The Ecchoing Green

POEM TEXT

The sun does arise,
And make happy the skies.
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring.
The sky-lark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around,
To the bells' cheerful sound.
While our sports shall be seen
On the Ecchoing Green.

Old John, with white hair
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak,
Among the old folk,
They laugh at our play,
And soon they all say.
'Such, such were the joys.
When we all girls & boys,
In our youth-time were seen,
On the Ecchoing Green.'

Till the little ones weary
No more can be merry
The sun does descend,
And our sports have an end:
Round the laps of their mothers,
Many sisters and brothers,
Like birds in their nest,
Are ready for rest;
And sport no more seen,
On the darkening Green.

SUMMARY

The sun rises and makes the skies cheerful. The bells ring happily to usher in springtime. All the songbirds, like the skylark and the thrush, sing even louder in order to match the happy sound of the bells. And all the while, we're out playing on the echoing village common.

Elderly, white-haired John laughs his troubles away as he sits under the ancient oak tree with the other elderly people. They chuckle at the children as they play, remembering, "We used to play just like that when we were little children on the village common."

At last, the children are too tired to play anymore. The sun goes down, and our games are over. Children crowd into their mothers' laps like little birds getting ready to sleep in their nests. And as it gets darker and darker, you can't see anyone playing on the village common anymore.

THEMES

LIFE, DEATH, AND RENEWAL

William Blake's "The Ecchoing Green" sees the entire circle of life in one neighborly day on a "green," a village common space. As elderly folks sit and watch children play on the grass, they happily remember the time when they played in just the same way—reminding readers that these children, too, will one day be elderly people watching a new generation at play. Through its images of "green" growth and a day fading into night, the poem explores the way that the rhythms of human life and death "echo" over and over again, and the comfort that people can take in these echoes.

The people who watch as the children play on the green don't just enjoy their antics: they remember being children just like these ones, playing just the same games. The children at play now, the poem suggests, will one day take the place of these "old folk"—and there's something lovely about that. "Old John," for example, who sits laughing at the children's games, feels his "care" lighten as he looks on: embracing the natural process of birth, growth, and death, the poem implies, can be a real comfort, helping people to feel as if life goes on and death doesn't get the last word.

That sense of consoling cyclicality appears not just in the juxtaposition of the young folks with the old, but in the poem's setting. It's a beautiful spring day, a time of new life, and the poem follows the whole course of that day from dawn (when the children run out to play) to dusk (when their mothers take them home to bed). This movement from activity to rest metaphorically suggests the whole circle of life, from birth to death. A single day on the "ecchoing green" becomes a microcosm of a pattern that underlies everything from the seasons to society to any one person's life.

And the poem's mysterious speaker—a choral "we" who seems both to be among and separate from the children, calling them the "little ones"—further suggests that everyone participates in this circle of life together, playing all the roles of life, from child

to adult. Just as this speaker's voice could belong to anyone and everyone, every person's experience is connected and shared.

The poem's titular "Ecchoing Green" thus rings not just with the happy voices of the children, but with layers and layers of time and experience. Even as generations come and go, this poem suggests, they "echo" each other, repeating and repeating the experiences of birth, growth, and death. Everything changes, but everything stays the same, too—and that, the poem suggests, is a cause for joy.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-30

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-8

The sun does arise,
And make happy the skies.
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring.
The sky-lark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around,
To the bells' cheerful sound.

"The Ecchoing Green" begins with a simple, singsongy depiction of a spring morning in an English village. In jaunty couplets, the speaker imagines that everything in the world is happy simply to exist on a day like this one.

What's more, everything in the world is happy to exist *together*. In this poem's world, the sunrise makes the personified "skies" happy, and the church bells are "merry" as they "welcome the Spring." And the spring birds get into a singing contest with the bells, chirping ever "louder. Everything seems to be filled with life and joy.

Even the poem's sounds mimic the bells and the birds: the bouncy alliteration of "birds of the bush" and the assonance of "louder around" help readers to imagine themselves right in the middle of this springtime hullaballoo.

Part of the delight of existence here is that it's *shared*. All these personified things enjoy each other's company. Spring sunlight seems to have brought communal happiness to the whole world. And this sense of collective, joyful life will animate the whole poem.

At a first glance, these are pretty simple and traditional opening lines. The joy of spring is one of the oldest poetic themes there is, and rhymed couplets like those seen here (note how all the poem's lines come in rhyming pairs) are of the commonest forms.

But the personification in these first few lines hints at complexities to come. This poem will explore, not just the way that spring makes the world seem vibrantly alive, but the way that people and nature are intimately connected. And that connection doesn't only mean that people get to enjoy the spring right alongside the skies and the sun: it means that they're bound to natural cycles of birth and death, just as the seasons are.

LINES 9-10

While our sports shall be seen
On the Ecchoing Green.

After a cheerful, musical passage of scene-setting, the poem's speaker finally appears in the closing lines of the first stanza. This speaker isn't any one person, but a collective voice (talking about "our sports"). Again, a sense of community seems important here: this poem is a shared song, spoken as one by a harmonious group of people.

Amid all the beauty and exuberance of spring, this group is at play, getting up to all kinds of "sports" (or games) out on the village "Green," or common open space. Everyone's in it together, here, and everyone seems to be having a good time, enjoying each other's company just as the skies embrace the sun and the birds chime in with the bells. What with all that action and activity, it's no wonder that this "Green" is "Ecchoing" with joyful sounds.

On one level, the word "Ecchoing" might be read as a straightforward bit of imagery: the green is literally echoing with songs and shouts and ringing bells. But the speaker carefully capitalizes the word, as if the "Ecchoing Green" were an official title. That invites readers to look a little more carefully at what those words might mean.

If this "Green" is always and officially "Ecchoing," then it might echo more than just sound. Perhaps its echoes have to do with other kinds of repetitions, too.

The rest of the poem will bear this possibility out. And the form of this first stanza gives readers a clue about what kinds of repetitions might be at stake, here. As the stanza ends, readers might notice that it's a 10-line dizain—a very unusual form in English-language poetry. But it doesn't *feel* too strikingly weird, because it's built of common, simple rhymed couplets.

In other words: this long, peculiar stanza is made up of a series of small, everyday pieces. That sense of small repetitions coming together to form a big pattern will turn out to be one of this poem's major themes.

LINES 11-14

Old John, with white hair
Does laugh away care,
Sitting under the oak,
Among the old folk,

At the beginning of the second stanza, the speaker turns to one

character in particular: "Old John," a fellow who the speaker seems to know personally, and expects the reader to know, too. Even if the reader isn't acquainted with *this* Old John in particular, they've almost certainly met *an* Old John, an archetypal white-haired old man.

Old John might at first seem like a pretty incongruous figure in the springtime world the first stanza has set up. Spring is symbolically a time of youth and exuberant new life, while old age is usually associated with the sorrow and chill of winter. And Old John seems familiar with wintry sorrow: he has plenty of "care," or worries.

But on this spring day, he's ready to "laugh away" all that "care" with the other village "old folk." The village's elderly people have gathered under "the oak"—another creature that the speaker seems to expect the reader to know personally, as much a fixture of the village as Old John himself. Oaks are an ancient symbol of longevity, strength, and maturity, and there's a sense that the oak on the Green has been there since long before even the elderly folks resting beneath it were born, long enough that everyone knows which tree the speaker means when they say "the oak."

These cheerful old people, taking it easy under a tree that represents long life, create a striking juxtaposition with the youthfully springy scene around them. But Old John and his friends don't seem to feel upset about being old people in a young world. Rather, they enjoy everything about the day, as much as the birds and the playful speaker do.

LINES 15-20

They laugh at our play,
And soon they all say.
'Such, such were the joys.
When we all girls & boys,
In our youth-time were seen,
On the Ecchoing Green.'

As it turns out, Old John and the other "old folk" are feeling cheerful, not *in spite* of the fact that they're old in a youthful world, but *because* they're old in a youthful world. As the collective speaker is at "play," the elderly laugh and reminisce, recalling that they reveled in just such "joys" when they were children.

These lines give readers another clue about the identity of the speaker, who here seems to be the voice of all the village children. They also draw attention back to the idea of *repetition*, of echoes and cycles.

As the old people look at the children playing, they seem almost to time-travel. They don't just say "ah, that's just how we used to play," but something subtler. Take a closer look at the phrasing here:

'Such, such were the joys.
When we all girls & boys,
In our youth-time were seen,

Referring to themselves as "girls & boys," the old folks seem to say that they're *still* girls and boys, in some sense. Their memories of their childhood on exactly this "Ecchoing Green" are so close they could touch them. By the same token, the children at play now will someday become the "old folk," sitting under the same oak and watching the next generation of kids at play.

The poem underlines that idea with literal repetitions. The closing line of this stanza is a refrain, exactly the same as the closing line of the previous stanza: "On the Ecchoing Green." In other words, the words "Ecchoing Green" themselves echo! There's a kind of hall-of-mirrors effect here, as if the poem is looking off into eternity, echoes echoing echoes forever.

And sound isn't the only thing that's echoing on this green. The Green *itself* is an echo, a place where the same cycles of birth, life, aging, and death play out again and again. Humanity is as much a part of these natural cycles, the poem suggests, as birdsong is part of the spring.

With the multiple meanings of "Ecchoing" in mind, perhaps readers will even see the imagery of the "Ecchoing Green" differently. A green might be an outdoor common space, but "green" is also a *color*—and a symbolic one, too, associated with life and rebirth. An echoing "green" in this sense might create a strange image in the reader's mind: a kind of endless, infinite greenness, a picture of infinite renewal.

LINES 21-24

Till the little ones weary
No more can be merry
The sun does descend,
And our sports have an end:

The beginning of the third stanza brings some new ambiguity into the mix. In the previous stanza, the speaker seemed to be the voice of all the village children. Now, that voice distances itself from the children, calling them the "little ones."

Both standing right among the children and seeing them from afar, the voice of the speaker suddenly seems like the voice of *humanity*. Just as the "old folk" still feel close to the "girls & boys" they used to be, the speaker seems able to inhabit the children, the old folks, and the folks in between all at once.

That might take readers back to the first stanza, where everything in the world seemed to be sharing in a collective joy. Part of being alive, this poem suggests, is understanding that one is connected to the same natural cycles as everything else, and that one will play all of life's parts (if one is lucky enough to live to old age!). Being alive means being part of a continuous process of beginnings and change and endings.

Even the language here echoes the first stanza, with a

difference. The sun "does arise" in the first stanza; here, it "does descend." This repetition gestures to the ancient symbolism of morning and night, which fits right in with the seasonal symbolism of the spring. What rises must fall, what goes up must come down, and what's born must get old and die one day.

In other words, this single spring day out on the "Ecchoing Green" is beginning to look more and more like a microcosm of both human life and nature as a whole.

LINES 25-28

Round the laps of their mothers,
Many sisters and brothers,
Like birds in their nest,
Are ready for rest;

The poem's big ideas about eternally renewing natural cycles might sound pretty grand. But in these lines, the speaker makes it clear that these massive patterns of life and death play out on an intimate scale.

As the sun goes down and the children get tired, they flock to their mothers' laps to snuggle up "like birds in their nest." This tender simile paints a sweet, down-to-earth picture of little kids nestling into their mothers' skirts. But it also connects the children back to the "sky-lark and thrush" that sang so raucously at the beginning of the poem. These "little ones" are as much a part of the natural world as those birds.

The alliteration and assonance in these lines make being part of nature sound not just awe-inspiring, but comforting:

> Many sisters and **b**rothers,
> Like **b**irds in their nest,
> Are **re**ady for **re**st;

The connected sounds here travel in pairs, as cozy as those "birds in their nest." And the "sisters and brothers" might remind readers of the now-elderly "girls & boys" resting under the oak tree.

As the poem draws to its conclusion, readers get the sense that participating in the endless cycles of the "Ecchoing Green" is at once extraordinary and completely everyday—and that there's something beautifully comforting about that.

LINES 29-30

And sport no more seen,
On the darkening Green.

The poem's final lines return to the refrain of the previous two stanzas—but with a difference. In the first stanza, "sports shall be seen / On the Ecchoing Green"; in the last stanza, those "sports" are "no more seen / On the **darkening** Green." The fun, in other words, is at an end.

That "darkening" isn't just the sun going down: it's an image of the mystery of death. Since this whole day on the Green has been a microcosm of the circle of life, this sunset is a meaningful one.

But again, there's nothing too scary about this symbolic death. It's just a natural next step: you get up in the morning, you play all day, you get tired, you go to sleep! And every sleep, every sunset, comes with an awakening and a sunrise.

These closing lines, then, suggest that the "Ecchoing Green" of infinite renewal sweeps death up in its progress, too. Here, death isn't an ending, but part of an endless, joyful cycle. Spring turns to winter, and children turn to "old folk"—but new springs, and new children, always come along.

The final "darkening" here might be natural, but it's also mysterious. Even as this poem's collective speaker revels in the wonder of eternal renewal, they stop short of dusting their hands and saying, "And that's all there is to it!" Being alive and part of the circle of life, this poem concludes, is a matter for wonder and awe as much as for joy.

SYMBOLS

THE GREEN

The "Ecchoing Green" itself is a symbol of life, freshness, and renewal.

On a surface level, this green is just a pleasant, parklike space where the people of the village can gather and enjoy themselves. But symbolically, it suggests eternity in more ways than one. Not only does it "echo," suggesting endless repetition, but it's also *green*, a color symbolically associated with youth and new growth. It's fitting, then, that this "green" is the spot with young children come to play. The "old folk," meanwhile, sit on the sidelines, "under the oak"—a long-lived tree that represents maturity.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 9-10:** "While our sports shall be seen / On the Ecchoing Green."
- **Lines 19-20:** "In our youth-time were seen, / On the Ecchoing Green.'"
- **Lines 29-30:** "And sport no more seen, / On the darkening Green."

THE OAK

The oak tree is a symbol of continuity and maturity.

Because they sprout from tiny acorns and live for centuries, oak trees are a common symbol of both growth and longevity. When the poem refers to the oak as a place where the "old folk" rest, it thus reminds readers that this oak might have been sheltering the village's elderly for years and years.

While the children play on the "green," a color linked with new life and vitality, the elderly sit beneath this sturdy, fully-grown plant—a fact that reflects that they, too, are in a more mature stage of their lives.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 11-14:** "Old John, with white hair / Does laugh away care, / Sitting under the oak, / Among the old folk, "

LIGHT AND DARKNESS

Light and darkness, morning and night, symbolize the circle of life, from birth until death.

"The Ecchoing Green" begins at sunrise and ends at dusk, following children from the moment they get up and go out to play until the moment they get tired and head home to bed. This one day symbolically represents the whole progress of a human life. These children are in the "morning" of their lives now, but before long they'll be like the "old folk" resting under the tree—and not long after that, their own personal "sun" will set, and they'll die.

By relating sunrise and sunset to the human life cycle, the poem suggests that death is as natural and inevitable as sunset. But it also hints at renewal and rebirth: after every sunset comes a new sunrise.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "The sun does arise, / And make happy the skies."
- **Lines 23-24:** "The sun does descend, / And our sports have an end:"
- **Lines 29-30:** "And sport no more seen, / On the darkening Green."

POETIC DEVICES

JUXTAPOSITION

The poem is built around a major juxtaposition: that between the old and the young. At the same time, the poem makes it clear that the gap between those seemingly distinct groups isn't really all that wide.

The poem's first stanza focuses on the exuberance of the children playing and of the natural world in spring. Everything, from the sun to the skies to the birds, seems full of energy. The children's "sports" go on "while" the world rejoices around them.

In the next stanza, the poem turns to the elderly folks who watch the children at play. Whereas the children are up and running about, these "old folk" sit under an oak tree and reminisce. That oak tree itself symbolizes longevity and maturity, and its presence speaks to the fact that people like "Old John" are in a much different stage of life.

And yet, it's also clear that the "old folk" see the kids as a reflection of their younger selves: these kids are doing exactly what the old people used to do when they were "girls & boys." Even as the poem juxtaposes these groups, then, there's also a sense of *continuity* here: those kids will one day be sitting under the oak tree, watching a new generation play on the green.

In other words, juxtaposition helps to make this poem's central point: change is life's constant, and everything that lives is part of the same "ecchoing" natural cycle of life, death, and rebirth.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-10
- Lines 11-20

REPETITION

The poem's repetitions help to support its underlying themes. This is a poem about "ecchoing," after all—about the way that nature's cycles repeat and repeat.

One of the most pronounced flavors of repetition here is the poem's refrain. At the end of the first two stanzas, the speaker returns to exactly the same words: "On the Ecchoing Green." The poem thus describes an echo *using* an echo, creating a kind of infinite hall-of-mirrors effect: echoes echoing echoes forever. In the last stanza, though, the speaker switches from the "Ecchoing Green" to the "darkening Green," a change that suggest deaths and endings are as much a part of this endless cycle as springy new life.

Other repetitions here make similar points. Describing the children at play, the speaker returns and returns to the words "our sports," giving readers the sense that these games are as time-worn and consistent as the seasons: "Old John" probably enjoyed exactly the same "sports" when he was a kid. In fact, the "old folk" underline that very point with epizeuxis when they say "Such, such were the joys" of their childhoods.

The natural world around these scenes is full of joyful repetition, too. The whole first stanza uses parallelism to suggest that nature is in rhythmic harmony on this lovely spring morning:

> The sun does arise,
> And make happy the skies.
> The merry bells ring
> To welcome the Spring.

This repeated sentence structure suggests that not just human life, but the whole world is rejoicing in its timeless cycle of life and death.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "The sun does arise,"
- **Line 3:** "The merry bells ring"
- **Lines 5-7:** "The sky-lark and thrush, / The birds of the bush, / Sing louder around,"
- **Line 8:** "bells"
- **Line 9:** "our sports"
- **Lines 9-10:** "seen / On the Ecchoing Green."
- **Line 17:** "Such, such"
- **Lines 19-20:** "seen, / On the Ecchoing Green.'"
- **Line 24:** "our sports"
- **Line 29:** "sport"
- **Lines 29-30:** "seen, / On the darkening Green."

SIMILE

In lines 26-28, the poem compares tired children to baby birds:

> Round the laps of their mothers,
> Many sisters and brothers,
> Like birds in their nest,
> Are ready for rest;

On the one hand, this simile simply paints a touching picture of little kids nestling down into their mothers' laps. This gentle image underlines everything that's *natural* about the relationship between a child and a parent: the children's behavior is as sweet and instinctive as the behavior of birds.

That sense of naturalness also links the children back to the literal birds who sang so exuberantly back in the first stanza. If the children are connected to the birds, similarly playing in the morning and settling down to rest at night, they're also connected to nature's cycles in general: day turning to night, youth turning to old age, spring turning to winter.

This lone simile thus does a lot of lifting! By relating the children to birds, the speaker both paints a tender portrait of little kids at the end of the day and suggests that these little kids' daily lives are part of the massive and eternal forces of nature.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 26-28:** "Many sisters and brothers, / Like birds in their nest, / Are ready for rest;"

PERSONIFICATION

The poem uses personification to suggest that everything in the world is part of the ongoing dance of life.

All the poem's personification turns up in its first four lines, and all of it makes the same point: nature is full of joy on this lovely spring morning. Take a look at the language the speaker uses here:

> The sun does arise,
> And make happy the skies.
> The merry bells ring
> To welcome the Spring.

Read one way, these lines describe a perfectly ordinary morning in a 19th-century English village: the sun rises and the church bells ring to mark the time, just as they do every day. But personification makes these everyday happenings feel like part of an underlying universal joy. If the sky is happy just because the sun rises, then there must be something wonderful about the mere fact that nature works the way it works!

And those "merry bells" suggest that people can reflect that joy back into the world through music. Those bells seem to express the happiness of the people who *made* the bells, and they perhaps even invite the reader to think about how this very poem is like a "merry bell"—a work of art that expresses delight and gratitude for all the wonder of the world.

These moments of personification thus suggest that there's something marvelous about the natural order of things. But they also make it sound like this spring day in particular is a lovely one, worth rejoicing in—the kind of day that might lead a poet to reflect on what's miraculous about the ordinary.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "The sun does arise, / And make happy the skies."
- **Lines 3-4:** "The merry bells ring / To welcome the Spring."

IMAGERY

The imagery in "The Ecchoing Green" helps to connect the poem's philosophy to tangible experience, allowing readers to understand the speaker's point not just with their minds but with their senses.

Much of the imagery here works on the ears. In the first stanza, for instance, the song of the "birds of the bush" collides with the "bells' cheerful sound"—so the birds sing "louder," making a joyful ruckus. That sense of exuberant noise fits right in with what's going on in the human world, where children are running around outside, no doubt shrieking even "louder" than either the bells or the birds.

It's no wonder, then, that the "Green" is "Ecchoing." This moment of imagery is, on one level, plainly descriptive: the green is literally echoing with all kinds of happy noises. But it also does something subtle to the mind's eye. A "green" is an outdoor common space, but "green" is also a *color*, and the idea of an echoing green in *that* sense might create a mental image of an endlessly expanding, endlessly repeating greenness. This effect is both lush and surreal, helping to give readers the sense that the speaker is talking about more than just one day on one particular "green": this poem is dealing with *symbolic*

greenness, with the infinite renewal of life itself.

The poem's last flicker of imagery does something interesting with that image, too. In the final line, the "Green" is no longer "Ecchoing," but "darkening." This vivid word helps to paint a picture of the green as dusk falls, but it also again might flash readers back to the idea of the *color* green getting darker and darker, fading out into the darkness of death. This "darkening," too, is just part of the natural cycles this poem traces.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-8:** "The sky-lark and thrush, / The birds of the bush, / Sing louder around, / To the bells' cheerful sound."
- **Line 10:** "the Ecchoing Green."

ASSONANCE

Moments of assonance help to give this poem its joyfully musical tone, and to evoke the springtime scenes the poem describes.

For instance, take a look at the repeated vowel sounds in lines 3-4:

> The merry bells ring
> To welcome the Spring.

The /eh/ sound running through these lines makes them ring out over and over—just like those bells. The consonance between "bells" and "welcome" strengthens this effect, too. A few lines later, when the speaker hears the birds singing "louder around" to compete with all that "cheerful" ringing, those repeated /ow/ sounds do indeed set up a bright contrast with the /eh/ sounds of the bells.

Later on, assonance evokes not just sounds, but feelings:

> Are ready for rest;

Here, matched /eh/ sounds feel as cozy as the children clambering into "the laps of their mothers."

And listen to the emphatic assonance in the next-to-last line of the poem:

> And sport no more seen,

Those long /o/ sounds (again emphasized by consonance, this time the /r/ of "sport" and "more") make this line fall with some extra weight. It's almost as if a bell is tolling again—but now, it's telling the time, reminding everyone out on the "Ecchoing Green" that the day has come to its end.

Assonance thus subtly supports, not just the poem's music, but its themes.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "merry bells"
- **Line 4:** "welcome"
- **Line 7:** "louder around"
- **Line 13:** "under"
- **Line 14:** "Among," "old folk"
- **Line 23:** "sun does"
- **Line 28:** "ready," "rest"
- **Line 29:** "sport," "more"

ALLITERATION

Like assonance, alliteration gives the poem both music and meaning.

Lines 26-28 provide some good examples of alliteration in action:

> Many sisters and brothers,
> Like birds in their nest,
> Are ready for rest;

The paired /b/ and /r/ sounds here feel gently final: the alliterative words come to rest with their matching sounds just like the little "birds" go home to the "nest" of their mothers' laps.

The speaker also uses alliteration to simply make the poem sound more musical and memorable. Alliterative moments like "birds of the bush" and "more can be merry" elevate the poem's language and add to its lyricism.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 6:** "birds," "bush"
- **Line 9:** "sports," "seen"
- **Line 11:** "with white"
- **Line 16:** "soon," "say"
- **Line 18:** "When we"
- **Line 21:** "ones weary"
- **Line 22:** "more," "merry"
- **Line 23:** "does descend"
- **Line 25:** "mothers"
- **Line 26:** "Many," "brothers"
- **Line 27:** "birds"
- **Line 28:** "ready," "rest"
- **Line 29:** "sport," "seen"

CONSONANCE

Consonance, like assonance and alliteration, helps to give this poem some music and draws attention to meaningful moments.

Take the consonance in the poem's second line, for instance:

> The merry bells ring

The /r/ sounds draw extra attention to the ringing of those bells. The assonance of the short /eh/ sound adds yet more emphasis to the line ("merry bells"), bringing the bells' music to life through the language of the poem.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "merry," "ring"
- **Line 6:** "birds," "bush"
- **Line 7:** "louder," "around"
- **Line 9:** "sports," "seen"
- **Line 11:** "with white"
- **Line 15:** "laugh," "play"
- **Line 16:** "soon," "say"
- **Line 18:** "When we"
- **Line 21:** "Till," "little," "ones weary"
- **Line 22:** "more," "merry"
- **Line 23:** "does descend"
- **Line 25:** "mothers"
- **Line 26:** "Many," "brothers"
- **Line 27:** "birds"
- **Line 28:** "ready," "rest"
- **Line 29:** "sport," "seen"
- **Line 30:** "darkening Green"

VOCABULARY

Sky-lark and thrush (Line 5) - Two species of songbird.

The bush (Line 6) - The woods, forest, etc.

Sports (Line 9, Line 24, Line 29) - "Sports" don't necessarily mean "athletics" here; rather, the word just suggests playful games.

Green (Line 10, Line 20, Line 30) - An outdoor common space in the middle of a village, rather like a park.

Care (Line 12) - Burdens and worries.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"The Ecchoing Green" uses a form of Blake's own invention, and it's both simple and strange. The poem is broken into three 10-line stanzas (or dizains)—a pretty unusual stanza form in English-language poetry. But each of those stanzas also breaks down into five rhyming couplets, which is a far more common shape.

This combination of the large and the small fits right in with the poem's themes. The way these dizains are built from couplets reflects the way that whole lives are built from a series of ordinary days.

The poem's repetitions also reflect its interest in the cycles of life and nature. Each of these stanzas ends with a refrain that brings readers right back to the "Ecchoing Green"—making that echo literal as well as figurative!

METER

"The Ecchoing Green" uses a bouncy dimeter throughout. That means that each line uses two strong stresses, like this:

> On the Ecch- | oing Green.

But there are a lot of variations within that dimeter. Many of the lines here (like the one quoted above) are in anapestic dimeter, which means they use two anapests, metrical feet with a da-da-DUM rhythm. The poem doesn't strictly stick to anapests, though: it also uses iambs, feet with a da-DUM rhythm, as in lines 3-4:

> The mer- | ry bells ring
> To wel- | come the Spring.

In other words, there's a mixture of steadiness (always two beats) and playfulness (unpredictable feet) here. And that "echoes" this poem's themes! The combination of that reliable, pulselike dimeter and the frolicking variation of iambs and anapests reflect the poem's sense that energetic new life is also part of an ancient, reliable pattern.

RHYME SCHEME

"The Ecchoing Green" is built from rhymed couplets, like this:

> AABBCCDDEE

This tight, steady rhyme scheme fits right in with the poem's interest in childhood and new life: it sounds kind of like a children's song. The vocabulary helps with that effect, too. The rhyme words here tend to be pretty plain, using words you might expect to find in any nursery rhyme: "joys" and "boys," "nest" and "rest."

But the poem creates some subtle effects with this simple pattern. The last two lines of every stanza always return to exactly the same rhyme words: "seen" and "Green." This repetition points to the poem's interest in natural cycles. Everything here just keeps coming back to that endlessly-echoing "Green"—both in the poem's themes and in its rhymes!

SPEAKER

The speaker of "The Ecchoing Green" is a chorus. Sometimes, this chorus seems to be the voice of all of the children playing on the green, enjoying "our sports" and "our play." But this chorus also seems to see and notice more than any child could—and to separate itself from the children, as when it notes that the "little ones" have gotten too tired to play.

One possibility is that this mysterious chorus isn't just the children, but people in general. After all, one of the poem's big points is that the "old folk" were once children; as Shakespeare put it, "one man in his time plays many parts." Speaking both as a child and an adult, this poem's speaker might well be the "ecchoing" voice of humanity itself.

SETTING

"The Ecchoing Green" reveals its setting in its title: this poem is set on a green, a village common space for leisure and play. But that green also has mysterious symbolic power.

As a place where the young and old gather together, the "Ecchoing Green" can also be read as the shared stage of existence itself. The green's echoes aren't just the ringing cries of children, but the echoing rhythms of human life: children are born, grow old, and die, and every child playing here now will—if they're lucky—one day take the places of "Old John" and the other "old folk."

The green is thus both a completely ordinary place *and* an almost mythic one.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

William Blake (1757-1827) is a poet unlike any other. Often considered one of the earliest of the English Romantics, he also stands apart from any movement as a unique philosopher, prophet, and artist.

Blake first printed "The Ecchoing Green" in *Songs of Innocence* (1789), one of his most famous and important works. He would later expand this collection into *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794), a two-part book that examines what Blake called "the two contrary states of the human soul."

Many of the poems in *Songs of Innocence* have a counterpart in *Songs of Experience*, a twin poem that reads the same subjects from a new perspective. For instance, "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" both explore creation, divinity, and nature—but in very different ways! In this way, some read "The Ecchoing Green" as a counterpart to "The Garden of Love," Blake's tirade against repressive religion and its way of stifling natural "joys and desires."

Blake didn't just *write* poetry: he also designed, engraved, printed, painted, and published illuminated manuscripts using a technique he called the "infernal method." Blake painted his poems and pictures on copper plates with a resilient ink, then burned away the excess copper in a bath of acid—the opposite of the process most engravers used. But Blake often did the opposite of what other people did, believing that it was his role to "reveal the infinite that was hid" by custom and falsehood.

Even among the often countercultural Romantics, then, Blake was an outlier. Samuel Taylor Coleridge himself—no stranger to a wild vision—once remarked that he was "in the very mire of common-place common-sense compared with Mr. Blake."

While Blake was never widely known during his lifetime, he has become one of the most famous and beloved of poets since his death, and writers from Allen Ginsberg to Olga Tokarczuk to Philip Pullman claim him as a major influence.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"The Ecchoing Green," with its joyfully and endlessly repeating natural cycles, fits right in with a very Romantic belief in the connection between people and nature. Many Romantic poets and philosophers believed that nature could, in the words of Wordsworth, teach people more "than all the sages can." In the Romantics' eyes, the rhythms and beauty of nature held deep and silent wisdom, just waiting for people to come along and absorb it.

This idea was in part a reaction to the Enlightenment, an 18th-century period of scientific and philosophical advancement. The Enlightenment valued order and reason; for instance, this was the period in which the scientist Carl Linnaeus developed a formal taxonomy for classifying plants and animals.

That kind of razor-sharp clarity was all well and good, the Romantics felt, but too much of it and one risked missing out on mystery and humility. The vastness and power of nature, in their eyes, had a way of putting people in their right place, reminding them that they didn't know everything and couldn't control everything.

The Romantic love of nature was also spurred by the Industrial Revolution, which was gathering steam (literally!) when Blake wrote this poem in the late 18th century. An increasingly mechanized and factory-driven society made thinkers like Blake worry that people were losing touch with their place in the natural order—and thus with their humanity. Blake was particularly appalled by the child labor that marked this era, seeing it as a consequence of the way that mechanization and conformism cut people off from their naturally independent imaginations.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Blake's Illuminations — Visit the Blake Archive to see beautiful images of the poem as Blake originally designed and illustrated it. (http://www.blakearchive.org/work/songsie)
- More About Blake — Learn more about Blake's life and work at the British Library's website. (https://www.bl.uk/people/william-blake)

- Blake's Music — Read a short article about the music of Blake's poetry. (https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-music-of-william-blakes-poetry)
- The Poem as a Song — Listen to the poem set to music and performed by another important poet, Allen Ginsberg. (https://youtu.be/LgNsTHJvDPo)
- Blake's Influence — Read an interview with the writer Philip Pullman in which Pullman discusses Blake's deep influence on his work. (https://www.npr.org/2017/10/19/557189779/philip-pullmans-realm-of-poetry-and-inspiration)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER WILLIAM BLAKE POEMS

- A Poison Tree
- London
- The Chimney Sweeper (Songs of Experience)
- The Chimney Sweeper (Songs of Innocence)
- The Clod and the Pebble
- The Divine Image
- The Garden of Love
- The Lamb
- The Little Black Boy
- The Sick Rose
- The Tyger

HOW TO CITE

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