

LINES WRITTEN IN EARLY SPRING

BY WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

THEMES

Beauty and sublimity of nature

Destruction of man

Rational thought

Romantic sensibility

We are to understand nature as a sensory entity – this experience is awoken in his speaker in the opening present-tense injunction 'I heard.'

The problem posed to the speaker is that of being fully immersed in nature ('in a grove') whilst being unable to access its potential.

The **slant rhyme** between 'notes' and 'thoughts' is a thematic hint to how humanity has fallen out of the natural rhythm of nature.

Juxtaposition: Competing and conflicting emotions of that 'sweet mood' and 'sad thoughts' reflecting on the inescapable presence of the misery-ridden human world that threatens the sanctity of nature even from afar.

Ambiguity of 'sad thoughts' denotes a universal quality for each reader to reflect upon their own source of sadness. Its plural form hints towards the multiple problems affecting humanity.

Feminised conceit of nature, observed in the **pronoun** 'her,' connoting a divine, maternal role of nurturing and restorative effects against the masculine progressive force of 'What man has made of man' – aggressive, masculine enlightenment project (ROMANTIC NOTION)

Natural scenery invites connotations of fertility, life, growth, harmony, abundance, and refuge. The prepositional movement ('through,' 'in that' to the verbal 'trailed') follow the speaker's attempt to document and trail all of nature's delights. The **syllabic weakness** of 'trailed' might even imply that the speaker doubts his own experience – emphasis on the speaker's passivity against the vivacity of nature e.g. 'periwinkle' is the syntactical subject of the second line and makes movement

Personification of the vibrancy of nature full of movement, perpetual, living dynamic and animated.

Plosives (/p/) sonically convey the dynamism, energy, and playfulness of natural life. The movements 'hopped and played' connote freedom and joy, unlike the contained adult speaker that 'sate reclined.' Reference to the immediacy of the child (ROMANTIC NOTION)

The verb 'seemed' suggests that the speaker can recognize nature's joys, but still retains a distance from his own pleasure.

'Budding twigs' as a metaphor for the future of society, suggestive of humanity's potential and a source of hope for the future. Wordsworth holds that the next generation might bring about politics of equality and unity. Metaphorical conceit of spring as being representative of change and hope.

Synchronicity of the natural scene, intermingling of a 'thousand blended notes' to perfect harmony perhaps at odds with a conflicted and divided humanity – long assonance /oh/ of 'grove' and 'notes' connect the song to its location.

I heard a thousand blended notes,

While in a grove I sate reclined,

In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts

Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did Nature link

The human soul that through me ran;

And much it grieved my heart to think

What man has made of man.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,

The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;

And 'tis my faith that every flower

Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,

Their thoughts I cannot measure:—

But the least motion which they made

It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,

To catch the breezy air;

Backdrop of the **French Revolution** and rebellion – ideas of oppression, enslavement and cruelty that Wordsworth personally witnessed of France's Reign of Terror in sharp juxtaposition to the harmonious intentions of nature – inevitability of man's misery and cruelty to himself and others (CONTEXT)

Forced **enjambé line break** ('Nature link / the human soul that through me ran') that might suggest the irreparable distance between nature and humanity. The intrinsic connection of man as one of nature has been forgotten/ neglected.

Wordsworth employs the language of loss with the verb 'grieved', separation, mourning and lament – implication of the sense of death and loss of another

Repeating, **cyclical refrain** to show the incessant and unanswerable problem of humanity's misery in perfect contrast to the 'fair works' of nature. The corrupt purposes of all of humanity are represented here, like social division, enslavement, poverty and oppression.

Emphatic /m/, and the **diacope** on the word "man," draws attention to the speaker's belief that humanity's problems are all our own fault, the consequence of splitting ourselves off from the inherent joy of nature: "man" has only "man" to blame for the world's suffering.

Reference to 'periwinkle' – a plant with medicinal, pain-relieving qualities – an analogy for the restorative and rejuvenating powers of nature.

The **determiner** upon 'every flower' emphasizes nature's abundance, variety, and heterogeneity, yet they also remain united in stark contrast to a divided humanity – intrusion of human doubt here as the speaker draws these parallels.

The "budding" twigs that catch the "breezy" air carry in their /b/ sound the bursting roundness of the buds and the playful blows of the spring breeze.

Anthropomorphic personification of the 'budding twigs' – stretched out in unison and harmony in the mutual action of 'spread[ing] out their fan,' Wordsworth appears to draw a link between humanity's increasing disconnection with nature to the social division that will only worsen with no impetus to change.

Still, the speaker is incapable of 'feeling' – basis of the romantic experience. This is deeply ironic for all of his excitement and determination to find joy and connect with nature (observing the multi-clausal, fast-paced structure) – his methods are flawed.

The **conditional** 'if' locates the speaker's doubt for humanity to ever rekindle its original connection to nature. It is so innate in the human condition for man to waver and betray the other. His hesitance and site of question lies not with nature, but man.

Exclamative – disbelief that humanity has strayed so far. Condemnation of humanity's moral degradation as a warning for the future of society as well as a desire to reconnect with nature and each other, to unite rather than destroy.

And I must think, do all I can,

Modal verb, 'I must' suggests urgency and a imperative to enact change.

That there was pleasure there.

The **declarative**, 'there was' defines his sense of experience – he is certain of its worth.

His heightened appreciation for nature might form an attack of the industrialising presence ravaging the countryside, destroying places of idyllic beauty – the 'grove' in which he sits is a secluded site, far from man (ROMANTIC NOTION – PASTORAL)

If this belief from heaven be sent,

Reverence and awe for nature's divine power (PANTHEISM) – 'Nature's holy plan,

If such be Nature's holy plan,

Have I not reason to lament

Speaker grieves the irreconcilable disconnect between nature's infinite beauty and the misery of man that inhibits him. This is not a didactic reflection, but contemplative.

What man has made of man!

Cyclical – he returns to the original 'sad thought' that haunted him in stanza 2.

In order to build a nuanced argument, I think it's important to emphasise that Wordsworth is not simply a poet of emotion, but rather effects a synthesis of Thought and Feeling that is necessary for man to be restored to nature – dark by-product of the Enlightenment

METRE

- In the poem's first, second, third, and sixth stanzas, three lines of **iambic tetrameter** build up to a single line of **iambic trimeter**. That even, steady build followed by abrupt change fits in with the poem's reflections on how humanity has fallen out of step with natural rhythms.
- The fourth and fifth stanzas, which describe the pure delight of the natural world, use more traditional ballad meter (alternating lines of tetrameter and trimeter)—and their balance reflects the harmony they describe.

RHYME SCHEME

Simple rhyme scheme that hearkens back to traditional songs and ballad: ABAB

Wordsworth valued the common language of man and the easy pattern here suits his poem's philosophy of simple natural harmony.