



To Autumn

This is Keats's last great ode, written when his health was deteriorating. It contains the acceptance of the passing of time and it is the most perfect realisation of the principle of the 'negative capability' (→ 4.15), since the sense of Beauty, embodied by Autumn, overcomes all the other considerations linked to the human world of suffering and decay.

John Keats
Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes, and Other Poems
(1820)

1

- Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness¹,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run²;
5 To bend with apples the moss'd³ cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core⁴,
To swell the gourd⁵, and plump the hazel shells⁶
With a sweet kernel⁷; to set budding more⁸,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
10 Until they think warm days will never cease,
For Summer has o'er-brimm'd⁹ their clammy cells¹⁰.

2

- Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store¹¹?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor¹²,
15 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind¹³;
Or on a half-reap'd furrow¹⁴ sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies¹⁵, while thy hook¹⁶
Spares the next swath¹⁷ and all its twined¹⁸ flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner¹⁹ thou dost keep
20 Steady thy laden²⁰ head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press²¹, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozyings²², hours by hours.

3

- Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, –
25 While barred²³ clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
And touch the stubble-plains²⁴ with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats²⁵ mourn
Among the river shallows, borne aloft²⁶
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
30 And full-grown lambs loud bleat²⁷ from hilly bourn²⁸;
Hedge-crickets²⁹ sing; and now with treble soft³⁰
The redbreast³¹ whistles from a garden-croft³²;
And gathering swallows twitter³³ in the skies.

- 1 mellow fruitfulness. Dolce fecondità.
2 round the thatch-eves run. Corrono intorno alle grondaie.
3 moss'd. Muscosi.
4 core. Parte centrale.
5 swell the gourd. Gonfiare la zucca.
6 plump the hazel shells. Riempire i gusci delle nocciole.
7 kernel. Gheriglio.
8 to set budding more. Per fare sbocciare di più.
9 o'er-brimm'd. Riempito oltre misura.
10 clammy cells. Celle appiccicaticce.
11 amid thy store. Fra la tua ricchezza (lett.: provviste).
12 granary floor. Aia.
13 winnowing wind. Lett.: vento che setaccia (cioè, che separa il grano dalla pula).
14 on a half-reap'd furrow. Sopra un solco mietuto per metà.
15 Drows'd ... poppies. Reso sonnolento dal profumo dei papaveri.
16 hook. Falce.
17 swath. Falciata.
18 twined. Intrecciati.
19 gleaner. Spigolatrice.
20 laden. Carica.
21 cyder-press. Pressa da mele.
22 oozyings. Stille.
23 barred. Striate.
24 stubble-plains. I campi di stoppie.
25 gnats. Moscerini.
26 borne aloft. Portati in alto.
27 bleat. Belano.
28 from hilly bourn. Dal limite della collina.
29 Hedge-crickets. Grilli di siepe.
30 treble soft. Dolce voce.
31 redbreast. Pettiroso.
32 garden-croft. Orticello.
33 twitter. Cinguettano.

**VISUAL ANALYSIS**

1 READ this text and write a heading to each section in the spaces provided.

2 LOOK at the visual analysis of the text and write down what each highlight and colour represents.

.....

.....

What does Autumn help the flowers do?

.....

thou

.....

Hedge-crickets

full-grown

3 DISCUSS the following questions in pairs.

- 1 What does the first stanza describe?
- 2 What is the relationship between Autumn and the sun in the first stanza?
- 3 How is Autumn portrayed in the second stanza?
- 4 What does the third stanza describe?
- 5 What are the sounds created by the animals in the third stanza compared to?
- 6 Who does the poet identify himself with?
- 7 What language is used in this ode?
- 8 What tone characterises the ode?

4 COMPLETE the summary of the text with the words from the box below.

music

seeds

harvesting

whistling

personifies

sun

ripen

last

dying

fullness

describing

celebrates



In this ode Keats **(1)** the cycle of life and accepts that death is a part of life.

The first stanza begins with the speaker **(2)** Autumn as being a 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness'. This season and the **(3)** are depicted like best friends because they both make the fruits **(4)** The ripening will lead to the dropping of **(5)** , which sets the stage for spring flowers and the re-starting of the whole process. He tells us about the bees that think summer can **(6)** forever as they buzz around the flowers. Thus the first stanza describes quite vividly the **(7)** and abundance of life.

In the second stanza the speaker **(8)** Autumn as a woman: 'Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind'. The time for **(9)** and preparing for the Winter is described. Most of the hard work has already been done, and Autumn can just take a nap in the fields, walk across brooks or watch the making of cider.

In the third stanza the speaker points out that the music of Spring is a distant memory, but that Autumn's **(10)** is pretty cool. This music includes images of harvested fields at sunset, gnats flying around a river, lambs bleating, crickets singing, and birds **(11)** This stanza is probably the barest of the three because there is direct reference to the **(12)** Autumn.