keats himself was stricken with consumption, and in the effort to save his life a warmer climate was the last resource. Lack of sympathy with Shelley and his poetry led him to reject Shelley's generous offer of entertainment at Pisa, and he sailed with his devoted friend the painter Joseph Severn to southern Italy. A few months later, in 1821, he died at Rome, at the age of twenty-five. His tombstone, in a neglected corner of the Protestant cemetery

just outside the city wall, bears among other words those which in bitterness of spirit he himself had dictated: 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water.' But, in fact, not only had he created more great poetry than was ever achieved by any other man at so early an age, but probably no other influence was to prove so great as his on the poets of the next generation.

The most important qualities of his poetry stand out clearly:

1. He is, as we have implied, the great apostle of full though not unhealthy enjoyment of external Beauty, the beauty of the senses. He once said: 'I feel sure I should write, from the mere yearning and tenderness I have for the beautiful, even if my night's labours should be burnt every morning and no eye ever rest upon them.' His use of beauty in his poetry is marked at first by passionate Romantic abandonment and always by lavish Romantic richness. This passion was partly stimulated in him by other poets, largely by the Italians, and especially by Spenser, from one of whose minor poems Keats chose the motto for his first volume: 'What more felicity can fall to creature than to enjoy delight with liberty?' Shelley's enthusiasm for Beauty, as we have seen, is somewhat similar to that of Keats. But for both Spenser and Shelley, in different fashions, external Beauty is only the outer garment of the Platonic spiritual Beauty, while to Keats in his poetry it is, in appearance at least, almost everything. He once exclaimed, even, 'Oh for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts!' Notable in his poetry is the absence of any moral purpose and of any interest in present-day life and character, particularly the absence of the democratic feeling which had figured so largely in most of his Romantic predecessors. These facts must not be over-emphasized, however. His famous final phrasing of the great poetic idea--'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'--itself shows consciousness of realities below the surface, and the inference which is sometimes hastily drawn that he was personally a fiberless dreamer is as far as possible from the truth. In fact he was always vigorous and normal, as well as sensitive; he was always devoted to outdoor life; and his very attractive letters, from which his nature can best be judged, are not only overflowing with unpretentious and cordial human feeling but testify that he was not really unaware of specific social and moral issues. Indeed, occasional passages in his poems indicate that he intended to deal with these issues in other poems when he should feel his powers adequately matured. Whether, had he lived, he would have proved capable of handling them significantly is one of the questions which must be left to conjecture, like the other question whether his power of style would have further developed. Almost all of Keats' poems are exquisite and luxuriant in their embodiment of sensuous beauty, but 'The Eve of St. Agnes,' in Spenser's richly lingering stanza, must be especially mentioned.
2. Keats is one of the supreme masters of poetic expression, expression the most beautiful, apt, vivid, condensed, and imaginatively suggestive. His poems are noble storehouses of such lines as these:

The music, yearning like a God in pain.

Into her dream he melted, as the rose
Blendeth its odour with the violet.

magic casements, opening on the foam

Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

It is primarily in this respect that he has been the teacher of later poets.

3. Keats never attained dramatic or narrative power or skill in the presentation of individual character. In place of these elements he has the lyric gift of rendering moods. Aside from ecstatic delight, these are

mostly moods of pensiveness, languor, or romantic sadness, like the one so magically suggested in the 'Ode to a Nightingale,' of Ruth standing lonely and 'in tears amid the alien corn.'

4. Conspicuous in Keats is his spiritual kinship with the ancient Greeks. He assimilated with eager delight all the riches of the Greek imagination, even though he never learned the language and was dependent on the dull mediums of dictionaries and translations. It is not only that his recognition of the permanently significant and beautiful embodiment of the central facts of life in the Greek stories led him to select some of them as the subjects for several of his most important poems; but his whole feeling, notably his feeling for Nature, seems almost precisely that of the Greeks, especially, perhaps, of the earlier generations among whom their mythology took shape. To him also Nature appears alive with divinities. Walking through the woods he almost expects to catch glimpses of hamadryads peering from their trees, nymphs rising from the fountains, and startled fauns with shaggy skins and cloven feet scurrying away among the bushes.

In his later poetry, also, the deeper force of the Greek spirit led him from his early Romantic formlessness to the achievement of the most exquisite classical perfection of form and finish. His Romantic glow and emotion never fade or cool, but such poems as the Odes to the Nightingale and to a Grecian Urn, and the fragment of 'Hyperion,' are absolutely flawless and satisfying in structure and expression.

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

"**Ode to a Nightingale**" is a poem by John Keats written in May 1819 in either the garden of the Spaniards Inn, Hampstead, London, or, according to Keats' friend Charles Armitage Brown, under a plum tree in the garden of Keats House, also in Hampstead. According to Brown, a nightingale had built its nest near his home in the spring of 1819.

In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast-table to the grass-plot under a plum-tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of the nightingale.

Inspired by the bird's song, Keats composed the poem in one day. It soon became one of his 1819 odes and was first published in *Annals of the Fine Arts* the following July. "Ode to a Nightingale" is a personal poem that describes Keats's journey into the state of Negative Capability. The tone of the poem rejects the optimistic pursuit of pleasure found within Keats's earlier poems and explores the themes of nature, transience and mortality, the latter being particularly personal to Keats.

The nightingale described within the poem experiences a type of death but does not actually die. Instead, the songbird is capable of living through its song, which is a fate that humans cannot expect. The poem ends with an acceptance that pleasure cannot last and that death is an inevitable part of life. In the poem, Keats imagines the loss of the physical world and sees himself dead—as a "sod" over which the nightingale sings. The contrast between the immortal nightingale and mortal man, sitting in his garden, is made all the more acute by an effort of the imagination. The presence of weather is noticeable in the poem, as spring came early in 1819, bringing nightingales all over the heath. Many critics favor "Ode to a Nightingale" for its themes but some believe that it is structurally flawed because the poem sometimes strays from its main idea.

BACKGROUND

Of Keats's six major odes of 1819, "Ode to Psyche" was probably written first and "To Autumn" written last. Sometime between these two, he wrote "Ode to a Nightingale". It is possible that the poem was written between 26 April and 18 May 1819, based on weather conditions and similarities between images in the poem and those in a letter sent to Fanny Keats on May Day. The poem was composed at the Hampstead house Keats shared with Brown, possibly while sitting beneath a plum-tree in the garden. According to Keats' friend Brown, Keats finished the Ode in just one morning: "In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast-table to the grass-plot under a plum-tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feelings on the song of the nightingale." Brown's account is personal as he claimed the poem was directly influenced by his house and preserved by his own doing. However, Keats relied on both his own imagination and other literature as sources for his depiction of the nightingale.

The exact date of "Ode to a Nightingale", as well as "Ode on Indolence", "Ode on Melancholy" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn", is unknown, as Keats dated all as 'May 1819'. However, he worked on the four poems together and there is a unity in both their stanza forms and their themes. The exact order the poems were written in is also unknown, but they form a sequence within their structures. While Keats was writing "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and the other poems, Brown transcribed copies of the poems and submitted them to Richard Woodhouse. During this time, Benjamin Haydon, Keats' friend, was given a copy of "Ode to a Nightingale", and he shared the poem with the editor of the *Annals of the Fine Arts*, James Elmes. Elmes paid Keats a small sum of money, and the poem was published in the July issue. The poem was later included in Keats' 1820 collection of poems, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and Other Poems*.

STRUCTURE

"Ode to a Nightingale" was probably the first of the middle set of four odes that Keats wrote following "Ode to Psyche", according to Brown. There is further evidence of this in the structure of the poems because Keats combines two different types of lyrical poetry in an experimental way: the odal hymn and the lyric of questioning voice that responds to the odal hymn. This combination of structures is similar to that in "Ode on a Grecian Urn". In both poems the dual form creates a sort of dramatic element within the poem. The stanza forms of the poem is a combination of elements from Petrarchan sonnets and Shakespearean sonnets.

When it came to vowel forms, Keats incorporated a pattern of alternating historically "short" and "long" vowel sounds in his ode. In particular, line 18 ("And purple-stained mouth") has the historical pattern of "short" followed by "long" followed by "short" and followed by "long". This alteration is continued in longer lines, including line 31 ("Away! away! for I will fly to thee") which contains five pairs of alternations. However, other lines, such as line 3 ("Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains") rely on a pattern of five "short" vowels followed by "long" and "short" vowel pairings until they end with a "long" vowel. These are not the only combination patterns present, and there are patterns of two "short" vowels followed by a "long" vowel in other lines, including 12, 22, and 59, which are repeated twice and then followed up with two sets of "short" and then "long" vowel pairs. This reliance on vowel sounds is not unique to this ode, but is common to Keats's other 1819 odes and his *Eve of St. Agnes*.

The poem incorporates a complex reliance on assonance—the repetition of vowel sounds—in a conscious pattern, as found in many of his poems. Such a reliance on assonance is found in very few English poems. Within "Ode to a Nightingale", an example of this pattern can be found in line 35 ("Already with thee! tender is the night"), where the "ea" of "Already" connects with the "e" of "tender" and the "i" of "with"

connects with the "i" of "is". This same pattern is found again in line 41 ("I cannot see what flowers are at my feet") with the "a" of "cannot" linking with the "a" of "at" and the "ee" of "see" linking with the "ee" of "feet". This system of assonance can be found in approximately a tenth of the lines of Keats's later poetry.

When it came to other sound patterns, Keats relied on double or triple caesuras in approximately 6% of lines throughout the 1819 odes. An example from "Ode to a Nightingale" can be found within line 45 ("The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild") as the pauses after the commas are a "masculine" pause. Furthermore, Keats began to reduce the amount of Latin-based words and syntax that he relied on in his poetry, which in turn shortened the length of the words that dominate the poem. There is also an emphasis on words beginning with consonants, especially those that begin with "b", "p" or "v". These three consonants are relied on heavily in the first stanza, and they are used syzygically to add a musical tone within the poem.

In terms of poetic meter, Keats relies on spondee throughout his 1819 odes and in just over 8% of his lines within "Ode to a Nightingale", including line 12;

/	˘	/	/	˘	˘	/	/	˘	/
Cool'd	a	long	age	in	the	<i>deep</i>	<i>delv</i>	ed	earth

and line 25:

˘	/	˘	/	˘	/	/	/	/	/
Where	pals	y	shakes	a	few,	<i>sad,</i>	<i>last,</i>	<i>gray</i>	<i>hairs</i>

To Walter Jackson Bate, the use of spondees in lines 31–34 creates a feeling of slow flight, and "in the final stanza . . . the distinctive use of scattered spondees, together with initial inversion, lend[s] an approximate phonetic suggestion of the peculiar spring and bounce of the bird in its flight."

ABOUT THE POEM

The poem begins suddenly, marked by use of heavy sounding syllables ("My heart aches" line 1), as it introduces the song of a hidden bird. Immediately, the narrator is overcome with such a feeling that he believes he has either been poisoned or is influenced by a drug. It is soon revealed that the source of this feeling is a nightingale's song. The narrator empathises with it and finds it has paralyzed his mind:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
 My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains,
 One minute past, and lethe wards had sunk,
 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
 But being too happy in thine happiness,—
 That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
 In some melodious plot

Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Sings of summer in full-throated ease. (lines 1–10)

The song encourages the narrator to give up his own sense of self and embrace the feelings that are evoked by the nightingale. No longer a poison, the narrator wants to experience more of the feeling and escape from reality:

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
* * * * *

That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim: (lines 11–13, 19–20)

The narrator uses metaphorical wings to join the nightingale. It is at this moment that the poem moves into a deep, imaginative state, and the narrator cries out:

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! (lines 31–35)

The state that the narrator wants is seemingly a state of death, but it is one that is full of life. The paradox expands to encompass the night, a tender presence that allows some light to shine through:

tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways. (Lines 35–40)

In the new state, the narrator's senses change. He loses his sense of sight, but his ability to smell, taste, and hear allows him to experience the new world, the new paradise that he has entered:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild; (lines 41–45)

The narrator describes a world of potential, and empathizes with the creatures of that world. He is soon called to the sounds of insects just as he heard the nightingale before. This is then replaced by a new sound:

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath; (lines 51–54)

The narrator has blinded himself to better connect to the nightingale. This same theme appears in John Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*, written after he lost his sight, whose Book III describes the nightingale's

song coming out of darkness. The world is no longer present in the poem, as the imagination has taken over. What separates life and death, self and nothingness, are removed:

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod. (lines 55–60)

Death serves as a muse within the poem. It is, to the narrator, soft and comes upon the narrator as he composes the poem. He seeks death, wants to die, and wants to be with the nightingale because he experienced the height of life and nothing else would be worth experiencing. To live after that point would be a living death to the narrator. He desires to be like the nightingale, able to constantly give himself up in song and transcend life and death. However, he soon realizes that he will always be different from the bird:

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown: (lines 61–64)

The world of imagination is not a place that a man could ever live in. This knowledge causes the narrator to become disheartened as the imaginary world is destroyed. The narrator cannot have the imaginary land. He is not just separate from the bird, but from poetry and imagination in general. The narrator mourns in the final lines of the poem as he realizes that he has been abandoned by his art:

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep? (lines 71–80)

KEATS' RECEPTION

Contemporary critics of Keats enjoyed the poem and it was heavily quoted in their reviews. An anonymous review of Keats's poetry that ran in the August and October 1820 *Scots Magazine* stated: "Amongst the minor poems we prefer the 'Ode to the Nightingale.' Indeed, we are inclined to prefer it beyond every other poem in the book; but let the reader judge. The third and seventh stanzas have a charm for us which we should find it difficult to explain. We have read this ode over and over again, and every time with increased delight." At the same time, Leigh Hunt wrote a review of Keats's poem for the 2 August and 9 August 1820 *The Indicator*: "As a specimen of the Poems, which are all lyrical, we must indulge ourselves in quoting entire the 'Ode to a Nightingale'. There is that mixture in it of real melancholy and imaginative relief, which poetry alone presents us in her 'charmed cup,' and which some

over-rational critics have undertaken to find wrong because it is not true. It does not follow that what is not true to them, is not true to others. If the relief is real, the mixture is good and sufficing."

John Scott, in an anonymous review for the September 1820 *London Magazine* argued for the greatness of Keats's poetry as exemplified by poems including "Ode to a Nightingale":

The injustice which has been done to our author's works, in estimating their poetical merit, rendered us doubly anxious, on opening his last volume, to find it likely to seize fast hold of general sympathy, and thus turn an overwhelming power against the paltry traducers of talent, more eminently promising in many respects, than any the present age has been called upon to encourage. We have not found it to be quite all that we wished in this respect--and it would have been very extraordinary if we had, for our wishes went far beyond reasonable expectations. But we have found it of a nature to present to common understandings the poetical power with which the author's mind is gifted, in a more tangible and intelligible shape than that in which it has appeared in any of his former compositions. It is, therefore, calculated to throw shame on the lying, vulgar spirit, in which this young worshipper in the temple of the Muses has been cried-down; whatever questions may still leave to be settled as to the kind and degree of his poetical merits. Take for instance, as proof of the justice of our praise, the following passage from an Ode to the Nightingale:--it is distinct, noble, pathetic, and true: the thoughts have all chords of direct communication with naturally-constituted hearts: the echoes of the strain linger about the depths of human bosoms.

In a review for the 21 January 1835 *London Journal*, Hunt claimed that while Keats wrote the poem, "The poet had then his mortal illness upon him, and knew it. Never was the voice of death sweeter." David Moir, in 1851, used *The Even of St Agnes* to claim, "We have here a specimen of descriptive power luxuriously rich and original; but the following lines, from the 'Ode to a Nightingale,' flow from a far more profound fountain of inspiration."

At the end of the 19th century, Robert Bridges's analysis of the poem became a dominant view and would influence later interpretations of the poem. Bridges, in 1895, declared that the poem was the best of Keats's odes but he thought that the poem contained too much artificial language. In particular, he emphasised the use of the word "forlorn" and the last stanza as being examples of Keats's artificial language. In "Two odes of Keats's" (1897), William C Wilkinson suggested that "Ode to a Nightingale" is deeply flawed because it contains too many "incoherent musings" that failed to supply a standard of logic that would allow the reader to understand the relationship between the poet and the bird. However, Herbert Grierson, arguing in 1928, believed *Nightingale* to be superior to "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "Ode on Melancholy", and "Ode to Psyche", arguing the exact opposite of Wilkinson as he stated that "Nightingale", along with "To Autumn", showed a greater amount of logical thought and more aptly presented the cases they were intended to make.

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness,—
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,

In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
Already with thee! tender is the night,
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time

I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath;
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy!
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

SUMMARY

Keats is in a state of uncomfortable drowsiness. Envy of the imagined happiness of the nightingale is not responsible for his condition; rather, it is a reaction to the happiness he has experienced through sharing in the happiness of the nightingale. The bird's happiness is conveyed in its singing.

Keats longs for a draught of wine which would take him out of himself and allow him to join his existence with that of the bird. The wine would put him in a state in which he would no longer be himself, aware that life is full of pain, that the young die, the old suffer, and that just to think about life brings sorrow and despair. But wine is not needed to enable him to escape. His imagination will serve just as well. As soon as he realizes this, he is, in spirit, lifted up above the trees and can see the moon and the stars even though where he is physically there is only a glimmering of light. He cannot see what flowers are growing around him, but from their odor and from his knowledge of what flowers should be in bloom at the time he can guess.

In the darkness he listens to the nightingale. Now, he feels, it would be a rich experience to die, "to cease upon the midnight with no pain" while the bird would continue to sing ecstatically. Many a time, he confesses, he has been "half in love with easeful Death." The nightingale is free from the human fate of having to die. The song of the nightingale that he is listening to was heard in ancient times by emperor and peasant. Perhaps even Ruth (whose story is told in the Old Testament) heard it.

"Forlorn," the last word of the preceding stanza, brings Keats in the concluding stanza back to consciousness of what he is and where he is. He cannot escape even with the help of the imagination. The singing of the bird grows fainter and dies away. The experience he has had seems so strange and confusing that he is not sure whether it was a vision or a daydream. He is even uncertain whether he is asleep or awake.

ANALYSIS

The "Ode to a Nightingale" is a regular ode. All eight stanzas have ten pentameter lines and a uniform rhyme scheme. Although the poem is regular in form, it leaves the impression of being a kind of rhapsody; Keats is allowing his thoughts and emotions free expression. One thought suggests another and, in this way, the poem proceeds to a somewhat arbitrary conclusion. The poem impresses the reader as being the result of free inspiration uncontrolled by a preconceived plan. The poem is Keats in the act of sharing with the reader an experience he is having rather than recalling an experience. The experience is not entirely coherent. It is what happens in his mind while he is listening to the song of a nightingale.

Three main thoughts stand out in the ode. One is Keats' evaluation of life; life is a vale of tears and frustration. The happiness which Keats hears in the song of the nightingale has made him happy momentarily but has been succeeded by a feeling of torpor which in turn is succeeded by the conviction that life is not only painful but also intolerable. His taste of happiness in hearing the nightingale has made him all the more aware of the unhappiness of life. Keats wants to escape from life, not by means of wine, but by a much more powerful agent, the imagination.

The second main thought and the main theme of the poem is Keats' wish that he might die and be rid of life altogether, providing he could die as easily and painlessly as he could fall asleep. The preoccupation with death does not seem to have been caused by any turn for the worse in Keats' fortunes at the time he wrote the ode (May 1819). In many respects Keats' life had been unsatisfactory for some time before he wrote the poem. His family life was shattered by the departure of one brother to America and the death from tuberculosis of the other. His second volume of poetry had been harshly reviewed. He had no gainful occupation and no prospects, since he had abandoned his medical studies. His financial condition was insecure. He had not been well in the fall and winter of 1818-19 and possibly he was already suffering from tuberculosis. He could not marry Fanny Brawne because he was not in a position to support her. Thus the death-wish in the ode may be a reaction to a multitude of troubles and frustrations, all of which were still with him. The heavy weight of life pressing down on him forced "Ode to a Nightingale" out of him. Keats more than once expressed a desire for "easeful Death," yet when he was in the final stages of tuberculosis he fought against death by going to Italy where he hoped the climate would cure him. The death-wish in the ode is a passing but recurrent attitude toward a life that was unsatisfactory in so many ways.

The third main thought in the ode is the power of imagination or fancy. (Keats does not make any clear-cut distinction between the two.) In the ode Keats rejects wine for poetry, the product of imagination, as a means of identifying his existence with that of the happy nightingale. But poetry does not work the way it

is supposed to. He soon finds himself back with his everyday, trouble-filled self. That "fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is fam'd to do," he admits in the concluding stanza. The imagination is not the all-powerful function Keats, at times, thought it was. It cannot give more than a temporary escape from the cares of life.

Keats' assignment of immortality to the nightingale in stanza VII has caused readers much trouble. Keats perhaps was thinking of a literal nightingale; more likely, however, he was thinking of the nightingale as a symbol of poetry, which has a permanence.

Keats' evocative power is shown especially in stanza II where he associates a beaker of wine "with beaded bubbles winking at the brim," with sunny France and the "sunburnt mirth" of the harvesters, and in his picture in stanza VII of Ruth suffering from homesickness "amid the alien corn." The whole ode is a triumph of tonal richness of that adagio verbal music that is Keats' special contribution to the many voices of poetry.

STANZA WISE ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

Stanza 1

The Benumbing Effect of the Nightingale's Song

The poet's heart aches and his body is benumbed as he hears the song of a nightingale. He feels like one who has taken a benumbing poison or a dulling drug. This effect is produced on him by the happy song of the nightingale who is singing in a joyous, glorious voice among the green beech-trees; and who is called by the poet a light-winged nymph of the trees.

The Effect of Languor Heightened by the Very Movement of the Verse

It is to be noted that the poet lapses away into a kind of swoon on hearing the ecstatic song of the nightingale and he seeks oblivion. The following words in this stanza produce a cumulative effect of drugged languor: "aches", "drowsy numbness", "pains", "dull opiate", "Lethe-wards had sunk". The very movement of the verse here contributes to the total effect of languor that is produced.

The Excess of Happiness

It is an excess of happiness, occasioned by the bird's song that produces the mood of languor in the poet. However, the narcotic effect is to some extent relieved by a feeling of renewed life that is produced by a reference to the "light-winged Dryad of trees", "the melodious plot of beechen green", and "summer".

Stanza 2

The Poet's Desire for Some Marvellous Wine

The poet craves for a drink of some marvellous wine brewed in the warm, gay and mirthful regions of France, or a large cup of red wine fetched from the fountain of the Muses. He wants this wine to enable him to leave this world of reality and to escape into the forest where he can join the nightingale.

An Atmosphere of Warmth in this Stanza

The nightingale and its songs have given way, in this stanza, to other thoughts—thoughts of wine, the colourful lands in which its grapes are grown, and the gaiety which it brings. A general atmosphere of warmth predominates in this stanza. “Sun-burnt mirth” combines the idea of the sun’s warmth with the warmth of joy in the merry-makers. This is a richly sensuous stanza with its references to gaiety and merrymaking, the cool wine, the dancing, the blushing wine with its bubbles winking at the brim. The poet’s desire for wine does not mean a desire for warmth and gaiety; it is a desire for escape from the world of realities.

Stanza 3

The Sorrows in Human Life

The poet wishes to forget himself and escape from this world of perplexity and sorrow into the forest to be in the company of the nightingale. Life, he says, offers a depressing spectacle with its weariness, fever, and fret. This is a world in which people hear, each other’s groans, a world in which palsy may attack the old and consumption may attack the young, in which merely to think is to become sad, and in which both beauty and love are short-lived.

Most Pessimistic Lines

Here we have some of the most pessimistic lines in English poetry. Of course the picture of life depicted here is one-sided, but it is nonetheless realistic and convincing. It cannot be doubted that the amount of suffering in this world is far greater than the amount of happiness. Apart from that, these lines echo the poet’s personal grief caused by the premature death of his brother Tom. Although these lines are prompted chiefly by personal grief, yet their universal character has to be recognised.

The Nightingale’s Happiness

The Nightingale is believed by the poet to be happy because it is not human, because it has never known the weariness, the fever and fret of human existence. “And the poet knows too well that the happiness is mentally following the bird into its world among the leaves cannot last, for he is a human being after all, and what is human must pass away. His depression is thus implicit in the happiness itself.”

Stanza 4

The Poet’s Use of His Imagination to Escape from Life

Dismissing the idea of wine, the poet decides to fly into the forest on the wings of his poetic imagination. He rejects Bacchus and seeks the help of Poesy. The next moment he feels transported into the forest. The moon is shining, surrounded by the stars, but the forest is dark because very little light can penetrate the thickly-growing leaves of trees.

The Beauty of Nature

After having given expression to thoughts of human sorrow in the third stanza, the poet here makes a vigorous effort to get back into a happy mood. Gloomy thoughts about the human lot are now brushed aside, together with the possibility of wine. Seeking refuge in poetic fancy, he draws pleasure from the glory of Nature. However, the picture of Nature in the second half of the stanza has been

criticised as being “affected” because of the reference to the “Queen-Moon”, and the idea of the stars as fairies. “Keats is being self-consciously poetical in the bad sense, as though he had gone back to the ‘pretty’ manner of *Endymion*. It is not accidental that he has used the rather affected word “Poesy” here. The lines are exceedingly charming, and when we have said that, we have made a point against them. This kind of charm is not what we have come to accept from the mature Keats.”—(Robin Mayhead)

Stanza 5

The Flowers in the Forest

The poet cannot see what flowers grow at his feet in the forest and what blossoms are on the fruit trees. However, by the scents that fill the dark air, he can guess that the forest is full of white hawthorns, sweet-briers, violets, and buds of musk-roses which will in due course attract multitudes of flies on summer evenings.

A Richly Sensuous Stanza

This is again a richly sensuous stanza. The poet makes a delighted response to the sensuous beauty of the world of Nature.

Stanza 6

The Poet’s Desire for Death

As he hears the nightingale’s song in the darkness, he remembers how on many occasions in his life he has wished for death that would bring a release from the burden of existence. More than ever before, he now feels a desire to die, though he would like to die a painless death: “To cease upon the midnight with no pain.” The nightingale will continue to pour forth its ecstatic melody even when he is dead and become completely deaf to it.

A Morbid Mood

The mood of the poet has again changed. He started the poem in a mood of ecstasy which changed, into a mood of extreme sorrow in the third stanza. In the fourth and fifth stanzas, he changed back into a joyous mood. Now he expresses a wish to die. In this stanza he is therefore in a most morbid mood. The desire for death is obviously an unhealthy one and, though the reader may have been sharing the preceding moods of the poet, he may not be able to share this desire for death.

Stanza 7

The Mortality of Human Beings Versus the Nightingale’s Immortality

The poet now contrasts the mortality of human beings with the immortality of the nightingale. The nightingale’s song, he argues, has not changed for centuries. The voice of the nightingale which he now hears is perhaps the same as was heard in ancient times by emperor and clown, the same as was heard by the miserable Ruth as she stood in the alien corn. It is the same voice which has often cast a spell upon the enchanted windows of a castle situated on the shore of a dangerous ocean in “fairy lands forlorn”.

Illogical Reasoning in this Stanza

There is something illogical about the poet's attributing immortality to the nightingale but, of course, he is referring to the continuity of the bird's song which has remained unchanged through the centuries. He certainly does not mean that the bird is literally immortal. He only takes the nightingale's song as a symbol of permanence. Generations pass, yet the song of the nightingale continues from age to age. In the *Ode On Melancholy*, Keats accepts impermanence as inevitable, but here he dwells upon the idea of permanence.

The Famous Closing Lines of this Stanza

The last two lines of the stanza have become famous for the sense of wonder and mystery which they arouse. It is said that in these two lines Keats has touched the high watermark of romanticism.

Stanza 8

The Poet's Disillusionment

The word "forlorn" acts on the poet's mind like the ringing of an alarm bell and reminds him of his own forlorn condition. As the song of the nightingale becomes more distant, his imagination which had carried him into the forest also declines, and the poetic vision fades. He knows that he is moving back from the region of poetic fancy to the common world of reality. After all, "the fancy cannot cheat so well as she is famed to do."

The Note of Frustration in the Final Stanza

In the concluding stanza, the poet introduces two new ideas. One is that even the song of the nightingale cannot be heard constantly and that it must fade away before long. Secondly, the poetic imagination itself has only brief flights and that, at the end of a poetic flight to beautiful regions, one must return to the painful realities of life-. Thus the ode, which had opened on a note of ecstasy, ends on a note of frustration.

THEME OF THE POEM

"Ode to a Nightingale" describes a series of conflicts between reality and the Romantic ideal of uniting with nature. In the words of Richard Fogle, "The principal stress of the poem is a struggle between ideal and actual: inclusive terms which, however, contain more particular antitheses of pleasure and pain, of imagination and common sense reason, of fullness and privation, of permanence and change, of nature and the human, of art and life, freedom and bondage, waking and dream." Of course, the nightingale's song is the dominant image and dominant "voice" within the ode. The nightingale is also the object of empathy and praise within the poem. However, the nightingale and the discussion of the nightingale is not simply about the bird or the song, but about human experience in general. This is not to say that the song is a simple metaphor, but it is a complex image that is formed through the interaction of the conflict voices of praise and questioning. On this theme, David Perkins summarizes the way "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" perform this when he says, "we are dealing with a talent, indeed an entire approach to poetry, in which symbol, however necessary, may possibly not satisfy as the principal concern of poetry, any more than it could with Shakespeare, but is rather an element in the poetry and drama of human reactions". However, there is a difference between an urn and a nightingale in

that the nightingale is not an eternal entity. Furthermore, in creating any aspect of the nightingale immortal during the poem the narrator separates any union that he can have with the nightingale.

The nightingale's song within the poem is connected to the art of music in a way that the urn in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is connected to the art of sculpture. As such, the nightingale would represent an enchanting presence and, unlike the urn, is directly connected to nature. As natural music, the song is for beauty and lacks a message of truth. Keats follows Coleridge's belief, as found in "The Nightingale", in separating from the world by losing himself in the bird's song. Although Keats favours a female nightingale over Coleridge's masculine bird, both reject the traditional depiction of the nightingale as related to the tragedy of Philomela. Their songbird is a happy nightingale that lacks the melancholic feel of previous poetic depictions. The bird is only a voice within the poem, but it is a voice that compels the narrator to join with in and forget the sorrows of the world. However, there is tension in that the narrator holds Keats's guilt regarding the death of Tom Keats, his brother. The song's conclusion represents the result of trying to escape into the realm of fancy.

Like Percy Bysshe Shelley's "To a Skylark", Keats's narrator listens to a bird song, but listening to the song within "Ode to a Nightingale" is almost painful and similar to death. The narrator seeks to be with the nightingale and abandons his sense of vision in order to embrace the sound in an attempt to share in the darkness with the bird. As the poem ends, the trance caused by the nightingale is broken and the narrator is left wondering if it was a real vision or just a dream. The poem reliance on the process of sleeping common to Keats's poems, and "Ode to a Nightingale" shares many of the same themes as Keats's *Sleep and Poetry* and *Eve of St. Agnes*. This further separates the image of the nightingale's song from its closest comparative image, the urn as represented in "Ode on a Grecian Urn". The nightingale is distant and mysterious, and even disappears at the end of the poem. The dream image emphasizes the shadowiness and elusiveness of the poem. These elements make it impossible for there to be a complete self-identification with the nightingale, but it also allows for self-awareness to permeate throughout the poem, albeit in an altered state.

Midway through the poem, there is a split between the two actions of the poem: the first, attempts to identify with the nightingale and its song, and the second discusses the convergence of the past with the future while experiencing the present. This second theme is reminiscent of Keats's view of human progression through the Mansion of Many Apartments and how man develops from experiencing and wanting only pleasure to understanding truth as a mixture of both pleasure and pain. The Elysian fields and the nightingale's song in the first half of the poem represent the pleasurable moments that overwhelm the individual like a drug. However, the experience does not last forever, and the body is left desiring it until the narrator feels helpless without the pleasure. Instead of embracing the coming truth, the narrator clings to poetry to hide from the loss of pleasure. Poetry does not bring about the pleasure that the narrator original asks for, but it does liberate him from his desire for only pleasure.

Responding to this emphasis on pleasure, Albert Guerard, Jr. argues that the poem contains a "longing not for art but a free reverie of any kind. The form of the poem is that of progression by association, so that the movement of feeling is at the mercy of words evoked by chance, such words as *fade* and *forlorn*, the very words that, like a bell, toll the dreamer back to his sole self." However, Fogle points out that the terms Guerard emphasizes are "associational translations" and that Guerard misunderstands Keats's aesthetic. After all, the acceptance of the loss of pleasure by the end of the poem is an acceptance of life and, in turn, of death. Death was a constant theme that permeated aspects of Keats poetry because he was exposed to death of his family members throughout his life. Within the poem, there are many images of death. The nightingale experiences a sort of death and even the god Apollo experiences death, but his death reveals his own divine state; as Perkins explains: "But, of course, the nightingale is not thought to be literally dying. The point is that the deity or the nightingale can sing without dying. But, as the ode makes clear, man cannot—or at least not in a visionary way."

With this theme of a loss of pleasure and inevitable death, the poem, according to Claude Finney, describes "the inadequacy of the romantic escape from the world of reality to the world of ideal beauty". Earl Wasserman essentially agrees with Finney, but he extended his summation of the poem to incorporate the themes of Keats's *Mansion of Many Apartments* when he says, "the core of the poem is the search for the mystery, the unsuccessful quest for light within its darkness" and this "leads only to an increasing darkness, or a growing recognition of how impenetrable the mystery is to mortals." With these views in mind, the poem recalls Keats's earlier view of pleasure and an optimistic view of poetry found within his earlier poems, especially *Sleep and Poetry*, and rejects them. This loss of pleasure and incorporation of death imagery lends the poem a dark air, which connects "Ode to a Nightingale" with Keats' other poems that discuss the demonic nature of poetic imagination, including *Lamia*. In the poem, Keats imagines the loss of the physical world and sees himself dead—he uses an abrupt, almost brutal word for it—as a "sod" over which the nightingale sings. The contrast between the immortal nightingale and mortal man, sitting in his garden, is made all the more acute by an effort of the imagination.

With "Ode to a Nightingale," Keats's speaker begins his fullest and deepest exploration of the themes of creative expression and the mortality of human life. In this ode, the transience of life and the tragedy of old age ("where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs, / Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies") is set against the eternal renewal of the nightingale's fluid music ("Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!"). The speaker reprises the "drowsy numbness" he experienced in "Ode on Indolence," but where in "Indolence" that numbness was a sign of disconnection from experience, in "Nightingale" it is a sign of too full a connection: "being too happy in thine happiness," as the speaker tells the nightingale. Hearing the song of the nightingale, the speaker longs to flee the human world and join the bird. His first thought is to reach the bird's state through alcohol—in the second stanza, he longs for a "draught of vintage" to transport him out of himself. But after his meditation in the third stanza on the transience of life, he rejects the idea of being "charioted by Bacchus and his pards" (Bacchus was the Roman god of wine and was supposed to have been carried by a chariot pulled by leopards) and chooses instead to embrace, for the first time since he refused to follow the figures in "Indolence," "the viewless wings of Poesy."

The rapture of poetic inspiration matches the endless creative rapture of the nightingale's music and lets the speaker, in stanzas five through seven, imagine himself with the bird in the darkened forest. The ecstatic music even encourages the speaker to embrace the idea of dying, of painlessly succumbing to death while enraptured by the nightingale's music and never experiencing any further pain or disappointment. But when his meditation causes him to utter the word "forlorn," he comes back to himself, recognizing his fancy for what it is—an imagined escape from the inescapable ("Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf"). As the nightingale flies away, the intensity of the speaker's experience has left him shaken, unable to remember whether he is awake or asleep.

In "Indolence," the speaker rejected all artistic effort. In "Psyche," he was willing to embrace the creative imagination, but only for its own internal pleasures. But in the nightingale's song, he finds a form of outward expression that translates the work of the imagination into the outside world, and this is the discovery that compels him to embrace Poesy's "viewless wings" at last. The "art" of the nightingale is endlessly changeable and renewable; it is music without record, existing only in a perpetual present. As befits his celebration of music, the speaker's language, sensually rich though it is, serves to suppress the sense of sight in favor of the other senses. He can imagine the light of the moon, "But here there is no light"; he knows he is surrounded by flowers, but he "cannot see what flowers" are at his feet. This

suppression will find its match in “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” which is in many ways a companion poem to “Ode to a Nightingale.” In the later poem, the speaker will finally confront a created art-object not subject to any of the limitations of time; in “Nightingale,” he has achieved creative expression and has placed his faith in it, but that expression—the nightingale’s song—is spontaneous and without physical manifestation.

VOCABULARY AND ALLUSIONS

Stanza I

Line 2, *hemlock*: a poison made from an herb or a poisonous drink made from that herb.

Line 4, *Lethe*: a river in Hades (the underworld). Souls about to be reincarnated drank from it to forget their past lives.

Line 7, *Dryad*: a wood nymph or nymph of the trees. Dryads or nymphs were female personifications of natural features, like mountains and rivers; they were young, beautiful, long-lived and liked music and dance. A Dryad was connected to a specific tree and died when the tree died.

Stanza II

Line 3, *Flora*: goddess of flowers and fertility

Line 4, *Provençal*: of Provence, an area in the south of France associated with song, pleasure, and luxury.

Line 6, *Hippocrene*: a spring sacred to the Muses, located on Mt. Helicon. Drinking its waters inspired poets. (The nine muses were associated with different arts, such as epic poetry, sacred song, and dancing.)

Stanza IV

Line 2, *Bacchus*: Roman god of wine.

*pard*s: leopards, which drew Bacchus's chariot.

Line 3, *viewless*: invisible.

Poesy: poetry in general or, depending on how you read this ode, a specific kind of poetry: visionary poetry or fantasy.

Line 6, *haply*: perhaps, by chance.

Line 7, *fays*: fairies.

Line 10, *verdurous*: green.

Stanza V

Line 3, *embalmed*: (1) fragrant, (2) preserved body. Is Keats using both meanings here to suggest the inextricably mixed nature of life?

Stanza VI

Line 1, *darkling*: in the dark.

Line 10, *requiem*: song or musical service for the repose of the dead.

Stanza VII

Line 6, *Ruth*: Boaz saw Ruth, the Moabite, working in the fields, fell in love with her and married her; David is one of her descendents. A book in the Bible is named after her. She is frequently alluded to by poets for her devotion to her mother-in-law Naomi or as a stranger in a strange land. In a sense she has achieved immortality.

Line 7, *corn*: grain, often wheat, in British usage.

Line 9, *casements*: windows.

Stanza VIII

Line 5, *plaintive*: expressing sadness.

anthem: (1) a hymn of joy or praise, patriotism, or devotion; (2) a sacred choral song generally based on words from the Bible. Both meanings carry with them intense feelings and high seriousness.

FIGURES OF SPEECH

Alliteration

of **h**emlock I **h**ad drunk (line 2)

dull opiate to the **d**rains (line 3)

Singest of **s**ummer (line 10)

deep-**d**elved earth (line 12)

Provençal song, and **s**unburnt mirth (line 14)

With **b**eaded **b**ubbles **w**inking (line 17)

And **w**ith thee **f**ade **a**way into the **f**orest **d**im (line 20)

Fade **f**ar away, **d**issolve, and quite **f**orget (line 21)

breezes **b**lown (line 39)

winding mossy **w**ays (line 40)

Fast **f**ading violets cover'd up in leaves; (line 47)

And **m**id-**M**ay's eldest child (line 48)

many a **m**uséd rhyme (line 53)

self-**s**ame song (line 65)

sole **s**elf (line 72)

Anaphora

Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,

Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;

Where but to think is to be full of sorrow

And leaden-eyed despairs,

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes (lines 25-29)

Apostrophe

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird! (line 61)

Assonance

My **sense**, as though of **hemlock** I had drunk (line 2)

Of **beechen green** (line 9)

sunburntmirth (line 14)

Metaphor

O for a beaker full of the warm South (line 15)

Comparison of the South to a liquid

on the viewless wings of Poesy (line 33)

Comparison of poetry to a bird

Personification

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes (line 29)

Comparison of Beauty to a person

the Queen-Moon is on her throne (line 36)

Comparison of the moon to a person

Simile

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell

To toll me back from thee to my sole self! (lines 71-72)

COMMENTARY ON ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE 1819 (1820)

In this meditation on poetic experience, the poet attempts to conceptualise a reconciliation of beauty and permanence through the symbol of the nightingale. The poet begins by explaining the nature and cause of the sadness he is experiencing, a sadness translated into a physical ache and a drowsy numbness. He feels as he might if he had taken some poison or sedating drug. This feeling is in fact the result of a deep awareness of the happiness of the nightingale he hears singing. His resulting pleasure is so intense it has become painful. He longs for some intoxicant that will let him achieve union with the nightingale, take him out of the world, and allow him to forget human suffering and despair and the transience of all experience. Wine, however, is rejected in favour of the poetic imagination. He enters some twilight region of the mind. While he can see nothing, the other senses feed his imagination, constructing within his mind what cannot be seen in fact. This prompts him to contemplate leaving the world altogether. He realises, however, that the ultimate form of forgetfulness, of escape from the troubles of life, would be death. Death at such a moment, listening to the nightingale pouring forth its soul in ecstasy, would be the supreme ending. And yet death is rejected. As the poet realises, the bird would sing on, and he would be unable to hear it. While all humans must die, the nightingale is, in some sense, immortal. The poet, thinking back to the classical world of the Roman emperors and to the Old Testament world of Ruth, considers how its song has been heard for so many centuries. Keats takes us even further back, into a fairy world, a landscape both magical and yet forlorn. With this word 'forlorn', the spell is broken: the poet returns to the self, to the present. Fancy, he claims, has failed him once more. He again becomes aware of the landscape around him and the bird's song begins to fade, leaving him wondering whether his experience was a vision or a waking dream.

The nightingale has traditionally been associated with love. The influential myth of Philomela, turned into a nightingale after being raped and tortured, stresses melancholy and suffering in association with love. It has also been associated with poetry. Keats no doubt knew Coleridge's two poems 'To the Nightingale' (1796) and 'The Nightingale: "A Conversation Poem"', and, according to his letters, only days before

writing this ode he had talked with the older poet on such subjects as nightingales, poetry and poetical sensation.

Why did Keats choose the nightingale's song as the basis of meditation in this poem? Is he drawing upon its traditional associations or not? Such critics as Helen Vendler believe that in the choice of music Keats finds a symbol of pure beauty, non-representational, without any reference to ideas, to moral or social values. The nightingale's song is vocal, but without verbal content, and can serve as a pure expressive beauty. Others have argued that it represents the music of nature, which can be contrasted with human art, verbal or musical.

The poem is basically structured around the contrast between the poet, who is earthbound, and the bird, which is free. A related opposition is that between the mortal world, full of sorrow and marked by transience, and the world of the nightingale, marked by joy and immortality. One of the points that has troubled many critics is this claim of immortality for the nightingale: 'Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!' (line 61). The nightingale is, after all, a natural creature. It has been suggested that Keats is referring not to the individual bird, but to the species. This solution has been strongly criticized, however, as humanity, the 'hungry generations' (line 62), could also be credited with such immortality as a species. An alternative suggestion is that the nightingale addressed in stanza 7 is purely symbolic; is this solution more convincing? If so, what does the nightingale symbolize? A further interpretation might be that, since the nightingale sings only at night and was traditionally thought of, therefore, as invisible, it, through its 'disembodied' song, transcends the material world (so in that sense is immortal); and here Keats is talking of 'embalmed darkness', an atmosphere of death.

Another problematic point is Keats's final question on the status of his experience: 'Was it a vision, or a waking dream?' (line 79). Some critics have decidedly affirmed that the poem is about the inadequacy of the imagination, a rejection of the 'deceiving elf' (line 79). Others see more ambivalence in Keats's attitude. After the possibility of joining the bird in its immortal world has been rejected as a trick of the fancy, they would argue, Keats still suggests through his final question that such vision or transcendent experience is possible, or, at least, still something for which he longs. Is this, ultimately, an escapist poem, or is Keats emphasizing the need to accept the human condition, with all the suffering that is associated with it? Compare the ode, in this respect, with the 'Ode on Melancholy'.

Language is effectively used to create mood. In the opening of the poem, for example, a sense of sluggish weightiness is suggested by the heavy thudding alliterative 'd', 'p', and 'm' when Keats describes his own dull ache. Compare this with the effects created in the second half of the stanza by the light assonantal sounds in such words as 'light' and 'Dryad' and the sensuous assonantal sounds of 'beechen', 'green' and 'ease' when Keats turns to the joy of the nightingale. Compare the vitality and the jubilant tempo of stanza 2 with the dull heaviness and monotony in stanza 3. How are these different effects created? Consider, for a start, the use of repetition, with devices like parallelism and anaphora. There is a dense concentration of sense impressions in this ode, and a frequent use of synaesthesia. In stanza 1, for example, the 'plot' where the bird sings is itself 'melodious' and the song contains 'summer': the visual evokes the aural and the aural the visual. In stanza 2, Keats conveys the taste of wine with reference to colour, action, song and sensation. When Keats says, in stanza 5, 'I cannot see what flowers are at my feet, / Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs', the suggestion that the incense could be seen emphasises the density and headiness of the perfume: it is so strong it seems visible, tangible. This is often said to be the most personal of the odes. Perhaps it would be better to say that from the abrupt opening of 'My heart aches' onwards, it creates the impression of being the most subjective. Leaving aside the claim by many critics that it is personal in an autobiographical way, how is this impression of subjectivity achieved? It is the processes and movement of the poet's mind that are the central focus of

'Ode to a Nightingale', and the personal 'I' is very much in evidence. In this respect compare the poem with the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.

Keats' ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

The Genesis of This Ode

In the early months of 1819, Keats was living with his friend Brown at Wentworth Place, Hampstead. In April a nightingale built her nest in the garden. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in its song, and one morning, sitting in a chair on the grass-plot under a plum-tree, he composed a poem containing his poetic feelings about the song of the nightingale. This was his *Ode to a Nightingale* which was first printed in July, 1819. Subsequently it formed part of the volume which appeared in 1820 entitled *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems*.

The Same Train of Thought in Four of the Odes

Four of Keats's odes, the *Ode to a Nightingale*, the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, the *Ode on Melancholy*, and *To Autumn* should be studied together. They were all written in 1819 and the same train of thought runs through them all. One can even say that these four odes sum up Keats's philosophy.

The Most Passionately Human and Personal of the Odes

"The first-written of the four, the *Ode to a Nightingale*, is the most passionately human and personal of them all". It was written soon after the death of Keats's brother Tom, to whom he had been deeply attached and whom he nursed to the end. Keats was feeling keenly the tragedy of a world in which a young man grows pale, becomes a skeleton, and meets his end prematurely ("Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies"). The song of the nightingale aroused in him a longing to escape with it from this world of sorrows to the world of ideal beauty. The song of the nightingale somehow symbolised to him a world of ideal beauty. "He did not think of a nightingale as an individual bird, but of its song, which had been beautiful for centuries and would continue to be beautiful long after his generation had passed away; and the thought of this undying loveliness he contrasted bitterly with our feverishly sad and short life. When, by the power of imagination he had left the world behind him and was absorbed in the vision of beauty roused by the bird's song, he longed for death rather than a return of disillusionment."

A Key Contrast in the Poem

The poem contrasts the immortality of the nightingale (as symbolised by its song) with the mortality of human beings. It also contrasts the happiness and joy of the bird with the sufferings, sorrows and afflictions of the human world where youth, beauty and love are all short-lived.

A NOTE ON THE POET'S MOOD IN THE ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

Joy and Ecstasy in the Opening Two Stanzas

The poet's mood in the two opening stanzas is one of joy and ecstasy which almost benumbs his senses. This mood is due to the rapturous song of the nightingale. This mood leads him to a desire for a beaker of wine by drinking which he can forget this world or sorrows and misfortunes and fade away into the forest where the nightingale is singing its joyous song.

The Sense of the Tragedy of Human Life

The poet then expresses the sense of the tragedy of life and the sadness resulting therefrom. He refers to the weariness, the fever, and the fret of human life. This is a world where men sit and hear each other groan, where palsy shakes the few last hair of aged people, where young people fall a prey to fatal

diseases (like tuberculosis), where merely to think is to become sorrowful, and where beauty and love are short-lived. Thus the mood of ecstasy with which the poem had opened changes here into a mood of deep pessimism and despair.

The Mood of Delight in the Midst of Natural Beauty

The mood of deep pessimism and despair gives way to a mood of delight occasioned by his imaginative contact with the beauty and glory of Nature. He has flown into the forest on the wings of his imagination in spite of the retarding effect of the dullness of the brain. (The pure reason or intellect hinders the free play of the imagination.) The moon, the stars, the flowers growing at his feet relieve his sense of the tragedy of life.

A Pessimistic Mood Once Again

Next, we find the poet “half in love with easeful death”. He refers to this desire for death on earlier occasions but at this moment especially he thinks it “rich to die”. This desire for death shows a morbidity in the poet. He strikes an unduly pessimistic note. Life has its sorrows and griefs; beauty and love and youth are short-lived; but Nature has its joys, its charm, its glory. The reason why the poet yields to a feeling of utter despair is that his personal circumstances are at the back of his mind when he is writing the poem. His brother Tom had died of tuberculosis; he himself suffered from this dreaded disease; and his love for Fanny Brawne had not been fulfilled.

The Poet’s Envy of the Nightingale’s Joy

The thought of his own death makes the poet contrast the mortality of human beings with the immortality of the nightingale. He feels that the song of nightingale which he is now hearing is the same as was heard in ancient times by emperor and clown, and by the tearful Ruth, the same that often in the past had unlocked magic casements in the solitary countries of the fairies or the legendary countries of romance. Having denied a feeling of envy of the nightingale’s joy in the opening stanza, he now is undoubtedly in a mood of envying the immortality of the nightingale. A desire to die, expressed in the preceding stanza, here imperceptibly leads him, though implicitly, to envy the supposed immortality of the bird. In the final stanza, he is again overcome by a feeling of melancholy because, not only is the nightingale’s song fading away, but also because his imaginative flight into the forest has ended and he finds himself face to face with the stern realities of life. He finds that the nightingale’s song gives rise to an illusion, and illusion which fails, leaving the listener alone with his cares and griefs.

CRITICAL APPRECIATION

A Masterpiece

The *Ode to a Nightingale* shows the ripeness and maturity of Keats’s poetic faculty. This poem is truly a masterpiece, showing the splendour of Keats’s imagination on its pure romantic side, and remarkable also for its note of reflection and meditation. The central idea here is the contrast of the joy and beauty and apparent permanence of the nightingale’s song with the sorrows of human life and the transitoriness of beauty and love in this world.

Its Melancholy, and the Note of Pessimism

A passionate melancholy broods over the whole poem. The passage describing the sorrows and misfortunes of life is deeply pessimistic. The world is full of weariness, fever, and fret, and the groans of suffering humanity. Palsy afflicts the old and premature, death overtakes the young. To think here is to be full of sorrow; both beauty and love are short-lived.

The Reason for the Poet's Despondency

Keats wrote this poem shortly after the death (from consumption) of his brother Tom to whom he was deeply attached. He was also perhaps thinking of the premature death of Elizabeth Taylor. He was therefore weighed down by a profound sense of the tragedy of life; and of that sense of tragedy, this poem is a poignant expression.

The Desire to Die

The note of pessimism is found also in the lines where the poet expresses a desire to die, "to cease upon the midnight with no pain". When we remember that Keats actually died a premature death, we realise the note of unconscious prophecy in these lines, which for this reason become still more pathetic.

Sorrows of Life in General; and the Personal Grievances

The passionately personal and human character of this poem is thus obvious. It reveals Keats's sense of the tragedy of human life in general and his sense of personal suffering in particular. The poem brings before our eyes a painful picture of the sorrows and griefs of human life, and at the same time it conveys to us the melancholy and sadness which had afflicted Keats for various reasons. The poem is the cry of a wounded soul.

Its Rich Sensuousness and Pictorial Quality

The poem is one of the finest examples of Keats's pictorial quality and his rich sensuousness. We have an abundance of rich, concrete, and sensuous imagery. The lines in which the poet expresses a passionate desire for some Provincial wine or the red wine from the fountain of the Muses have a rich appeal:

O for a draught of vintage, that hath been
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sun-burnt mirth!

These lines bring before us a delightful picture of Provence with its fun and frolic, jollity, merry-making, drinking and dancing. Similarly, the beaker full of the sparkling, blushing Hippocrene is highly pleasing.

Then there is the magnificent picture of the moon shining in the sky and surrounded by stars, looking like a queen surrounded by her attendant fairies:

And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays.

The rich feast of flowers that awaits us in the next stanza is one of the outstanding beauties of the poem. Flowers, soft incense, the fruit trees, the white hawthorn, the eglantine, the fast-fading violets, the coming musk-rose full of sweet juice—all this is a delight for our senses.

Apart from these sensuous pictures, there is also the vivid and pathetic image of Ruth when, sick for home, she stood tearful amid the alien corn. This is a highly suggestive picture calling up many associations to the mind of one who is acquainted with the Bible.

Its Lyric Intensity

The poem is a beautiful example of lyrical poetry, poetry which is the impassioned expression of passionate feelings. The poem opens with a passionate feeling of joy akin to the numbing effect of some drug. This is followed by a *passionate* desire for wine. Then comes *apassionate* melancholy born of the spectacle of sorrow in this world. Next is the *passionate* delight in flowers and blossoms, followed by & *passionate* desire for death. The lyrical intensity of this ode is, indeed, one of the reasons of its greatness as poetry.

Its Style

The poem is written in a superb style. It displays Keats's power as a master of poetic language at its highest. Keats here shows consummate skill in a choice of words and in making original and highly expressive phrases. Certain phrases, expressions and lines continue to haunt the mind of the reader long after he has read the poem. The phrase "the blushing Hippocrene" which refers to the fountain of the Muses and its red wine looking like the blushing cheeks of a pretty girl is indeed beautiful. Again, this wine has beaded bubbles "winking at the brim". The word "winking" here means sparkling but how much more is suggested by this word! The bubbles seem to be inviting a man to the wine as a girl's wink would invite him to her company. Another expressive phrase is "purple-stained mouth", that is, a mouth which has been stained red by wine. Memorable also are the following phrases and expressions—"verdurous blooms" (line 40); "embalmed darkness" (line, 43); "Mid-May's eldest child—the coming musk-rose" (lines 48-49); "The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves" (line 50). The line "the weariness, the fever and the fret" admirably describes the sorrows and perplexities of life. "Leaden-eyed despair" effectively conveys the dullness in the eyes of a man who is in a state of despair. Still another memorable line is: "To thy high requiem become a sod."

The Romantic Character of the Poem

The *Ode to a Nightingale* is a highly romantic poem. Its romanticism is due to (a) its rich sensuousness, (b) its note of intense desire and its deep melancholy, (c) its suggestiveness, (d) its sweet music, and its fresh and original phrases. Two lines in the poem represent the high water-mark of pure romanticism:

The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

The touch of the supernatural, the mystery, and above all the suggestiveness of these lines have made them a test by which purely romantic poetry can be judged and measured.

In form this poem is a "regular ode". There is a uniformity of the number of lines and of the rhyme-scheme in all the stanzas.

Sidney Colvin Observes:

In the *Ode on Melancholy*, Keats expresses his experience of the habitual interchange and alternation of the emotions of joy and pain. The same crossing and inter-mingling of opposite currents of feeling finds expression, together with unequalled touches of the poet's feeling for Nature and romance, in the *Ode to a Nightingale*. It is not the particular nightingale he had heard singing in the garden that he speaks about in the poem, but a type of the race imagined as singing in some far-off scene of woodland mystery and beauty. Thither he tries to follow her: first by aid of the spell of some southern wine—a spell which he makes us realise in lines suggestive of the southern richness and joy. Then follows a contrasted vision of all his own and mankind's sufferings which he will leave behind him. Nay, he needs not the aid

of Bacchus. Poetic fancy alone shall carry him thither. For a moment he mistrusts its power, but the next moment finds himself where he longed to be, listening to the imagined song in the imagined woodland, and imagining in the darkness all the secrets of the season and the night. In this joy he remembers how often the thought of death has seemed welcome to him, and thinks it would be more welcome now than ever before. This nightingale would not cease her song—and here, by a breach of logic which is also a flaw in the poetry, he contrasts the shortness of human life, meaning the life of the individual, with the permanence of the nightingale's life, meaning the life of the race. This last thought leads him off into the ages, whence he brings back memorable touches of far-off Bible and legendary romance in the stanza closing with the words "in faery lands forlorn". Then, catching up his own last word "forlorn", with an abrupt change of mood and meaning, he returns to daily consciousness, and with the fading away of his forest-dream the poem closes.

According to Sidney Colvin, the *Ode To a Nightingale* is not strictly faultless, but its revealing imaginative insight, its conquering poetic charm, its touch that strikes so lightly but so deep, are preferable to faultlessness. With the *Ode On a Grecian Urn*, this poem is "among the veriest glories of our poetry".

Allen Tate calls the *Nightingale Ode* "an emblem of one limit of our experience: the impossibility of synthesizing, in the order of experience, the antinomy of the ideal and the real".....Allen Tate finds little to say in defence of the third stanza which, he says, is bad eighteenth-century personification, without on the one hand Pope's precision, or the energy of Blake on the other. "It gives us," says Tate, "a picture of common reality, in which the life of man is all mutability and frustration. But here if anywhere in the poem the necessity to dramatise time or the pressure of actuality, is paramount. Keats has no language of his own for this realm of experience."

F.R. Leavis has said that the *Ode to a Nightingale* records the poet's mood of indulgence and serves equally as an indulgence for the reader. Leavis is obviously being too severe or austere in his disapproval-of the "fine excess" of the poem. Keats's profusion and prodigality, one must recognise, is here modified by a principle of sobriety. Wholeness, intensity, and naturalness are the qualities of this ode. Nature is, indeed, the real norm, Nature as it appears to the romantic imagination; wholeness and intensity are attributes of Nature, as are freedom, ease, spontaneity, harmony, and sobriety. Imagined as the golden age of Flora and the country green, and more fully as the forest of the nightingale, it becomes first the bird, the voice of Nature; then the ideal poet; and finally the ideal itself. This Nature is the antithesis of the world of privation depicted in the third stanza.

20TH-CENTURY CRITICISM

At the beginning of the 20th century, **Rudyard Kipling** referred to lines 69 and 70, alongside three lines from **Samuel Taylor Coleridge's** *Kubla Khan*, when he claimed of poetry: "In all the millions permitted there are no more than five—five little lines—of which one can say, "These are the magic. These are the vision. The rest is only Poetry.'" In 1906, Alexander Mackie argued: "The nightingale and the lark for long monopolised poetic idolatry--a privilege they enjoyed solely on account of their pre-eminence as song birds. Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale* and Shelley's *Ode to a Skylark* are two of the glories of English literature; but both were written by men who had no claim to special or exact knowledge of ornithology as such." Sidney Colvin, in 1920, argued, "Throughout this ode Keats's genius is at its height. Imagination cannot be more rich and satisfying, felicity of phrase and cadence cannot be more absolute, than in the several contrasted stanzas calling for the draft of southern vintage [...] To praise the art of a passage like that in the fourth stanza [...] to praise or comment on a stroke of art like this is to throw doubt on the reader's power to perceive it for himself."

Bridge's view of "Ode to a Nightingale" was taken up by H. W. Garrod in his 1926 analysis of Keats's poems. Like Albert Gerard would argue later in 1944, Garrod believed that the problem within Keats's

poem was his emphasis on the rhythm and the language instead of the main ideas of the poem. When describing the fourth stanza of the poem, Maurice Ridley, in 1933, claimed, "And so comes the stanza, with that remarkable piece of imagination at the end which feels the light as blown by the breezes, one of those characteristic sudden flashes with which Keats fires the most ordinary material." He later declared of the seventh stanza: "And now for the great stanza in which the imagination is fanned to yet whiter heat, the stanza that would, I suppose, by common consent be taken, along with *Kubla Khan*, as offering us the distilled sorceries of 'Romanticism'". He concluded on the stanza that "I do not believe that any reader who has watched Keats at work on the more exquisitely finished of the stanzas in *The Eve of St. Agnes*, and seen this craftsman slowly elaborating and refining, will ever believe that this perfect stanza was achieved with the easy fluency with which, in the draft we have, it was obviously written down." In 1936, F. R. Leavis wrote, "One remembers the poem both as recording, and as being for the reader, an indulgence." Following Leavis, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, in a 1938 essay, saw the poem as "a very rich poem. It contains some complications which we must not gloss over if we are to appreciate the depth and significance of the issues engaged." Brooks would later argue in *The Well-Wrought Urn* (1947) that the poem was thematically unified while contradicting many of the negative criticisms lodged against the poem.

Richard Fogle responded to the critical attack on Keats's emphasis on rhyme and language put forth by Garrod, Gerard, and others in 1953. His argument was similar to Brooks: that the poem was thematically coherent and that there is a poet within the poem that is different from Keats the writer of the poem. As such, Keats consciously chose the shift in the themes of the poem and the contrasts within the poem represent the pain felt when comparing the real world to an ideal world found within the imagination. Fogle also responded directly to the claims made by Leavis: "I find Mr. Leavis too austere, but he points out a quality which Keats plainly sought for. His profusion and prodigality is, however, modified by a principle of sobriety." It is possible that Fogle's statements were a defense of Romanticism as a group that was both respectable in terms of thought and poetic ability. Wasserman, following in 1953, claimed that "Of all Keats' poems, it is probably the 'Ode to a Nightingale' that has most tormented the critic [...] in any reading of the 'Ode to a Nightingale' the turmoil will not down. Forces contend wildly within the poem, not only without resolution, but without possibility of resolution; and the reader comes away from his experience with the sense that he has been in 'a wild Abyss'". He then explained, "It is this turbulence, I suspect, that has led Allen Tate to believe the ode 'at least tries to say everything that poetry can say.' But I propose it is the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' that succeeds in saying what poetry can say, and that the other ode attempts to say all that the *poet* can."

LATER CRITICAL RESPONSES

Although the poem was defended by a few critics, E. C. Pettet returned to the argument that the poem lacked a structure and emphasized the word "forlorn" as evidence of his view. In his 1957 work, Pettet did praise the poem as he declared, "The *Ode to a Nightingale* has a special interest in that most of us would probably regard it as the most richly representative of all Keats's poems. Two reasons for this quality are immediately apparent: there is its matchless evocation of that late spring and early summer season [...] and there is its exceptional degree of 'distillation', of concentrated recollection". David Perkins felt the need to defend the use of the word "forlorn" and claimed that it described the feeling from the impossibility of not being able to live in the world of the imagination. When praising the poem in 1959, Perkins claimed, "Although the "Ode to a Nightingale" ranges more widely than the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," the poem can also be regarded as the exploration or testing out of a symbol, and, compared with the urn as a symbol, the nightingale would seem to have both limitations and advantages." Walter Jackson Bate also made a similar defense of the word "forlorn" by claiming that the world described by describing the impossibility of reaching that land. When describing the poem compared to the rest of

English poetry, Bate argued in 1963, "Ode to a Nightingale" is among "the greatest lyrics in English" and the only one written with such speed: "We are free to doubt whether any poem in English of comparable length and quality has been composed so quickly." In 1968, Robert Gittins stated, "It may not be wrong to regard [*Ode on Indolence* and *Ode on Melancholy*] as Keats's earlier essays in this [ode] form, and the great *Nightingale* and *Grecian Urn* as his more finished and later works."

From the late 1960s onward, many of the Yale School of critics describe the poem as a reworking of John Milton's poetic diction, but they argued that poem revealed that Keats lacked the ability of Milton as a poet. The critics, Harold Bloom (1965), Leslie Brisman (1973), Paul Fry (1980), John Hollander (1981) and Cynthia Chase (1985), all focused on the poem with Milton as a progenitor to "Ode to a Nightingale" while ignoring other possibilities, including Shakespeare who was emphasised as being the source of many of Keats's phrases. Responding to the claims about Milton and Keats's shortcomings, critics like R. S. White (1981) and Willard Spiegelman (1983) used the Shakespearean echoes to argue for a multiplicity of sources for the poem to claim that Keats was not trying to respond just Milton or escape from his shadow. Instead, "Ode to a Nightingale" was an original poem, as White claimed, "The poem is richly saturated in Shakespeare, yet the assimilations are so profound that the Ode is finally original, and wholly Keatsian". Similarly, Spiegelman claimed that Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had "flavored and ripened the later poem". This was followed in 1986 by Jonathan Bate claiming that Keats was "left enriched by the voice of Shakespeare, the 'immortal bird'".

Focusing on the quality of the poem, Stuart Sperry, argued in 1973, "'Ode to a Nightingale' is the supreme expression in all Keats's poetry of the impulse to imaginative escape that flies in the face of the knowledge of human limitation, the impulse fully expressed in 'Away! away! for I *will* fly to thee.'" Wolf Hirst, in 1981, described the poem as "justly celebrated" and claimed that "Since this movement into an eternal realm of song is one of the most magnificent in literature, the poet's return to actuality is all the more shattering." Helen Vendler continued the earlier view that the poem was artificial but added that the poem was an attempt to be aesthetic and spontaneous that was later dropped. In 1983, she argued, "In its absence of conclusiveness and its abandonment to reverie, the poem appeals to readers who prize it as the most personal, the most apparently spontaneous, the most immediately beautiful, and the most confessional of Keats's odes. I believe that the 'events' of the ode, as it unfolds in time, have more logic, however, than is usually granted them, and that they are best seen in relation to Keats's pursuit of the idea of music as a nonrepresentational art."

In a review of contemporary criticism of "Ode to a Nightingale" in 1998, James O'Rourke claimed that "To judge from the volume, the variety, and the polemical force of the modern critical responses engendered, there have been few moments in English poetic history as baffling as Keats's repetition of the word 'forlorn'". When referring to the reliance of the ideas of John Dryden and William Hazlitt within the poem, Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, in 1999, argued "whose notion of poetry as a 'movement' from personal consciousness to an awareness of suffering humanity it perfectly illustrates."

CLEANTH BOOKS AND ROBERT PENN WARREN ON THE ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

A Striking Contrast in the Poem

In this poem the world of mankind and the world of the nightingale are contrasted with each other. The listener in the human world responds to the song of the nightingale, and feels an intense desire to find his way into the world in which the bird sings "of summer in full-throated ease". For the poet, the world

of the nightingale is a world of richness and vitality, of deep sensuousness, of natural beauty and fertility; this world appeals to the imagination and has its own ideality.

The Poet's Reverie and its End

The reverie into which the poet falls carries him deep into the “embalmed darkness” out of which the bird is singing and deep into a communion in which he can make his peace even with death. But the meditative trance cannot last. With the very first word of the eighth stanza, the reverie is broken. The word “forlorn” occurs to the poet as the adjective describing the remote and magical world suggested by the nightingale’s song. But the poet suddenly realises that this word applies with greater precision to himself. The effect is that of an abrupt stumbling. With the new and chilling meaning of “forlorn”, the song of the nightingale itself alters: it becomes a “plaintive anthem”. The song becomes fainter. What had before the power to make the sorrow in man fade away from a harsh and bitter world, now itself “fades” (line 75) and the poet is left alone in the silence.

Two Issues in the Poem

The *Ode to a Nightingale* is a very rich poem. Two particular issues in it deserve attention. One is the close connection that the poet establishes between pleasure and pain; and the other is the connection between life and death.

The Double Effect of the Bird's Song

The song of the nightingale has a curious double effect. It makes the poet’s heart “ache”, but this ache results from the poet’s being too happy in the happiness of the nightingale. The song also acts as an opiate, making the poet feel drowsy and benumbed. Opiates are used to deaden pain, and in a sense the song of the bird does give the poet momentary relief from his unhappiness, oppressed as he is with the “weariness, the fever, and the fret” of the world of humanity.

The Yearning to Escape from the Human World

Secondly, the nightingale’s song makes the poet yearn to escape from a world overshadowed with death—“Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies”, “Where but to think is to be full of sorrow”. Yet when he has approached closest to the nightingale’s world, the highest rapture that he can conceive of is to die—“To cease upon the midnight with no pain”. The world of the nightingale is not a world untouched by death, but one in which death is not a negative and blighting thing. The question that arises is, “What is it that prevents the poet from entering the world of the nightingale?” He tells us himself: it is the dull brain that perplexes and retards. The beaker of wine for which he had earlier called, and the free play of the imagination (“the viewless wings of Poesy”)—both have this in common: they can release a man from the tyranny of the dull brain. The brain insists upon clarity and logical order; it is an order that must be dissolved if the poet is to escape into the richer world of the nightingale.

The World of the Nightingale, Also a Saddening World

But the world of the nightingale is also a world characterized by darkness. We associate darkness with death, but this darkness is replete with the most intense life. This darkness is, indeed, emphasised: “shadows numberless” (line 9); “the forest dim” (line 20); “verdurous glooms” (line 40). Having entered the dim forest, the poet “cannot see”. Though the fifth stanza abounds in sensuous detail and appeals so powerfully to all the senses, most of the images of sight are *fancied* by the poet. He does not actually see the Queen-Moon or the stars. He can only “guess” what flowers are at his feet. He has found his way into an “embalmed darkness”. The word “embalmed” primarily means “sweet with balm”, but the word is also suggestive of death. In finding his way imaginatively into the dark forest, the poet has approached death.

The Nightingale's Environment Described Realistically

Keats has described the flowery environment of the nightingale with full honesty. His primary emphasis is on fertility and growth, but he accepts the fact that death and change have their place here too: the violets, for instance, are thought of as "fast-fading". But the atmosphere of this world of Nature is very different from that of the human world haunted by death, where men sit and hear each other groan. The world of Nature is a world of cyclic change: the "seasonable month", "the coming musk-rose". Consequently the world of Nature can appear fresh and immortal, like the bird whose song seems to be its spirit.

Man's Alienation from Nature

The poem is not only about man's world as contrasted with the world of Nature, or death and deathlessness, but also about alienation and wholeness. It is man's necessary alienation from Nature that makes death so horrible. To dissolve, to fade into the warm darkness is to merge into the eternal pattern of Nature. In such a communion, death itself becomes something positive—a flowering, a fulfilment.

The Bird, Wholly Merged in Nature

The bird is not alienated from Nature, but wholly merged in Nature. The-bird shares in the immortality of Nature which remains, through all its changes, unwearied and beautiful. The poet does not think this particular bird to be immortal. The bird is in harmony with its world—not, as man is, in competition with his ("No hungry generations tread thee down"); and the bird cannot conceive of its separation from the world which it expresses and of which it is a part. It is in this sense that the nightingale is immortal. Man knows that he is born to die, knows the weariness, the fever, and the fret of the human world, knows in short "What thou among the leaves hast never known" (line 22); and this knowledge overshadows man's life and all his songs. Such knowledge overshadows this poem and gives it its special poignancy.

The Effect of the Word "Forlorn"

With the word "forlorn" the poet's attempt to enter the world of the nightingale collapses. The music which almost succeeded in making him "fade far away" now itself fades and in a moment is "buried deep in the next valley-glades" (lines 77-78).

RICHARD HARTER FOGLE ON THE ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

A Picture of the Opposites in the Poem

This critic considers the *Ode to a Nightingale* to be a romantic poem of the family of *Kubla Khan* and *The Eve of St. Agnes* in that it describes a choice and rare experience which is remote from the commonplace. A treatment of this sort of experience requires great skill. The principal stress of the *Nightingale Ode*, according to this critic, is a struggle between ideal and actual. It also implies the opposition between pleasure and pain, imagination and reason, fullness and privation, permanence and change, Nature and the human, art and life, freedom and bondage, waking and dream.

The Meeting of Extremes

The drugged dull pain in lines 1-4 is a frame and a contrast for the poignant pleasure of lines 6-10; at the same time it is inseparable from it. Extremes meet, as Keats has said in *A Song of Opposites* and the *Ode On Melancholy*. They meet because they are extremes, as very hot and cold water are alike to the

touch: their extremity is their affinity. Both pleasure and pain are in the opening stanza heightened, and meet a common intensity. The felicity which is permanent in the nightingale is transient and therefore excessive in the poet. It is so heavy a burden that it can be endured only briefly. Its attractions make everyday living ugly by contrast. Allen Tate refers to the *Nightingale Ode* as revealing the dilemma of the romantic imagination when faced with the contrast between the ideal and the real. Good romantic poems, like *Kubla Khan* and the *Nightingale Ode*, define this dilemma, dramatise it, and transform it to a source of strength.

Abundance, Fullness, or Completeness

The theme of the second stanza is abundance or fullness. The ideal lies in completeness. The nightingale sings in full-throated ease, and the beaker is full of the true, blushful Hippocrene. This fullness contrasts with the sad satiety of the third stanza, where but to think is to be full of sorrow; it is modulated in the embalmed darkness of the fifth stanza; and it ends in the sixth stanza in a climatic fullness of song, with the nightingale pouring forth her soul abroad in ecstasy.

A Concentration of Effect

The draught of vintage has been cooled a long ago in the deep-delved earth; the fountain of the Muses is the true, the blushful Hippocrene, and the beaker is brimful, with purple-stained mouth. Such concentration of effect is probably what Keats had in mind when he advised Shelley to “load every rift with ore”

An Escape from Actuality through Wine

The draught of vintage symbolises an imaginative escape from actuality. The longing to fade away into the forest dim is in order to avoid another kind of fading away, the melancholy dissolution of change and physical decay. In the third stanza a world of privation is substituted for the golden world of the second stanza. For ease is substituted the weariness, the fever, and the fret; for abundance, a few, sad, last grey hairs. In this world of privation youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies.

A Vivid Picture of Distress and Grief

The privation of the third stanza is as vividly depicted as the ideal abundance of the second. The personifications of age, youth, beauty, and love are vitalised by their contexts; they are comparable to “veiled Melancholy” in her “soveran shrine” in the *Ode on Melancholy*, and the personifications of *To Autumn*. The process of tedium, time, and decay is effectively conveyed in the third stanza, and the four-fold repetition of “Where” is a further reinforcement.

(According to Douglas Bush, the real theme of Keats’s six great odes is the sadness of mutability.)

The Value of the Ideal

In the *Nightingale Ode*, Keats is affirming the value of the ideal, and this is the primary fact. He is also recognising the power of the actual, and this is an important but secondary consideration. Keats is at once agonised and amused at the inescapable discrepancy between them. He reconciles them by a prior imaginative acceptance of the unity of experience, by means of which he invests them with a common extremity and intensity of feeling. He need not give equal attention to both, for the actual can take care of itself; it is the ideal which requires support.

The Romantic, Picturesque Fourth Stanza

The forest scene of the fourth stanza is romantically picturesque without being really pictorial: one does not visualise it, but its composition is describable in visual metaphor. The moonlight, a symbol of

imagination, intermingling with darkness suggests the enchantment of mystery. After thus using suggestion Keats goes on, in the fifth stanza, to specification. The imagery in the fifth stanza is particular and sensuous, but not highly visual. Hawthorn, eglantine, violets, and musk-rose are important chiefly for their pastoral association. Here, as in the second stanza, the theme is fullness, but with an added pathos because of the introduction of darkness and death in the sixth stanza. The generous fertility of Nature is inseparable from the grave.

A Reasonable Inference from the Experience of the Forest

The death mentioned in the sixth stanza is a reasonable inference from the experience of the forest. As freedom, ease, intensity, fullness, and consummation the two are one. Death is easeful and rich. "To cease upon the midnight" is in one respect the same as "pouring forth thy soul abroad". In each is an outpouring, and a release from the prisoning self. This imaginative acceptance of death is not, however, without reservation. The poet has been only *half* in love with easeful death. The acceptance, in fact, includes the reservation, since it is an acceptance of the limits as well as the freedoms of this death:

Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
To thy high requiem become a sod.

The Nightingale's Immortality

In a swift transition the death theme of the sixth stanza turns to a basis for the immortality of the nightingale in the seventh stanza. The objection that the nightingale, is not immortal need not trouble us. The objection has been met by the suggestion that Keats is thinking of the race of nightingales, and not the individual nightingale. At any rate, the bird in this stanza is a universal and undying voice: the voice of Nature, of imaginative sympathy, and therefore of an ideal romantic poetry, infinitely powerful and profuse (compare the "profuse strains of unpremeditated art" of Shelley's *To a Skylark*, and the "music loud and long" of *Kubla Khan*). As sympathy, the voice of the nightingale resolves all differences: it speaks to high and low (emperor and clown); it comforts the human home-sickness of Ruth and frees her from bitter isolation; and equally it opens the casements of the remote and magical. Lines 65-70 combine the two kinds of romanticism—the domestic and the exotic. But both the kinds are linked by their common purpose of fusing the usual with the strange. Ruth is distanced and framed by time and rich association, but in relation to the magic casements she is homely and familiar. These magic casements are the climax of the imaginative experience.

The Fancy Cannot Cheat So Well

The final stanza is a soft and quiet withdrawal from the heights. The word "forlorn" is like a bell which tolls the death of the imagination. Ruth is forlorn in her loneliness. The faery lands are pleasurably forlorn in a remoteness which is really the condition of their value. In any case, the word brings the poet to the common, everyday world. The fact that fancy cannot cheat so well is not a rejection of imagination but part of the total experience.

The Complexity of Feeling and Thought in the Poem

The *Ode to a Nightingale* contains the highest, the fullest, the most intense, the most valuable mental experience which Keats can imagine. This experience is the centre of the poem, and the basis of its unity. Within this unity, however, is a complex of feeling and thought which moves in alternate rises and falls, a series of waves. These waves are not of equal height; they rise gradually to a climax in the seventh stanza, and the rise subsides in the conclusion.

QUESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. Does the poet view himself as a part of nature or as outside of nature?
2. Does he admire the nightingale because it is so "natural" or so "unnatural"? That is, because it is a shining example of nature's beauty or because it exceeds the limitations of nature?
3. How do the images of nature within the nightingale's world compare to the images elsewhere in the poem? What is distinctive about this world?
4. What is the significance of the flight of the nightingale at the end of the poem? Why does Keats conclude the poem with this image?
5. Is the speaker afraid of death, or he is just afraid of old age? How are death and old age treated differently in the poem?
6. What does he mean by calling the nightingale "immortal"?
7. Why is the speaker "half in love" with death in stanza 6?
8. Is he being serious when he says that he wouldn't mind dying at midnight to the nightingale's song? How can you tell?
9. Is there a divide between the real and fantastic worlds in the poem, or is the entire poem a fantasy?
10. What is the role of wine, drugs, and drunkenness in the speaker's imaginative journey?
11. Why is he unable to continue dreaming about the nightingale after it has flown away and what does this say about the nature of reality versus fantasy?
12. What does the speaker mean when he says that he wants to "fade away"?
13. Aside from your dreams, have you ever felt like you were in a different reality? What inspired this feeling, and what brought you back to the normal world?
14. Have you ever thought what it would feel like to be an animal of any kind? If you could spend a day in the life of any animal, which would you choose?
15. Have you ever been unable to tell the difference between life and a dream? Have you ever woken up from a dream, and felt that it was real? How do we know that our dreams are not real? Are nightingales actually that happy? What could be stressful about the life of a nightingale?
16. Do you think birds have any concept of "beauty"? Do they know that their songs are "beautiful" or is that just a projection of human ideas?