

"upon westminster bridge" by william wordsworth essay sample

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“ Upon Westminster Bridge” by William Wordsworth Essay Sample

William Wordsworth was a leading figure in the Romantic movement and although many of his poems deal with rural themes Upon Westminster Bridge describes a very urban landscape.

The poet William Wordsworth was one of the major poets of the Romantic movement in Britain, and his poetry is generally focused on nature and man's relationship with the natural environment. Many of his poems are focused on the landscapes of the Lake District, paying particular attention to the power of nature and the ordinary people living and working on the land. This poem is perhaps a little unusual for Wordsworth as it takes the city of London as its subject.

Romanticism William Wordsworth is an important Romantic poet. Along with poets like Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth's Romantic poetry focuses on feelings and emotions, often those provoked by interacting with nature. Other aspects of Romantic poetry are creativity and a less formal approach to the composition of poems than the period immediately before Romanticism.

Subject The poem is about the experience of crossing Westminster Bridge early in the morning and seeing the calmness and beauty of the city of London. The poem describes the city in a very positive way, communicating its power and 'splendour'.

Wordsworth suggests that the view of the city is a rival for anything naturally occurring: 'Earth has not anything to show more fair' is the opening line.

The use of the word 'smokeless' in line 8 gives the reader a clue about why this scene is so powerful. Under normal circumstances, the smoke from homes and factories would have obscured the view of the city; it is as if the speaker is experiencing the true beauty of the city for the first time.

Upon Westminster Bridge is a sonnet praising the beauty of London and comparing it favourably to the wonders of nature.

StructureThe poem is a sonnet, a format most commonly associated with love poetry, which reflects Wordsworth's feelings for his subject matter. Sonnets tend to have 14 lines and a regular rhyme scheme, and this poem follows that pattern, although not strictly. Romantic poets rejected the confines of pre-determined structure.

Wordsworth delays revealing the subject of the poem until the fourth line; he creates anticipation in the reader using this technique. This structure reflects the speaker's own realisation of the scene before him.

Wordsworth writes with an intense passionate in praise of London.

Attitudes and ideasIn this poem Wordsworth links the city of London to the power and beauty of nature. The speaker is dismissive of those who cannot see things as he does: he describes anyone who is not moved by the scene he is presenting in the poem as being "Dull ... of the soul".

Towards the end of the poem the speaker exclaims " Dear God!", indicating the power of this experience. As with Wordsworth's nature poems, the speaker's reaction to what he is encountering reveals a powerful spiritual effect.

You may like to compare Upon Westminster Bridge to London by William Blake.

ComparisonIf this poem is considered alongside William Blake's London, the differing attitudes are striking. Whilst this poem is positive, Blake is concerned with the negatives of life in London. Wordsworth here is focusing on the city in the morning, and does not mention seeing people. Blake's poem is about the effects of the city on its inhabitants.

Wordsworth's line " The river glideth at his own sweet will' is arguably a conscious rejection of Blake" description of the " charter'd Thames". Unlike Blake's speaker, the speaker in this poem seems to believe in the power of nature to persist alongside the man-made city, even that it is perfected by the city.

Sample AnswerThe poem begins by asserting that what is about to be described (the city, we learn on line 4) surpasses anything else on Earth, and that anyone who can pass by " A sight so touching" must have a " Dull ... soul".

The city is personified as a person dressing in "The beauty of the morning" as if it is a "garment". This suggests that the city is using nature to become perfected.

The city described in the poem is "glittering in the smokeless air", which perhaps shows us that this occasion is exceptional and that normally the "majesty" of the city is hidden by the smoke.

The city has a stillness and a calm which the speaker claims cannot be bettered by nature. The speaker celebrates the size and beauty of the city and is in awe of its appearance in the early morning sunlight.

The river is also personified, moving calmly and with full control through the city. The speaker presents the city as if it is incapable of being restricted or controlled by anyone.

The final lines of the poem offer a strong sense of the potential the speaker sees in the city. It is as if it is a great beast which is resting, implying that soon it will be transformed upon waking.

There are no people described in the poem other than the speaker, suggesting that even cities can offer the space to reflect on one's reaction to the environment, an important element of Romantic poetry.

Reference: "Upon Westminster Bridge" by William Wordsworth