

ENGLISH

TOPIC: TO AUTUMN

1. Published in 1820.
2. Keats was inspired by a quiet walk through the stubble fields around Winchester. Keats writes to Reynolds on September 22, 1819: “ How beautiful the season is now. How fine the air- a temperate sharpness about it really without joking, chaste weather- Dian skies. I never liked stubble fields so much as now, eye better than the chilly green of spring. Somehow, a stubble plain looks warm, in the same way that some pictures look warm. This struck me so much in my Sunday’s walk that I composed upon it.”
3. “Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness.”- Keats addresses autumn as the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness because during autumn mists, fruition and ripeness prevail all around. Remember that Keats does not regard autumn as the prelude to winter. He is not disturbed by the thought of the snows of winter that will soon follow. Rather he is content with the present happiness. Alliteration.
4. “Close bosom friend of the maturing sun.”- Autumn is the bosom friend of Sun. The Sun is called mature because- a) the Sun in autumn is imagined as old and b) the Sun causes the fruits to mature.
5. “Conspiring with him...” Autumn conspires with the Sun. The two friends conspire to: i) to load the vines with fruits, ii) to bend the cottage trees with apples and ripen all fruits to maturity, iii) to swell the guard, iv) to plump the hazel nuts with sweet kernels and v) to bloom the later flowers.
COPULATION IMAGE.

6. "later flower for the bees."- By 'later flower' Keats means that are meant to bloom in late autumn.
7. "until they think warm days will never cease."- 'They' here refers to the bees. The flowers blooming in late autumn make the bees think that summer/happy days will never cease. 'Warm days' means days of summer.
8. "Summer has overbrimmed their clammy cells."- Clammy means sticky and wet. The cells in the bee-hives are sticky and wet to touch as they are full of honey.

STANZA- II

9. "Who hath not seen thee...granary floor."
Keats here personifies Autumn in the female shape of a harvester who sits idly on the floor of the granary and watches the winnowing operation. Her hair is softly lifted by the wind caused by winnowing. [The winnowing is careless because she has no fear of the future; he knows that much corn has been gathered, threshed and winnowed already.] The word 'store' suggests the abundance of crops.
10. "Thy hair softly lifted by the winnowing wind."- Autumn has been here personified as a woman, of say, a harvester sitting on the granary and her hair by the gentle wind caused by the winnowing operation.
11. "Or on a half-reaped...poppies."- Keats here personifies Autumn in the female shape of a reaper at her work. On being intoxicated by the fume of poppies the reaper has fallen asleep with scythe still in hand.[Furrow means corn-field. It is half reaped because the reaper, while reaping, has fallen asleep because of the fume of poppies.

12. "And sometimes like a gleaner...across a brook."- Keats here personifies Autumn as a gleaner on her way home across a brook in the evening with a load of sheaves held steadily on head.
13. "Or by a cider- press...hours by hours."- Cider press is a pressing machine used for crushing juice from apples. [Keats here personifies Autumn as a wine/ drink maker sitting patiently by the cider press and watching the apple juice oozing.
14. So in this stanza Keats personifies Autumn in human manifestations- as a reaper, a gleaner, a harvester and a cider presser.

STANZA-III

15. "Where are the...music too." Keats here seems to lament at the absence of the songs of spring. But in the very next line he dismisses his nostalgia for the bygone days and feels happy and content because autumn has its own music. So he asks autumn not to worry about the songs of spring.
16. "while barred clouds...with rosy hue...then in a wailful choir..."- 'Barred clouds' mean clouds lying in long bars or clouds with strips like bars. 'Soft dying day' implies evening. The day is dying gently and its light is slowly fading from the sky(circumlocution/periphrasis, personification). In the evening clouds seem to be resting in the evening sky and glow in the light of the setting sun. Notice the dying of the day is not tragic. Rather it is soft and gentle because of fruition and repose in Autumn.

The glowing clouds in the sky cast a ruddy glow on the stubble plains. Stubble means stumps of grain or straw left by the reapers .

"Then in a wailful choir" implies that while the songs of spring are generally heard in the morning when the birds wake up and sing, the songs of autumn are heard in the evening.

17. "Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn/Among the river
sallows...lives or dies."- Keats here describes the music of autumn produced
by the gnats, a kind of small insect living in marshy places. They produce a
mournful kind of music.[The river sallows refer to a kind of drooping plant
with long leaves, of say, willow tree, which grow by rivers.]

Borne aloft means carried high whereas sinking implies coming down. The
gnats being tiny creatures are easily carried high as the light wind blows and
come down when the wind ceases to blow.

The gnats produce this melancholic song in chorus(Choir which literally
means boys singing together in the church) perhaps because winter is about
to come which in turn implies death and destruction. Needless to say, the
choir sound is the collective buzzing sound of their tiny little wings.

18. "And full grown lambsbleat from hilly bourn."- The lambs are full grown;
so they bleat loudly. They are bleating near the small stream/bourn that
flows down a hill.

19. "Hedge crickets sing..."-crickets, a kind of insect, are seen chirping in the
hedge and they add to the music of Autumn.

20. "The red breast whistles from a garden croft."- The red breast, a small
singing bird is called so because it has a reddish hatch on its breast. They
whistle in an enclosing garden or garden croft and thereby add to the music
of autumn.

21. "And gathering swallows twitter in the sky."- This line invites contradiction
in interpretation. It may mean the swallows have taken to the sky at twilight
and they twitter joyfully as the sun goes down and thus adds to the music of
Autumn.

Simultaneously this line is tinged with a tragic overtone. The swallows are
migratory birds. They build their nests in different places in summer. At the
advent of winter they gather together to fly to warmer countries. So, their

collective twittering implies winter is approaching which in turn signals death and destruction in sharp contrast to the all pervasive fullness and repose of autumnal picture.

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