Structure And Literary Devices In Sleep And Poetry by John Keats

The one who came to optimize the popular conception of the Romantic poet as a passionate dreamer that celebrates the world of imagination, who lived a short life and still managed to produce 54 poems that widely range from sonnets, odes, romance, and epics. John Keats lost his parents at age fourteen, but he still managed to push himself to become a surgeon and a poet on the side. Eventually, he gave up being a surgeon and became a full-time poet. Initially, everyone dismissed him as a poet. It wasn't until he gained a few motives from being in tumultuous emotional circumstances. Between being engaged and wanting to be financially secure before marrying and being haunted by fears of his own early death- throat ulcers from the previous summer during a walking tour in poor weather. This is when he founded one of the "most extraordinary periods of creativity in the history of English literature" (Black, 2013, p. 432-433). Whatever life he was creating in his poems, the reader lived it. It put them in the moment, especially the poem "Sleep and Poetry." M. H. Abrams puts it well in his article describing the fourth dimension of poetry. He says to produce the full effect of reading a poem four dimensions must come into play. "The visual aspect, the sounds of words, the meaning of words, and the variety of speech sounds" (Abrams, 2012, p. 2). He successfully decodes all four dimensions in his poem "Sleep and Poetry" through imagery, symbolism, personification, language, tone, and structure.

To start, "Sleep and Poetry" is the young Keats' platform. He begins with a series of questions, which Keats later gives his answer to. Keats's beloved sleep was: gentle, tranquil, secret, serene, and nonliving. I could tell he held sleep in high regard, but then he furthers his thought with more questions and answers "But what is higher beyond thought than thee?" (Sleep and Poetry 19). So, for all its soothing and inspiring qualities, sleep is disturbed by poetry. Poetry solves life mystery he says, it reveals truths and celebrates achievements. This was around the time he started devoting his life to poetry instead of being a surgeon. And since he devotes his life to poetry he, therefore, has to unravel aspects of life and communicate them with humanity. Keats thinks he deserves "immortality" as his reward for his demotion. He says "life is but a day" because he is scared fate won't grant that to him. (Sleep and poetry 85). At the end of the stanza, he rejoices with the life that he was given. He then asks for ten years to accomplish his poetry goals and that his artistic appreciation of nature will carry him through it all. It caught me off guard when he acknowledged that poets should not just aim to celebrate the pastoral landscape considering how many of his famous poems were nature-themed. He said they need to engage in life's deepest mysteries. He starts criticizing eighteenth-century Schools of poetry. They turned poetry into a craft instead of art through their "musty laws" (Sleep and Poetry 195). He defines the true meaning of poetry in his own words by describing it as a friend, who lifts the thought of man. But it is more than beauty, it is also darkness. Together it honors what it means to be human. The poem concludes with the idea of brotherhood. He pays tribute to his friends: "And friendliness the nurse of mutual good" (Sleep and Poetry 122). He specifically mentions Leigh Hunt. He ends the poem on a good note by asserting that a new poet has arose. "Howsoever they be done, I leave them as a father leaves his son" (Sleep and Poetry 404). He is inspiring us to go forth into the world and to speak for oneself.

Displayed in this poem, are many literary devices. All the devices unite to give it the effect of the

fourth dimension. The most important tool used here is imagery. Keats was known for his strong use of imagery and it is very relevant in “Sleep and Poetry.” Imagery gives the poem a visual aspect dimension. M. H. Abrams says that the visual aspect signals the audience is to read the printed text as a poem, not as prose, and also offers visual cues as to the pace, pause, stops, and intonation of reading. I noticed an abundant amount of imagery used just in the first stanza. Keats paints in my head the prettiest, most significant scenarios. “What is more gentle than a wind in summer?/ What is more soothing than the pretty hummer/ That stays one moment in an open flower” (Sleep and poetry 1-3). I could almost feel the slight warm breeze and hear the sweet buzz of a hummingbird. All senses were intrigued. When he says, “ What is more tranquil than a musk-rose blowing/ In a green island, far from all men’s knowing?” (Sleep and Poetry 5-7). I became relaxed and able to understand why he started answering those questions with sleep because sleep intrigues relaxation. Another example of imagery that cues peace is “than wings of swans, then doves dim-seen eagle?” (Sleep and Poetry 22). Every sense I have is collected and soft. In the next stanza, sensory details are still being drawn in. Taste is brought into play as fresh berries from mountain trees are introduced. Keats also uses imagery to convey his direct criticism. In lines 233-235 of “Sleep and Poetry” themes of poems are being described as “ugly clubs, the Polyphemus Disturbing the sea.” Like the Polyphemus, their energy isn't directed with focus or precision. So their “clubs" only get attention from “ disturbing the sea.”

Another literary device he uses to create the fourth dimension is his use of symbolism and personification. Keats compares sleep to poetry and while doing so he personifies sleep to make a better argument. The first stanza starts with imagery and although when first reading it, I couldn't tell the imagery was about sleep, I soon figured it out. “What is more gentle than a wind in summer?” Keats answered his question with sleep. Sleep is what was more gentle than summer wind and more soothing than the “pretty hummer” and “buzzes cheerily from bower to bower.” Sleep can not actually do a lot of what he was saying, but by putting these characteristics with sleep, it made it more intense for me to read. Keats also directly describes sleep in the second stanza by saying it “is the most happy listener” (Sleep and Poetry 16). When I first read these descriptions I was overwhelmed so I didn't think about their meaning a lot. The only thing they did for me was to set the tone. But they do have a meaning that I have never thought about before. Sleep is the best listener and being a good listener is letting one truly express himself. Sleep brings along dreams, which brings self-expression. There is not a better match with poetry than sleep because that is exactly what poetry does to the writers. Sleep stands as a symbol for poetry and the more Keats goes on with personifying sleep the further it allows me to relate it to poetry. Giving the poem one of the dimensions of meaning words. His words are not just there to set the tone.

The structure of this poem is not very complex. The rhyme scheme starts off as aabbccddeeffgghh and does not extremely change throughout. It is written in heroic couplets. However, this is ironic considering his attack on the Augustan approach to poetry that makes use of the same verse form. Although the structure is obvious to see, the tone often is varied. This makes the dimension of “a variety of words” easy to accomplish. First, Keats goes on and on about sleep and how nothing can get better than sleep, then he adds on to that by bringing poetry in. Sleep is now being compared to poetry for its soothing and inspiring qualities. Stanza three is a lot shorter than the first two stanzas and has a short and typical meaning behind it also. This stanza focuses on nature and humanistic importance. He then starts talking about death “Of flowering bays, that I may die a death” he was contemplating the many possibilities afterlife. (Sleep and Poetry 58). He shifts from the afterlife to immortality where he can be

whatever he wants to be in peace. He expresses that he has a fear of dying without accomplishing everything he wanted to accomplish. Music is the next aspect brought into “Sleep and Poetry.” The sounds of nature are music to our ears and it is a beautiful thing to listen to, only if we stop and allow ourselves to listen. This is where he starts defining the true purpose of poetry and realistically explaining how life works. There will be hard times and poems should not only include happiness and bright colors, but also death and sadness to illustrate those hard times in life. His final switch in tone is to friendship. The reason the tone is shifted so much is because of what this poem demonstrates. This is how young Keats expressed his and others' works. He is exploring all the possible directions his work could go. It goes back and forth from positive to negative too many times to count, which is much like his struggle to fame during this period of his life. But no matter what. Keats stays determined to bring back the true meaning of poetry.

Sleep engages with the human heart. It explores life sorrows and joys, which is the reason why he chose to interpret his meaning of poetry alongside sleep. He used literary devices like imagery, symbolism, and personification only to emphasize the relationship between the two. But, the message was not to show the relationship, it was to show the importance of reviving poetry’s energy and purpose. A step from the poem's deep meaning is a good technique and structure. A lot of poets can not achieve including the four dimensions of poetry in their poem. He inserted the visual aspect of the sounds of words by using imagery to draw in all of my senses. He then combined symbolism and personification to create the dimension of the meaning of words. And lastly, language, structure, and sound to give the poem the dimension for a variety of words.