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A04

11/16/2022

### Sonnet 73's Expression of Life Through the Lens of Nature

Growing old and growing up is a natural process of life. Reaching a point where you can see the end, but still appreciate all of the phases that have passed is a healthy way of coping with change. This is what Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 embodies: growing old is something to be acknowledged and understood yet admired and appreciated. Sonnet 73 creates a parallel between nature and aging which reveals how growing old is a natural process through the use of naturalistic metaphors, lyrical structures, and nature imagery.

Literary tools and elements are what makes a poem unique and speak to the true essence each poem is trying to embody. Sonnet 73 starts with a classic metaphor meant to set the scene for the ongoing topic of growing old in the poem. The speaker compares his age to the time of year "when yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang," (line 2). This metaphor showcases the imagery of a tree with very few leaves left, which is meant to relate to how the speaker feels about his own age: growing old and acknowledging the amount of time he has left in this world. His years of life are represented by the low number of leaves. At this point in the poem, the metaphors are meant to represent the speaker's age, and how the speaker feels as if it relates to nature, but his opinions on what growing old means haven't been touched upon yet. In all, the metaphor of the fallen leaves creates a parallel between nature going through its natural process and humans going through there's. We associate fallen leaves with autumn, not death, which is

what the speaker is trying to convey; growing old is simply just a process and phase of human life just like how plants react and adapt through the changing seasons.

The use of a metaphor is the main literary element used in Sonnet 73 to portray this connection between death and nature. In the fifth line of the poem, Shakespeare uses another metaphor to represent the speaker's portrayal of his age by saying "in me thou seest the twilight of such day," (line 5). The speaker is again comparing his age to an element of nature, saying that he is the end of the day, this means he is approaching the end of his day which is the equivalent of approaching the end of his life.

This connection of age being represented by elements of nature is used to further express the natural elements of aging. The poem isn't claiming that aging is bad, or a negative in life. Rather it is expressing how growing old is a natural process and a natural progression in human life. By having clear metaphors that compare this process to nature itself, Shakespeare is further emphasizing the normal and natural nature of growing old; it's just simply something that happens, like the leaves falling and the day ending.

Then comes the direct comparison of death to nature in the metaphor relating to twilight. The rest of the quatrain reads "As after sunset fadeth in the west, which by and by black night doth take away, death's second self, that seals up all in rest," (lines 6-8). "Death's second self" is in reference to death itself. Death is seen as a concluding chapter of life; the end of the day is clearly being compared to death. This comparison once again ties into how death is a natural part of life. It is all a cycle, and death is the conclusion to that cycle, just like nighttime is the conclusion to the cycle of a day. This tie back to nature is meant to reinforce the idea that growing old and dying is a natural occurrence.

With metaphors being the main driving force of this sonnet, another impactful one occurs in lines 9-12. This metaphor is all about fire; how an old flame is related to the aging of the speaker. “In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire that on the ashes of his youth doth lie, as the death-bed whereon it must expire, consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by,” (lines 9-12). The speaker expresses how his lover sees him as the flame, but a dying flame which is meant to represent his youth going away from him. The last line claims that his youth is dying from the life that once gave it energy. This metaphor is meant to represent youth as something that is fleeting, yet the flame still goes on. The connection to natural elements once again, in this case, it being a flame, continues to suggest that aging is inevitable. Life comes and goes, just like a fire's flame, and nothing about it is inherently good or bad, it simply is. The flame represents youth fading away, and the speaker uses this metaphor to explain to his lover where he is at and how he perceives his own age.

Metaphors aren't the only literary techniques used in this sonnet to emphasize the idea of death that Shakespeare is portraying. The structure of the poem collaborates with literary word choices in relation to nature that flood the poem to create vivid imagery, and this collaboration amplifies the idea that growing up and growing old is something to be appreciated, especially by one's loved ones, because it is something natural. The first three quatrains take the reader on a visual journey through the metaphors of fallen leaves, twilight, and flames of a fire, which all three have a direct connection to nature. The structure of this is meant to immerse the reader into the mind of the speaker. All the colorful and lively descriptions of the fallen leaves, the cold autumn weather, the birds chirping, and the late twilight turning to night time. This scene creates a sense of comfort in things ending, and then this comfort is interrupted by the description of fire. While some may have a negative connotation of fire as something that eats away at things,

the speaker represents fire as something warm and welcoming. It's the inevitable, and he is able to tie that into the idea of comfortability that was showcased earlier in the structure of the poem through the vivid nature imagery.

In the last couplet of the poem, Shakespeare writes "This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong, To love that well which thou must leave ere long," (lines 13-14). This ending structure ties everything together and creates a shift in perspective. This volta shifts the sonnet from the comparison of growing old to things that occur in nature, to expressing why growing old is a good thing. The speaker is expressing to his loved one that it is important to love what will soon be lost, and not to dread losing it, but rather appreciate it for what it was. The love will only grow stronger, and the appreciation for what is about to be lost is what makes it even better.

By structuring the poem with this last couplet having the realization that appreciating the life you have led is better than worrying about it ending reveals the true essence of the sonnet that love will grow stronger through the natural processes of life. This ties the whole poem together; it creates a comparison in the beginning with the metaphors, and then the epiphany occurs. By having this epiphany occur at the end, it creates a lyrical flow to the structure.

Shakespeare's Sonnet 73 is a beautifully written poem filled with nature-based metaphors, colorful natural imagery that ties in with said metaphors, and a classic sonnet structure that reveals an emotional shift in the last couplet. All of these nature-filled literary elements tie in together to emphasize the idea that growing old is a natural occurrence in life. Just like the leaves will fall during autumn, the sun will go away during twilight, and the glowing flames of a fire will consume itself, one's life will ultimately come to an end just like everything does in the natural world. The poem also expresses how this natural occurrence of life coming to

an end isn't something that should be feared. In regards to love, whether it be the love someone holds for another, or even the love one holds for their own life, the realization that the cycle of life might be coming to a conclusion should just amplify that love. Overall, Shakespeare's sonnet 73 exclaims how growing old is the natural life cycle, and rather than fearing this realization, it will lead to one's love for others and for one's life to grow stronger.

Works Cited

Greenblatt, Stephen and James Simpson. "Sonnet 73," *The Norton Anthology English Literature*.  
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