

Commentary on field of autumn



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Advancing like a silent threat, the onset of winter is presented throughout the poem as a season with sinister intent. The “ acid breath of noon” approaches in a “ Slow” manner, as if sneaking up on autumn. The personification of the “ acid breath” not only suggests to the reader the fog is murderous, but one could be lead to imagine that the fog is poison gas. This is because “ Field of Autumn” was published in 1947, two years after the Second World War; clearly the memory of the War would be even more poignant than it is to this day, scars more fresh, and any references more painful.

Continuing with the theme of war, Laurie Lee chooses to describe the “ taking” of the village “ without sound;”, implying an stealthy invasion. As “ taking” is in an emphatic position at the beginning of a line, it stresses how it is doing so without permission. Uninvited, winter has no right to ambush such a colourful beauty that autumn is defined to be. A vibrant time of year, autumn is presented as a season that offers many colours to adorn the landscape. The “ copper-coated hill” and “ violet ground” is a romanticism of the dyes of the season, a literary style often associated with Keats.

The intrusion of the strangling winter appears to trap and take the life autumn has to offer. The “ vulture headed sun lies low”, as if in wait to take its prey. The negative connotations the word “ vulture” entails are mainly in connection with death, as a vulture feeds on carrion. Using this metaphor for the sun, Lee darkens the mood of the poem, just as she darkens the imagery within the poem. The “ blackened tongue” of a sheep somehow seems to sour the colours of the poem, almost using the “ tongue” to taste the foul colour.

Transitioning between the two seasons, “Field of Autumn” seems to capture the tuning point at which winter truly takes over. From feeling of a place that is universally unaware of this overthrow, with a slow smothering of the “copper-coated hill”, to the stealthy “taking” of the village. Gradually specific things begin to notice, such as the horse that “dares not raise his foot or move/his shoulders”, as if a fear was binding its movement, despite only having a vague understanding or intrinsic sense a change is occurring.

Furthermore, the lack of movement is repeated in the penultimate stanza when “each spider binds with glittering snare/the splintered bones of grass”. The imagery of “glittering snare” should be of an intricate spider's web with dew drops, but such a word as “snare” draws the reader's train of thought to a metal trap set by hunters. Developing the metaphor, Lee deftly weaves in the word “bones”, to make reference to the “snare” as it would be a sought after item, and also reminds the reader of the morbid theme she infuses in her poem.

The harsh noises of “glITTerIng Snare” are very dental, and therefore threatening as they are almost spat when said. Constricting words imply that frost has frozen the landscape, and has killed it. In conclusion, Lee draws her poem to an end by presenting the inevitability of winter's grasp upon the land. Tantalisingly, she builds tension as she repeats the use of “Slow”, and a sense of something inescapable takes over. The first use of a personal pronoun when time is described to “suck(s) our life,”, infers realisation of unavoidable death; in a way, it is much more terrifying that an end is imminent.

Lee connects the beginning and end of the poem by repeating "Slow moves" at the start of the first and last stanza, allowing the reader to look back at their journey through the transitioning "Field of Autumn". When the "rose tree's thread of scent draws thin-", one may imagine that it is life hanging by a "thread", and the desperation of survival is apparent. The caesura the hyphen causes, coupled with "draws thin", generates a thought of a sharp intake of breath, or the final gasp of air, and the sudden end of life.

At this point tension has reached its apex, and the short severity of "snaps" appears all the more violent and absolute. The final line of the poem is quite incongruent with the rest of the poem as in every other stanza there has been half rhymes ("sound... ground.") that have neatly completed each stanza. The final word "air" does not rhyme with "flower", and it implies a definite change. I believe this is used to symbolise the total change of season, accenting the fact that winter, is finally here.