

Paul Verlaine, *Chanson d'Automne* (from *Poèmes saturniens*, 1867)

Literal Translation by Barbara F. McManus

NAME: _____

1	Les sanglots longs Des violons De l'automne Blessent mon coeur	The long sobs Of the violins Of autumn Wound my heart
5	D'une lueur Monotone.	With a languor Monotonous.
	Tout suffocant Et blême, quand Sonne l'heure,	All suffocating And pale when The hour sounds,
10	Je me souviens Des jours anciens Et je pleure;	I remember The former days And weep;
	Et je m'en vais Au vent mauvais	And I go away In the ill wind
15	Qui m'emporte Deçà, delà, Pareil à la Feuille morte.	that carries me off Here and there Similar to the Dead leaf.

QUESTIONS:

I. SOUND

Sound Painting: Point out two onomatopoeic words in the first stanza. Describe the sound painting in the rest of the stanza, pointing out all the word sounds which contribute to the very strong imitation of a violin. How has Verlaine drawn upon elements of phonology which are characteristic of the French language to create this effect?

Sound Patterns: Point out all the repeated and alternating sounds in lines 13-14. Why did Verlaine call attention to these lines with such elaborate patterning? What function do these lines play in the poem?

Rhyme: Identify all the rhyming words in the poem according to part of speech (e.g., noun, adjective, adverb, etc.). Are the rhymes full or partial? Give an example of rhyming words that are the same parts of speech and ones that are different. What type is used more often in this poem, and how does that enhance the meaning of the poem?

II. METER (*Practice reading the poem aloud to bring out the sounds, rhythm, and meter. Since this is such a short poem, each of the French students should read it aloud.*)

Describe the meter of this poem. Break lines 1-6 into syllables, counting the number of syllables in each line and marking the rhyme scheme with letters of the alphabet, indicating which of the rhymes are masculine or feminine. Does this rhyme scheme persist throughout the poem?

III. DICTION AND SYNTAX

Collocation: In what collocation (context) might you expect to see the words *blessent*, *coeur*, *languer*, *suffocant*, *blême*, *mauvais*, and *morte* appear together? What does this suggest about the theme of the poem?

Connotation: What is the connotation of the adjective *monotone* (l. 6), and how does this connotation work with the noun *languor* (l. 5)? What is the connotation of the adjective *anciens* (l. 11) and what effect does this have on the poem?

There are only 9 nouns in the poem, and only three of these refer to concrete objects (*coeur, violons, feuille*); these three all belong to the figurative dimension of the poem. What effect does this lack of concreteness and specificity have on the poem?

IV. IMAGERY AND FIGURATION

Imagery: As already noted, sound imagery dominates in this poem. Can you find any visual imagery at all? What effect does this lack of concrete imagery have on the poem?

Metaphor: Find two metaphors in lines 1-4 and explain the vehicle, tenor, and connection of each (note that the first also includes a faint personification, and second includes metonymy). How do these metaphors set the tone for the rest of the poem?

Metonymy: Find an example of metonymy in line 9. What does this contribute to the poem?

Simile: Find a simile in lines 17-18 and explain the vehicle, tenor, and connection. Why do you think that this simile closes the poem?

V. VIRTUAL WORLD

Genre: Does this poem belong to any established genre? If not, why do you think Verlaine chose not to use an established poetic genre? (Note what was happening on the artistic scene at the time this poem was written and the fact that this poem was included in a section entitled *Paysages tristes* (“sad or melancholy landscapes”).

VI. TONE

Speaker: Is the narrative first- or third-person? Is the narrator a participant or an observer? gendered or ungendered? omniscient or limited? intrusive or objective? Point to elements in the poem which explain your answers to these questions.

Addressee: Is the poem addressed to a specific person or a generalized audience?

Subject: What is this poem about, and how is this subject matter connected to the speaker? What are the dominant emotions, and are we ever told the reasons for these emotions?

Form: What is the relationship between the emotions expressed and the form of their expression (does the form mimic, contradict, or stand in tension with the emotion)?