

# Love's Philosophy

Percy Bysshe Shelley

## OVERALL SUMMARY

The poem's speaker uses the processes of nature as a means of persuading a second party to engage in a relationship with them. This is done by highlighting the way in which many aspects of the natural world work together in harmony and intertwine with each other.

## STANZA SUMMARY

- The poem's speaker comments on the **duality present within nature**: they observe that within nature, everything is interconnected, and question why humanity should not be the same.
- As the poem continues, the speaker begins to use more blatant language, almost describing nature as one would a human relationship. More physical elements of human relationships are drawn attention to here, further emphasising **the relationship between humans and nature**. The reader comes to understand that the speaker is using this as a persuasive argument to a supposed lover that humans should exist in relationships in the same way nature does.

## CONTEXT

- Percy Bysshe Shelley was a popular Romantic poet known for his lyrical and long-form verse.
- He had two wives, the second being author of 'Frankenstein', Mary Shelley.
- Growing up in the countryside in the late 1700s, Shelley learnt to fish and hunt in meadows and would often spend time with friend, Thomas Medwin, surveying surrounding landscapes. Consequently, it is **unsurprising that nature plays such a huge role in his work**.
- Percy Shelley wrote in the early 1800s, just as the Romantic period was coming into full swing. During this era, artists were keen to express **their dislike of the spread of industrialism thanks to the Industrial Revolution**. During this political period, many social changes were also being made, including the increase in calls for the **abolition of slavery** as well as the **French Revolution**, so many were being inspired to voice their objections. Shelley utilised key devices of the period in much of his poetry, rendering some of it controversial.
- It is also very typical for Shelley, a Romantic poet, to talk about nature and being **sublime** as the Romantics focused on how **awe-inspiring** nature was.

# LOVE'S PHILOSOPHY

Percy Bysshe Shelley

The fountains mingle with the river  
And the rivers with the ocean,  
The winds of heaven mix for ever  
With a sweet emotion;  
Nothing in the world is single;  
All things by a law divine  
In one spirit meet and mingle.  
Why not I with thine?—

See the mountains kiss high heaven  
And the waves clasp one another;  
No sister-flower would be forgiven  
If it disdained its brother;  
And the sunlight clasps the earth  
And the moonbeams kiss the sea:  
What is all this sweet work worth  
If thou kiss not me?

# Key Themes & Analysis

## INTERCONNECTIVITY

- Like many other romantic poems, 'Love's Philosophy' **relies heavily upon the personification of nature** to portray its intended message. In this sense, **the interconnection between nature and humanity is actively acknowledged** by the line **"All things by a law divine/ In one spirit meet and mingle"**; a thought-provoking, interactive take that encourages readers to embrace the concept and feel as though they are connected to the poet.
- During stanza one, **powerful descriptors of an idyllic setting** such as **"sweet"**, **"heaven"**, **"divine"** and **"fountains"** develop a semantic field of a higher, divine universe, alluding to a **spiritually superior reality**.
- This idea is reinforced by the seventh line, **"In one spirit meet and mingle"**, (note the inclusion of the noun **"spirit"** itself) suggesting that the coming together of these natural elements is what produces the **mentioned** heavenly experience.
- This **allusion to divinity** continues during the second stanza with the mention of **"Heaven"** interacting with the **"mountains"**.
- The **connotations to religion** here develop the speaker's argument as they claim that even God insists upon the joining of them with their partner. This could also act a reassurance of pure intentions towards the poem's subject.
- Interestingly, the noun **"mountains"** in line one of stanza two rhymes with the noun **"fountains"** in line one of the first stanza. The connection between these elements across the poem as opposed to within two lines demonstrates the **interconnection of all aspects of nature**, not only those that literally exist together.
- Repetition of the verbs **"clasp"** and **"kiss"** in the second stanza not only **bestows nature with human qualities**, but it enhances the sense of intimacy presented between different elements of the natural world.
- The second stanza places particular emphasis on the **semantic field of human relationships intertwined with the descriptions of nature**.
- The consonance (repetition of consonant sounds) visible during line 7, the verbs **"meet"** and **"mingle"** both beginning with the letter 'm', not only displays a **blatant recognition** of sameness and harmony but brings about a smooth and satisfying rhythm that **underlines this prevalent idea**.

## HUMAN QUALITIES/ RELATIONSHIPS

- **Repetition** is a key device used to emphasise **powerful verbs** that highlight the message of the poem. This is demonstrated by the verbs "mingle" in the first stanza and "kiss" in the second. These verbs, along with the adjective "single", reflect the words often used **colloquially** to describe human relationships. Additionally, "mingle" and "kiss" refer to a **sense of union and togetherness** – an aspect of nature that the speaker draws attention to.
- The poem commences with **aquatic imagery**, the speaker using nouns like "fountains", "Ocean" and "rivers". This is significant as it sets the tone of the poem, the **free-flowing behaviour representative of a yearning to be free and limitless spiritually**. This fluidity is emphasised by the **enjambement** between the first and second lines of the poem and is perhaps **a nod to the political controversy of the Romantic movement**, a **pivotal** (causing a lot of significant change) moment in time with regard to **political movements advocating for freedom**, for example, the French Revolution and the abolition of slavery.
- Additionally, **images of water can be considered representations of the unpredictable nature of human passion and emotion** – the **meandering**, fast-flowing river constantly changes direction and can alter its state according to seasons or time of day.
- The vast "Ocean" conceals a **multitude of undiscovered secrets**, reflecting the depth of the human soul and a desire to get to explore a person completely.
- The religious aspect of the poem also exists through the reference to "sister" ("sister- flower") and "brother". Not only could this be an **explicit reference** to the relationships between humans, whether that be blood-related siblings or good friends, but it also **resembles the addressing of members of the Church to one another as 'sister'/'brother'**. As religion itself is a concept crafted by humanity this aspect of the poem itself solidifies the closeness of humanity with nature.

# Form

## IAMBIC TETRAMETER

- This term describes the inclusion of 8 syllables per line, normally alternating between stressed and unstressed.
- This regular form continues throughout the poem's entirety, placing emphasis of the **existence of the natural world as one, interconnected body**. The ways in which elements of nature mingle with each other reflect the way that **humans co-exist and depend** on each other to live a fulfilling life.

## ABAB RHYME SCHEME

- This regular rhyme scheme along with regular meter develops the notion that **human behaviour and nature's behaviour are one and the same**.
- For example: ***"Nothing in the world is single; / All things by a law divine / In one spirit meet and mingle. / Why not I with thine?"***. This idea is reiterated here by the inclusion of vocabulary reminiscent of 'dating' amongst humans, such as **'mingle' and 'single'** (used in the sense of someone without a partner, but applied to nature.)

# Structure

## END- STOPS

- This poem is **heavily punctuated**, involving frequent use of **end-stopping**.
- The end-stops, however, occur only at the end on every two lines, excluding that which states that **"Nothing in the world is single"**. This somewhat groups each pair of lines together, demonstrating, via the poem's structure, that nothing should exist alone.
- The final line of each stanza is written using the **interrogative tone**, revealing the intent of the speaker who is trying to **justify their desires using the laws of nature** in order to persuade another to engage in a relationship with them.

# Comparisons

I Think Of Thee	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
<b>Similar</b>	<p><b>Nature to portray intense</b></p> <p>feelings of love</p> <p>Both poems focus on an expression of love for another person through the comparison of human emotion to the behaviour of nature. Although they place focus on different aspects of the natural world, they both appear to highlight a certain <b>interconnectivity</b> between the elements of nature that is reflected in human relationships.</p>	<p><b>The form of both poems is regular relative to their genres</b></p> <p>In 'I Think Of Thee', this constitutes a 14-line poem written in iambic pentameter, typical of a sonnet that would be used as an expression of affection, whilst, in Love's Philosophy, a constant ABAB rhyme scheme alludes to the unwavering continuation of nature's processes as well as the interconnection of all its elements that work together.</p>	<p><b>Enjambement</b></p> <p>Both poems use a range of punctuation for dramatic effect, including a mixture of enjambement and end-stopping. In 'Love's Philosophy', this is likely representative of an overwhelming of the senses as the speaker expresses profound levels of affection, as well as the variety of nature's features coming together to create a balanced and functional universe. In 'I Think of Thee', this, again, could point to an overwhelming of the senses, as the speaker professes intense feelings of desire and longing towards their partner.</p>	<p>Both Browning and Shelley were born around the start of the Romantic era, using poetic devices that were typical of the period.</p>
<b>Different</b>	<p>Religious connotations that exist within 'Love's Philosophy' are not present during Browning's poem. Additionally, the intention of Shelley's work is to persuade a potential partner that the speaker is worthy of their love, whereas Browning's speaker simply comments on their feelings for their pre-existing romantic partner.</p>	<p>Whilst Love's Philosophy follows a consistent metre and a regular, ABAB rhyme scheme, 'I Think Of Thee' follows the typical structure of a sonnet, consisting of 14 lines in iambic pentameter with a slightly irregular rhyme scheme, demonstrating an underlying conflict within the speaker regarding the dynamic of their relationship. There is more uncertainty in this poem as readers are unsure as to whether the speaker is the more or less dominant force in the relationship and are given an idea of co-dependence.</p>	<p>There is no use of the interrogative tone in Browning's sonnet like there is in Shelley's poem, but she does make use of the exclamatory tone to place emphasis on her personal relationship with the subject. There is an example of caesura within Browning's sonnet that does not make an appearance in 'Love's Philosophy'.</p>	<p>It could be argued that Shelley's writing, particularly during this poem, includes more underlying controversy than that of Browning. Additionally, Shelley's poem is a lot less personal, as the speaker addresses a fictional figure, whereas Browning is likely commenting on her relationship with the poet, Robert Browning.</p>

Before You Were Mine	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
<b>Similar</b>	<p><b>Religion</b></p> <p>Both poems make reference to religious ideas, Duffy, who was raised as a Catholic, mentioning the 'mass' that her mother attended in her youth and Shelley using a semantic field of religion to introduce an idea of pure intentions and a suggestion that the union of him with his partner is 'God's Plan'.</p>	Not the same	Both poems are quite heavily punctuated to induce a certain effect. In both, each stanza contains a line written in the interrogative tone as the speaker directly addresses the person to whom the poem is devoted.	Both of these poems were very much inspired by the childhood of each poet – Duffy in the sense that she recognised the responsibilities taken on by her mother since having children, whilst Shelley was almost hyper-aware of his natural surrounding after growing up exploring the countryside.
<b>Different</b>	<p>Shelley compares human relationships to nature to emphasise the ways in which they are connected</p> <p>Duffy also draws attention to issues regarding the restricted lives of women during the 1950s as she was more focused on these social issues as opposed to those during the Romantic Era. Differing from this, Shelley subtly underlines his dislike of industrialisation through his celebration of nature – a common attitude during the movement.</p>	<p>"Love's Philosophy" includes a very regular ABAB rhyme scheme along with regular metre (iambic tetrameter). In this way, Shelley highlights the togetherness of nature and the reliance of certain elements on each other for survival and the continuation of natural processes. This completely contrasts Duffy's poem that includes no regular rhyme scheme or metre. This helps to underline the underlying sense of resentment (bitterness) the speaker holds towards the happiness of their mother prior to their birth.</p>	Shelley distributes punctuation in a more pre-meditated way, his use of end-stops grouping pairs of lines together, whilst Duffy deliberately avoids this organised approach, giving the sense that her words flow naturally as though she is speaking in prose (written or spoken language in its ordinary form, without metrical structure)	<p>Duffy wrote much later than Shelley, meaning she was less influenced by ideas of the Romantic era and drew attention to different social and political themes. In this case, this involved the lives of young women living in the 1950s.</p> <p>Duffy's poem is a lot more personal than Shelley's as Shelley was more focused on the ideas he wanted to discuss as opposed to the actual subject he the speaker addressed.</p>