

The aesthetic of life's cycle: a Kantian analysis of figurative language in William Blake's *The Ecchoing Green*

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the aesthetic portrayal of life's cyclical nature in William Blake's poem, The Ecchoing Green. In particular, it focused on analyzing the role of figurative language in enhancing the poem's artistic depth. In pursuit of this objective, the study employed a qualitative descriptive method and aesthetic criticism. Grounded on Immanuel Kant's Analytic of the Beautiful, the study analyzed how Blake's use of literary devices evoked the four principles central to aesthetic judgment: disinterested pleasure, universal subjectivity, purposiveness and necessity. To capture the representation of each stage of life, the analysis categorized the figurative expressions according to the three fundamental stages of life: childhood, adulthood and old age. The findings revealed that the use of figurative language not only delineates the phases of life. It is evident that the poem did not solely illustrate the joys and innocence of youth, the wisdom and resilience of adulthood and the introspective peace of old age. Through the aesthetic lens, it revealed how figurative language captured the essence of each stage of life. Significantly, the figurative languages in The Ecchoing Green enhanced the poem's artistic coherence and emotional resonance. This study showed how the harmonious structure and universal themes embedded in the poem evoked a deep appreciation of the transient yet beautiful nature of human life. Ultimately, the research highlighted the role of figurative language in shaping aesthetic experience and literary perception. As a result, the analysis contributed to a richer understanding of how language evoked deeper philosophical and universal truths. More importantly, the study strategically contributed to the promotion of literary appreciation and critical thinking. In the light of the study's insights, the analysis encouraged active engagement with literature as a medium for understanding human experiences across life stages. By fostering a deeper literary appreciation, cultural awareness and critical thinking, the study aligned with Sustainable Goal 4 which is the Quality Education.

Keywords: *Literary Criticism, William Blake, Aesthetic Criticism, Poetic Expressions, Human Experiences*

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Introduction

"Life is a gift" as Maya Angelou once said which reminded us to cherish every moment and to embrace the beauty in every phase of life. This appreciation of life's stages is echoed in literature, wherein the cycle of life frequently emerged as a central theme. The recurring theme of the life cycle in literature stemmed from its ability to capture the harmony between nature and human existence. William Blake, a prominent English Romantic poet known for his visionary and deeply symbolic works (Dutta & Talukder, 2024), masterfully conveyed this theme in *The*

Ecchoing Green, vividly illustrated the passage of time using figurative language. Many uses figurative language because humans, as natural imitators, better appreciate and relate to nature when it is likened to human qualities Azmi et al. (2023). Although figurative language has been a constant feature in literature, its form and functions have evolved over time (Monteza & Miralles, 2023). Consequently, the study aimed to analyze how figurative language enhanced the poem's aesthetic depiction of time's passage. However, while poetry's distinctive creative and aesthetic appeal is

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rooted in its subjective and personal experience (Furniss & Bath, 2013), a comprehensive study connecting the assessment of a poem's creativity and aesthetic appeal remained lacking (Chaudhuri et al., 2024). Moreover, the determinants of aesthetic appreciation in poetry remain largely unclear (Hitsuwari & Nomura, 2021). In fact, numerous studies pointed out the need to explore perception across art forms and other artistic domains (Knoop et al., 2016), emotional and aesthetic response in meaning-making process (Ahmad & Khalid, 2022), poetic expression in less structured and more emotionally driven forms (Osowiecka & Kolanczyk, 2018), aesthetic and artistic beauty of literature (Manqoush & Al-Wadhaf, 2021). To address the gap, the study offered a focused aesthetic analysis of *The Ecchoing Green's* figurative expression and how it contributes to its artistic beauty and thematic depth.

The study of (Godess-Riccitelli, 2024), provided an insightful clarification and expansion of Kant's aesthetic theory. By focusing on the concept of *expression* as the figurative language of nature, the study proposed a triadic connection between the expressive forms of natural beauty, the aesthetic judgment of such beauty, and the moral significance of judgment. Moreover, the study of Filieri (2021), bridged Kantian

Method

In conducting the literary analysis, the study utilized qualitative research design while integrating close reading, aesthetic analysis and Kant's Analytic of the Beautiful into a unified methodological approach. According to Pillai & Kaushal (2020). Descriptive research primarily focuses on presenting "description of the state of affairs as it is at present", without exerting control over the variables involved. Guided by Pillai and Kaushal's assertion, the study described the portrayal of life's cyclical nature as depicted through its use of figurative language. However, the descriptive lens was not limited to thematic identification. To delve deeper into the poem's artistic and emotional layers, the study adopted an aesthetic analysis approach.

The study's framework is grounded on Immanuel Kant's *Aesthetic Theory* particularly, the *Analytic of the Beautiful*. Kant's concept of

epistemology with contemporary linguistic theory particularly in cognitive linguistics. It explored how this notion offered insights into the organization of language and meaning. Furthermore, (Al-Sheikh & Hasan Mousa, 2018), explored Nizar Kabbani's love poetry through the lens of Kantian aesthetics, particularly the *Critique of Judgment*. The study bridged the gap between cultural context and aesthetic form which deepened the understanding of modern Arabic poetry and its timeless aesthetic values.

Hence, the study is aimed to illustrate the portrayal of the cycle of life, particularly investigating the significant influence of literary devices on the aesthetic portrayal of the poem on the cycle of life. Through this study, it contributed a new perspective and expansion of studies by applying Kantian aesthetics on how the poem's portrayal of nature and human life reflects the cyclical beauty of existence. Thus, the study deepened our understanding how philosophical frameworks could unveil new interpretative dimensions in canonical texts.

By examining the various figurative language used, the objective of the study is to investigate the aesthetics of figurative language in *The Ecchoing Green* by William Blake and how it contributed to the portrayal of the cycle of life..

aesthetic judgment revolved around four key principles specifically: disinterested pleasure, universal subjectivity, purposiveness and necessity (Kant 51-70). According to Paramalingam (2023), aesthetic approaches examined how literature evokes an appreciation of beauty, emotional impact and sensory experience. This theoretical foundation guided the aesthetic literary approach used to analyze *The Ecchoing Green* by William Blake. *The Ecchoing Green* is part of Blake's collection *Songs of Innocence*. It was published in 1789 and it was one of Blake's most popular poems. He was misunderstood as a poet, artist and visionary until his death in 1827 (Anjani et al., 2024).

The study focused on how Blake's figurative expressions elicited the four principles of beauty. The study employed an aesthetic literary approach to examine the aesthetics of the literary devices used to portray

the cycle of life in *The Ecchoing Green* by William Blake. The aesthetic value of literature is the capacity of the literature to evoke an aesthetic experience Prawira (2008). It involved academic and intellectual evaluation of imaginative literature (Widyaningsieh, 2021). One's understanding of literature and the arts

has extended beyond aesthetic perception and sensory experience; it is infused in the language used to evaluate literary or artistic works (Aljarelah, 2024).



Fig. 1: Framework of Analysis Based on Kant's Concept of Aesthetic

To explore these implications, the study employed close reading as a systematic tool. Through this process, key figurative expressions which have illustrated the different stages of life were analyzed. Subsequently, the themes which emerged from Blake's use of figurative language are identified and categorized by which stage of life it depicted. The detailed textual engagement was guided by the aesthetic approach. Furthermore, the figurative language and themes were analyzed

Results and Discussion

The results and discussion of this study explored the intricate relationship between figurative language and Kantian aesthetics in William Blake's "*The Ecchoing Green*." By examining the poem through the lens of Kant's aesthetic theory, this section highlighted how Blake's use of figurative language reflected the natural and philosophical beauty of life's cyclical journey. Through its vivid imagery and symbolism, Blake captured the essence of childhood innocence and the cyclical nature of life, reminding us that youth is a brief period of

in relation to their contribution to the poems aesthetic appeal and thematic depth. Lastly, the findings were synthesized to highlight the significance of figurative language in shaping artistic perception. Rather than treating each method in isolation, the study synthesized these perspectives to reveal how descriptive analysis, aesthetic appreciation and philosophical insight collectively deepen our understanding of the poem's artistic portrayal of life's beauty and transience.

great happiness that ends (Dutta & Talukder, 2024)

Figurative Language

This section examined the use of figurative language in William Blake's "*The Ecchoing Green*," highlighting how metaphors, imagery, personification, and symbolism contribute to the poem's overall aesthetic impact. Through a Kantian lens, these devices were analyzed not only for their literary function but also for how they evoke a sense of reflective beauty and emotional resonance.

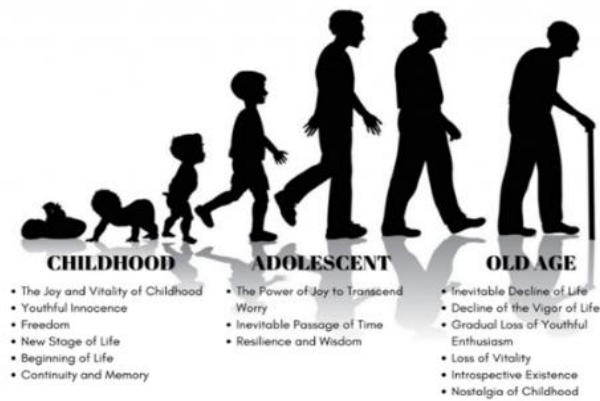


Fig. 2: The Echoing Green's Themes in Stage of Life

Childhood

This subsection focused on the depiction of childhood in "The Echoing Green," analyzing how Blake used figurative language to present childhood as a symbol of innocence, joy, and the beginning of life's cycle.

Personification

The opening lines of *The Echoing Green*, it personified youthful innocence through natural imagery and subtle personification on the following lines: "The sun does arise" (Line 1), and "And make happy the skies" (Line 2). Human qualities are attributed to the sun such as arising similar to waking up and making the skies happy. In fact, the "sun" symbolizes the warmth, light and vitality of childhood (Dutta & Talukder, 2024). The use of archaic auxiliary "does" had lent a lyrical, almost childlike tone, which reflected the simplicity and purity of a child's voice. The sun's presence has transformed the environment into one of comfort, hope and playfulness similar to what children bring to their surroundings which indicated the unspoiled emotional expressiveness of youth. By attributing the emotional quality of happiness to the skies, the poem infused nature with a sentient joy that mirrors the untainted glee of youth.

Metaphor

"The skylark and thrush" (Line 5) did not just represent the birds but also symbolized the vibrant life and energy of the natural world. Birds like the skylark and thrush expressed joy and natural beauty (Dutta & Talukder, 2024) which painted an image of unbounded movement and spontaneous expressions. These birds are metaphorically standing in for the

youth or the early stages of life, which are full of activity and free. Their lively presence represented the exuberance of life, the blossoming of youth, or the beginning of a new cycle in nature.

The vibrancy of the childhood and joyous renewal are expressed in the following line, "The merry bells ring" (Line 3) and "To welcome the Spring" (Line 4). It indicated that childhood is the season of renewal, growth and new beginnings. It symbolized a time of refreshing experiences; an early promising stage of life filled with possibilities. Spring is the season of new life. It was aligned to the fresh and untainted perspective of a child. Childhood is often seen as a time of growth and development similar to spring. According to Kanar (2006), it suggests the carefree nature of youth.

Symbolism

The dawn symbolized the fresh beginning of life as expressed in the line, "The sun does arise" (Line 1). It symbolizes youth and immaturity (Kanar, 2006). Just as the day begins with sunrise, life began in the innocence and joy of youth. The phrase, "make happy the skies", suggested that nature itself mirrors the pure joy of youth. The sky is often symbolic of one's outlook on life, which reflected the clear and joyful outlook of the untainted world among children. Children often have innocent eyes on the world. They have seen the world as a place of wonder and delight.

"The Echoing Green" (Line 10), symbolized the amplification of joy, where the joys of childhood play echo through time. The echoing sound suggests that the joyful

experience reflects the happiness of the people in it (Kanar, 2006), particularly the sounds of children playing and the community engaging in shared happiness. However, an echo was never permanent, rather it would fade. The line also gave a subtle sense of ephemerality, hinting that the joy and innocence of the moment may not last forever.

Onomatopoeia

"On the echoing green" (Line 10), The use of the word, *"echoing"*, mimicked the reverberation of sound. The idea of sound echoing is particularly evocative of the sound of

Adolescence

This subsection explored the representation of adolescence in *"The Echoing Green,"* emphasizing how Blake's figurative language captures the transitional phase between innocence and maturity.

Symbolism

The significant contrast between the elderly generation and the youth is presented in the line, *"Old John, with white hair"* (Line 11). The *"Old John"* represented the later stages of life. The *"old man"* symbolizes wisdom, experience and the passage of time Dutta & Talukder (2024). Moreover, his *"white hair"* symbolized more than just physical aging. It reflected the wisdom gained through years of life's joys and struggles. While children represented innocence, Old John embodied the accumulation of life's lessons. He gained valuable life's lesson which come with age. His presence among the playful children highlighted the inevitable transience of life.

The line, *"Sitting under the oak"* (Line 13), presented the image of age, resilience and wisdom. An *"oak"* tree is often symbolized strength and endurance which reflects the

Old Age

This subsection delved into the portrayal of old age in *"The Echoing Green,"* analyzing how Blake's figurative language reflects the themes of reflection, wisdom, and the closing of life's cycle.

Symbolism

The inevitable transition from youthful vitality to exhaustion was expressed in the line, *"Till the little ones weary"* (Line 21). The word, *"Till"* suggested the passage of time.

childhood playing, singing and laughing emphasizing the joy and energy of youth (Dutta & Talukder, 2024). Children often played in ways that amplified their energy and sound, making their laughter or voices seem to echo across fields or playgrounds, adding a sense of vitality and liveliness. At a deeper level, an echo was never not just a sound. It was a reflection of a sound that has already happened. This subtly introduces the idea that even in the midst of joy, there is something transient or repetitive about human experience.

elderly generation. According to Palupi (2021), *"the oak"* represented the older generation's superiority and strength. It was a symbol of wisdom and steadfastness Palupi (2021). They have withstood many seasons of life. Similar to an oak tree which stands tall through storms and sunshine, the elderly have faced life's challenges. They have gathered wisdom and remained rooted in their experiences. Moreover, the imagery of the elderly *"under the oak"* suggested a space of reflection, rest and shared wisdom. The oak's shade provides shelter which symbolizes peace. The peace which came with age.

Personification

Showing happiness despite old age could momentarily erase life's hardship. In the line, *"Does laugh away care"* (Line 12), it gave a human attribute to laugh as if it had the ability to dispel worries. According to Dutta & Talukder (2024), it gave laughter the ability to take away the worries of a person. It transformed laughter from a simple reaction into a force. It was capable of lighting the weight of life's burdens. It highlighted how moments of happiness provided relief from the anxieties which came with age.

Meanwhile, the phrase, *"little ones"*, represented children. Children often embodied the innocence and carefree nature of youth. However, the word, *"weary"*, suggested that even the most vibrant stages of life must come to an end. The weariness was not just physical exhaustion. It symbolized the gradual loss of youthful enthusiasm. It implied the end of the games of childhood Kanar (2006). People inevitably grew older and less energetic. Yet, the tone remained gentle and accepting. It

suggested that weariness was not a tragic end. Instead, it is a natural and peaceful progression.

As life progressed, there was an inevitable decline of youthful joy based on the line, *“No more can be merry”* (Line 22). The phrase, *“No more”*, conveyed finality. It highlighted how the playful innocence of childhood could not last forever. According to Dutta & Talukder (2024), the litotes usage of *“no more”* depicted sadness and finality. On the other hand, the word, *“merry”*, symbolized the carefree happiness of youth. However, the absence in this line suggests the onset of exhaustion and the passage of time. It reflected how the boundless joy of youth gradually faded in old age.

The approach to rest, reflection and the end of life was symbolized in the line, *“On the darkening green”* (Line 30). According to Sanders (2018), *“the darkening green”* presented a threatening image of loss and constriction. However, the *“darkening”* did not necessarily convey a sense of loss. It reflected how old people were gradually retreated into a more introspective existence. Moreover, the *“darkening”* also symbolized the pressures and responsibilities and the onset of adolescence Dutta & Talukder (2024; Kanar, 2006)

Repetition

The elderly people yearned for the feeling of a carefree and innocent childhood based on the lines, *“Such, such were the joys”* (Line 17). The use of *“such”* repetitively suggested an attempt to express an indescribable joy. It expressed the loss of the *“joys”* of the old folks Sanders (2018). However, by repeating the word, Blake

Aesthetic of the Portrayal of the Cycle of Life

Through the harmonious depiction of life’s cyclical nature, *The Echoing Green* by

emphasized how the memory of youthful happiness lingered. The longing was not just for the activities of youth, but the emotional state associated with being a child.

Personification

Individuals eventually faced the decline which came with age. According to the line, *“The sun does descend”* (Line 23, Stanza 2), it personified the sun as actively *“descending”* from the sky. It mirrored the natural winding down of life. The *“sun”* served as a powerful symbol of life. In the earlier stanzas, the rising of the sun represents the joy and vitality of childhood. Then, its position at midday reflected the peak of adulthood. Therefore, its descent marked the transition into old age. It signified the gradual fading of energy. It created a much darker and less active scene (Palupi, 2021).

Metaphor

The enthusiasm and vigor of life inevitably declined over time based on the line, *“And our sports have an end”* (Line 24) and *“And sport no more seen”* (Line 24). The use of metaphor compared youthful joy, energy and vitality to physical play. Blake used *“sport”* as a representation of the carefree pleasure of life. According to Dutta & Talukder (2024), it personified a sport capable of ending on its own. However, the phrases implied not only the end of the play. It implied having to leave the joys of childhood (Palupi, 2021). It depicted the inevitable fading of youth and happiness, as well as the eventual end of life. The third stanza emphasized the natural limits to play (Sanders, 2018).

William Blake evoked a sense of disinterested pleasure, universal subjectivity, purposiveness and necessity.

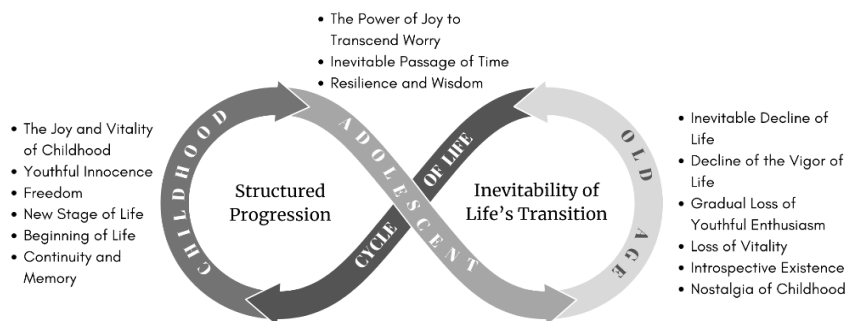


Fig. 3: The Aesthetic of the Cycle of Life on The Echoing Green

Disinterested Pleasure

The use of vivid figurative language created aesthetic experience which was for the poem to be appreciated for its beauty alone. Disinterested pleasure refers to an appreciation that is free from desire and personal utility. In *The Echoing Green*, the readers found joy in the portrayal of life's natural progression rather than in any moral or utilitarian message. The underlying themes showed the beauty and melancholy of aging and life (Palupi, 2021). The poem started with the lines:

*"The sun does arise,
And make happy the skies;"* (Line 1-2)

The personification of the sun spreading happiness is aesthetically pleasing because it transformed a simple sunrise into a joyful event. Moreover, the unselfish joy of children is depicted in the following lines:

*"The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring."* (Lines 3-4)

These lines evoked delight in the carefree nature of childhood. The pleasure did not stem from wanting to be a child again or from the desire to control time. However, the pleasure was from observing the harmony and innocence of childhood.

Universal Subjectivity

Furthermore, the themes resonated with universality. Based on the themes that emerged, the emotional response is not confined to the self. Rather, it depicted shared human experiences of the cycle of life. According to (Sanders, 2018), the poem represented positive and communal values. These positive and communal values are expressed through the figurative language of the poem. It was identified that each stage of life expressed various themes such as (1)

Necessity

In addition, the use of figurative language embodies aesthetic necessity. It is not simply decorative. Rather, each figurative language is essential in conveying the poem's meaning. For instance, in the following line,

*"The sun does arise,
And make happy the skies;"* (Line 1-2)

In these lines, the personification is not a mere embellishment but a necessary

childhood: the joy and vitality of childhood, youthful innocence, freedom, new stage of life, the beginning of life, and continuity and memory; (2) adolescence: the power of joy to transcend worry, inevitable passage of time, resilience and wisdom; and (3) old age: the inevitable decline of life, a decline of the vigor of life, gradual loss of youthful enthusiasm, loss of vitality, introspective existence, and nostalgia of childhood.

These identified themes became a representation of the stages all humans pass through. Regardless of cultural or temporal background, all can relate to the feelings of youthful joy, the wisdom of adulthood and the quiet reflection of old age which were highlighted through its emerging themes.

Purposiveness without Purpose

Moreover, the poem exhibited purposiveness through its structured progression. Each stanza represented childhood, adolescence and old age respectively (Palupi, 2021). It appeared intentional yet served no external end beyond aesthetic experience. The structured portrayal of life solely conveyed order and meaning. For instance, the natural unfolding of life is depicted in the following lines:

*"The sun does arise" (Line 1)
"The sun does descend" (Line 23)*

These lines mirrored the human lifespan which is the transgression from childhood to old age. There is no didactic moral explicitly stated, yet the poem feels complete and meaningful. The progression reaffirmed the natural and organic cycles wherein childhood is followed by old age (Sanders, 2018). Accordingly, beauty lies in the natural order itself.

expression for the vitality and joy of youth. Moreover, the transitions from youth through adolescence to old age are not forced. It unfolded with organic subtlety which are necessary. The fluidity of natural aesthetic progression is depicted not just in its structure as well as in its lines such as:

*"On the Echoing Green." (Line 10 & 20)
"On the darkening Green." (Line 30)*

The shift was not merely visual. Rather, the shift was a necessary aesthetic movement

from energetic life to reflective and peaceful life. The transformation of the green from “echoing” to “darkening” mirrored the natural progression of life as it moves towards stillness.

The study was built upon previous studies by further illuminating Kant’s aesthetic theory through the specific lens of figurative language in William Blake’s *“The Echoing Green”*. Unlike (Fileri, 2021) integration of Kantian epistemology with cognitive linguistics, this study applied Kant’s concepts to poetic expression, thereby enriching the dialogue between philosophical aesthetics and literary analysis. Additionally, similar to (Al-Sheikh & Hasan Mousa, 2018) work on bridging cultural context and aesthetic form, this study contextualized Blake’s poetry within Kantian philosophy, demonstrating how timeless aesthetic principles can deepen our appreciation of literary texts across different

Conclusion

The study examined the aesthetic effects of the figurative language in *“The Echoing Green”* by William Blake on the portrayal of life’s cyclical nature. Through aesthetic analysis, figurative language created an emotional and intellectual appreciation of literature. In particular, the vivid use of figurative language, harmonious structure and universal themes created an aesthetic appreciation for the natural progression of life. Thus, the study highlighted the effects of language in shaping artistic perception. Furthermore, the universal themes resonated with the general experiences of life. According to the aesthetic judgment of Kant, judgments of beauty are subjective yet universal. Hence, the implications of Kant supported the communal values of the poem. Moreover, the structured progression in each stanza conveyed a sense of order and meaning.

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eras. While earlier studies explored the triadic relationship between natural beauty, aesthetic judgment and moral significance, this study highlighted how Kantian aesthetics could be applied to the analysis of figurative language, revealing layers of meaning which connected beauty, emotion and moral reflection.

The implications of the study encouraged readers to recognize the significant connection between aesthetic experience and the cycle of life as expressed through figurative language. Through this study, readers could learn to appreciate how beauty arises not just from form, but from the harmonious interplay between nature, emotion and moral reflection. This understanding fostered deeper engagement with literature and art to see beyond surface meaning and to embrace philosophical and emotional insights embedded in poetic expression.

In conclusion, *“The Echoing Green”* by William Blake united both form and meaning in literature. Through its vivid use of figurative language, it illustrates the beauty of the cyclical nature of life. Moreover, it recognized the universal experience of each stage of life. The portrayal of the cycle of life is a reminder of the transient yet harmonious beauty of life. Hence, the aesthetic experience of the poem demonstrated how language served as a bridge between artistic expression and human emotions. Through this lens, the study contributed to a deeper understanding of how literary aesthetics shape perceptions. However, further research is needed to explore how Blake’s use of figurative language compares to other Romantic poets in their depiction of life’s cyclical nature.

extend our sincerest appreciation to our adviser and co-author, Ana Mae Monteza, PhD. Her invaluable guidance, insightful feedback, and unwavering support were essential to the completion of this analysis. Her expertise and dedication significantly shaped the direction and quality of our work. We are deeply grateful for her mentorship and commitment.

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