

# Percy Bysshe Shelley



## Political Beliefs

- Political radical directly influenced by Rousseau
- He advocated Catholic Emancipation, republicanism, parliamentary reform, the extension of the franchise, freedom of speech and peaceful assembly, an end to aristocratic and clerical privilege, and a more equal distribution of income and wealth.
- Shelley's advocacy of nonviolent resistance was largely based on his reflections on the French Revolution and rise of Napoleon, and his belief that violent protest would increase the prospect of a military despotism.
- E.g. Peterloo Massacre (August 1819) — demonstration to demand the reform of parliamentary representation where cavalry charged at the crowds leading to 15 deaths.
- Themes in 'Prometheus Unbound' and 'England in 1819.'
- The Proposals are Shelley's earliest public statement of the way in which love and politics should be inseparable: "Love for humankind" should "place individuals at distance from self," thereby promoting "universal feeling."

## Visionary Poet

- Lamented his inability to return to England and help those in need
- Wrote his poetry in the hope that it would inspire and influence those that read it
- In Italy, far from the daily irritations of British politics, Shelley deepened his understanding of art and literature and, unable to reshape the world to conform to his vision, he concentrated on embodying his ideals within his poems.
- His aim became, as he wrote in "Ode to the West Wind," to make his words "Ashes and sparks" as from "an unextinguished hearth," thereby transforming subsequent generations and, through them, the world.
- Role of the poet as the agent of political and moral change — "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.*"

## Personal Life

- Loss of his son, William in 1819
- Death of his daughter, Clara
- Grew increasingly estranged with his second wife, Mary Shelley

## Religious Beliefs

- Shelley was an avowed atheist, who was influenced by the materialist arguments in Holbach's *Le Système de la nature*
- His atheism was an important element of his political radicalism as he saw organised religion as inextricably linked to social oppression
- 'Necessity of Atheism' — Belief cannot come from a voluntary act of will; the burden of proof for belief can be found in only three sources: the senses, reason, or testimony.

## Free Love

- "A system could not well have been devised more studiously hostile to human happiness than marriage." He argued that the children of unhappy marriages "are nursed in a systematic school of ill-humour, violence and falsehood".
- He believed that the ideal of chastity outside marriage was "a monkish and evangelical superstition" which led to the hypocrisy of prostitution and promiscuity.
- He denied that free love would lead to promiscuity and the disruption of stable human relationships, arguing that relationships based on love would generally be of long duration and marked by generosity and self-devotion.

### Tone:

Exultant and idealised tone, reflecting an earnest desire to be transformed and propelled to a more optimistic future.

Expression of poetic adoration and rebellion to see the establishment of a new order

Lyricism and constant iambic pentameter present a hymnal tone, combined with the musicality of the sounds, creates the sense of Shelley's desire to be harmonious with nature's melody.

### Themes:

- Power of nature
- Visionary Poet
- Autumn — Death and Renewal
- Revolution
- Youth

# Ode to the West Wind

BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

## 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 winged 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, oh 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 aëry 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

Recognition that, in the optimistic praise of nature's renewal, leaves personified elements in association with death. Personification of nature, as a force or agent, that breathes life and decays as 'leaves dead.' Essential juxtaposition of the cyclicity of life.

Takes a while to establish the iambic pentameter: indeed, first six lines of the poem are all metrically irregular. The first line, for instance, contains a spondee in its second foot ('West Wind') which gives the line six stresses rather than the typical five. These metrical variations are intentional for they make the poem rhythmically as wild and energetic as the West Wind itself.

Autumn imagery produces a tone of momentary grief and melancholy yet overturned by joy of the conception of the continuous destruction and regeneration of life. Liminal/transitional state when the summer's abundance begins to fade

Direct address to the West Wind as a 'destroyer and preserver,' in an appeal to the violence of its passage to scatter his voice over the course of the universe in hope that he may bring the regeneration of mankind, without the need for conflict between man that was produced in the overturning of power structures (like the Haitian and French Revolutions).

'Destroyer and preserver' — juxtaposition/ diametric opposition/ antithetical ideals in the announcement of unity of opposing ideals that death is required for the rebirth of life. In order to have the beauty of renewal that Spring promises, one also needs the powerful destructive force of the West Wind/

Romantic notion of antiquity (Hellenism) and Greek mythology wherein the Maenads were the female followers of Dionysus, famous for their hedonistic celebrations. The West Wind makes the clouds 'tangled boughs,' 'approaching storm' and 'hail' to create a Dionysian chaos of drunken revelry and death. Here, it may be considered that this 'dying year' reflects own repentance for the hedonistic approach that led to the deaths of his wife, Harriet, and daughter to realise the instability of man and even his unstable political systems (evidenced by the Haitian and French Revolutions).

Cantos begins with the exclamation of the approximant alliterative, 'O wild West Wind' that impresses the power and grandeur of nature simultaneous to its softness and serenity in the soft /w/ sounds. The adjective, 'wild' anticipates that the West Wind is out of human control, untamed, undomesticated — industrialisation.

Autumnal colour imagery of dead leaves, infected seemingly by pestilence. Rather than leaves, we first consider them as people (synaesthesia). Speaker is in need of a revolution to renew a dead and 'pestilence-stricken' world full of suffering and injustice

Gothic imagery of the static decay of 'winged seeds' 'like a corpse within its grave,' employing gothic imagery, that is uplifted by its movement to 'Spring.'

Lightness in fricatives, 'flocks to feed in air.' Cyclic essence of the world

Seeds are originally in the image of 'corpses; but the wind restores life to them. Perhaps the wind is an allegory for restoring the spirit of protest, for a return of selfhood?

Sublime of nature in 'stream,' 'steep sky' and 'boughs of Heaven and Ocean,' where the sibilance conveys the awe of onlooking onto nature. Praise of natural power and divinity to conjure storms of 'tangled boughs.' Only in witnessing nature is the speaker connected to divinity. Atheistic praise of natural power.

Onrush of the wind's powers, transformative movement of 'dead leaves,' as a vehicle for change

Convoluting syntax mimics the unpredictable gusts of wind that is enhanced by the enjambments that delays the reveal of the subject of the sentence.

Of the dying year, to which this closing night  
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,  
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Metaphorical imagery produces an apocalyptic image that returns the reader to the powerful and violent force of the West Wind.

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere  
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh hear!

Anaphora in the repeating, 'thou' may be a desperate, insistent questioning of the possibility to communicate with the natural world: he both admires and celebrates its depth, whilst also wanting to share its power.

III  
Thou who didst waken from thy slumber  
The blue Mediterranean  
Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams,

lulling to mimic the soporific feel of the Mediterranean as that the West Wind awakens. Epistrophe in exaltation of the refrain, 'O hear' that places the West Wind on the same plane as a deity with praise and supplication. Perhaps, this is a reflection of Shelley's atheism — in the 'Necessity of Atheism,' one source of belief was the senses that he obtains from the effects of the 'West Wind.'

'Old palaces and towers' are a symbol for history in all its accomplishments that transfixes the Mediterranean. Symbols of the triumphs of the past that the West Wind disturbs — revolutionary force? Disturbance to traditionalism/ status quo/ societal order?

Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,  
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers  
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

Destruction of 'Baiae's bay' where classical, wealthy Greeks would cluster, might be emblematic of an old, antiquated way of thinking. Through Baie's death, therefore, induced by the West Wind's tide, might be alluding to the dawn of a new age catalysed by the American Revolution, potentially referenced by the title.

The resurrection of the 'corpses' of 'winged seeds might appear to be a Christian allusion. Yet, Shelley in his atheism, portrays it to be an entirely natural process to be 'overgrown with azure moss and flowers.'

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers  
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou  
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

Nature's power in a terrifying and decimating quality to enforce judgement over the emerging capitalistic and imperialistic worldviews spawned by the classical Greeks and Romans but recurred by industrialism.

Gradual gaining of 'West Wind's' strength from 'breath' to 'voice.' Still, it remains intangible and invisible. For the revolution, it is an element beyond human control — cycle of renewal where death and corruption is inevitably followed by life and renewal.

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below  
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear  
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Poem's refrain becomes more anxious, more desperate and his demands seem to betray a deep uncertainty that calls into question whether humans can communicate with nature, even as the poem's form imitates the natural phenomenon it describes.

Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,  
And tremble and despoil themselves: oh hear!

#### IV

Desires the power and liberty that he can obtain from the 'West wind; emphasised by the parallel structures of conditionals that underlines his urgency. Lack of freedom in the metrical regularity of the iambic pentameter represents the sudden strictness of the form.

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

Until this point, the speaker has remained anonymous resulting in a suppression of personality, employing first-person pronouns 'I,' 'my,' and 'me.' Dramatise the situation where the natural imagery of 'leaf,' 'cloud,' and 'wave' coexist with the author. 'Imagines that he could identify with them. Impossible for him to abandon his experience of reality (deaths of family/ Peterloo massacre/ corruption) to enter a world of innocence that he once had in his boyhood.'

The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even  
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

Shelley is deeply aware of his human identity in 'Oh, lift me up as a wave, a leaf, a cloud.' He understands the impossibility but continues praying for it. The only possibility for his wish is through death/ decay/ pain as death leads to rebirth and resurrection.

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,  
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed  
Scarce seem'd 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!

Reference to those that have sacrificed themselves for political independence/ loss of innocence/ corruption

A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd  
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 wither'd leaves to quicken a new birth!  
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,  
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Repeating 'my' makes the canto sound self-possessed as it becomes more demanding, rather than a request or prayer. The poet becomes the wind's instrument, 'lyre.' Symbol of the poet's own passivity towards the wind; he becomes his musician and the wind's breath becomes his breath — from 'enchanter' to 'incantation.'

Rejuvenating quality in the ending rhetorical question, 'Can Spring be far behind?' The hope encapsulated in 'Spring' and seasonal change whilst perhaps alluding to the Peterloo massacre of 1819, signalling that Shelley is using seasonal change to propel his reader into social radicalism to call into question existing power structures.

Shelley may have intended a defence of popular resistance, following the 15 deaths of the Peterloo massacre. Following the optimistic transition to Spring, Ode to the West Wind may be an assurance to the young radical, like Shelley once was, to aspire to reforming the world for a coming age of republicanism and parliamentary reform.

### Structure — Ode + Iambic Pentameter

In ancient Greek tradition, an ode was considered a form of formal public invocation. It was usually a poem with a complex structure and was chanted or sung on important religious or state ceremonies. Shelley combines the two elements of a *tone of exaltation of Horatian odes* and the *personal contemplations of Pindar Odes* in this poem. In the English tradition, the ode was more of a "vehicle for expressing the sublime, lofty thoughts of intellectual and spiritual concerns". This purpose is also reflected in Shelley's ode.

### Terza Rima (Interlocking 3-line rhyme scheme ABA BCB CDC)

Five sonnet-like blocks of 'cantos' written in terza rima, ending with a rhyming couplet = Impression of the poem stopping and starting in a series of flights and rests that conveys ideas of perpetual movement and renewal that Shelley associate with the wind.

### Inspiration from Dante's Comedy

Medieval view of the journey of the soul after death, showing divine justice as punishment or reward. Shelley might have been inspired by this form to elevate ideas of nature to the divine and being of God.

Sense of personality as vulnerably individualised led to self-doubt, and greatest fear was that it was 'tameless, and swift, and proud.' It employs plural forms to show peace and pride, redefining the use of this "Will" 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" for what might come—the future.

Purification promised by nature reveals the frailty of humankind in the exclamative, 'O hear' that evidences a hymnal, evangelical tone that may reflect a longing for the purification of the natural world, untampered by industrialism. The sonnet form of the cantos may be used to embellish and enlarge this notion in the sense that nature's power has the ability to invoke worship away from the materialistic contemporary worldview itself. This is enforced by the use of terza rima, where the interlocking rhyme scheme, may enact a sense of unification, elevating nature to the divine.

Adjectives like 'fast' 'delight' 'transparent' or 'bright' form a lexical field of optimism

Parallelism ('The sun is warm, the sky is clear') and lack of conjunctions/ asyndeton accentuate the speed and simplicity of the speaker's observations

Colour imagery, 'blue,' 'purple,' 'green' portrays the vividity and variety of life that nature presents. Optimism and expectation of nature.

Slow, measured descriptions in standard grammatical structure that accelerate towards the end of the stanza by removing verbs from his clauses: 'the winds, the birds, the ocean floods' in asyndeton that is ultimately undercut by the soft sibilance of the final noun 'Solitude's' that partially conveys to the reader a sense of 'Shelley's own dejection

## Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples

The sun is warm, the sky is clear,

Natural world serves as a distraction from his grief and isolation. Form of company for his lonely form.

The cumulative effect of this personification is the vivid impression of life — the world is equally as alive as human life

The waves are dancing fast and bright,

Blue isles and snowy mountains wear

'Unexpanded buds' as symbolic imagery for hope and anticipation

Repetition of "I see" and "I see" relates to Romantic notion upon a person's own sensory experiences and introspection. Speaker retelling a memory during a moment of introspection.

The purple noon's transparent might,

The breath of the moist earth is light,  
Around its unexpanded buds;

Like many a voice of one delight,

The winds, the birds, the ocean floods,

The City's voice itself, is soft like Solitude's.

Depth and unfathomable ('untrampled floor') nature of the sea that holds these unfathomable ideas

Dynamic verbs ('thrown,' 'flashing' 'strown') in conjunction with the violence and aggression implicit in the cacophonous sounds on 'deep' and 'green' arguably conveys the breadth of emotion within nature between the beautiful and the harsh and chaotic. Nature is a reciprocal entity to man's emotion.

I see the Deep's untrampled floor

With green and purple seaweeds strown;

I see the waves upon the shore,

Like light dissolved in star-showers, thrown:

Sibilance ('Seaweed strown; sits upon the shore' 'dissolved showers') essentially silences all other noise with the sound of the sea; the simile, 'like light dissolved in star-showers' could arguably convey Shelley's own depressive feelings in the total dissolution of the self.

I sit upon the sands alone,—

The lightning of the noontide ocean

Is flashing round me, and a tone

Arises from its measured motion,

How sweet! did any heart now share in my emotion.

Shelley explores the unknowing parts of his mind, but he cannot verbally or poetically express the reasons for such emotion. He witnesses the beauty of nature around him, but his alienation is apparent and the reasoning for such a reaction remain inexplicable to him. Perhaps, Shelley urges that the very act of going into nature is to discover the parts of ourselves that we cannot immediately fathom.

Aspirant alliteration in 'have, hope and health' that conveys the emptiness that Shelley feels.

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

With the exclamation 'alas,' Shelley shifts the poem, upon this volta, poem of emotion in this internal outburst of regret and remorse.

Volta with the realisation that despite the evident beauty of the world and Shelley's expressed desire to seek refuge in the 'noontide ocean,' he actually stands in opposition to the natural world in the transformation of 'star showers' to 'lightning,' a vivid image of conflict and danger. Second, in the 'measured motion' of the waves,' he becomes conscious of a sound that seems to embody his dejection, 'share in [his] emotion.'

Restrained speech in the internal structure of the poem in terms of commas and hyphens, eliciting pause..

The sequence, within stanza 3, functions as a negative inversion of the first in the repetition of 'nor' as Shelley looks inwardly. He lists fame, power, love and leisure, purposefully negating each one wherein he finds nothing he has of his own or holds of value. All that he feels is an abstraction. The asyndeton of the sixth line creates an impression of the relentless accumulation of Shelley's troubles.

Hyperbolic repetition upon "nor," lacking in all positive qualities in this anaphora. He is devoid of all hope.

Concrete metaphor that we might interpret as jealousy in coveting the good fortune of a neighbour, in that Shelley has been equally dealt (diction) in misery.

Inner landscape is flat and featureless in perfect contrast to the natural world's mountains and ocean depths. Completing the move from external to internal contemplation.



Simple contrast between “warm air” and “cold cheek” highlights his alienation from the lively world around him. Lethargic to the point he cannot even end his own life.

Dislocation from the world of people and natural world, where he sees smiling faces but doesn't feel any happiness himself. Potentially condescension in his voice that they ignore the tones of nature. distancing himself in opposition by usage of pronouns in “I” “Me” and “My” oppose “They.”

Others I see whom these surround—

Smiling they live, and call life pleasure;

To me that cup has been dealt in another measure.

Here, we observe that nature no longer has the restoring or restorative effects, as suggested by the first-generation Romantics. In the post-revolution age, Shelley's dejection becomes emblematic of the hopelessness of the zeitgeist.

Or here is the volta? At this point, Shelley can barely even experience despair — unable to feel either happiness or sadness? Suggestive of unbearable lethargy (“lie down,” “tired” “weep away” “sleep” “cold.”

Separate entity of nature, in which humanity inhabits. We can only surrender to its power e.g., Shelley's wish of death.

The image of him pressing a cheek to the sand might betray a desire to leave a mark or make an impact on the world otherwise indifferent to his action and pain. Weakness of the modal verbs, “could” and “might.” Strong modal is used only once, “Which I have borne and yet must bear.” Insurmountable pain and grief that will continue throughout his life.

Yet now despair itself is mild,

Even as the winds and waters are;

I could lie down like a tired child,

And weep away the life of care

Which I have borne and yet must bear,

Till death like sleep might steal on me,

And I might feel in the warm air

My cheek grow cold, and hear the sea

Breathe o'er my dying brain its last monotony.

Reconnecting to nature and its warmth deteriorating. Three potential interpretations:

1. Heightens his state of misery when with nature
2. No warmth to Shelley
3. Metaphysical death of emotion

Crosses the bridge between first- and second-generation romanticism

Two examples of life in nature versus death of humanity. Could this emphasise how humanity cannot affect nature in any way?

Renewed sense of opposition to the natural world. He describes his own heart as *lost* and *old* and imagines how it *insults* the beauty of the day with an *untimely moan*. Conversely, the day is described as *sweet* and possessing a *stainless glory*. The word *stainless* once again suggests that, no matter what he attempts in his life, he'll leave no mark or blemish on a world that exists on its own terms, with or without him there. Fatalism

Cyclically moves around to the idea of rejection. After all that he has experienced, who will understand him? Article, 'some' distances him from the rest of humanity, steeped in pathos, rejected by the rest of humanity. Dialect between nature and emotion.

Some might lament that I were cold,

As I, when this sweet day is gone,

Which my lost heart, too soon grown old,

Insults with this untimely moan;

They might lament—for I am one

Whom men love not,—and yet regret,

Unlike this day, which, when the sun

Shall on its stainless glory set,

Will linger, though enjoyed, like joy in memory yet.

Admission to a shred of positivity that still survives in his barren emotional landscape. The phrase *like joy in memory yet* admits to a tiny hope – that his memory would bring some joy to others. Multiclausal sentence, comprised of broken syntax, made up of three sections. Memories form both joy and regret, opposite entities yet both are inevitable. Memories of past, good times. Link to Wordsworth: “recollection in tranquillity.”

Longing for fame and grandeur. Sorrowful for the misery he has had in the past.

## STRUCTURE

Structure (optimism and beauty of nature, its strength and might, inward reflection, existential void, futility of memory) is in parallel to Shelley's life.

The poem is written in stanzaic form, where each of the five stanzas contains nine lines (Spenserian stanza); the first eight lines are written in iambic tetrameter. These lines are in

The fact that Shelley can live in nature does not necessarily take away introspection and suicide. Self-absorbed, cannot appreciate anything external. Anything larger that might put his feelings into place.

perfect iambic tetrameter; emphasis falls on every second syllable, giving the poem a soothing, consistent rhythm that might evoke the gentle sound of waves washing ashore. Final line in each stanza is longer – six iambic measures in fact (technically called an alexandrine/hexamter). The last line stands out and is isolated from the previous eight in a way that represents his own feelings of alienation from those around him.

The poem follows the strict rhyme scheme associated with the Spenserian stanza: ABABBCBCC. Overall effect of such a tightly constructed rhyme scheme is that the poem feels very controlled and musical. The musicality of the poem itself mirrors the beauty of the natural landscape it describes.

Subject of the poem is Harriet Westbrook's death.

Semantic field of coldness/temperature that create the inhospitable Earth: "chilling" "ice" "fields of snow"

# Lines: The cold earth slept below

BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Space between (prepositions "below" "above" make up a space potentially to be filled. Nature.

Cyclical motif of sleep and dormancy as a temporary state of being. Eventually, life will be reawaken. For nature, the grave is only the beginning, whereas for humans the grave is a reminder that life is finite.

The cold earth slept below;

Above the cold sky shone;

And all around,

With a chilling sound,

From caves of ice and fields of snow

The breath of night like death did flow

Beneath the sinking moon.

The wintry hedge was black;

The green grass was not seen;

The birds did rest

On the bare thorn's breast,

Whose roots, beside the pathway track,

Had bound their folds o'er many a crack

Which the frost had made between.

Thine eyes glow'd in the glare

Of the moon's dying light;

As a fen-fire's beam

On a sluggish stream

Gleams dimly—so the moon shone there,

And it yellow'd the strings of thy tangled hair,

That shook in the wind of night.

The moon made thy lips pale, beloved;

The wind made thy bosom chill;

The night did shed

On thy dear head

Chilled image of the Earth. Variety of images associated with freezing weather and inhospitable places. Metaphor for death, grave of nature, body cannot be confined to the Earth (subversion)

Classically gothic & supernatural. Shelley states that the "moon is sinking". The only source of light disappearing suggesting imminent envelopment by darkness. The moon is commonly culturally associated with lunacy, femininity and fertility- this links to the suicide of pregnant Harriet, drawing reminiscence to the loss of an unborn life, and the dark mental state she was in

The poem has continuous links to rivers, ice and water. "Death did flow, beneath the sinking moon", "flow" "stream"

The poem's dark subject matter even shines through to the integral basis of each line with internal rhyme creating a sense of claustrophobic burial "the birds did rest on the bare thorn's breast". The monosyllabic words and assonance contribute to the thudding tone "sluggish stream".

Strength of nature. Tree survives despite being displaced by man.

There are further links to rural superstition "As a fen-fire's beam on a sluggish stream". Fen Fires are said to send travellers away from the correct path, leading them to death. It's as if Shelley is removing personal blame away from Harriet for her mental disintegration, towards a non-descript malignant force leading her astray. Is this self-preservation, indicative of Shelley's reluctance to accept a form of responsibility for the death?

"Thy tangled hair" Ought to be beautifying but incongruous to setting

Haunting essence. Wild, aggressive animalistic terror of death. Physical traits become motifs oh how past can haunt you.

Undercurrent/ undertone/ implication of hope in the promise of return and rebirth. Religious/transcendental

Active voice places nature at fault. Displacement of blame

Although there are no people there, these landscapes have their own presence. They feel dark and possibly malignant, while also representing danger. The speaker would not survive in this place long.

Nothing lively or vibrant. Restart/temporary state, Will return to life. Not a permanent state of being. Always the emergence of life from a death like state. Alliterative and assonance of 'ee' in 'The grass was not seen.'

Light motif ('glow'd' 'dying light' 'fen-fire's beam' 'gleams dimly') as the poem progresses

Volta — personal pronoun/direct address/ tonal shift. Humiliation and embarrassment

Fen fires as an allusion to destiny or fate. Perhaps, Shelley is fated to lead a doomed life.

Female ending of 'beloved.' Masculine endings (monosyllabic/stressed) on all other lines. Term of endearment disrupts rhyme scheme revealing a slip on

Repeated presence of moon (link to Frankenstein) ghostly/spectral quality to nature. Nature is changing and interacting with the body (The wind made thy bosom chill' Body almost doll-like with grotesque 'strings of raven hair' — symbol of death. Gothic romance/ haunting love.

Pervasiveness. Simile of life and death. Inescapable. Human existence of night/personification.

Extreme and bleak landscape. Semantic field — sense of oppression and desolation. Reference to underworld and heaven.

Clear signal of unity and togetherness of internal rhyme. Relationship linger — Shelley's grief.

Image suggestive of a dire or destitute land — guilt or grieving?



Its frozen dew, and thou didst lie  
Where the bitter breath of the naked sky  
Might visit thee at will.

Nature personified. Nature has life that Shelley's dead wife lacks. Dead person now part of nature. Is she reborn into nature? Is Shelley using this juxtaposition to emphasise the person's lifelessness? Grotesque and pervading quality to it as it visits the body. Companionship between death and nature. Enormity of natural elements expresses the depth of his guilt

#### STRUCTURE

- Eulogy
- First half about nature/ setting
- Cyclical
- Poem in iambic tetrameter
- Rhythm shifts — picks up at time or a complete lack of it
- Spondaic — heavy rhythm contrasts to more simplistic, upbeat, childing rhythm of second stanza created by the internal rhyme. Anapest emphasises the contrast between life and death

STRUCTURE: This poem is a loose adaptation of Canto 28, lines 1-51 of Dante's Purgatorio., which Shelley translated. It is almost a catalogue of wild flowers. Divine quality of flowers/nature (+ Wordsworth's pantheism). Equate Earth to the wait of purgatory in which each flower harkens back to a divine origin?

The sudden transformation of 'Bare Winter' to 'Spring' itself hints of the supernatural; a dream-like quality. The harshness, decay and death of 'Bare Winter' is subsumed into the dawn of Spring, bringing forth new life. The seasons, as is typical of the Romantics, are capitalised, giving them a universal abstract force — separate entities.

Sensory experience — immersive, otherworldly, overpowering entrance into nature. Takes the centre stage and focus of narrator/reader, all through the catalogue of flowers. Emphasis on the general sentiment, rather than detail. Nature is an internal source of joy and happiness. Man will join the essence of the universe. Sensuous, tactile, nurturing of human embrace

CONTEXT: Flowers seem to personify every kind of human experience, particularly the ones he has lost: they are lovers (a flower "kissed it [a corpse] and fled") and they are childish ("Like a child, half in tenderness and mirth"). They are, nonetheless, seemingly raised from the strife of human living ("The constellated flower that never sets" — setting being a common metaphor for dying). — deaths of children and wife. Maternal soothing idea

Epithets: Shelley talks of the "Daisies, those pearly Arcturi of the earth" and "moonlight-coloured may". In this way, he seems to harken back to the Greek myths he was inspired, though with a twist: while the Greek myths gave heroes epithets, Shelley seems to be directing us to the impression that these flowers are, in some way, divine or heroic. Timelessness and universality as immortalised folklore

The 'sod scarce' may refer to the expansive, proliferation of nature and plants. The 'tall flower' these notions of size and breadth note the rampancy of the wild — cannot be controlled, yet a sense of amazement in this. Autonomous, not affected at all.

Beauty of childhood without the pregnancy and accompanying pain. Pastoral beautiful image (classical of Romanticism). That age without pain yet is preceded by that of the mother.

Syndetic listing of wildflowers and colour imagery:

- Sensory overload — relentless, plenty
  - Eternal image that is to forever last
  - Idealised, perfect, idyllic image — evidence of the dream state
  - Franticness that strains against the soft iambic; abundance and variety of nature (hyperbole)
  - Seasonal changes in various colours; variety across spring/summer months.
- Kaleidoscope of mixture that is so

Serpentine threatens the tranquillity of this image. It may be a symbol for a disturbance of traditional romance (as associated by 'roses') perhaps in phallic imagery — sexual impulses destroyed his first marriage? Edenic betrayal that prevents a return to such beauty. Decorative or unwanted.

Personification — holds an independent, uncontrollable quality that the narrator can observe. Equally humane? Human experience

Past simple tense — recounting/ remembrance of a dream. Abstract, dreamlike quality effected by the softening iambic pentameter that it opens with Dream venue for repressed desire. Rhythm of walking in /w/ sound highlights plodding pace/wandering. Sensory aspect creates illusion of a dream.

## THE QUESTION BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

I dreamed that, as I wandered by the way,

Relative clause emphasises the continual movement and travel of the narrator. Where to? What is his destination? Notion of progress and where will he/humanity end up?

Bare Winter suddenly was changed to Spring

And gentle odours led my steps astray,

Mixed with a sound of waters murmuring

Along a shelving bank of turf, which lay

Under a corpse, and hardly dared to fling

its green arms round the bosom of the stream,

FORM AND STRUCTURE: The poem comprises five stanzas of eight lines each. The rhyme scheme in each follows the pattern ABABABCC. The metrical rhythm is iambic pentameter, that is, five metrical feet or iambs per line, where a iamb is made up of one unstressed followed by one stressed syllable. The effect is an elegant, measured pace. The regularity of the rhyme scheme suggests a sense of peace and confidence inspired by nature.

The final phrase 'as thou mightest in dream', using the archaic form of the conditional 'might', reinforces the dream-like quality. Transitory, dependent, illusive

But kissed it and then fled as thou mightest in dream.

Beauty — listing of wildflowers and beauty impresses upon the extent and sight of this beauty/ nature. Almost never-ending that it stuns the narrator into individual accounts.

The effect of the broken syntax and forms a moment of contemplation/that the reader before the next line catalogue of flowers. Each is given weight. Method of paying Mourning? Listing of multiple attributes these flowers. Fragmented, difficult understanding conveys complexity that is unifying and

There grew pied wind-flowers and violets,

Daisies, those pearly Arcturi of the earth,

The constellated flower that never sets;

Tension between a feminine gentleness and beauty (delicacy of 'pied wind-flowers,' 'tender bluebells,') with strength ('low wind'). This marriage of images.

Faint oxlips; tender bluebells, at whose birth

The sod scarce heaved; and that tall flower that wets

Impression of motherhood in 'like half in tenderness and mirth — it's face with heaven's collected tears mournful, tearful, somber image translate to Shelley's personal deaths of his own children and his first wife. Protection/nurturing/co

Like a child, half in tenderness and mirth—

Its mother's face with Heaven's collected tears,

As an atheist, Shelley here may be speaking a guided, idealised principle of religion image of heaven, forgiving and sanctifi

When the low wind, its playmate's voice, it hears.

Witnesses human experience personification. M

In the hyperbole of the extended length of each of these flower names. We have a dedication and observance of their characteristics — soak up each moment of temporary respite/dream

And in the warm hedge grew lush eglantine,

There is a permanence to the flower removed from the transience of human and even of actual flowers. The day, in poem, often seems to function metaphor for the entirety of human life here the flower is unaffected by currents of time. Instead, it keeps its "v (which also seems to celebrate the flow away from temporality and into eter

Green cowbind and the moonlight-coloured may,

And cherry-blossoms, and white cups, whose wine

Was the bright dew, yet drained not by the day;

And wild roses, and ivy serpentine,

Sensory effects follow speaker's movements. Echo his wandering.

With its dark buds and leaves, wandering astray;

Bittersweet. Cannot be beheld by a waken eye; this is what makes it to beautiful. The impossibility of being realised.

And flowers azure, black, and streaked with gold,

Prediction of Winter in colouration of 'black and streaked with gold'

Fairer than any wakened eyes behold.

Gothic imagery of 'starry river' 'oak that overhung the hedge' 'moonlight beams' — supernatural state that centres on pantheistic display. All converging.

And nearer to the river's trembling edge

There grew broad flag-flowers, purple pranked with white,

Metaphysical in the emerging light. Of 'white,' 'broad and bright' 'light.' Shelley calls on his readers to accept the challenge of transcendence by seeking a spiritual connection with the natural world, in order to create the social and political transition that the Romantics so coveted. Endows natural with its own agency. 'Overhung the edge' into the world of men/intervene/alleviate — draw onto transcendental qualities

And starry river buds among the sedge,

Edenic in the natural beauty and paradise, almost darkly undercurrent by a suggestion of light beings secondary to the night. Untrained world, yet to be destroyed by man.

And floating water-lilies, broad and bright,

Which lit the oak that overhung the hedge

Suggestion of a divine force in a cosmic setting that spotlights the natural, which soothes the speaker. Almost pantheistic? No singular entity, but a form of transcendence?

With moonlight beams of their own watery light;

Consciousness of the sheer impermanency that, whilst reiterating the impression of posthumanism in Shelley's work, also alludes to the sublime in the asyndetic listing, impatience to form a list. This natural macrocosm holds a sense of sublime authority over Shelley's imagination: though he is struck by the spiritual power of it, there is something distinctly unattainable about it. Thus, overwhelmed by "thingness," Shelley's mind becomes enveloped in arguably too much universe. Similar to Wordsworth's 'sober pleasure.'

And bulrushes, and reeds of such deep green

/ee sound in long, draw-out syllables the dazzled eye, the sight that stuns in the astonishment and confounding of that unelongated vowel sounds convey tranquility, peace that make up a metaphysical scene 'moonlight' 'watery' 'soothed'

As soothed the dazzled eye with sober sheen.

Methought that of these visionary flowers

I made a nosegay, bound in such a way

Tone (in the introduction of personal pronoun) of the thought processes that govern this setting (dream). Self-consciousness that it is crafted from his own mind. Irony for this setting is born mentally, yet in his formation of a bouquet in which he may harness this natural microcosm. Recreation fails by 'bound' for they are unnatural. Tension. Ruin through organisation.

That the same hues, which in their natural bowers

'Visionary flowers' referring both to showing how to live - freedom (wordsworthian), a product of a dream/vision. Example of hypallage where, for conciseness, adjective is put with a noun other than the one to which it refers. So here, it is not really the flowers that are 'visionary', but the person describing them. Again, that notion of the visionary poet.

Were mingled or opposed the like array

Detriment of recreation, binding nature through controlling such beauty ultimately ruins it. The nosegay is beautiful by its wildness/abandon/freedom. Disturbance.

Kept these imprisoned children of the Hours

'Personal pronoun recognises the flaws within him — 'within my hand, 'Imprisoned' 'bound' semantic field of constraint. 'Children' flowers that are given hours to live now that they are cut down. Juxtaposition of something unnatural with destiny to wilt and die

Within my hand,—and then, elate and gay,

CONTEXT: final question of the women with whom he will share the experience. He was searching for a soulmate, but many criticised him for playing with relationships. His first wife, Harriet Westbrook, committed suicide, which some attributed to Shelley's poor treatment of her.

hastened to the spot whence I had come,

"Oh! To whom?": When Shelley tries to imagine a lover to whom he "might there present" a bouquet of flowers, he fails. He is brought back to his sparse reality, which does not indulge in the excessive descriptions of his dream but rather functions with a rather economic exclamative and question. Tonally, the two manage to seem completely distinct even though Shelley's reality has only three words to establish itself with. Jarring in the realisation he has contributed to the destruction of nature.

That I might there present it!—Oh! to whom?

Use of exclamation and rhetorical question at the end of the poem create a sense of disappointment as the speaker is jolted back into reality, and also establishes a cyclical structure to the poem

Nosegay/flowers is sensorial in its appeal. Implication of sweet smell.



