

To autumn and binsey poplars essay



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The Victorian era was a time of great change. The industrial revolution brought about a rapid expansion of towns and cities, causing the rural population to flood in, drawn by the need to find work in the factories and mills and escape the poverty of the countryside.

The countryside was disappearing quickly and writers, such as John Keats, Gerard Manley Hopkins and Thomas Hardy, regretted its loss and constantly looked back to an idyllic, romanticised past and were concerned about capturing something that they thought would be swallowed up by the ever-expanding industrial landscape. In 'Binsey Poplars', Hopkins begins by treating the trees not just as a thing of beauty, but as his own, something deeply personal to him. 'My aspens dear' These beautiful trees gave shade and protected the earth from the sun by their leaves, adding to the sense of peace and tranquillity of the scene, a feeling which is heightened by Hopkins' use of alliteration, '..

. whose airy cages quelled, Quelled or quenched in leaves the leaping sun...' These things of beauty, Hopkins laments, have all been destroyed by man, 'All felled, felled, are all felled.

' Whilst the repetition of the word 'felled' suggests that sound of the axe chopping at the trees, I believe you can almost sense the anger and despair rising in Hopkins as the words are repeated. He then moves on to comparing the trees to soldiers who have been slaughtered in battle, of whom not one has been allowed to live, '...a fresh and following folded rank Not spared, not one.' Hopkins suggests that this slaughter is not just happening here but, by the way he broadens out the image, it is being repeated all over the

countryside, by rivers and on meadows, as these soldiers, who a short time ago were able to dandle’.

....

. a sandalledShadow that swam or sankOn meadow and river and wind-wanderingweed-winding bank.’The use of personification here, coupled with alliteration seems to emphasise the idea of life continuously being extinguished. Like many today who are asking, “ What have we done to our world?” Hopkins is grieving over the wholesale destruction of the natural habitat, which he believes is being caused by people’s inability to see the effects of their actions.

I believe that his use of the emphatic and anguish in the cry, ‘O if we but knew what we do....

’ is written to remind us of Christ’s words on the cross, ‘ Forgive them, O my Father, for they know not what they do,’ and is his way of showing how important this is to him. What are people doing without a thought about the consequences?’...

. we delve or hew -Hack and rack the growing green!’Hopkins writes ‘ rack’ here to suggest that the grass is stacked on the cart or in the barn, but the Victorians would also recognise the homophone ‘ wrack’ (to wreck), and the idea of the land being ‘ wrecked’ creates a powerful image. The countryside is defenceless against these attacks and the damage caused is often irreversible, in the same way that the eye, which is so subtle and powerful, is

so easily damaged permanently,'Since country is so tenderTo touch, her being so slender,....

.. even where we meanTo mend her, we end her. When we hew or delve.'If people are not careful, their slightest touch may end the lives of not just the trees, but possibly that of nature itself. Hopkins goes on to say that, even before our time, the earth held such beautiful views as these trees, all of which is now lost forever.

' After-comers cannot guess the beauty been.'He expresses great sadness in the idea that all it took was a few strokes of an axe to achieve this destruction. You can almost here him add the words '..

. that's all,' to the middle of the line,'Ten or twelve, only ten or twelveStrokes of havoc...'and the sense of grief and disbelief over what has happened in the repeated phrase,'.

...sweet especial rural scene, Rural scene, a rural scene, Sweet especial rural scene.'Hopkins believed that human beings are harmed as much as the landscape by the kind of destruction as happened here. In the poem he wants us to feel that there is a real loss to ourselves for, not only will the landscape not be there, we will not be able to see it.

In this way it really will be as if our eyes had been, like the landscape, irreversibly damaged.'To Autumn' by John Keats is among the last of his poems and it is often regarded as his most achieved ode. The poem is in the form of an ode which contains three stanzas, and each of these has eleven lines. The Poem does not follow any specific rhyme scheme.

The first stanza has an ABABCDEDCCCE pattern whereas the second and the third ones have an ABABCDECDDE pattern. With regards to the meaning of the poem, Keats gives an intense description of autumn. The first stanza begins showing autumn as misty and fruitful and with the help of a 'maturing sun', ripens the fruit. It builds up the landscape in a more concrete way.

It's full of imagery to help create a picture in the readers mind. 'And fill all fruits with ripeness to the core, To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells' Next, we can see clearly Keats' use of hyperbole. Keats writes that a tree has so many apples that it bends, while the gourds swell and the hazel shells plump. This also helps the reader to comprehend the point he is trying to make. Finally, Keats suggests that the bees have a large amount of flowers.

And these flowers did not bud in summer but now, in autumn. As a consequence, the bees are constantly working and their honeycombs are overflowing since summer. Just like the second stanza, the third stanza continues with rhetorical questions. In the first one Keats asks the woman where the sounds of the spring are. And the second one is just a repetition of the same question. However, the poet tells autumn that she has her own sounds, although some of them are sad.

' Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn' He is trying to tell autumn not to worry about the songs of spring or any other season and that autumn also has it's own music and songs. At the end of the poem, Keats make it sound almost as if it is fading out and I think that this is to symbolise the end of a

day and even the end of autumn because he makes reference to a 'red-breast' which is not necessarily associated with autumn. To conclude, a deeper reading could suggest that Keats talks about the process of life. Autumn symbolises maturity in human and animal lives.

Some instances of this are the 'full-grown lambs', the sorrow of the gnats, the wind that lives and dies, and the day that is dying and getting dark. As all we know, the next season is winter, a part of the year that represents aging and death, the end of life. However, in my opinion, death does not have a negative connotation because Keats accepts 'autumn' as part of life even though winter is coming. It seems to me that the main difference in the two poems is that they were written for different reasons. Keats was nearing the end of his life when he wrote 'To Autumn' and, whilst it would appear that he is talking about the cycle of the seasons and the end of summer, the poem would appear to have a greater universal message in that he is also talking about the circle of life.

In Hopkins' 'Binsey Poplars', the message is that nature, the earth and the landscape are all being destroyed only because people were, and are, failing to realise the full consequences of their actions. His view is that the landscape is so precious, yet so fragile, because even the slightest action by man can change it irreversibly. Both poets talk about death in nature, the loss of the autumn, the trees and, in Keats' case, his own life as it was drawing to a close. In my opinion both poets also want the same thing, that is: for the world to remain unchanged; for the landscape to stay as they believed it was intended to be and for the advance of industry to be halted.