

AQA English GCSE

Poetry: Worlds and Lives

Lines Written in Early Spring – *William Wordsworth*

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LINES WRITTEN IN EARLY SPRING

William Wordsworth

Brief Summary

Wordsworth reflects on the beauty and harmony of nature **contrasted** with the corruption and cruelty of mankind. Sitting in a peaceful **natural setting**, he feels both joy and sadness: joy at nature's vitality, but sorrow at how humanity has lost its connection to that natural goodness. The poem explores how far people have strayed from their **innate moral and spiritual bond** with the natural world.

Synopsis

- The speaker sits in a **natural setting**, surrounded by flowers, birds and trees.
- The calm and harmony of the scene stir both pleasure and sadness within him.
- He recalls how nature is part of **God's creation** and thus **innately** good.
- This reminds him that humanity, too, was created by God and intended to live in harmony with nature.
- He **laments** that humans have broken this connection through greed, conflict and industrialisation.
- The poem ends with a quiet **moral reflection**: if God created joy and unity in nature, it is deeply wrong that mankind should destroy it.



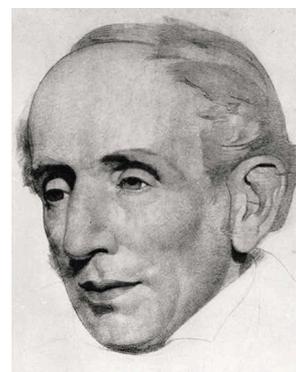
Context

Romanticism

Wordsworth was a leading figure of the **Romantic movement**; a literary and artistic movement (late 18th to early 19th century) that emphasised **emotion**, **imagination**, and the **spiritual value of nature**. Romantic poets reacted against the **Industrial Revolution**, which they believed was destroying both the natural world and human morality. They valued simplicity, individual experience, and a deep connection to nature as a source of truth and beauty.

The Industrial Revolution

When Wordsworth wrote this poem (1798), Britain was undergoing massive **industrial and urban change**. Factories, pollution and **mechanised labour** were replacing rural communities and traditional ways of life. The poem's sorrowful tone reflects Wordsworth's unease at this: the idea that humankind's progress comes at the cost of its moral purity and spiritual wellbeing.



Religious and Philosophical Beliefs

Wordsworth's poetry often suggests a **pantheistic view**: the belief that God is present within all living things. In *Lines Written in Early Spring*, the natural world reflects divine harmony, whereas human actions (war, greed, exploitation) appear sinful and corrupt. The poem expresses both faith and disappointment: faith in nature's **divine** order, and disappointment in humanity's failure to live up to it.

The Lyrical Ballads (1798)

This poem was first published in *Lyrical Ballads*, a collection co-written by Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It marked a **revolution** in poetry – focusing on ordinary language, common life, and natural emotion rather than **artificial** style. Like many poems in the collection, *Lines Written in Early Spring* reflects Wordsworth's desire to “trace the primary laws of our nature” through simple, reflective observation.

The title “Lines Written in Early Spring”

“Lines Written” conveys immediacy and sincerity, suggesting a spontaneous outpouring of feeling.

The simplicity of the title reflects Wordsworth's belief that poetry should capture ordinary language and authentic emotion.

Lines Written in Early Spring

“Early Spring” symbolises rebirth and purity, reinforcing the poem's focus on renewal and innocence.

Perspective and tone

The poem is written in the **first person**, giving it a deeply personal and reflective tone. The speaker acts as a **moral observer**, moved by emotion rather than intellect. His **tone shifts** from gentle delight to **melancholy lament** – a movement from harmony to **disillusionment**. This **duality** mirrors Romantic ideals: emotion as the path to truth, and sorrow as the price of awareness.



Lines Written in Early Spring

Hyperbole indicates the overwhelming harmony and unity in nature. Nature is presented as musical & ordered.

Personification suggests Nature forms a spiritual bond with humanity. Emphasises the Romantic idea of unity between humans and nature sharing a deep, innate connection.

Natural imagery- wreaths suggest continuity and harmony.

More personification of nature- reflects Wordsworth's belief in nature's spiritual vitality

The speaker still gets joy from the bird's playful and innocent movements indicated by the verbs 'hopped' and 'played'. Nature is often linked to innocence in Romanticism.

Highlights Romantic intuition to find beauty everywhere.

Repetition from line 8 emphasises his sorrow about humanity.

I heard a **thousand blended notes**,
While in a **grove I sate reclined**,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.

Through **primrose tufts**, in that sweet bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;
And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me **hopped and played**,
Their thoughts I cannot measure:—
But the least motion which they made
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

If this belief from heaven be sent,
If such be **Nature's holy plan**,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man?

Pastoral setting creates a calm, reflective atmosphere. "Reclined" suggests ease and openness to nature.

Juxtaposition highlights Romantic melancholy. Beauty in nature triggers reflection on sorrow.

Direct emotional expression shows disappointment in humanity. Highlights contrast between natural goodness and human corruption.

Shows personal belief and intuition, reflecting Romantic prioritisation of emotion over reason. Shows a spiritual trust in nature, as though it is a religion.

Acknowledges limits of human understanding.

Personification of the twigs implies they actively seek pleasure. Seasonal imagery conveys renewal and a new beginning.

Religious language presents nature as sacred and divinely guided.

Rhetorical question shows the contrast between natural harmony and human cruelty.



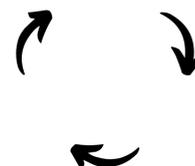
Structure

Regular Form

- Six **quatrains of alternating rhyme** (ABAB) reflect harmony and balance – mirroring the natural order Wordsworth describes.
- The steady rhythm of **iambic tetrameter** (four beats per line) gives a calm, measured pace.

Cyclical Movement

- The poem begins and ends with the **refrain** “*What man has made of man,*” enclosing the joyful observations within sorrow.
- This **cyclical pattern** mirrors the speaker’s emotional journey: joy → reflection → grief → moral realisation.



Contrast Between Nature and Humanity

- The first four stanzas describe joy and life in nature.
- The final stanza returns to moral reflection, disrupting the serenity – symbolising how human corruption mars natural perfection.

Language and Imagery

Personification

Wordsworth **personifies nature** throughout: flowers “*enjoy,*” twigs “*spread,*” and birds “*play.*” This technique suggests that nature possesses its own spirit or consciousness, strengthening the sense of **unity** and divine design.



Religious Imagery

Wordsworth fuses spirituality with nature: phrases like “*Heaven,*” “*holy plan,*” and “*faith*” elevate the natural world into sacred territory. The effect is to make nature not simply beautiful, but morally and **spiritually instructive**.

Natural Lexis

The frequent use of **natural nouns** – “*primrose,*” “*periwinkle,*” “*twigs,*” “*breezy air*” – reflects Wordsworth’s Romantic belief that simple, sensory detail can awaken deep emotion and moral thought.

Juxtaposition

Wordsworth **contrasts** the harmony of nature with the damage caused by humans. The “*birds around me hopped and played*” and “*twigs*” that “*catch the breezy air*” create a calm, joyful scene, which is undercut by the speaker’s sadness in “*What man has made of man*”. This contrast makes human corruption feel even more tragic because it disrupts a world that seems naturally peaceful.



Themes

Connection to Nature and Spiritual Harmony

Wordsworth presents nature as a source of harmony, joy, and spiritual order. Flowers, birds, and trees are shown instinctively sharing in pleasure, suggesting a world governed by a **“holy plan.”** Through **religious language** such as **“faith”** and **“heaven,”** nature is elevated beyond the physical and presented as morally and spiritually instructive. The poem reflects the **Romantic** belief that closeness to nature nurtures emotional balance and spiritual wellbeing.

Humanity’s Moral Decline

In contrast to nature’s harmony, Wordsworth **laments** humanity’s moral failure. The repeated line **“what man has made of man”** conveys sorrow and disappointment, suggesting that society has become cruel and destructive. While nature follows a **divine** and **harmonious** order, human behaviour is portrayed as corrupted by greed and violence, implying that moral decline results from humanity’s separation from the natural world.

Innocence and Natural Joy

Nature is associated with innocence and instinctive happiness. Birds **“hopped and played,”** flowers **“enjoy”** the air, and even the smallest movements appear filled with pleasure. This natural joy contrasts sharply with human suffering, highlighting the **tragedy** of lost innocence and suggesting that true **contentment** comes from simplicity and harmony rather than ambition or progress.



Reflection and Emotional Awareness

The poem shows how quiet reflection leads to moral understanding. The speaker’s experience of nature produces both pleasure and sadness, **embodying** the **Romantic** belief that deep emotion reveals truth. As the speaker becomes more aware of nature’s goodness, he also recognises humanity’s failure, suggesting that **emotional awareness** brings both insight and sorrow.



Comparisons

Shall earth no more inspire thee – Emily Brontë

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both explore human connection to nature and the emotional or moral consequences of disconnection. Wordsworth mourns “What man has made of man” in contrast to the harmony of nature, while Brontë shows the listener as isolated from the world, “ever moving / In regions dark”. Personification of nature creates a spiritual or restorative presence in both poems. Wordsworth gives agency to flowers and birds, while Brontë imbues nature with active, nurturing power (“I know my mountain breezes / Enchant and soothe thee still”). Both reflect a contemplative, reflective tone, with moments of melancholy and moral or emotional insight. Each poem links observation of the natural world to human introspection or moral reflection.
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wordsworth is reflective and generalised, commenting on humanity as a whole; Brontë is intimate, addressing one individual listener directly. Brontë suggests potential emotional restoration through nature’s intervention (“Return and dwell with me”), whereas Wordsworth ends on unresolved lamentation. Tone: Wordsworth blends delight with melancholy; Brontë mixes melancholy with gentle urging and hope.

With Birds You’re Never Lonely – Raymond Antrobus

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both stress the importance of connecting with the natural world for emotional or spiritual wellbeing. Wordsworth observes birds and flowers to reflect on humanity’s failings, while Antrobus contrasts urban life with rural, natural spaces to highlight joy and community. Nature is presented as morally and emotionally significant. Wordsworth sees harmony in nature as part of a “holy plan,” while Antrobus shows how birds and trees provide stability, identity, and continuity. Both use sensory and vivid natural imagery. Wordsworth’s primroses, twigs, and birds are detailed; Antrobus describes “sun-syrupped” trees and vibrant birds to emphasise presence and life.
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wordsworth focuses on human moral failings and universal reflection, while Antrobus is more immediate and personal, showing how nature fosters community and individual identity.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wordsworth's nature is spiritual and idealised; Antrobus' nature is tangible, playful, and culturally embedded in human activity. • Structure differs: Wordsworth uses regular quatrains and cyclical reflection; Antrobus' modern free verse mirrors lived experience and urban rhythm.
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In a London Drawing Room – George Eliot

Similarities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both explore the effect of external environments on human emotions. Wordsworth contrasts nature with humanity's moral failings; Eliot contrasts urban life with emotional isolation. • Both suggest disconnection from the world can lead to sadness or moral reflection. Wordsworth reflects on human cruelty; Eliot shows individuals "all hurry on & look upon the ground," ignoring each other. • Observation is central to both poems. Wordsworth reflects on natural scenes; Eliot observes urban behaviours.
Differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wordsworth contrasts moral goodness in nature with human failings, whereas Eliot portrays the city as restrictive, joyless, and monotonous. • Tone: Wordsworth balances gentle delight with melancholic reflection; Eliot is critical, detached, and observant. • Wordsworth's speaker finds harmony and consolation in nature, whereas Eliot highlights isolation, monotony, and emotional disengagement. • Structure: Wordsworth's regular quatrains mirror natural harmony; Eliot's more descriptive, flowing style mirrors the constant movement and monotony of city life. • Nature vs urban setting: Wordsworth elevates the natural world as restorative; Eliot shows the artificial urban environment as limiting and alienating.

