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Correspondence with the Season of Autumn

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Seth Nevin

Third Place Winner, Robert Penn Warren Essay Contest

Correspondence with the Season of Autumn

Art has taken many forms over the centuries. These centuries have shaped and warped the concept and ideal form of art, yet; poetry still exists and enchants its audience with no additional structures or strings. Many poems are still held in high regard of the English canon, however; John Keats' "To Autumn" produces an effect unlike others, which has cemented its place of study. Keats, within his poem, makes effective use of imagery, symbolism, and personification to exemplary affect due to the impressionistic form of the language and rhetorical devices. Furthermore, Keats makes astonishing work of the form's rhyme scheme and structure by using it to further his concept of Autumn that he presents within "To Autumn". By this marriage, Keats produces a masterclass of imagery, personification, and symbolism alongside the rigidity and flowing aptitude of the form.

Within his poem, Keats personifies and celebrates the seasonal aspect of Autumn through the deeds or places one may find it. To quote, "Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find / Thee sitting careless on a granary floor," (Lines 13-4). As shown, Keats is referring to the season of Autumn as if it were a physical body that may be found within the world in certain places. In his attempt to personify an abstract concept, such as a season, Keats relies on the imagery and scenery that he can create with his descriptive forces. Throughout the poem, Keats makes a referral to the sensory descriptions of the place as to drag someone into a landscape. He makes marks with sight saying, "To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees," (Line 5) alongside other references of how Autumn will "plump the hazel shells" (Line 7) alongside budding the

flowers of bees. It is through these sensory appeals that Keats makes his effective use of imagery. Rather than attempting to bring a landscape to a person. Keats thoroughly drags you into his own. By fleshing the world and surroundings of Autumn and how it sits upon the granary floor, awaiting the cider-press to finish its last oozings, Keats cements the reader within his imagery and symbolism rather than presenting it within the form.

This appeal to the senses of sight, hearing, and smell actively create the ‘ideal Autumn day’. This ‘ideal’ is where Keats symbolism and imagery become the most effective. By personifying Autumn and allowing this Autumn to create the acts that he gives life, he envisions the Jack Frost of Autumn. This entity is plumping hazels, harvesting fields, and being sung to by crickets, wind, and water. Autumn, then, is shown to actively participate in the autumnal activities of harvest. Keats’ imagery, then, wishes to be impressionistic and bring the smells of cider, the sights of plumped hazels and hanging apples, and the musicality of crickets and redbreasts to life and show the life of Autumn that is often overlooked within a ‘dead season’. This, however, is paradoxed by the liveliness of the activities presented within “To Autumn” alongside the warming, celebratory language employed by Keats. A few examples of this warm, naturalistic language from stanza one is his use of bosom, bless, ripeness, swell, plump, budding, warm, and summer (Lines 1-11).

Continuing, Keats’ form explicitly plays into the effect of the poem by also characterizing Autumn beyond the rhetorical devices in play within the content. “To Autumn” is composed of three (3) stanzas made of eleven (11) lines each. Furthermore, it holds iambic pentameter throughout, neglecting the Augustin Inversions that Keats employs. The intriguing aspect of the form, however, comes through in his ending rhyming words and the rhyme schemes. The first and second stanza have a similar end rhyme that is shared between them,

however; they are separate in rhyme scheme as the first stanza uses ABABCDEDCCCE and the second stanza uses ABABCDECDDE. However, the phonetical sounds of the ending rhyme are similar in their pronunciation and evoke a similar feeling. The third stanza, on the other hand, uses the rhyme scheme of ABABCDECDDE, the same as the second stanza. However, the phonetical rhyming seems distant and drastically different from what the first two present and use. It is here that Keats shows his marriage of form and content as the distinction of these concepts further personify Autumn alongside the content.

The first and second stanza in their shared and similar ending rhymes and phonetical choices exemplify and show Autumn's action and places. By sharing this personification with the content, the form shapes how Autumn acts and where exactly it may be found during its season. This sharing of concept with the form allows for a stronger connection between the two aspects of the poem. Furthermore, the second and third stanza sharing their rhyme scheme is equally important. In this shared quality, Keats unifies the concept of Autumn's music, the third stanza, existing in the same places as this personified Autumn, the second stanza. By these shared qualities, the stanzas are connected by form and content alongside holding and nursing the original thoughts related to their respective stanzas.

In conclusion, Keats use of form and content shines in their marriage alongside their individual examination. Within the content aspect of "To Autumn", Keats makes an exemplary use of personification, imagery, and symbolism to draft out the ideal Autumn. This Autumn is the helper of harvests and the benevolent cornucopia to the feasts. However, this characterization does not end with the rhetoric. Keats marries the form to characterization, itself, as he tailors the stanzas to play with one another and to give fresh life to the personification of Autumn through their interconnection. It is by this marriage that "To Autumn" becomes a standing piece of

English canon while others fall to the wayside. In his addressment of Autumn, Keats has shown the vitalization of the season alongside where it may hide away from the lazy, prying eye.