

"the trees" by philip larkin essay sample

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The trees are coming into leaf

Like something almost being said;

The recent buds relax and spread,

Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again

And we grow old? No, they die too,

Their yearly trick of looking of looking new.

Is it written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh

In full grown thickness every May.

Last year is dead, they seem to say,

Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

Imagery to Larkin's " The Trees"

Voice, tone, imagery and structure are the 4 essential factors to developing a brilliant poem. This essay will focus on imagery to Larkin's poem, ' The Trees'. On a general perspective of the poem, Larkin creates a great conception of optimism – a natural image of fresh leaves, springtime and a new life. However, we also see the downfall of this optimism as Larkin questions the meaning of life in the second stanza of the poem. With his smart employment of poetic utensils such as imagery, alliteration, repetition and enjambment, Larkin will escort us readers into the metaphysical world of this poem.

Larkin introduces the poem cheerfully as 'The trees are coming into leaf' - symbolizing 'leaf' as a form of life. Ideally, we are able to image a sense of hope and encouragement in the first stanza as he states that 'The recent buds relax and spread;' However, the tone shifts into a rather negative outlook as the poem approaches the third line of the first stanza - 'Their greenness is a kind of grief'. We are able to see the shift from optimism to pessimism in this line as we picture the idea of being born and then being destined to die. With Larkin's use of alliteration in the word 'greenness' and 'grief', we view the ideal of life as 'grief' because it is above all, short-lived.

In the second stanza, Larkin introduces a rhetorical question as he asks 'Is it that they are born again And we grow old?' Here he seems to question the immortality of leaves in comparison to the ephemeral lives of humans. Via his deployment of the diction "born again" signifying fresh renewal, and of diction "grow old" signifying death, Larkin reveals the theme of contrast between youth and age. The end of the second stanza ends with a sense of pessimism as we can see that Larkin mocks the ideal of 'looking new' by referring it as a 'trick'. By using an enjambment, Larkin links this line the following 'Is written down the rings of grain'. Through the diction of 'rings of grains', Larkin implies that despite trees looking stable and fresh on the outer appearance, they (trees) too can grow in the inside as well. This is seen in the 'rings of grains'. This imagery can in a sense be compared to humans - despite the outer appearance of looking young, we will eventually grow older and this is counted by our age, our 'rings of grains'.

Finally, in the third stanza, Larkin compares trees with ' unrestling castles
thresh', a metaphor to seemingly describe trees as a fortress of hiding
something. This creates an image of being virile ' In full grown thickness
every May.' At the end of the poem, Larkin closes the stanza with a
repetition of sibilant sounds of ' Begin afresh, afresh, afresh'. This sibilant
effect and long vowel sounds creates an image of how leaves of trees are
being rushed and blown by the wind. Additionally, it also creates an
ambiance of being optimistic in the end as the poem closes with freshness
and positivity - a new start and chapter of human life.

In conclusion, we were able to dive into Larkin's metaphysical world of how
one grows old and experiences the concerns of growing old. The obstacle
that is faced is when Larkin allows us readers to ponder about what life
really means and look back at all the time we have robotically spent in our
lives. Moreover, Larkin cleverly structures the poem in a regular 3-stanza
form to reflect the ideal of this poem being conversational and simply chatty.
The structure of the poem with 3 stanzas also seems to give an image of
nature's cycle of birth, growth and renewal. This summarizes the theme and
imagery of the poem and the wonderful nature in which Larkin creates.