

**Syntactic Complexity and Aesthetic Awareness in Keats's****"To Autumn": an exercise in Aesthetic Criticalism****SAMIR A.K. ALSHEIKH****UNIVERSITY OF MISAN/COLLEGE OF EDUCATION/ENGLISH DEPARTMENT****To Autumn****I**

- 1 Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness ,  
 2 Close bosom – friend of the maturing sun ,  
 3 Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
 4 With fruits the vines that round the thatch – eves run ;  
 5 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage – trees ,  
 6 And full all fruit with ripeness to the core ;  
 7 To swell the gourd , and plump the hazel shells  
 8 With a sweet kernel ; to set budding more ,  
 9 And still more , later flowers for the bees ,  
 10 Until they think warm days will never cease ,  
 11 For summer has o'er – brimmed their clammy cells .

**II**

- 12 Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store ?  
 13 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
 14 Thee sitting careless on a granary floor ,  
 15 Thy hair soft – lifted by the winnowing wind ;  
 16 Or on a half – reaped furrow sound a sleep ,  
 17 Drowsed with the fume of poppies , while thy hook  
 18 Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers ;  
 19 And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
 20 Steady thy laden head across a brook ;  
 21 Or by a cedar – press , with patient look ,  
 22 Thou watchest the last oozing hours by hours .

**III**

- 23 Where are the songs of Spring ? Ay , where are they ?  
 24 Think not of them , thou hast thy music too –  
 25 While barred clouds bloom the soft – dying day  
 26 And touch the stubble – plains with rosy hue :  
 27 Then in a willful choir the small gnats mourn  
 28 Among the river shallows , borne aloft  
 29 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies ;  
 30 And full – grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn ;  
 31 Hedge – crickets sing ; and now with treble soft  
 32 The red – breast whistles from a garden – croft ;  
 33 And gathering swallows twittering in the skies .

A close reading of Keats's poem immediately shows predominance of certain syntactic units , i.e. the nominal groups in the first place and the verbal

groups in the second . Table ( I ) illustrates all the nominal groups in Keats's " To Autumn " . Out of 56 , no less than 13 have both a specific deictic ( 11 " the , " 2 others ) , and a modifier ( other than the deictic ) or qualifier or both . The less in frequency are the nominal groups containing the type which consists of the head preceded by a specific deictic ( 10 "the, " I other ) . Next to that type is the one consisting of a modifier ; it is only ( 8 ) . The type is equal in number to the type consisting of both non – specific deictic and a modifier . Less than these types is the one involving the head only ; it is ( 7 ) in number . the other type consisting of a qualifier is ( 4 ) which is equal to that one which consists a qualifier while the head is preceded by the specific deictic" the".

What is characteristic about the nominal groups in the poem is that the head is mostly a compound noun or it is preceded by a compound modifier . The nominal groups are mostly embedded in prepositional groups which amount to ( 17 ) in the text .

The other syntactic unit in Keats's poetic text , as Table II has illustrated , is the verbal group . Out of (35) , no less than ( 20 ) are intransitive processes , whereas ( 15 ) are transitive processes throughout the poem . The compound processes are scarcely found in the poem .

The first division of the poem is laden with , in terms of Halliday's Functional Grammar ( FG ) , material processes ; whereas the third division is overwhelmed with sensing process . In the second division , though the material processes are still predominant , this type is not highly dynamic as of the first division .

Such a complex network of poetic syntax is not without relevance to the Keatsian aesthetic premises . But before going through the correlation of the poetic linguistic form and the aesthetic interpretation , it is of interest to this paper to analyze systematically the poem in its three divisions so as to realize the cohesion of the poetic text as a unit whole .

"To Autumn " was written between 7 and 13 March 1818 . Apparently , the poem is a picturesque abstraction of the beauty of the season . The poem opens with a series of nominal groups as if the poet painted in words the landscape against which all the physically dynamic acts of nature will proceed .

Season of mist and mellow fruitfulness ,

Close bosom – friend of the maturing sun ,

Let's notice , first , the metonymic noun group ( season of mist ) and the identification of autumn with ripeness and friendship and the sun with mature . so , it is the time of blossoming and growth . The pictorial scene is abruptly plunged into a set of actively natural actions caused by that imaginative conspiracy between the agent ( autumn ) and her instrument ( the sun ) . The choice of ( *conspire* ) is of significance to the stylistic analysis . *Conspire* is a syntactically intransitive , but semantically transitive verb item ; yet Keats chooses a syntactic framework within which to portray the conspiracy between Autumn and the Sun , which seems transitive , even though in fact " how to load

and bless . . . , to bend . . . ' , etc. is complement , not a direct object , of *conspire* . ( See Freeman , 1981 : 83 – 99 ) . The significance of the verb item lies in the fact that autumn is personified and it is the actor that causes all the act of ripeness in the natural phenomenon . These images of natural growth are encoded in the syntactic network of the poem , or to satisfy Halliday's perspectives , the lexicogrammatical network of the text . The processes with exception of *bless* are of material type as in ,

- load with fruit the vines that round the thatch run ,
- bend with apples the moss'd cottage – trees ,
- fill all fruit with ripeness to the core ,
- swell the gourd ,
- plump the hazel shells with a sweet kernel .

The processes , whether transitive or intransitive , are interwoven with the nominal groups such as , " fruit , " " the vines , " " the thatch – eves , " " the core , " the moss'd cottage –trees , " " ripeness , " " the gourd , " " the hazel shells , "and " a sweet kernel " . The correlation of the syntactic units creates the texture of the text not only as syntactic units but also semantic units since the text itself is " unit of meaning " . Not only the conjunctions , but even the infinitives , in this context , operate as coherent " ties " to bind the patterns together as one whole .

In the initial lines of verse , the nature is portrayed as a static phenomenon by the use of the nominal groups , but it is immediately set in motion by and through the sequence of the material processes of the poetic structures . The nature is fruitfully at work ; the whole universe around the poet is charged with activeness . The personified autumn , using the sun as her instrument , directs all the forces of nature as a revealing actor . Let's consider , now , the lexicogrammatical choice *bless* . *Bless* , is a verbal process . The category represents the process of saying . The *Sayer* is conscious . But to occur in the poetic structure , " *to load and bless with fruit the vines . . .* , " this verbal process leads to a collocational shift . So , the process is metaphorically used in the structure . This may explain the Keats's religious and aesthetic faith in the eternity of beauty that is transient .

The Keatsian aesthetic thinking is manifested by and through a series of images which are construed thematically to build up the imaginatively dynamic landscape . " *To Autumn* " ; however , is not simply a descriptive poem about the season . Rather, it is poetic thinking of nature which is parallel to art , as we shall see , encoded into highly compacted poetic style . The language of poetry serves as a vehicle to carry the Keatsian aesthetic vision . The poem . By the force of imagery , Autumn is imaged as a strong reproduction power , a power which is traditionally represented as female Cerec , the goddess of corn and harvest . ( See Sendry and Giannone , 1966 : 75 ) . Still , that powerful overflow of ripeness witnesses an impulse of transience . As the ode develops , the sense of change is gradually felt in the second division .

The image of Autumn , in the second stanza , is identified with a woman leisurely sitting " careless on a granary floor ," or " sounds a sleep on a half – reaped furrow. "

What is illuminating , here , is the prominence of the prepositional groups , as in " on a granary floor , " " by the winnowing wind , " " on half – reaped furrow , " " with the fume of poppies . " " by a cider – press , " " with patient look . " The function of these syntactic units is to give depth to the poetic structures . The detailed account of the season in her transient intervals are mirrored by these lexicogrammatical units .

The actions , sorted out in the chosen processes ( seek , sit , drowse , keep ) are not active as before . Here , we may notice the omnipresence of the mental processes like " see , watch", while the Sensor is still the she – autumn .This may explain the presence of the pronoun " she " for the first time in the text . The metaphorical modes of expression ( metaphor and simile ) are closely linked to the identity of the woman . They are still images of beauty , " while thy hook / Spares the next swath and all its twine'd flowers, " or " And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep / Steady thy laden head across a brook, " The sluggish activities may express the spirit of change in the body of nature . The spirit of transience ; however , is strongly felt and seen in the final division .

The seminal stylistic feature of the third stanza of "To Autumn" is the predominance of the mental processes in its various manifestations . Here , we anticipate ,

- ( 1 ) processes of perception , e.g. "touch" "bleat" , " whistle" , "twitter",
- ( 2 ) processes of cognition , e.g. "think" ,
- ( 3 ) processes of affection , e. g. " mourn" , "sing".

Moreover , we may find the existential processes , as in "be" "bloom", "live", "die", The whole scene is overwhelmed with auditory images. "To Autumn" is aesthetically sensory in its third division, There is a progress from the tactile senses, to the visual , culminating in the auditory senses , and focuses on the vegetable world, then on the human activity in gathering the harvest and concludes in the world of animals, birds and insects . (See Barnard, 1973: 675). With the sunrise , in the first stanza, the nature is fully active. All the inanimate elements are set in motion . with the sunset in the final stanza; however, the poet is left with the sounds of nature . The life – death antithesis is presented as in, "while barre'd clouds bloom the soft – dying day", "or" sinking as the light wind lives or dies. "One more stylistic characteristic is the frequent occurrences of the compounds, like ,

- the stubble – plain ,
- Hedge – crickets ,
- The red – breast ,
- A garden – croft .

And also the compound epithets , as in ,

- the soft dying – day ,

- full – grown lambs .

"To Autumn", stylistically speaking, is written impersonally: there is no self – reflection in the poem. The metaphorical structures is organically systematized so as to produce the texture of the poetic text. Though the images portray the temporal and special transience, they work in a complementary schema to encode the aesthetic content. Keats's experience is purely aesthetic. The experience is structured in the language of the poem . The syntactic design is correlated to the poet's aesthetic intuition . Freeman ( Ibid. : 93-4 ) sheds light on what he has called "syntactic mimesis", imitation by the poem's syntactic pattern of the subject matter. So Freeman:

"To Autumn encapsulates just an act of self – creation .Autumn, external to natural process at the outset of the poem, controls it, is informed by it, and at the poem's end is one which it. That movement is precisely mirrored in the poem's syntax . . . "To

Autumn" is not only a poem a bout poetry. It is a poem about Poetry.

Freeman, in reality, attributes the aesthetic experience with a universal dimension. The impersonal style , here , does not portray the visible physical events of nature only, but also the invisible process of poetic creation .



Professor M.A.K. Halliday

The question that necessarily arises, in this context, is: What is really the purposive ness of keats's "To Autumn" as poetic creation?

To approach a satisfactory interpretation to the poem on an aesthetic basis , it is of interest to this paper to speculate philosophy of beauty, more specifically Kant's philosophical axioms. So, to analyze the Ketsian insights in terms of Kant's aesthetic paradigm, let's embark on Ketas's wording. In his letter to John Hamilton Reynolds on May 3, 1818, the poet argues that "axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses".

In his *Critique of Judgment* Kant has categorized the axioms or "moments" of the aesthetic judgment . The first moment is that " aesthetic judgment is free or

pure of any such interests . Interest is defined as a link to real desire and action."(See the Internet Encyclopaedia, pp. 1- 20) When saying, "That is a beautiful sunset, "our saying involves an aesthetic judgment (or "judgment of taste"). Such a judgment is disinterested , meaning that we take pleasure in something because we judge it beautiful (Ibid) .



Immanuel Kant

Taking " To Autumn , " as a piece of imagination , we discern that the poem is portrayed as a pleasurable moment . Not only that , the poet rejoices the " season of mists and mellow fruitfulness. "That rejoice or ecstasy has been encoded in an abstract, picturesque, poetic form. The poetic style is impersonal, sponsored by the powerful overflow of syntax . There is a "disinterested" judgment in dealing with the aesthetic object , i.e. Autumn .In prose, Keats has explicitly expressed such a joy in judgment . In his letter to Reynolds of 21 September 1819 (cited in Barnard, 1973: 674–5) , Keats has described the poem's occasion. But what is characteristic about the letter is the poet's aesthetic judgment and his taking pleasure in the transcendental moment of beauty. So Keats,

How beautiful the season is now – How fine the air . A temperate sharpness about it – Really without joking , chaste weather – Dian skies – I never lik'd stubble fields so much as now – Aye Better than the chilly green of the spring . Somehow a stubble Plain look warm- In the same way that some pictures look warm – This struck me so much in my sunday's walk that I composed it .

For Keats, not only searching joy in the agreeable is possible, but in something disagreeable too. After beholding West's painting "Death on the Pale horse, "Keats's comment , in his letter to George and Thomas Keats on December 21 1817, is that, "the excellence of every Art is its intensity ,capable of making all evaporates, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth.

The joy in beauty, in reality, is a thematic structure that is organically rooted in Keatsian aesthetic poetics . Not only the odes, but in Keats's poetry, we discern that Keats's images mirror that religious and aesthetic faith, a faith in

the permanence of "beauty that must die". The joy in beauty is obviously revealed in the first lines of Keats's *Endymion* (cited in Barnard, 1973: 106):

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever :  
Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness . . .

Likewise , the glorification of the season is , in fact , a homage to beauty . Such insights in the phenomenon of nature are fundamentally concerned with the "beauty of the beautiful"; it does not link to any earthly desire or action. The very transcending thing is transformed into a permanent work of art by and through the power of imagination. It is of interest to mention that the very expression "disinterested" is used by both the German philosopher and the English poet. For Keats, the word means "free from selfish interest". Keats presumes that this may be the nature of poetry as distinguishing from the deliberate and self – conscious.

The second Kantian axiom is that "aesthetic judgment behaves universally. If I judge a certain landscape to be beautiful, then, I implicitly demand universality in the name of *taste*. (Opt.ic, p. 7). Keats's poem, as we have seen, is not simply descriptive account of the season beauties. Rather, it penetrates the overwhelming process of the natural phenomenon in an abstract way. What gives the poem its universal hue is the " aesthetic distance "which the poet exercises in portraying the season. Keats's coinage "negative capability" refers to the poet's endeavor to describe the ability to experience life without attempting to impose one's personality upon it. (See Gilbert, 1965: 72–3). Keats argues that " with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration (Opt. ic, p.7). Both the philosopher and the poet correlate the process of art to the "mystery", in the case of Keats, and the "unknown", in the case of the philosopher . So, it is not just that the purpose "for the beauty of the beautiful " happens to be unknown but it cannot be known. "To Autumn", is taken to be an excellent illustration of the Kantian "negative capability".

"Purposiveness" is the third and the milestone of Kant's philosophy of beauty.

To enlighten that moment, Kant argues that beauty is equivalent neither to utility nor perfection, but is still purposive . Beauty in nature, then, will appear as purposive with respect to our faculty of judgment, but its beauty will have no ascertainable purpose. "This is why beauty is pleasurable since, Kant argues, pleasure is defined as a feeling that arises on the achievement of a purpose , or at least, the recognition of purposiveness. (The Internet Encyclopedia ,pp. 1- 20) . In a sense, "To Autumn", as a unit of meaning, is essentially sensual, but still, there is neither philosophical schema nor philosophical content in it. The images are portrayed to serve nothing but the ends of their own, i.e., the beauty of the beautiful.

The fourth and the last moment of the aesthetic judgment is that of necessity . Kant means that the judgment does not either follow or produce a determining

concept of beauty, but exhausts itself in being exemplary precisely of an aesthetic judgment. The necessity of judgment is grounded upon "common sense", by which he means a priori principle of our taste, that is, our feeling for the beautiful (Ibid.).

So far Keats's poetry is concerned, there is a general consensus amongst critics that Keats is essentially sensual. That is to say "sensation" is the key idea of Keats's experience . His letters overdo such an assumption . In his letter to Benjamin Baily (Opt. ic), he rejoices, "O for a life of Sensation rather than of thought ! It is "a vision in the form of youth" a Shadow of reality to come". And by that feeling , the poet could reach the" happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated – And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight sensation. "But this is not the whole story. The Keatsian experience is not purely sensual : there is a sense of unification between sense and thought . Life of sense may not only mean sense experience, but also intuitive perception of truths (Ibid.). The very concept can be anticipated in Croce' intuitionism as the fundamental process of our knowledge. The immediate perception of sensuous or empirical intuition, the immediate apprehension of intellectual or immaterial objects by our intelligence is called "intellectual intuition". It may be remarked that Kant calls empirical intuitions our

knowledge of objects through sensation and pure intuition our perception of space and time as the forms a priori of sensibility . ( See Knight . 2003 : 1-3 ) . Kant , in his aesthetic philosophy , is on the side of the British philosophers of art and beauty (Shaftsbury, Hutcheson, Hume, and Broke). The key ideas of the group are that (I) the idea of a definite human nature, such that studies of beauty could, within limits, be universal in scope; (ii) the assertion that beautiful objects and our responses to them were essentially involved in sense or feeling, and were not cognitive; (iii) that any "natural" responses to beauty were generally overlaid by individual and communal experience, habits and customs (Ibid.) .

Keats, on his side, asserts the significance of experience in acquisition of knowledge. Keats comments , in his letter to George and Georgiana Keats on February 14 – May 3, 1819, that "Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced – even a Proverb is no proverb to you till your Life has illustrated it". That is because "an extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people". So the poet who amounts the "wings of imagination", would exist " partly on sensation partly on thoughts. "And the" eternal happiness "comes not only by drinking" this old Wine of heaven, but also by "increase in knowledge and know all things". Keats's developing aesthetics moves onward towardsthe realm of reality , "the setting sun will always set me to right-, say Keats in his letter to Benjamin Baily (Ibid.)", or if a sparrow come before my Window I Take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel. "But even in that" real "preoccupation, Keatss's pursuit is still aesthetic". The poet's intuition or the "feeling for the beautiful", predominates not only his poetic creation, but also his critical thought.



Keats's purposive ness , in this context , is different from that of Shelley . Shelley' is profoundly ideological . In Queen Mab ( 1813 ) , Shelley manifest his political and social world – view by discarding the tyrannical trinity of " kings , priests and statesmen . " He has his own " lust " to reform the situation and the institution of humanity . Though Keats's works of art may have had purposes ( the poet might have expressed a certain mood or communicated a certain concept ) , but , still , the thematic structure serves its purposive ness as an aesthetic vision . In the arts , as Mukarovsky ( cited in Freeman , 1970 : 49 ) has put it , aesthetic valuation necessarily stands highest in the hierarchy of the values containing in the work . Keats's " to Autumn , as the stylistic analysis has shown , does not embed self – reflection ; it is not a poem about individual emotionalism . Rather , it is an aesthetic judgment of nature claded in impersonal style . So , the poem , semantically speaking , is not about the creation of nature only , but also about the poetic creation itself which has the sense of universality . " To Autumn , " in this context , stands as par excellent exemplification of aesthetic judgment , not on the part of philosophy but on the part of poetry . The poem serves its end as an aesthetic experience .

The analysis of "To autumn", is an exercise in "Aesthetic Criticalism".

Aesthetic Criticalism is a critical approach that links the linguistic form of a literary text to its aesthetic form . The analysis has recourse to certain linguistic theory serving as a theoretical framework to the analysis. So the process proceeds from the linguistic analysis, which is the first phase, to the aesthetic interpretation. The two phases are necessarily correlated by a hypothesis . It is no wonder, in this respect, that the aesthetic interpretation follows or comes alongside with the linguistic form but never precedes it. The aesthetic interpretation, in our approach, is deepened by the axioms of the philosophy of beauty. The approach is a further development of the so – called "Stylistic Criticism", a trend in criticism exercised by practitioners in modern stylistic discipline. (See Freeman, 1980: 138–165). But, if the merit of the stylistic approach depends upon its ability to illuminate poetic form and its bases in pattern of language, as Freeman (Ibid.: 49 ) has said, the merit of our approach; however, is to correlate language to aesthetic thinking which is universal in nature.

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Table I  
Nomina Groups in " To autumn :

+ / - M/Q M	+ M/Q Q	MQ	+ M / Q
+ / - D later flowers warm days patient look barre'd clouds rosy hue full-grown lambs hilly bourn gathering swallows	season of mists mellow fretfulness treble soft	close bosom – friend of the maturing sun	
+ D the mossed – cottage trees the hazel shells their clammy cells the winnowing wind its twin'd flowers the next swath the laden head the last ooziings the soft – dying day the stubble - plains the small gnats the light wind the red – breast	thy hair soft – lifted the fume of poppies the thatch –eves the songs of Spring budding more		the vines the core the gourd the bees the river the store thy hook the music the skies
+D a sweet kernel non - a granary floor specific a gleaner a brook a cedar-press a wailful choir a garden - croft a half – reaped furrow			
- D fruit fruit summer ripeness hedge – crickets apples			

Table II

Processes in " To Autumn	
Transitive processes	Intransitive processes
load and bless with fruits the vines eves bend with apples the moss'd cottage – trees run fill all fruit with ripeness to the core swell the gourd plump the hazel shells with a sweet kernel set budding more has o'er brimmed their clammy cells hath not seen thee oft amid thy store may find thee spares the new swath keep steady thy laden head across the brook watch the last oozings hour by hour bloom the soft – dying day touch the stubble – plants with rosy hue	conspire with him round the thatch –  think warm days will never cease seeks abroad sit careless on a granary floor sound a sleep drows'd with the fume of poppies are the songs of Spring ? are they ? think not of them hast thy music too mourn sink lives or dies bleat from hilly bourn sing whistle twitter in the skies