

The descriptive art: a study of James Thomson's the seasons.
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Abstract:

The Seasons by James Thomson is dominated by a conception of order in nature. The poem treats nature not simply as an aggregate of individual details but rather as a vast pattern that has intellectual significance. The pattern is conceived to be both static and cyclical in character. As a static pattern nature is presented as a set of aesthetic and moral relationships. In the poem individual scenes are treated as aesthetic compositions, in the manner of the landscape art of the period. The problem of moral evil is posed by the suffering nature can inflict on man. As a cyclical pattern, nature is a pattern of action, a process. The activity of the individual objects of nature in their interrelationships with each other form the cyclical order of the seasons. The poem's conception of natural order is reflected in its style. Rhetorical figures, such as periphrasis and personification, that have the function of referring an object to its place in a scheme of classification are extensively used throughout the poem. Moreover, its conception of order as a cycle of action is reflected in the use of participial endings, which express the continuous action of natural objects. Convolved in structure, the syntax of the poem employs what one critic has called a phrasal type of construction. Subordinate phrases and clauses as well as a latinized word order interrupt and modify the expression of thought. The effect of the convolutions in the poem's sentence structure is to suggest the multitudinousness of nature. But the syntax also reveals the order that underlies nature. By creating meaningful patterns of expression, such as comparison and contrast, its syntax suggests the patterns that compose the individual scene and that form the seasonal cycle of nature. Thus, the poem does not simply describe nature. Rather, it presents a conception of nature, a nature that has form. Because it has form, nature is conceptually significant meaningful in terms of human understanding. The art of description, as it is exemplified in the diction and syntax of the poem, is an art of revealing the pattern that underlies the appearance of nature.

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