**Ode To Autumn**

**By**

**John Keats**

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,

   Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;

Conspiring with him how to load and bless

   With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;

To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,

   And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;

      To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells

   With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,

And still more, later flowers for the bees,

Until they think warm days will never cease,

      For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?

   Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,

   Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;

Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,

   Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook

      Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:

And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep

   Steady thy laden head across a brook;

   Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,

      Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?

   Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—

While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,

   And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;

Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn

   Among the river sallows, borne aloft

      Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;

And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;

   Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft

   The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;

      And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

The Sound

First of all how it sounds. Even if you don’t understand all the words, you’ll probably agree with me that the sound of the language is serious, warm, humming, noble and happy. Only towards the end when we also come to the end of the day in the scenes that the poet is describing can we start to feel a little chill. Lambs that bleat is not a warm sound. Neither are the mourning gnats (small flies) that are wailing in a choir. Not a nice sound at all (I hate buzzing mosquitoes and similar bugs, personally).

The red-breast (robin) singing is a bit better and swallows twittering is not a bad sound either, but overall these are thin bird sounds and somehow the poem sounds colder in this last stanza. Winter is coming. Those swallows will fly away; these are migrating birds that don’t stay in England over the winter. They’re flying back to Africa, until the spring will lure them (= make it attractive for them) back again.

The Imagery

What’s the second thing that makes the poem beautiful? The imagery, I suppose. The scene in the first stanza is of golden light that shines through a mist on ripening fruit and nuts: all the wonderful harvest that the season brings. The fruit and gourds are swelling and so are the bees’ honeycombs. Everything looks sweet and mouthwatering. There is a rich bountifulness of food of the season. The scene is pastoral: we are in the countryside and not in the city. This is typical in Romantic poetry, as Romantic poets loved the country and nature.

**Explanation:**

Line 1: SEASON of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Autumn is the season of mist (fog) when the clouds are hanging low. Mellow means  mild. And fruitfulness is being full of fruit and juice, or in more general terms, there is a lot of everything (plenty). Fruitful can also mean fertile and productive, so there is the idea here that more can be produced; the land brings forth plenty of fruit and it’s no problem to produce even more.

Line 2: Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;

A bosom friend is a close friend, so close bosom-friend is a bit double. Who is the bosom friend here? Well, that is the figure of Autumn, who is personified in the poem as a goddess. We’ll see later on that Autumn is a woman. In ancient art, autumn could be personified as a man or a woman. Here is an example of a man portrait. This shows Vertumnus, the Roman god of the harvest. It was painted in 1590-1 by the Italian painter Giuseppe Arcimboldo.

Maturing sun means that the sun is getting older. Of course the sun doesn’t really get much older in the autumn, but it is sinking lower in the sky and may look a little tired.

Lines 3 & 4: Conspiring with him how to load and bless

With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
Autumn is in a conspiracy with the sun (“him”) how to put on and bless with fruit the vines (= grape plants) that run around the roof. Thatch is reeds or some other plant that is used as roof covering. You can still find lots of those cottages today in the UK with thatch roofs.

Line 5: To bend with apples the moss’d cottage-trees,

Bend is make it not straight. Notice how in this line and the next ones there are a number of words that express that the fruit is heavy. The apples are bending the branches of the trees they’re growing on.

Mossed = covered with moss, the thick and low green stuff that can grow on almost anything.

Line 6: And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;

Another word that shows how heavy and full the fruit is. The fruit is “filled” with ripeness to the core (= its centre).

The fruit has grown to its fullest size and needs to be harvested.

Line 7:  To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells

The gourd becomes big and full. A gourd is a kind of vegetable or fruit that swell up like balloons. Cucumbers belong to the gourd family, as well as pumpkins and melons.

Plump means to become full. Hazel is a kind of nut (“shell): hazelnuts. You can find those in Nutella or in chocolate.

Line 8:  With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,

Kernel is the core or centre (of the hazelnuts).

Budding means growing and expanding (get bigger) or, of flowers, coming out.

Line 9:  And still more, later flowers for the bees,

Easy.

Line 10: Until they think warm days will never cease,

Cease = stop.

Line 11: For Summer has o’er-brimm’d their clammy cells.

For means because here.

Overbrimmed means full to the brim (= edge).

Clammy usually means moist (with water or a liquid), but here it probably means pushing open because they’re so full. Clams are shellfish that shut close.

So the line means that summer has made the nuts and flowers and all the harvest of summer grow until it bursts.

Line 12: Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?

Thee is the old-fashioned form of you. You is the Autumn goddess.

Thy is the old-fasioned word for your. Thy store means your business/jobs.

Line 13 & 14: Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,

Seek = search, look for.

Abroad means in other countries. But here it means away from home.

We’re finding Autumn sitting on a granary floor: this is the place where grain is brought in to be separated from its kernels (the word for this process is threshing).

Line 15: Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;

We should see this place as an open barn or where the wind is coming through the open door. Autumn’s hair is moving up. This is how we know she is a woman in the poem, because she has long hair.

Winnow means blow (by the wind), but can also more specifically mean that the wind is separating the grains’ chaff (the outer husk) from the inner kernel.

Line 16: Or on a half-reap’d furrow sound asleep,

We can also find Autumn outside in a field. A furrow is a ditch or trench (long hole) made by a plow. The furrow is half-reaped. Reaped means that the crop is harvested (gathered/collected).

Sound asleep means in a good, deep sleep.

Line 17: Drows’d with the fume of poppies, while thy hook

Autumn’s asleep with the toxic smell of poppies in her nose. Poppies are those red flowers from which opium and other drugs are made.

Hook = a tool with a bent pointy end, here used to gather the poppies.

Line 18: Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:

Spare means to save. Swath (pronounce swoth) = a strip of flowers that can be cut in one swath = one stroke made by a tool for harvesting such as a [scythe](https://englishwithasmile.org/2015/10/19/word-to-the-wise-scythe/)

Twined means twisted or woven.

Lines 19 & 20: And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;

A gleaner is a person who collects fruits or vegetables that are left lying after the harvest. Autumn has gleaned lots of leftovers and put them (“laden”) them on her head. She is crossing a brook = a small river/stream.

Lines 21 & 22: Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Autumn is watching the cyder-press = the device that squeezes the juice out of apples, to make wine (cider = apple wine).

Oozing is trickling. The apple juice is dripping out slowly, which is why Autumn is watching this process for hours by hours = a long time.

Line 23: Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?

Ay = a sad exclamation.

The speaker is sad that spring isn’t here.

Line 24: Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
No need to miss Spring, Autumn has (“hast”) her own music.

Line 25: While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,

Bar means a strip. Think of a bar of chocolate.

Bloom means to flower.

The question here is how barred clouds can bloom?

I’ve read a number of comments on this line and the most logical one seems that the soft-dying day is blooming, not the clouds. Although clouds can become big like flowers, I think what the poet means to say that the sky behind them colours, like the beautiful vivid (= bright)

colours of flowers.

Line 26: And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue;

The plains, which are stubbly after the harvest, get rosy (= pink).

Stubble means the short stalk after the grain or some other harvest has been cut.

Line 27: Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn

Gnat = a small biting fly that likes to live along rivers.

The gnats buzz in a group (a “choir” = a singing band). They mourn =

they are sad because of the dying day and also the end of the summer.

Line 28: Among the river sallows, borne aloft

Sallow = a willow tree.

Borne means carried, and aloft means up.

Line 29: Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;

The gnats sink = fly down.

Line 30: And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;

Bleat = the sound that sheep make.

Full-grown lambs = half-a-year-old sheep (they were born in the spring).

Hilly means with hills.

Bourn means place (a domain).

Line 31 & 32: Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;

A hedge is like a fence (a wall) made of plants or bushes. Crickets are those bugs that make a lot of noise as they rub their wings together. They don’t “sing,” but chirp.

Treble is a high, shrill voice or sound.

The red-breast is a bird. In England, that would be a robin.

Garden-croft is a piece of land next to the house, used as a vegetable garden.

Line 33: And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

A swallow is a migrating bird with a split tail, a white breast and black feathers. You can see them in Europe in summer and in Africa in winter.

They twitter = make soft noises. The swallows are making ready to leave for their winter home.