

**English Literature of the Romantic Period, 1798-1832**  
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**Romantic Poetry – 2 Nature, the Environment and Ecology Shelley**

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**Romantic Poetry 2: Nature, the Environment and Ecology**  
**Shelley**



Initially, Shelley believed in pantheism—the belief that God, or a divine, unifying spirit, runs through everything in the universe. He terms this spirit the “spirit of beauty” in “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” and identifies it with Mont Blanc and the Arve River in the same poem.

This belief treated all natural objects as possessing a soul and a life similar to humanity’s.

But it is not an unalloyed appreciation of Nature: Shelley recognizes that nature’s power is not wholly positive but is also destructive, in the form of seasons, for instance, and mutability is built into Nature. That is, while nature is splendidous it is also deadly, and perhaps beyond man. It is not always a tranquil Nature.



Hello everybody, as we explore the theme of nature environment and ecological in the Romantic poets, we have finish Wordsworth and Coleridge and a general introduction, we now turn to Percy Shelley.

Initially Shelley believed in pantheism, the believe that God or a divine unifying spirit runs through everything in the universe, in terms this spirit, the spirit of beauty in Hymn to intellectual beauty and identifies it with Mont Blanc and the Arve of River in the poem of the

same title, this belief, this pantheism treated all natural objects as possessing a soul and a life, which is similar to humanity, however this is not an unalloyed pure appreciation of nature.

Surely recognizes that nature's power is not wholly positive, it can also be destructive in the form of seasons, for example, and mutability, mutability is a theme of change, of inevitable decay and Shelley would say that mutability is built into the nature, that is why nature's splendorous, glorious and beautiful, it is also deadly, it is also destructive and perhaps before it will be beyond man, it is not always tranquil, so unlike Wordsworth representing nature is more or less always tranquil, Shelley had a little more ambivalence in his expression towards nature.

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"In their search to find ways of expressing their internal feelings, the Romantic poets look outwards to nature to find emblems of the mind." (JR Watson)



Actually JR Watson has said in their search to find ways of expressing their internal feelings, the Romantic poets look outwards to nature to find emblems of the mind, what Watson is saying, JR Watson's point is when they would need to speak about their insides, their internal feelings, they looked outwards for symbols and emblems of the mind itself.

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Shelley uses the West Wind to symbolize the power of nature and of the imagination inspired by nature. The West Wind is an agent for change. Even as it destroys, the wind encourages new life on earth and social progress among humanity, but mediated by the poet. Thus, Shelley suggests a link between the power of Nature, the power of the poetic mind and poetic language in this poem.



Shelley uses the West Wind to symbolize the power of nature and the imagination inspired by nature. The West wind is an agent of change, it is an agent for change, even as it destroys the wind encourages new life, new ideas, clean wind the earth and social progress amount humanary, but mediated by the poet, the Shelleys suggest a link between the power of nature, the power of the poetic mind and poetic language in this poem.

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In nature, the individual always dies. In the face of this mutability, the Poet prays that the wind, which controls all elements (in the course of the poem) earth, air and water, might make him its lyre. Does this imply a greater longevity or even permanence to poetry and imagination?



In nature, the individual always dies, mutability, decay and die. In the face of this mutability, the poet prays that a wind which controls all elements as you know in West wind poet will looking at it, the poet prays the wind that controls all the elements, air and water might make limits lyre, so whether this implies a greater longevity or even permanence to poetry and

imagination is a moot point, that is, if I am condemned to die, if in the natural course of evens, I decay and die what is a chance of my imagination becoming immortal or at least having of lifespan, if the wind were to take me up, if the wind were to animate me and the wind being immortal in many ways, it can impart greater longevity.

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Addressing the West Wind as "Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere", "O, uncontrollable!", "Spirit fierce", "impetuous one" Shelley wishes to present the poet, himself, as something akin to the dynamic, volatile, mobile wind (hence the image of "scatter" at the end of the poem



Addressing the West wind is a wild spirit which art moving everywhere, O, uncontrollable and then spirit fierce impetuous one, Shelley wishes to present the poet himself as something akin to the wind, that is his making the wind and the poet looked like a mirror images, both are dynamic, volatile, mobile, energetic, hence the image of scatter and the end of the poem, but we will look at that in a bit.

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But what the Poet really asks in the concluding stanza, not that he be enabled to merge his character with the wind's and become its instrument, but that it become him:

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Be thou, Spirit fierce,

My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!



What the poet really ask in the concluding stanza is not that he be unable to merge his character with the wind and become its instrument, he begins by saying that make me thy lyre is what he says, make me your harp, maybe your instrument but when the poem ends the wind comes him this is what he says.

Be thou, spirit fierce, my spirit, be thou me, what is Shelley doing here, Shelley is not asking to be transformed into an instrument for nature, he wants to be transformed into nature itself, he saying that the nature be me, you be me, be thou me, me impetuous one.

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This is no longer a metaphor for natural force but of artistic inspiration. The stanza began with a petition to the wind "Make me thy lyre"

Towards the end, he expects the wind to be subject to poetic imagination, will and even, perhaps diction: "Be through my lips to unawakened earth/The trumpet of a prophecy!"



This image is no longer metaphor for natural force, it is no longer a metaphor for dynamism, but its rather than image of artistic inspiration, the stanza which began with the petition to the wind access make me thy lyre, towards its and his change into something else, towards the end he expects the wind to be subject to poetic imagination, but that is the wind will become subject to the poetic imagination inside me, it may be subject to my way and even perhaps diction, what does he say that let me quotes those lines for you, Be through my lips to unawakened earth, the trumpet of a prophecy, let me read that again, Be through my lips to unawakened earth, the trumpet of a prophecy.

What he is saying is? You as a addressing a wind you will be subject to my poetic imagination and even perhaps my language, so it is through my lips that you become, you will be able to articulate enunciate a prophecy.

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The poem ends in an optimistic mood, as if the identification had worked and the seeds that the poet had sown were ready to germinate soon.

But there is something else here.

Slide



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?



The poem ends on an optimistic mood, in an optimistic mood as if the identification had worked and the seeds that the poet had sown were ready to germinate but there is something else here, please look at the lines, now coming up on your slide.

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe like wither'd leaves to quicken a new birth and by the incantation of this verse, scatter is from in an extinguish'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 the winter comes, can spring be far behind?

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Shelley says  
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?  
He doesn't say "when", but "if".

So is there an uncertainty at work here?



May I ask you to pay some attention to way the poem ends, Shelley says if winter comes, can spring be far behind? Do you see any problem with that, the problem is with the conditional if, he does not say when winter comes, can spring be far behind, he says if winter comes, can spring be far behind, my question then would be if there are certain uncertainty at work here? Is the Shelley uncertain whether will be spring it all, if winter comes, can spring be far behind, suggesting that winter may or may not come and if winter does not comes spring will not come.

He is not sing when winter comes spring will follow, so there is a certain amount of ambiguity, even might say ambivalence about Shelleys representation of nature as we have seen in the case of all of them, if you pay attention to what have been saying therefore and this is transitional argument not necessary about Shelley, there is no way we can argue a case that all Romantics had a uniform attitude towards the nature.

In many cases we actually have seen and have chosen the except that have been upon your slide with some amount of care, the romantic attitudes towards nature is often very ambivalence, so in Shelley's case there is nature and ally, nature is cause a metaphysical, nature is cause a mystical, which is also destructive, there is a fair amount of uncertain about nature itself, Coleridge having said that Oh wonderful nature, which inspires me, then says, but I cannot hope from a these external forms, those things are inside me.



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Nature is an ally and even maybe a reflection of himself, his character. This is why Shelley uses Nature to interchange his own identity: as a plucked violet, a sensitive plant, a skylark, the wind.



In "To a Skylark", Shelley begins by praising the bird's flight of the skylark, but then states, "Bird thou never wert". He transforms the embodied bird into a disembodied voice that soars.

Slide



Bird thou never wert,  
...  
Like a cloud of fire;  
The blue deep thou wingest,  
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.  
...

In the golden lightning  
Of the sunken sun,  
O'er which clouds are bright'ning,  
Thou dost float and run;  
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.  
...  
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight,  
...  
Until we hardly see, we feel that it is there.



So nature is an ally and maybe even a reflection of himself, his character, which is why Shelley uses nature to interchange on identity as a plucked violate, and sensitive plant, a skylark, the wind.

In one of his most famous poems to a skylark, Shelley begins by praising the birds flight, the birds soaring flight and then he states, bird thou never wert, that is, you never a bird, he transforms the embodied body to a dis-embodied voice and then he will say and here is on your slide, a set of lines from a Shelleys to a skylark, having said you are soaring high, he then says, but you never a bird like a cloud of fire, the blue deep how thou wingest and singing still dost soar and soaring ever singest.

In the Golden lightning of the sun sunken over which clouds are brightening, thou dost float and run like an unbodied joy, whose race is just begun and there is a key phrase in there and unbodied joy, so is he saying the bird is not material, and he will emphasise this, thou art unseen but yet I hear thy shrill delight, notice the image moving from the visual to the oral, from the ocular to the oral, I do not see you, I hear you until we hardly see but then he says he feels that it is there.

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Shelley evokes human characteristics that are the very contrast of the bird's :

And pine for what is not –  
Our sincerest laughter  
With some pain is fraught –  
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.



Shelley, evokes human characteristics that are the very contrast of the birds and then he would say in his famous lines, and pine for what is not, our sincerest laughter with some pain is fraught, our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought, so Shelley is dis-embodied so to speak the bird.

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In *The Sensitive Plant*

The three parts of the poem describe a magical garden tended by a magic lady through the four seasons.

The Sensitive Plant is distinct from the other plants and, therefore is doomed to solitude.

Slide



A Sensitive Plant in a garden grew,  
And the young winds fed it with silver dew,  
And it opened its fan-like leaves to the light.  
And closed them beneath the kisses of Night.  
And the Spring arose on the garden fair,  
Like the Spirit of Love felt everywhere;  
And each flower and herb on Earth's dark breast  
Rose from the dreams of its wintry rest.  
But none ever trembled and panted with bliss  
In the garden, the field, or the wilderness,  
Like a doe in the noontide with love's sweet  
want,  
As the companionless Sensitive Plant.



After the mistress' death, the garden "became cold and foul/Like the corpse of her who had been its soul". Not only was there no one to take care of it, but autumn and winter soon settled over it and the plants gave in one after the other. Instead, ugly and parasitic plants sprang from the soil infesting the garden

Slide



And plants, at whose names the verse feels loath,  
Filled the place with a monstrous undergrowth,  
Prickly, and pulpous, and blistering, and blue,  
Livid, and starred with a lurid dew.//



The sensitive plant another major Shelley poem the three parts of the poem describe a magical garden, they are attended by a magical lady through the four seasons, then the sensitive plant is made, represented as distinct from the other dance and doomed to solitude, here is the passage from a sensitive plant, it is a special, unique thing, it is been cultivated with great care of magical lady, but when the except ends he speaks about the plant is companion less in isolation.

Then what happens the mistress, the one whose tending the garden dies and the garden, he says, became cold and foul like the corpse of her who had been its soul, the garden became cold and foul like the corpse of her who had been its soul, not only was there no one to take care of it, but the seasons come and go, and soon the plants die, eventually the beauty of sensitive plant is no more ugly and parasitic plants sprang from the same soil infesting the

garden, well, Shelley says at coming up on your slide, the continuation passages from the sensitive plant.

Plants at whose names the verse feels loath, filled the place with a monstrous undergrowth, prickly and pulpous and blistering and blue, livid and starred with a lurid dew.

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In *Mont Blanc*, Shelley speaks of the impressions of the "universe of things", that is, external Nature which flows through the passive universal mind, exactly as a great river flows through a ravine. Later the ravine of the River Arve, which emerges from Mont Blanc, is imaged as the universal mind, and the River Arve is described as the "universe of things."



So seasons mutability the plants the hymn, now we move to his major Mont Blanc, where Shelley speaks of the impressions of the universe of things, that is external nature which flows through the passive universal mind, exactly as a great river water flows through a ravine, later the ravine of the river Arve, which emerges from Mont Blanc is imaged as the universal mind and the river Arve itself is described as the universe of things.

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Like Coleridge and Wordsworth, in the first two sections of the *Mont Blanc* Shelley has described the state of the universe as one in which *active* impressions impinge on a *passive* universal mind, which then produces “the sense sublime” (as Wordsworth called it). In the interactions between mind and matter has arisen a third quality, the *human* mind. Thus the human mind, or consciousness, is the product of an exchange, a transaction, between Nature and mind.



Later he discovers the true *meaning* of Mont Blanc. It teaches skepticism, some faith. The mountain teaches "to repeal/Large codes of fraud and woe And here the poet is the key player:



Thou hast a voice, great Mountain, to repeal  
Large codes of fraud and woe; not understood  
By all, but which the wise, and great, and good  
Interpret, or make felt, or deeply feel.



Like Coleridge and Wordsworth in the first two sections of the Mont Blanc, Shelley has described the state of the universe as one in which active impressions impinge on a passive universal mind, which then produces what Wordsworth would call the sense sublime, so there is an active, dynamic universe which acts upon the passive universal mind to produce something, it is in the interactions between mind and matter that arises a third quality, the human mind, so the human mind. Our consciousness is abroad of an exchange, a transaction between nature and mind.

Later, he discovers the true meaning of Mont Blanc, it teaches skepticism, he teaches some faith, the mountain teaches to repeal large course of fraud and woe, he says, and here the poet is a key player.

Coming up on when your slide Mont Blanc the following four lines, thou hast a voice, great mountain to repeal large codes of fraud and woe, not understood by all and then he says, but which the wise and great and go to interpret or make felt or deeply feel, so Shelley is actually talking about imagination, but also knowledge about meaning making, the meaning of the mountain going through his the mountains voice is not, he says understood all but some, the wise and the great and the good can do something.

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Power is immutable:



Power dwells apart in its tranquillity,  
Remote, serene, and inaccessible:  
And *this*, the naked countenance of earth,  
On which I gaze, even these primeval mountains  
Teach the adverting mind.



Power in the case of the mountain is immutable, power dwells apart in its tranquillity, remote, serene and inaccessible, what is your reading out on your slide is session from the next part of the poem Mont Blanc, power dwells apart in its tranquillity, remote, serene and inaccessible and this the naked countenance of earth on which I gaze, even this primeval mountains, teaching adverting mind.



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The poem concludes by speaking of the human imagination, its ability to reflect and refract the mountain.

The secret Strength of things  
Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome  
Of Heaven is as a law, inhabits thee!  
And what were thou, and earth, and stars, and sea,  
If to the human mind's imaginings  
Silence and solitude were vacancy?



The poem concludes by speaking of the human imagination, its ability to reflect and refract the mountain, so what is saying here. Let us look at the last lines of Shelley's poem before we conclude today, what were thou, he is asking the mountain, what were thou and earth, and stars and sea, if to the human minds imaginings silence and solitude were vacancy, the poem concludes by a major, with the major argument that the human imagination reflects and refracts the mountain, nature exists gas nature is power, yes, it is immutable, yes, but it is imagination in the human mind, in the human consciousness that finally interprets, so Shelley is actually giving primacy to the human imagination, nature maybe active, nature may be dynamic, maybe force full, but it is ultimately the power of the imagination itself. Thank you.