**On observing a Blossom on the first of February 1796**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

How might we go about looking more carefully at this poem? Here are a few annotations to start us off.

Sweet flower, that peeping from thy russet stem

Does he mean ‘frieze’ or ‘freeze’ intended? How do the two meanings differ? Is this a play on words?

Unfoldest timidly, (for in strange sort

This dark, frieze-coated, hoarse, teeth-chattering month

Hath borrowed Zephyr’s voice, and gazed upon thee

With blue voluptuous eye), alas, poor Flower!

How is the sense of deception developed here? Where is this idea picked up later on?

These are but flatteries of the faithless year.

Perchance, escaped its unknown polar cave,

Even now the keen North-East is on its way.

Is this an apt comparison – or is it too exaggerated?

How apt is ‘nipp’d’?

Flower that must perish! Shall I liken thee

To some sweet girl of too rapid growth

Nipp’d by consumption mid untimely charms?

…

Throughout the poem there’s a balance (or is it a conflict?) between the soft and the harsh. How many examples of this can you find?

And the warm wooings of this sunny day

Tremble along my frame and harmonise

The attempered organ, that even saddest thoughts

Mix with some sweet sensations, like harsh tunes

Played deftly on a soft-toned instrument.

The few personal pronouns reveal a change as the poem progresses. What do you notice about that change?

How many of the five senses does the poem appeal to or refer to? Which is the strongest?

**Follow up thoughts**

What is there about this poem that indicates its age? Think vocabulary, tone, punctuation.

Try ‘translating’ it into contemporary English.\* Does it work or are the sentiments themselves somehow out-dated?

The structure, though, is a commonly used one. Observation of something specific (though not so specific that we are told what kind of flower) which leads to a general moral or message, in this case, ‘even saddest thoughts / Mix with some sweet sensations’. Coleridge rounds off with a fine simile: ‘like harsh tunes / Played deftly on a soft-toned instrument’.

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\* Here’s a quick attempt to render the first section into something more familiar.

See this sweet flower, timidly unfolding and peeping from its russet stem. Oddly, it seems as if this dark, frozen, teeth-chattering month has borrowed the warm west wind's clothes and now looks upon you with longing eyes. But, poor flower, this is only flattery and you will be betrayed. Even now the keen north-easterly is perhaps on its way, having escaped from its hidden polar cave. The flower will perish. Shall I compare it to some sweet girl, grown up too rapidly and suffering from a dreadful chill?

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