

Mila University Center
Course: English Literature (Second Year BA)
Semester: One
Lecturer: Dr Nihad LAOUAR
Academic Year: 2022/2023

“Human Seasons” by John Keats Analysis

Four Seasons fill the measure of the year;
There are four seasons in the mind of man:
He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear
Takes in all beauty with an easy span:
He has his Summer, when luxuriously
Spring's honied cud of youthful thought he loves
To ruminatè, and by such dreaming high
Is nearest unto heaven: quiet coves
His soul has in its Autumn, when his wings
He furleth close; contented so to look
On mists in idleness—to let fair things
Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook.
He has his Winter too of pale misfeature,
Or else he would forego his mortal nature.

Summary:

This poem is written in iambic pentameter and follows the rhyme scheme of ab ab cd cd ef ef gg. It chronicles the four stages of life presented as the four seasons of the year. John Keats, in this poem, describes the four seasons that are present in the “mind of man”. This means that for every season of life, the individual has a different outlook.

Quatrain One Analysis:

The first quatrain depicts the first season, Spring, which represents the first stage of human life that is childhood. The third line reads “He has his lusty Spring, when fancy clear”. Spring is personified as “lusty” which means passionate and this emphasizes the parallel between Spring season and the youthful state of mind given that spring is a season of rebirth where the natural world revives and reinvigorates. The following line shows how the individual “takes in all beauty with an easy span” at this stage of life, implying that the individual at this point observes beauty without questioning anything and this suggests a sort of innocence that is typical of young age. It is important to note that, the poet’s portrayal of Spring only occupies two lines of the first quatrain which reflects the brevity or shortness of Spring which at the same time reflects the childish outlook on life.

Quatrain Two Analysis:

The following season is Summer and it depicts the following stage of life of adulthood. Summer, according to the poet, lacks the lust and ease of Spring because the human mind at this stage become more active and engaging. The individual at this level ruminates on their youthful thoughts for a very long time. This is presented as a metaphor in which the poet compares youthful thoughts to “spring’s honied cud”. This implies that the act of deep thinking is compared to the act of cows’ chewing their “cud” (grass) for a very long time. In the same manner, the individual reflects on their thoughts with more clarity for a considerable amount of time. Added to this, the man tends to “dream high” during this cycle and eventually gain a sense of enlightenment as he becomes more independent and acquires a sense of self as well as his own life. In doing so, gradually, the man enters the “quiet coves” of Autumn which symbolizes peace and quietness.

Quatrain Three Analysis:

In this stanza, the poet equates Autumn season with middle age. At this stage of life, according to the poet, the man resigns into his own thoughts and rests. Keats uses a bird metaphor as he compares middle-aged man’s soul to a bird who would “furleth” or roll its wings inwards as it rests. Likewise, the middle-aged man rests during this cycle of life. Autumn is a season of deterioration, decay and abundance and these reflect the condition of the middle-aged man that is marked by degrading physical health. This cycle of life is considered as a time of contentedness

for the man as he looks at things that are obscure/misty with peace; this occurs in lines two and three that read “contented so to look on mists in idleness”. The middle-aged man also lets “fair things”, that he once pondered upon at his early age, pass by “unheeded” or unnoticed like a “threshold brook” because this time for him is a time of resignation and closure. “Threshold brook” symbolizes countless natural miracles of life that we ignore because of our fast-fleeting lives. In short, the man during this stage is aware of his surroundings but he is no longer impelled by its delights and charms

Couplet Analysis:

The poem finishes with the last season, Winter, that represents the last stage of life in which the individual has to give up to his mortal nature as he ceases to exist. Winter represents death which is symbolized in the phrase “pale misfeature”.