Poetry 2

Contents

Introduction

Poetry is a universal language. There is no language that has not produced a form or another of poetry. In some cultures, poetry plays a fundamental and important role as a record of history as in Arab civilization. Poetry is different from other forms of literary production in that it uses language to its full. The language of poetry is condensed. It uses figurative language such as metaphor, simile, personification and uses music as in assonance, consonance, and rhyme scheme to achieve maximum effect.

The themes of poetry are culture bound. They are reflections of the needs of the times. It can treat love, war and friendship. It can be a record of a national theme or a ballad that records the myths and victories of a certain culture. All in a language that appeals to our emotions and senses.

In the following monograph, I select a group of poems that will help the student appreciate poetry in a manner that encourages him to exercise his personal intellect in getting to the meaning or meanings of poetry.

This Short pamphlet was compiled by me for use in class. These are selections of poems and their analyses as well as literary terms complied from various sources.

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Edmund Spenser

Edmund Spenser (ca. 1552-1599) ranks as the fore most English poet of the 16th century. Famous as the author of the unfinished epic poem The Faerie Queene, he is the poet of an ordered yet passionate Elizabethan world.

Edmund Spenser was a man of his times, and his work reflects the religious and humanistic ideals as well as the intense but critical patriotism of Elizabethan England. His contributions to English literature—in the form of a heightened and enlarged poetic vocabulary, a charming and flexible verse style, and a rich fusing of the philosophic and literary currents of the English Renaissance—entitle him to a rank not far removed from that of William Shakespeare and John Milton.

Spenser was the son of a London tailor, but his family seems to have had its origins in Lancashire. The poet was admitted to the newly founded Merchant Taylors' School about 1561 as a "poor scholar." There his headmaster was the patriotic and scholarly Richard Mulcaster, author of several books on the improvement of the English language. The curriculum at Mulcaster's school included Latin, Greek, and Hebrew; music and drama were stressed; and the English language was also a subject of study—then a novelty.

In 1569 Spenser went to Cambridge, where he entered Pembroke College as a sizar (a student who earns his tuition by acting as a servant to wealthy students). He spent 7 years at the university, gaining his bachelor of arts degree in 1572 and his master of arts degree in 1576. Records of the period reveal that Spenser's health was poor but that he had an excellent reputation as a student. He studied Italian, French, Latin, and Greek; read widely in classical literature and in the poetry of the modern languages; and authored some Latin verse. At Cambridge, Spenser came to know Gabriel Harvey, lecturer in rhetoric and man of letters, who proved to be a faithful and long-term friend and adviser. Among his fellow students were Lancelot Andrewes, later a learned theologian and bishop, and Edward Kirke, a future member of Spenser's poetic circle. (Source:

Sonnet XXXIV. Like as a ship, that through the ocean wide

Edmund Spenser (1552?–1599)

LIKE as a ship,
that through the
ocean wide,
By conduct of
some star, doth
make her way;
When as a storm
hath dim'd her
trusty guide
Out of her course
doth wander far
astray!
So I, whose star,
that wont with
her bright ray
Me to direct,
with clouds is
over-cast,
Do wander now,
in darkness and
dismay,
Through hidden
perils round
about me placed;
Yet hope I well
that, when this
storm is past,
My Helice, the
loadstar of my
life,

Will shine again,
and look on me
at last,
With lovely light
to clear my
cloudy grief,
  Till then I
wander careful,
comfortless,
  In secret
sorrow, and sad
pensiveness.

……

The Waste Land

BY T. S. ELIOT

FOR EZRA POUND
IL MIGLIOR FABBRO

I. The Burial of the Dead

April is the cruellest month, breeding

Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing

Memory and desire, stirring

Dull roots with spring rain.

Winter kept us warm, covering

Earth in forgetful snow, feeding

A little life with dried tubers.

Summer surprised us, coming over the Starnbergersee

With a shower of rain; we stopped in the colonnade,
And went on in sunlight, into the Hofgarten,
And drank coffee, and talked for an hour.
Bin gar keine Russin, stamm' aus Litauen, echt deutsch.
And when we were children, staying at the arch-duke's,
My cousin's, he took me out on a sled,
And I was frightened. He said, Marie,
Marie, hold on tight. And down we went.
In the mountains, there you feel free.
I read, much of the night, and go south in the winter.

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

Frisch weht der Wind

Der Heimat zu

Mein Irisch Kind,

Wo weilest du?

“You gave me hyacinths first a year ago;

“They called me the hyacinth girl.”

—Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,

Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not

Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither

Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,

Looking into the heart of light, the silence.

Oed’ und leer das Meer.

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,

Had a bad cold, nevertheless

Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe,

With a wicked pack of cards. Here, said she,

Is your card, the drowned Phoenician Sailor,

(Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)

Here is Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks,

The lady of situations.

Here is the man with three staves, and here the Wheel,

And here is the one-eyed merchant, and this card,

Which is blank, is something he carries on his back,

Which I am forbidden to see. I do not find

The Hanged Man. Fear death by water.
I see crowds of people, walking round in a ring.
Thank you. If you see dear Mrs. Equitone,
Tell her I bring the horoscope myself:
One must be so careful these days.

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.
Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
And each man fixed his eyes before his feet.
Flowed up the hill and down King William Street,
To where Saint Mary Woolnoth kept the hours
With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine.
There I saw one I knew, and stopped him, crying: “Stetson!
“You who were with me in the ships at Mylae!
“That corpse you planted last year in your garden,
“Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?
“Or has the sudden frost disturbed its bed?
“Oh keep the Dog far hence, that’s friend to men,
“Or with his nails he’ll dig it up again!
“You! hypocrite lecteur!—mon semblable,—mon frère!”

II. A Game of Chess

The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne,
Glowed on the marble, where the glass
Held up by standards wrought with fruited vines
From which a golden Cupidon peeped out
(Another hid his eyes behind his wing)
Doubled the flames of sevenbranched candelabra
Reflecting light upon the table as
The glitter of her jewels rose to meet it,
From satin cases poured in rich profusion;
In vials of ivory and coloured glass
Unstoppered, lurked her strange synthetic perfumes,
Unguent, powdered, or liquid—troubled, confused
And drowned the sense in odours; stirred by the air
That freshened from the window, these ascended
In fattening the prolonged candle-flames,
Flung their smoke into the laquearia,
Stirring the pattern on the coffered ceiling.
Huge sea-wood fed with copper
Burned green and orange, framed by the coloured stone,
In which sad light a carvéd dolphin swam.
Above the antique mantel was displayed

As though a window gave upon the sylvan scene
The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
"Jug Jug" to dirty ears.
And other withered stumps of time
Were told upon the walls; staring forms
Leaned out, leaning, hushing the room enclosed.
Footsteps shuffled on the stair.
Under the firelight, under the brush, her hair
Spread out in fiery points
Glowed into words, then would be savagely still.

"My nerves are bad tonight. Yes, bad. Stay with me.
"Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak.
"What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?
"I never know what you are thinking. Think."

I think we are in rats' alley
Where the dead men lost their bones.

"What is that noise?"
The wind under the door.

“What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?”

Nothing again nothing.

“Do

“You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember

“Nothing?”

I remember

Those are pearls that were his eyes.

“Are you alive, or not? Is there nothing in your head?”

But

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—

It’s so elegant

So intelligent

“What shall I do now? What shall I do?”

“I shall rush out as I am, and walk the street

“With my hair down, so. What shall we do tomorrow?

“What shall we ever do?”

The hot water at ten.

And if it rains, a closed car at four.

And we shall play a game of chess,

Pressing lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door.

When Lil’s husband got demobbed, I said—

I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.

He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you

To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.

You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,

He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.

And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,

He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,

And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.

Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.

Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.

HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.

Others can pick and choose if you can't.

But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.

You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique.

(And her only thirty-one.)

I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,

It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.

(She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)

The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the same.

You *are* a proper fool, I said.

Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,

What you get married for if you don't want children?
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,
And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot—
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME
Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.
Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.
Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.

III. The Fire Sermon

The river's tent is broken: the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
Crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.
By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . .
Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,

Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of the bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear.

A rat crept softly through the vegetation
Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
While I was fishing in the dull canal
On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
And on the king my father's death before him.
White bodies naked on the low damp ground
And bones cast in a little low dry garret,
Rattled by the rat's foot only, year to year.
But at my back from time to time I hear
The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
Sweeney to Mrs. Porter in the spring.
O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter
And on her daughter
They wash their feet in soda water
Et O ces voix d'enfants, chantant dans la coupole!

Twit twit twit
Jug jug jug jug jug jug
So rudely forc'd.

Tereu

Unreal City
Under the brown fog of a winter noon
Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant
Unshaven, with a pocket full of currants
C.i.f. London: documents at sight,
Asked me in demotic French
To luncheon at the Cannon Street Hotel
Followed by a weekend at the Metropole.

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun's last rays,
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.

I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
I too awaited the expected guest.
He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall
And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
Bestows one final patronising kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit . . .

She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;

Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
"Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over."
When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

"This music crept by me upon the waters"
And along the Strand, up Queen Victoria Street.
O City city, I can sometimes hear
Beside a public bar in Lower Thames Street,
The pleasant whining of a mandoline
And a clatter and a chatter from within
Where fishmen lounge at noon: where the walls
Of Magnus Martyr hold
Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold.

The river sweats
Oil and tar
The barges drift
With the turning tide
Red sails
Wide
To leeward, swing on the heavy spar.

The barges wash
Drifting logs
Down Greenwich reach
Past the Isle of Dogs.
Weialala leia
Wallala leialala

Elizabeth and Leicester
Beating oars
The stern was formed
A gilded shell
Red and gold
The brisk swell
Rippled both shores
Southwest wind
Carried down stream
The peal of bells
White towers
Weialala leia
Wallala leialala

“Trams and dusty trees.
Highbury bore me. Richmond and Kew
Undid me. By Richmond I raised my knees

Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe."

"My feet are at Moorgate, and my heart
Under my feet. After the event
He wept. He promised a 'new start.'
I made no comment. What should I resent?"

"On Margate Sands.
I can connect
Nothing with nothing.
The broken fingernails of dirty hands.
My people humble people who expect
Nothing."
la la

To Carthage then I came

Burning burning burning burning
O Lord Thou pluckest me out
O Lord Thou pluckest

burning

IV. Death by Water

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.
A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.
Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

V. What the Thunder Said

After the torchlight red on sweaty faces
After the frosty silence in the gardens
After the agony in stony places
The shouting and the crying
Prison and palace and reverberation
Of thunder of spring over distant mountains
He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying

With a little patience

Here is no water but only rock
Rock and no water and the sandy road
The road winding above among the mountains
Which are mountains of rock without water
If there were water we should stop and drink
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand
If there were only water amongst the rock
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit
There is not even silence in the mountains
But dry sterile thunder without rain
There is not even solitude in the mountains
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl
From doors of mudcracked houses
If there were water
And no rock
If there were rock
And also water
And water
A spring
A pool among the rock

If there were the sound of water only
Not the cicada
And dry grass singing
But sound of water over a rock
Where the hermit-thrush sings in the pine trees
Drip drop drip drop drop drop drop
But there is no water

Who is the third who walks always beside you?
When I count, there are only you and I together
But when I look ahead up the white road
There is always another one walking beside you
Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded
I do not know whether a man or a woman
—But who is that on the other side of you?

What is that sound high in the air
Murmur of maternal lamentation
Who are those hooded hordes swarming
Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth
Ringed by the flat horizon only
What is the city over the mountains
Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
Falling towers

Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
Vienna London
Unreal

A woman drew her long black hair out tight
And fiddled whisper music on those strings
And bats with baby faces in the violet light
Whistled, and beat their wings
And crawled head downward down a blackened wall
And upside down in air were towers
Tolling reminiscent bells, that kept the hours
And voices singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells.

In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
It has no windows, and the door swings,
Dry bones can harm no one.
Only a cock stood on the rooftree
Co co rico co co rico
In a flash of lightning. Then a damp gust
Bringing rain

Ganga was sunken, and the limp leaves
Waited for rain, while the black clouds
Gathered far distant, over Himavant.
The jungle crouched, humped in silence.
Then spoke the thunder
DA
Datta: what have we given?
My friend, blood shaking my heart
The awful daring of a moment's surrender
Which an age of prudence can never retract
By this, and this only, we have existed
Which is not to be found in our obituaries
Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
In our empty rooms
DA
Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms a prison
Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
Revive for a moment a broken Coriolanus
DA
Damyata: The boat responded

Gaily, to the hand expert with sail and oar

The sea was calm, your heart would have responded

Gaily, when invited, beating obedient

To controlling hands

I sat upon the shore

Fishing, with the arid plain behind me

Shall I at least set my lands in order?

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down

Poi s'ascose nel foco che gli affina

Quando fiam uti chelidon—O swallow swallow

Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie

These fragments I have shored against my ruins

Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.

Shantih shantih shantih

Example 2: *I, Being Born a Woman and Distressed* (Edna St. Vincent Millay)

I, being born a woman and distressed
By all the needs and notions of my kind,
Am urged by your propinquity to find
Your person fair, and feel a certain zest
To bear your body's weight upon my breast:
So subtly is the fume of life designed,
To clarify the pulse and cloud the mind,
And leave me once again undone, possessed.
Think not for this, however, the poor treason

Of my stout blood against my staggering brain,
I shall remember you with love, or season
My scorn with pity, —let me make it plain:
I find this frenzy insufficient reason
For conversation when we meet again.

In her modern sonnet, St. Vincent Millay creates a departure from the Petrarchan convention of ideal, courtly love. This form of love was based on the intellectual and emotional connection between a man and woman rather than base physical attraction. In fact, the woman poet in St. Vincent Millay's sonnet outright rejects the idea of anything but a physical and sexual connection, further claiming this as "the needs and notions of my kind." This indicates a reversal of gender roles such that the poet is representing women as being overcome with lust, passion, and desire. These are characteristics that would traditionally be attributed to men, and male poets in particular.

As a result, this sonnet is subversive for the reader in its theme and message. However, the beauty of the language, form, and rhyme scheme are true to the literary tradition and artistic nature of sonnet.

Example 3: *Remember* (Christina Rossetti)

Remember me when I am gone away,
Gone far away into the silent land;
When you can no more hold me by the hand,
Nor I half turn to go yet turning stay.
Remember me when no more day by day
You tell me of our future that you plann'd:
Only remember me; you understand
It will be late to counsel then or pray.
Yet if you should forget me for a while
And afterwards remember, do not grieve:
For if the darkness and corruption leave
A vestige of the thoughts that once I had,
Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.

Rossetti's sonnet is impactful in terms of its approach to its subject matter and theme. As in many sonnets, the poet is lamenting and mourning a lost love. However, the love has been lost due to the poet's death rather than that of the lover. Therefore, the sonnet's words and expressions are from beyond the grave which is symbolic of the poem's theme of remembrance.

Yet Rossetti again reverses the reader's expectations in this sonnet by breaking with traditional theme and allowing the poet to encourage her lover to happily forget her. Many traditional sonnets, particularly those of Petrarch, featured the themes of lost or unrequited love for which the poet would lament and suffer. In Rossetti's sonnet, the poet appears to wish the opposite of suffering and lamentation for the love she has left behind and, in turn, herself

Romanticism

English Romanticism tends to be dominated by a few names: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats. Here, we've tried to strike a balance and offer ten of the very best Romantic poems from English literature, which ensures that these canonical figures are well-represented, while also broadening that canon to include some important but slightly less famous voices. We hope you like this short introduction to Romanticism told through ten classic Romantic poems…

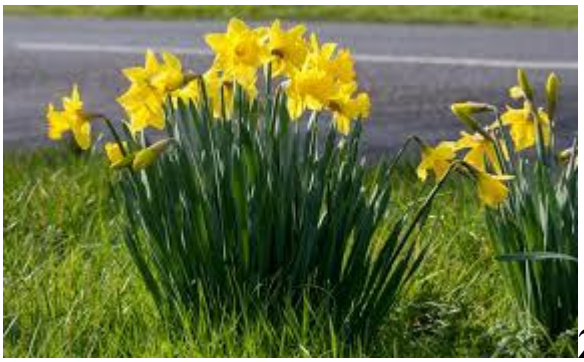
1. William Wordsworth, 'My heart leaps up'.

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky:
So was it when my life began;

So is it now I am a man;
So be it when I shall grow old,
Or let me die …

This simple nine-line poem describes how the poet is filled with joy when he sees a rainbow, and how he hopes he will always keep that sense of enchantment with the natural world. Wordsworth observes a rainbow in the sky and is filled with joy at the sight of a rainbow: a joy that was there when the poet was very young, is still there now he has attained adulthood, and – he trusts – will be with him until the end of his days. If he loses this thrilling sense of wonder, what would be the point of living? In summary, this is the essence of 'My heart leaps up'.

The poem contains Wordsworth's famous declaration, 'The Child is father of the Man', highlighting how important childhood experience was to the Romantics in helping to shape the human beings they became in adult life. 'My heart leaps up' is a small slice of Romanticism which says more about that movement than many longer poems do.



2. William Wordsworth, 'I wandered lonely as a cloud'.

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze …

Often known simply as ‘The Daffodils’ or ‘Wordsworth’s daffodils poem’, this is also one of the most famous poems of English Romanticism, and sees Wordsworth (1770-1850) celebrating the ‘host of golden daffodils’ he saw while out walking. The poem was actually a collaboration between Wordsworth, his sister Dorothy (whose notes helped to inspire it), and Wordsworth’s wife, Mary.

On 15 April 1802, Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy were walking around Glencoyne Bay in Ullswater when they came upon a ‘long belt’ of daffodils, as Dorothy put it memorably in her journal.
Dorothy **Wordsworth wrote of the encounter with the daffodils**, ‘we saw a few daffodils close to the water side, we fancied that the lake had floated the seed ashore & that the little colony had so sprung up – But as we went along there were more & yet more & at last under the boughs of the trees, we saw that there was a long belt of them along the shore, about the breadth of a country turnpike road. I never saw daffodils so beautiful they grew among the mossy stones about & about them, some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow for weariness & the rest tossed and reeled and danced & seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind that blew upon them over the Lake, they looked so gay ever dancing ever changing.’

The influence of this passage from Dorothy’s journal can be seen in Wordsworth’s poem, which he did not write until at least two years after this, in 1804

3. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Frost at Midnight’.

The Frost performs its secret ministry,
Unhelped by any wind. The owlet’s cry
Came loud—and hark, again! loud as before.
The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
Have left me to that solitude, which suits
Abstruser musings: save that at my side
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully …

So begins this great meditative poem. Wordsworth's great collaborator on the 1798 collection *Lyrical Ballads* was Coleridge. Written in 1798, the same year that Coleridge's landmark volume of poems, *Lyrical Ballads* (co-authored with Wordsworth), appeared, 'Frost at Midnight' is a night-time meditation on childhood and raising children, offered in a conversational manner and focusing on several key themes of Romantic poetry: the formative importance of childhood and the way it shapes who we become, and the role nature can play in our lives.

4. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner***.**

And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariner's hollo!

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white Moon-shine.'

'God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—
Why look'st thou so?'—With my cross-bow
I shot the ALBATROSS …

Written in 1797-8, this is Coleridge's most famous poem – it first appeared in *Lyrical Ballads*. The idea of killing an albatross bringing bad luck upon the crew of a ship appears to have been invented in this poem, as there is no precedent for it – and the albatross idea was probably William Wordsworth's, not Coleridge's (Wordsworth got the idea of the albatross-killing from a 1726 book, *A Voyage Round The World by Way of the Great South Sea*, by Captain George Shelvocke).

The poem is one of the great narrative poems in English, with the old mariner recounting his story, with its hardships and tragedy, to a

wedding guest. Variously interpreted as being about guilt over the Transatlantic slave trade, about Coleridge's own loneliness, and about spiritual salvation, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* remains a **challenging poem whose ultimate meaning is elusive.**

5. Charlotte Smith, 'Sonnet on being Cautioned against Walking on a Headland'.

Is there a solitary wretch who hies
To the tall cliff, with starting pace or slow,
And, measuring, views with wild and hollow eyes
Its distance from the waves that chide below …

English Romanticism wasn't entirely dominated by men, although it's true that names like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and so on tend to dominate the lists. But as Dorothy Wordsworth's role in inspiring 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' demonstrates, Romanticism wasn't quite an all-male affair.

This poem by Charlotte Turner Smith, a pioneer of Romanticism in England who was born before Wordsworth or Coleridge, is that rarest of things: a Gothic sonnet. This needn't surprise when we bear in mind that the sonnet's author, Charlotte Turner Smith (1749-1806) was associated with English Romanticism and was also a key figure in the revival of the English sonnet.

The Road Not Taken

Launch Audio in a New Window

BY ROBERT FROST

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,

And sorry I could not travel both

And be one traveler, long I stood

And looked down one as far as I could

To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

6. John Clare, '[The Yellowhammer's Nest](#)'.

Just by the wooden brig a bird flew up,
Frit by the cowboy as he scrambled down
To reach the misty dewberry—let us stoop

And seek its nest—the brook we need not dread,
’Tis scarcely deep enough a bee to drown,
So it sings harmless o’er its pebbly bed …

John Clare (1793-1864) has been called the greatest nature poet in the English language (by, for instance, his biographer Jonathan Bate), and yet his life – particularly his madness and time inside an asylum later in his life – tends to overshadow his poetry.

Like Charlotte Turner Smith, Clare is still a rather overlooked figure in English Romanticism and nature poetry, but he’s been called England’s greatest nature poet and the best poet to have written about birds. ‘The Yellowhammer’s Nest’, although not Clare’s best-known poem, shows his wonderful sensitivity to vowel sounds, as he explores the patterns found within nature by focusing on the nest of the bird, which is described as ‘poet-like’.

7. Percy Shelley, ‘Mont Blanc’.

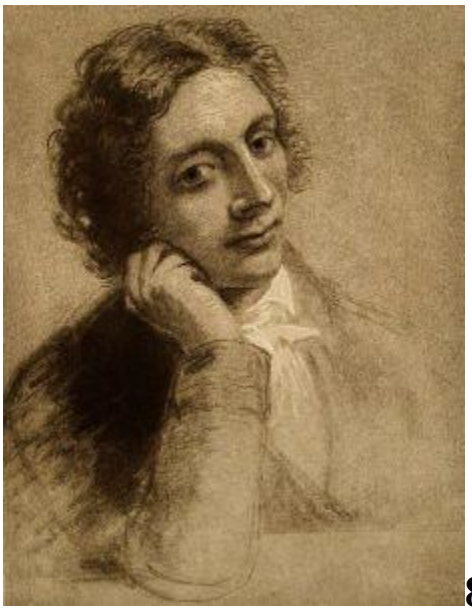
The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings
Of waters—with a sound but half its own,
Such as a feeble brook will oft assume,
In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,
Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves …

The Romantics were greatly interested in a quality that Edmund Burke called ‘the Sublime’: that peculiar mixture of awe and terror we feel when confronted with great forces of nature. Percy Shelley’s poem about Mont Blanc, the highest mountain in the Alps, is a classic example of

Romantic poetry about the Sublime – an ode to nature as a powerful and beautiful force.

Shelley composed 'Mont Blanc' during the summer of 1816, and it was first published in Mary Shelley's *History of a Six Weeks' Tour through a Part of France, Switzerland, Germany and Holland* (1817), which – beating *Frankenstein* by a year – was **actually Mary's first book**.

Immediately in the first two lines of 'Mont Blanc', Shelley foregrounds the key thrust of the poem: the relationship between the natural world and the human imagination. The 'everlasting universe of things', which recalls Wordsworth's talk of the 'immortality' of the earth in his 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' (which we've analysed **here**); Shelley notes that this 'universe of things' flows through the (mortal) mind. These external influences are variously light and dark, vivid and obscure.



8. Percy Shelley, 'To a Skylark'.

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from Heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art …

Shelley completed this, one of his most famous poems, in June 1820. The inspiration for the poem was an evening walk Shelley took with his wife, Mary, in Livorno, in north-west Italy. Mary later described the circumstances that gave rise to the poem: 'It was on a beautiful summer evening while wandering among the lanes whose myrtle hedges were the bowers of the fire-flies, that we heard the carolling of the skylark.' The opening line of the poem gave Noel Coward the title for his play *Blithe Spirit*.

Shelley asks the bird to teach him just half the happiness the bird must know, in order to produce such beautiful music. If the skylark granted the poet his wish, he – Shelley – would start singing such delirious, harmonious music that the world would listen to him, much as he is listening, enraptured, to the skylark right now. We have analysed this poem **here**.

9. John Keats, '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 …

From its opening simile likening the poet's mental state to the effects of drinking hemlock, to the poem's later references to 'a draught of vintage' and 'a beaker full of the warm South', Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' is one of the most drink-sodden poems produced by the entire Romantic period.

‘Ode to a Nightingale’ is about the poet’s experience of listening to the beautiful song of the nightingale. Keats has become intoxicated by the nightingale’s heartbreakingly beautiful song, and he feels as though he’d drunk the numbing poison hemlock or the similarly numbing (though less deadly) drug, opium. He is forgetting everything: it’s as though he’s heading to Lethe (‘Lethe-wards’, as in ‘towards Lethe’), the river of forgetfulness in Greek mythology.

The contrast between mortality and immortality, between the real world and the enchanted world the nightingale’s song seems to open a window onto (like one of those magic casements Keats refers to), is a key one for the poem.We have analysed this poem **here**.

10. Lord Byron, ‘Darkness’.

This poem was inspired by a curious incident: the eruption of Mount Tambora in Indonesia, which drastically altered the weather conditions across the world and led to 1816 being branded ‘the Year without a Summer’. The same event also led to Byron’s trip to Lake Geneva and his ghost-story writing competition, which produced Mary Shelley’s masterpiece *Frankenstein*. For Byron, the extermination of the sun seemed like a dream, yet it was ‘no dream’ but a strange and almost sublimely terrifying reality. Another example of the Romantic concept of the Sublime, brought to us by one of English Romanticism’s best-known figures. It begins:

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.
The bright sun was extinguish’d, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;
Morn came and went—and came, and brought no day …

If you’re looking for a good anthology of Romanticism, we recommend ***The New Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry (Penguin Classics)***. Discover more classic poetry with these uplifting **spring**

poems, these hot **summer poems**, these **poems for autumn and fall**, and these snowy **winter poems**.

The author of this article, Dr Oliver Tearle, is a literary critic and lecturer in English at Loughborough University. He is the author of, among others, *The Secret Library: A Book-Lovers' Journey Through Curiosities of History* and *The Great War, The Waste Land and the Modernist Long Poem*

Modern poems for further practice:

A Red, Red Rose

BY ROBERT BURNS

O my Luve is like a red, red rose
That's newly sprung in June;
O my Luve is like the melody
That's sweetly played in tune.

So fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in luve am I;
And I will luve thee still, my dear,

Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun;
I will love thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only luve!
And fare thee weel awhile!
And I will come again, my luve,
Though it were ten thousand mile.

2-

Those Winter Sundays

BY ROBERT HAYDEN

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,

Speaking indifferently to him,

who had driven out the cold

and polished my good shoes as well.

What did I know, what did I know

of love's austere and lonely offices?

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3-

She dwelt among the untrodden ways (The Lost Love)

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
  Beside the springs of Dove;
A maid whom there were none to praise,
  And very few to love.

A violet by a mossy stone
  Half hidden from the eye!
- Fair as a star, when only one
  Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
  When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and O
  The difference to me!

4-

I Remember, I Remember

BY THOMAS HOOD

I remember, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn;
He never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day,
But now, I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away!

I remember, I remember,
The roses, red and white,
The vi'lets, and the lily-cups,
Those flowers made of light!
The lilacs where the robin built,
And where my brother set
The laburnum on his birthday,—
The tree is living yet!

I remember, I remember,

Where I was used to swing,
And thought the air must rush as fresh
To swallows on the wing;
My spirit flew in feathers then,
That is so heavy now,
And summer pools could hardly cool
The fever on my brow!

I remember, I remember,
The fir trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky:
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from heav'n
Than when I was a boy.

Literary Terms

Anaphora the repetition of a word or phrase, usually at the beginning of a line.

Alliteration the repetition of sounds in a sequence of words. (See also**consonance** and **assonance**.)

Allegory narrative with two levels of meaning, one stated and one unstated.

apostrophe direct address to an absent or otherwise unresponsive entity (someone or something dead, imaginary, abstract, or inanimate).

assonance the repetition of vowel-sounds.

beat a stressed (or accented) syllable.

binary dual, twofold, characterized by two parts.

blank verse unrhymed iambic pentameter.

caesura an audible pause internal to a line, usually in the middle. (An audible pause at the end of a line is called an **end-stop**.) The French *alexandrine*, Anglo-Saxon alliterative meter, and Latin dactylic hexameter are all verse forms that call for a caesura.

chiasmus from the Greek letter Chi (X), a "crossed" rhetorical parallel. That is, the parallel form *a:b::a:b* changes to *a:b::b:a* to become a chiasmus.

climax the high point; the moment of greatest tension or intensity. The climax can occur at any point in a poem, and can register on different levels, e.g. narrative, rhetorical, or formal.

consonance the repetition of consonant-sounds.

couplet	two lines of verse, usually rhymed. **Heroic couplet:** a rhymed iambic pentameter couplet.
diction	word choice, specifically the "class" or "kind" of words chosen.
elegy	since the 17th century, usually denotes a reflective poem that laments the loss of something or someone.
end-stopped line	a line that ends with a punctuation mark and whose meaning is complete.
enjambed line	a "run-on" line that carries over into the next to complete its meaning.
foot	the basic unit of accentual-syllabic and quantitative meter, usually combining a stress with one or more unstressed syllables.
free verse	poetry in which the rhythm does not repeat regularly.
imagery	the visual (or other sensory) pictures used to render a description more vivid and immediate.
meter	a regularly repeating rhythm, divided for convenience into**feet**.
metonomy	a figure of speech in which something is represented by another thing that is commonly and often physically associated with it, e.g. "White House" for "the President."

ode a genre of lyric, an ode tends to be a long, serious meditation on an elevated subject.

prosody the study of **versification**, i.e. the form—meter, rhyme, rhythm, stanzaic form, sound patterns—into which poets put language to make it verse rather than something else.

refrain a phrase or line recurring at intervals. (N.b. the definition does not require that a refrain include the *entire* line, nor that it recur at *regular* intervals, though refrains often are and do.)

rhythm the patterns of stresses, unstressed syllables, and pauses in language. Regularly repeating rhythm is called **meter**.

scansion the identification and analysis of poetic rhythm and meter. To "scan" a line of poetry is to mark its stressed and unstressed syllables.

simile a figure of speech that compares two distinct things by using a connective word such as "like" or "as."

speaker the "I" of a poem, equivalent to the "narrator" of a prose text. In lyric poetry, the speaker is often an authorial persona.

speech act the manner of expression (as opposed to the content). Examples of speech acts include: question, promise, plea, declaration, and command.

stanza a “paragraph” of a poem: a group of lines separated by extra white space from other groups of lines.

symbol an image that stands for something larger and more complex, often something abstract, such as an idea or a set of attitudes. (See **imagery**.)

symbolism the serious and relatively sustained use of symbols to represent or suggest other things or ideas. (Distinct from allegory in that symbolism does not depend on narrative.)

synecdoche a figure of speech in which a part of something is used to represent the whole, e.g. “wheels” for “car.”

tone the speaker’s or author’s attitude toward the reader, addressee, or subject matter. The tone of a poem immediately impresses itself upon the reader, yet it can be quite difficult to describe and analyze.

topos a traditional theme or motif (e.g. the topos of modesty).

trope a figure of speech, such as a metaphor (**trope** is often used, incorrectly, to mean **topos**)

valediction an act or utterance of farewell.