**‘Lines Written in Early Spring’**

**William Wordsworth**

**Summary**

* The speaker sits alone beneath a tree in a ‘sweet mood’ (3) whilst enjoying the beauty of the natural world and listening to birdsong
* The speaker reflects on what ‘man has made of man’ (8) and laments that human nature is characterised by disharmony and conflict
* The focus then switches back the natural world and the speaker observes flowers and birds existing in a state of peace and ‘pleasure’ (16)
* Finally, the speaker wonders why humans seem unable to live together in similar harmony and suggests that this is a ‘reason to lament’ (23)

**Key Aspects of the Poem**

A The **vocabulary** used by Wordsworth emphasises the harmony of the natural world. The **verb** ‘trailed’ (10) suggests that flower blooms rest delicately in the grove, whilst the **verbs** ‘hopped’ and ‘played’ (13) indicate that the birds move with a sense of carefree joy.

B Wordsworth **personifies** Nature to highlight the destructive influence of humans. Whilst Nature creates ‘pleasant thoughts’ (3) and ‘fair works’ (5), the destructive actions of ‘man’ (8) are responsible only for ‘lament’ (23).

C The poem is a **ballad**, which is a **poetic form** traditionally used to explore and convey strong emotions. In this case, the strong emotions are connected to the natural world. Each **stanza** is a quatrain and follows a regular ABAB rhyme scheme to give the poem a song-like quality.

**Key Feature: Repetition [AO2]**

Wordsworth **repeats** the line ‘What man has made of man’ (8, 24) at the end of the poem, but phrases it as a **rhetorical question**. This has the effect of inviting the reader to reflect on the unsatisfactory ways humans typically behave towards each other and how they fail to meaningfully engage with the world around them. In this sense, Wordsworth makes a case for change because he highlights how much there is to be gained from fostering a deeper, more meaningful connection to Nature’s ‘fair works’ (5) and ‘holy plan’ (22). The **repetition** of the abstract noun ‘pleasure’ (16, 20) is also important because it reinforces this call to action.

**Key Context: The Industrial Revolution [AO3]**

‘Lines Written in Early Spring’ was published as part of a larger collection of poems in 1798. Britain was going through the **Industrial Revolution** at the time, which meant that cities were rapidly expanding. As a result, many people continued to migrate away from the countryside to find work in the factories and mills. The living conditions they endured were often cramped, unsanitary and miserable. As someone who believed in the restorative power of nature, Wordsworth was greatly concerned about this widespread **urbanisation**. He felt that it was destroying the natural world and disconnecting people from their greatest source ‘pleasure’(16) and fulfilment.

**Key Context: Romanticism [AO3]**

Wordsworth (1770-1850) is regarded as a **Romantic poet**, which means that his work is characterised by a reverence for the **natural world** and a strong belief in **individual liberty**. In a period of significant social and political change, Wordsworth felt that it was his duty to help improve the way people experienced the world around them. ‘Lines Written in Early Spring’ captures both his love of the natural world and his concerns about a widespread disconnection from it.

**Key Quotation: ‘I heard a thousand blended notes’ [AO2]**

The phrase ‘I heard a thousand blended notes’ (1) is a vivid evocation of the birdsong the speaker listens to at the start of the poem. It helps to establish a meditative **tone** and immediately conveys the beauty of the natural world. The number of a ‘thousand’ is purposefully **exaggerated** to highlight the richness and complexity of the sound, whilst also signalling the abundance of life in the ‘grove’ (2). Unsurprisingly, the ‘notes’ (1) fill the speaker with ‘pleasant thoughts’ (3) and a sense of peace. The ‘blended’ (1) quality of the birdsong is a particularly significant detail because it suggests a sense of unity, which reflects Wordsworth’s belief that the natural world is defined by harmony and connectedness. In **contrast**, at the end of the poem, the speaker recognises a ‘reason to lament’ (23) in the failure of humans to be guided by ‘Nature’s holy plan’ (22).

**Top Tip: Language Analysis [AO2]**

Wordsworth believed that poetry should be both **accessible** and **relevant** to a wide range of readers, not just a privileged minority. In an essay called ‘Preface to the Lyrical Ballads’, published in 1800, he stated that poetry should be composed in ‘the language really spoken by men’ (by which he meant ordinary people). This belief is reflected in the language of the poem: the vocabulary chosen by Wordsworth is relatively simple rather than ‘highbrow’ or complex, but is nonetheless precise and richly evocative.