

Example of color
imagery in robert
frost's "nothing gold
can stay" and william
ca...

[Literature](#)



Using color to make a scene truly come alive and create a distinct image for the reader is a true art form in poetry. Placing color at the forefront in the mind of the reader can take them away from the reality of reading black print on a white page and awaken the imagination, helping them to see what the writer was envisioning while writing, helping to bring home why it was important to the writer that imagery and color be a part of the reading experience for the reader. Two poems which feature heavy use of color to help underscore the writer's aims are Robert Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay" and William Carlos Williams' "Spring and All". Both of these make heavy use of color to underscore the vivid imagery and the sense of experience both are trying to convey.

"Nothing Gold Can Stay" opens with color in the first two lines: "Nature's first green is gold, her hardest hue to hold." The paradox of green being gold- obviously two different things- sets the reader thinking at once. Of course, gold has another meaning, something that is of value. The first green of spring, coming after a long, cold, bleak winter, often does indeed seem to be "gold", something very valued by the people perceiving it who have held out for it all winter. We are then told, "Her early leaf's a flower, but only for an hour," which we can still interpret in the context of spring, and are still emphasizing the green imagery with the leaf, which could be as pleasing to behold as a flower after a long, dreary winter. But the poem then moves on to more serious topics, those of Eden and the Fall. It is then revealed that this is about Eden, making the prior imagery all the more vivid, because for most raised in a Christian-dominated society, the notion that somehow everything in Eden was more beautiful than anything that can be perceived

after the Fall is a prevalent one. The last lines, “ So dawn goes down to day, nothing gold can stay,” seem to be saying that the beauty of dawn cannot compare to the mundaneness of day, meaning that, after the Fall, we can now only experience mere day and will never again see true dawn. At the end, though, we have tacit acceptance of the fate that mankind must now endure in a post-Fall world: nothing gold can stay, with the implication that the Fall would have inevitably happened sooner or later.

In Williams’ “ Spring and All”, we deal with a similar theme, a comparison of the beginnings of Eden to a wintry landscape transitioning into spring. He also chooses to make heavy use of color, and saves the revelation that this is about more than just landscape until the poem is nearly at an end. He calls the clouds “ blue”, an interesting choice because, in reference to the sky, “ gray” is a more common usage for clouds, while “ blue” makes one think automatically of a cloud-free sky. But then it occurs to the reader that blue clouds often imply an approaching storm. The “ muddy fields are brown with dry leaves”, “ the reddish purplish, forked, upstanding, twiggy stuff of bushes and small trees with dead, brown leaves under them leafless vines” are all along the road, and “ sluggish, dazed spring approaches”. But it is only after this vivid depiction of a landscape with fleeting hope that it is made clear that this is about the beginnings of Eden: “ They enter the new world naked, cold, uncertain of all save that they enter.” This is clearly a reference to Adam and Eve, and after they enter, the grass begins to grow, as does the wild carrot leaf. A “ profound change has come upon them: rooted they grip down and begin to awaken.”

It is interesting that two poems with such similar subject matter and structure also share a same need to express the emotions and imagery with such vibrant use of color.

References:

Fergusun, Alfred R. (1973). " Frost and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall."

Frost:

Centennial Essays.

Pritchard, William H. (1984). Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered.

Schmidt, Peter (1980). " Some Versions of Modernist Pastoral: Williams and the

Precisionists." Contemporary Literature 21: 3" Some Versions of Modernist

Pastoral: Williams and the Precisionists." Contemporary Literature 21: 3. 383-406.