

In Ode to the West Wind and To Autumn, Shelley and Keats respectively explore the seasons to convey thoughts on life and its transient nature. Like life, the last bleedings of autumn and nature must eventually come to an end but there is a bitter sweetness in the decline of this period which Keats and Shelley both capture.

→ In To Autumn and Ode to the West Wind, nature is utilised by the poets to present a message concerning mankind. Shelley contrasts the eternity of nature - it has the power of rebirth to man's transience. This concept of rebirth is evident in the cyclical structure of the poem which begins with the season of autumn ('thou breath of autumn's being' and ends with an invocation of the other seasons 'If winter comes, can spring be far behind?'). The cyclical structure reiterates the cyclical seasons. A sense of eternity by nature is further created by the linking of images across stanzas, such as the dead leaves which occur in Cantos 1, 2, 4, 5. This emphasises the west wind's ability to move natural elements across great distances but also its continuous and eternal presence. One can also see the wind as a god-like mythical force, in contrast to the mortal speaker who worships this quasi-deity 'hear, oh, hear!' - in pleading and dramatic tone. Shelley, as an atheist, replaces God as an external force with nature and elevates its position in contrast to the subservient man who experiences a transient life.

Similarly, in To Autumn, Keats links man and nature to illustrate a message on mortality and transience. His beautiful description of the fading season of autumn is very much an allegory for human life. To highlight this, Keats uses humanistic qualities in his description of nature to show that the two are interlinked. For example, autumn is personified as a beautiful woman 'thy hair soft like the willowing wind!'. This description is very much in fitting with European art in which seasons were often portrayed as beautiful women. Furthermore, a demagogic field of death similarly personifies the gnats who 'mourn' in a 'waitful choir' evoking images of human funerals to grave the dead. It is thus clear that Keats and Shelley both utilise nature's qualities of rebirth and death to reflect on man's transient nature.

In both poems, death imagery is used in fitting with the theme of transience. In Ode to the West Wind, Shelley uses the repeated symbol of dead leaves, 'yellow and black, and pale, and hectic red, pestilence-stricken multitudes', in a fully and rather grotesque use of imagery to depict autumnal leaves. The use of conjunction here 'and...and' creates a sense of excessiveness as if nature is being overwhelmed by death. The imagery

of death and decay in the poem. Contrary but takes on a more gothic and haunting form. 'Dulce' 'Vast Sepulchre' and 'like ghosts' all contributing to this sense. Shelley links this idea of natural death to his own literary death. Perhaps 'withered leaves' is even a play on words with 'leaves' referring both to the natural element and the pages of books. However, despite Shelley's supposed literary death, he uses high status literary forms such as the Canto form linking to Italian literature and the terza rima as used by Dante in his Divine Comedy. Such literary uses give the poem a timeless feel in contrast to the concepts of death depicted.

In 'To Autumn', death seems much more accepted. The ~~speaker~~ omniscient speaker contains his emotions and has a calm, accepting tone and thus death is gently welcomed. The idyllic pastoral images used to present the coming of death further suggests this. For example 'hedge crickets sing' 'the real breast whistles' and 'gathering swallows twitter' link to the ~~past~~ comforting setting of English countryside. The soothing quality and power of these images is especially comforting enforced by use of soft consonants. Keats has learned to accept death and the transient nature of life, perhaps due to his multiple experiences with the death of loved ones.

Though Keats does seem to resist death more than Shelley - suggested by the pleading last question of his poem 'O, hand, if winter comes can Spring be far behind?' he also realises its productive potential for new life and rebirth. 'By the incantation of their rose, scatter... ashes and sparks'. This is very much a poem about the poem itself which Shelley suggests is devoid of literary life but still has an almost magical power ('Incantation') to invoke new ideas in other writers. 'ashes and sparks' invokes images of funeral ritual. 'ashes to ashes' and 'sparks' the ability to create fire. Like the wind, Shelley has a prophetic power to give life to new ideas. This idea of the poet as a prophet is very much linked to Romantic ideals in which Romantics saw themselves as the bearers of truth.

Keats also embraces the end and the transient by looking at it in a highly positive manner. The poem itself - an ode and a praise of autumn - the liminal state between life and death - appreciates the end through use of poetic apostrophe. Keats attempts to appreciate the final moments of the day (or life) by underlining spring and instead supporting autumn - 'where are the songs of spring? ... think not of them, thou hast thy music too'. Keats give life to the dying - a paradoxical concept - highlighted in the use of oxymoronic language in the final stanza 'full

grown lambs' and 'bloom the fast-dying day'. There is a bitter-sweet tone to this last stanza linking to the Keatsian idea of the co-existence of happiness and sadness. Keats is almost dying, one can revel in the joy of the present moment but it will be ~~overcast~~ but tinted by the ~~oncoming~~ end to this joy. Such a tension between the present and the inevitable end is witnessed in the structure - each stanza attempts to capture the present moment but the poem as a whole resists this by progressing across the season of autumn and the day.

In conclusion, both poets use nature and its seasonal death to link to man's death. Of course, nature has the quality of re-birth so perhaps there is a sense of hope in this comparison or alternatively it is utilised to contrast the immortality of ~~the~~ nature and the mortality of man. Keats and Shelley acknowledge the positivity and bitter-sweetness of death - the former appreciating the present and not focusing on winter whilst the latter finds strength in the notion of rebirth. Ultimately both poems are very much about death and the transcendence of nature and man.