

Blake and keat's approaches compared



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William Blake was known for tailoring his romantic poetry specifically for children, particularly in 'Songs of Innocence', where the themes of nature and religion were utilised to allow Blake to directly educate his intended younger audience about faith, the beauty of the natural world, and the injustice of the industrial revolution in the 18th century. It is certain that Blake's poetry was intended to teach. However, Keats, who wrote the poem 'The Human Seasons' only two decades after Blake's 'Songs of Innocence', delivers far less of a 'taught' message and more of a general observation on the life of man, due to his more casual writing style, his younger and more innocent age, and his extremely short life span. These factors contribute to the possible interpretation that, as MacLeish states in 'Ars Poetica', "A poem should not mean, but be." Although Keats does not mean to teach, readers may often be able to discover and learn from his poetry.

In 'The Human Seasons', Keats creates an extended metaphor for the progression of the four seasons as man's life: youth in spring, adulthood in summer, old age in autumn and death in winter. The reader is able to learn from the final rhyming couplet of the poem, as Keats relates Winter to man's death. The words "mortal nature" are easily interpreted as the inevitable death of nature in harsher winter months as trees shed their leaves and become bare, but can also be seen as the mortality of man, allowing the reader to learn that death is inescapable. This reading is particularly poignant to Keats' contemporary readers, as his own early death due to tuberculosis emphasized this message, even without any explicit teaching. Somewhat similarly, Blake allows his readers to learn from his poetry in 'Holy Thursday'. Blake describes a "land of poverty" where it is "eternal

winter". When related to the inevitable morbidity in Keats' winter, the "eternal" nature of Blake's winter becomes much darker and can be interpreted as a never-ending world of death, gaining even more horror when you add the context of Blake writing for children. The imagery of this hopeless land allows the reader to learn of the disadvantages imposed on children during the industrial revolution and the sometimes deadly struggles they endured. Likewise, in 'Nurse's Song', the line "Spring and your day are wasted in play" continues the use of seasons as a metaphor for life, with the reader learning from "wasted", as it suggests that one shouldn't spend all of one's youth being childish and should instead gain the maturity which will be important later in life; this is a direct message from Blake to his young readers.

Still, Keats' 'The Human Seasons' gives an argument against the idea that poems are intended to teach. In the winter section of the poem, we see the importance of learning from poetry, rather than being taught. In the spring section of the poem, the subject "takes in all beauty", as Keats aims to promote and provoke a sense of discovery in the reader, rather than leading the reader to an easy conclusion. Furthermore, in the summer section "Spring's honied cud of youthful thought" allows the subject of the poem to learn from the mistakes of his "lusty" youth, as "honied cud" could be interpreted as the rose-tinted ideals of adolescence before entering into the harsh world of adulthood, and "lusty" has both excitable and sexual connotations. Keats' expertise in extended metaphor make it clear that he prefers his readers to come to their own conclusions after reading the poem, combining elements of discovery and learning rather than being given the

deeper meaning on a plate, in the manner of Blake's more explicit writing. After all, Blake's poetry offers more of a 'teaching' approach. The cynical 'London' from 'Songs of Experience' presents a more socially weathered Blake: due to his dissatisfaction with the corruption of the "blackening Church" and English politics, he describes the "mind-forged manacles" by which men are bound to the regime in London. Whilst "mind-forged" indicates that people are confined by their own interpretations, forces existing only in the mind, the use of "manacles" — very heavy, strong and physically imposing — creates a sense of this oppression in the real world, linking back to Blake's preference for the explicit. He is unafraid to speak out on the corruption of society and does so in order to teach and educate his readers, who were often too uninformed to be literate in these issues. Yet Blake gives such issues a voice.

Overall, there is a distinct contrast between the two poets' approaches on writing poetry specifically to teach their readers. Keats' poetry observes and his readers passively learn, Blake's poetry explores and his readers are actively taught.