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Personification in Shelley's Ode to the West Wind

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Abstract

Personification is a type of metaphor poets use to give human characteristics to non-human beings, inanimate objects, or abstract ideas. In poetry, personification allows poets to describe non-human entities and objects through the use of human characteristics, providing them with the ability to describe abstractions, offer relatable content, and enhance the visualization of the work. The poetry of the English Romantic period contains many depictions and concepts of nature. The romantic poets discuss the role of nature with different views in gaining significant ideas into the human attitude. These poets make an allegation to nature as if it some kind of living entity calls made for saving nature which is striving and conveying their notion to the realm.

Keywords: Non human entities, human characteristics, abstracts ideas

Introduction

Percy Bysshe Shelley's work belongs to the Romantic period. One of his most famous poems is Ode to the West Wind, which he wrote in November 1819 while he lived in Florence with his family. Shelley was interested in the wilder aspects of Nature as well as the homelier and more familiar ones. "Nature to him meant the cosmic environment and the great elemental processes- geological and seasonal change, storms, the water-cycle, volcanic activity and life and death" ^[1] "Ode to the West Wind" not only describes nature, but also expresses the revolutionary spirit of the poet. As the title implies the poem is an ode. The form of the ode usually means that the poem is dedicated to someone or something and that there is no fixed system of rhyme schemes. An ode is an elaborated and formally structured poem. The poet wants to celebrate some event with an ode. It is often a subjective reflection of the impression of the poet. Shelley's ode fulfils the aspect of being dedicated; the ode praises the west wind. But he consistently uses a rhyme scheme, the terza rima invented by Dante. So, the poem is labeled by Shelley as being an ode but it contradicts an ode in the aspect of rhyming. Consequently, the content is ode-like and the structure is rather a composition of a quintet of sonnets. However, the sonnets do not exactly correspond to the general forms of sonnets. Shelley uses for each of his sonnets four triplets and a final couplet, so that at least the condition of a sonnet consisting of fourteen lines is regarded.

The theme of nature's power dominates the entire poem. Commenting on Shelley's attraction towards Nature, Dawson mentions: He flew to Nature as he could not solve the mystery of life. In her freshness and grandeur, in the nobility of her silence and the friendliness of her unchangingness, he took refuge and hid himself in her starry pavilion against the windy tempest of life's futility and malice. He becomes her high-priest and confidant. He thirsts for her beauty and toils to mirror her glory in fit and perfect speech ^[2]. The West Wind is symbolically used to represent obliteration. For instance, the speaker says that the West Wind brings powerful storms that destroy human life and other living things. Even though the wind brings renewal, it is chaotic, destructive and unforgiving when it exercises its power. In the poem, the speaker directly addresses the west wind. The speaker treats the west wind as a force of death and decay, and welcomes this death and decay because it means that rejuvenation and rebirth will come soon. In the final two sections of the poem, the speaker suggests that he wants to help promote this rebirth through his own poetry—and that rejuvenation he hopes to see is both political and poetic: a rebirth of society and its ways of writing.

It is interesting to know that Shelley always refers to the wind as "Wind" using the capital letter, suggesting that he sees it as his god. He praises the wind, referring to its strength and might in tones similar to the Biblical Psalms which worship God.

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He also refers to the Greek God, Dionysus. The speaker continues to praise the wind and to beseech it to hear him. When he is satisfied that the wind hears him, he begs the wind to take him away in death, in hopes that there will be a new life waiting for him on the other side.

Shelley personifies many of nature's elements by attaching descriptions of remains of death that are typically human. He begins the poem with a simile by comparing the autumn leaves to ghosts. Shelley's restless soul was constantly drawn to moving natural objects such as, the moving winds, the on-rushing torrents, floating clouds and leaves, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing" [3]. Though leaves are in fact, living things, the term "ghost" implies a spirit or presence from a living being who has passed on. To become a ghost, it is necessary to have a soul and this is specific to humans and other mammals. Shelley uses the idea of giving a soul to an inanimate object in the second stanza of his poem as well. In the fourth line, he uses angels as a metaphor for decaying leaves. Here, the reader is compelled to envision spirit beings falling from the sky with the rain and lightning. In another area of the poem where Shelley applies human death attributes, he states that each of the "winged seeds" is "like a corpse within its grave" Again, he gives us the image of a human who has died and is lying in he or she's but! In the third stanza of Shelley's poem, he uses personification by assigning emotion to some of nature's elements. In the eleventh line, Shelley declares that the "sea-blooms and the oozy woods" will "suddenly grow grey with fear". The emotions he assigns are relative to the idea of death. These are the feelings that humans develop when they feel that death is near. Shelley has again, managed to give the reader an intense image of foliage shaking in.

Shelley first describes this wild spirit as an "enchanter" that drives multicolored autumn leaves before it. The autumn leaves have died and fallen off the trees, and so the poet likens them to "pestilence-stricken multitudes." A pestilence is a plague or serious illness that kills people, so this image is obviously of the wind as destroyer. In contrast, the poet then says that the wind at the same time also hides the "winged seeds" in their "dark wintry bed" until spring comes and the seeds sprout. This image shows the wind as preserver.

The poet describes how the wind sweeps the clouds along, bringing rain and lightning, and also how the wind creates a pattern in the clouds that looks like the hair "of some fierce Maenad." The Maenads were women who were devotees of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine. They would go into mad, ecstatic dances while they were worshipping. The poet suggests that the wild wind sculpts cloud patterns in the sky that suggest this wild abandon. The poet says that the wild spirit of the wind is also a singer of dirges, which are songs sung at funerals. In this case, the wind sings the death of the old year as it descends into winter. The late-season wild spirit of the west wind wakens the Mediterranean Sea, which sleeps during the summer, and causes the Atlantic Ocean to create chasms between tossing waves. Finally, the poet calls upon the west wind, as if it were sentient, to become the wild spirit of inspiration for him. The poet wishes to be like a leaf or cloud or wave so that the wind can touch and move him. He wants to scatter his words among mankind and be as "the trumpet of a prophecy." However, like the wild spirit of the wind, the poet longs to be not destroyer only but also preserver, as evidenced by the

last line when he states that the winter blowing of the west wind means that spring will eventually follow.

Conclusion

In the beginning, the poet personifies the West Wind as a Supernatural being, who embodies both anger and mercy, life and death. The wind is like a force that cannot be seen yet everything is controlled by it. Shelley considers the wind as "Preserver and Destroyer," a term that evokes spiritual imaginations. Next the poet personifies the wind with Death, as it turns the leaves into "ghosts" which are "pestilence-stricken." In addition phrases like "decaying" and "sepulcher" also symbolise the spirit of death. Yet, the poet asks the West Wind to "lift" him up that symbolises its positive side as supernatural being. In the final lines, the poet describes the west as having a "lyre", depicting that the West Wind has poetic characteristics as well. It is aeolian harp that "plays" lyrics. So both the poet and the wind are the same.

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