The poems of Shelley and Keats were inspired by times of tempestuous change. These works give us an insight into an increasingly mechanised time when poets sought a relationship with nature through literature. They offer a revolutionary perspective, from Shelley’s narrative of Mont Blanc’s unparalleled beauty to Keats’ hankering to be borne away on ‘viewless wings of Poesy’ after the beguiling nightingale. These Romantic poets explore our vulnerability to elemental forces, the sublimity of the natural world and the importance of imagination. How they responded to change can help us in our current climate crisis by making us consider how we make connections with the ground below and the air above, and encouraging us to take action.

Percy Bysshe Shelley’s ‘Mont Blanc’ is, despite its deceptively simple title, a contemplation of the infinite, abound with transience andbeauty**,** time and mortality**.** The poem poses a question: ‘What significance is nature to the mind? Especially when it is faced with such a vast, immeasurable power’. The speaker describes the rocky outcrops, the howling ravine and the mountains’ colossal height in the line:- ‘Thus thou, Ravine of Arve—dark, deep Ravine/ Thou many-colour'd, many-voiced vale/ Over whose pines, and crags, and caverns sail’. As the river courses down the mountain, it has the capacity to destroy everything in its path. For Percy Shelley, the rushing River Arve and dizzying peaks of Mont Blanc is an epithet, symbolising the inaccessible mysteries of nature.Today, this iconic mountain that features on so many posters, books and television programmes, is receding rapidly. Its diminishing scale is particularly poignant when Shelley’s generation viewed the ice-clad giant as an example of nature in its most powerful form. Reading this poem should be a global wake-up call. The Romantic verse is infused with reverence for nature**.**

As the pulse of life was becoming less human, poets sought an affinity with nature, but this wasn’t just a love of writing about the sublime, they were political, social, economic reactionaries whose poems we can now mobilise all these years later in our climate crisis. In Keats’ 1819 ode ‘To Autumn’ he describes ‘Thee sitting careless on a granary floor/ Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind; Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,’ the portrait of a character napping on a furrow while he should be working; a figure drunk on autumn's beauty, a Dionysiac figure whose recumbent contentment encapsulates those sleepy days of the equinox. However, many historians now believe that the poem is about climate change, a response to the eruption of Mount Tambora whose blanketing ash plunged the world into a seemingly eternal winter, harvests shrivelled**,** famine slunk in the shadows and disease was rife.‘To Autumn’ was written in 1819, and is undoubtedly rejoicing at a return to normalcy**,** with a plentiful harvest**.** The last stanza of the ode opens with an exclamatory ubi sunt, ‘Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?‘ Here, Keats reminds us about the transitory nature of the season and the inevitable winter that will follow, the poem mediates on life and death.

Similarly,Sir Phillip Sydney’s poem ‘Astrophil and Stella 102’ also includes an ubi sunt with its refrain ‘Where be the roses gone which sweetened so our eyes?’ This is thefinal ofsix hexameter sonnets on the subject of Stella, the star’s illness.Interestingly, the generation proceeding us may also ask similar questions. ‘Where be the snow gone, which delighted the children so?’ Drawing these comparisons make the issue of climate change personal and affecting, the mature odes of 1819 remind us that life on earth is a fragile affair, especially today.

The year without sun certainly brought forward many dark masterpieces from the gloom such as Mary Wolsteincroft Shelley's ‘Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus.’ Upon writing, ‘Ode To Autumn’, Keats celebrates a return to normality - something that, heartbreakingly, we may never regain. Another example of a masterpiece that will allow us to consider climate change from a different perspective is a famous poem by Percy Shelley. ‘Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!’ cries the speaker in ‘To a Skylark’ suggesting that the bird is a heavenly being, its ascension watched with pure delight and wonder:- ‘Higher still and higher/ From the earth thou springest/Like a cloud of fire/The blue deep thou wingest/And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.’ Today, some of the most beloved species of animals will become extinct, many due to climate change, the grim irony of lines like ‘Soaring ever singest’ becomes apparent. The speaker watches the songbird seeming to burst from the earth ‘like a cloud of fire’ which flies below the descending sun like an‘unbodied joy’ although the bird is out of sight, its unearthly, captivating song rings through the purple evening. This celestial creature’s flight upwards could be interpreted as theascensionof Christ into heaven on the fortieth day after the Resurrection into the presence of God.As the bird rises higher and higher, the speaker’s unfathomable excitement at seeing the bird is reminiscent of a child’s awe. The Romantics believed it was necessary to look at the world with a childlike perspective; they were innocent and uncorrupted, having a precious affinity with nature.

In conclusion, Percy Shelley and John Keats had a feeling that they were ‘chosen’ to guide others through a chaotic period of monumental change. Once again, we are living through a time when we are becoming ever more separated from the natural world. In our time, which is so often absent of light, it falls to our generation of torch-bearing poets, writers and speakers to guide others in tackling climate change.Contemporary verse on our world’s peril will argue that the legacy of both Keats and Shelley’svision is more relevant than ever -and hope that these poems might bere-examined within a wider context of climate change.