

TO AUTUMN

Keats composed *To Autumn* on Sep 19, 1819 at Winchester. He walked near Winchester along the river Itchen. In a letter to his friend John Hamilton Reynolds Keats described the impression the scene had made upon him and its influence on the composition of *To Autumn*. It is the final work in a group of poems known as Keats' 1819 .

The Ode was composed by Keats to state that the contemplation of beauty itself gives one a calmness and joy peculiar to itself.

Keats called the poem *To Autumn* and did not specifically call it an Ode which it truly is.

Among Keats' odes this is perhaps the shortest, but the mellowest and the most winsome.

The theme is about the mystery of the natural processes.

The poet's sensuous myth-making on the sweet and relaxed season of autumn.

Substance of the poem---

The season of Autumn is full of mists and ripe fruits. It appears that the sun and autumn are close friends and have been working together to grow fruits and flowers in abundance. The sun has been secretly helping the season to give juicy fruits to vines which grow round the eaves of thatched cottages. The apple trees are also filled with sweet apples. Under the influence of the sun the gourd and shells of hazel nuts become big and fat; the later flowers begin to bloom in plenty. Their sweet smell attracts bees to them. They think that the pleasing season will exist for ever and continue giving them honey.

Then the poet thinks of Autumn as human beings associated closely with the seasonal activities in autumn. The harvester is sitting carelessly on the threshing floor with his/her hair softly flying in the breeze that separates the chaff from the grain. There is the tired reaper seen sleeping intoxicated by the smell of poppies holding the stems of the corn in one hand and the sickle in the other among the fields; and sometimes the poor gleaner is found crossing the stream with a heavy load of what she has been able to pick throughout the day. Then there is the farmer extracting juice from cyders and watching the last oozings patiently.

In this season the songs of springs cannot be heard, but it is not yet without music and not inferior to that of spring. The poet has introduced the songs of Autumn in the scene of sunset glory when the purple clouds gather round the setting sun and their reflection brightens up the earth and the sky. During this season the sad chanting of the small gnats among the river swallows, the bleating of the lambs on the hills, the songs of hedge-crickets, the whistling of the red-breast and lastly the twittering swallows in the sky are heard in plenty.

Analysis of the poem

The mood of relaxed satisfaction is blended with a pleasant melancholy.

The achievement of peace, plenty and security pervades the whole poem.

Throughout the poem the poet places emphasis on the linked realms of external nature and human spirit.

The pictures of nature are imbued with the living human instincts and urges. The pictures of nature are rendered mythopoeic in this way. The myths created are not borrowed but original and new. The nature myths seem to remove all distinction between the life of external nature and the life of man.

The entire poem may be taken as a metaphor for poetry. Keats' idea of poetry is the harvest of the mind. The harvest symbol is central in Keats' mind and recurs in almost all his poems.

The picture of the becoming or process of change in To Autumn provides a living account of a cooperating mutual process in which all life is engaged in different activities that are harmonized and subsumed in the process of becoming. This symbolic core in the beautiful, articulate and concrete imageries in the poem bridges the gap between earth and heaven, the poet and the poet's dream, the sensuous responses to the world and the higher intellection.

In all major poems of Keats, specially in his Odes the conflict is between time and eternity. But in To Autumn the poet provides a dynamic picture of a synthesis of the irreconcilables.

The mood of composure comes in the background of nature's growth and abundance. The series of organically active verbs like load, bless, fill, swell, plump, budding, over-brimmed etc represent the burgeoning fulfilment of organic life.[stanza 1]

Man and his fulfilment are related to the natural scene[stanza 2].

The sunset hour is taken up with the harmonious orchestration of the various natural sounds.[The cry of the insects, twittering of the birds, bleating of the lambs]

The harmonious fusion of nature and man is completed and consummated in melodies. The movement is from the landscapes to the sky where the swallows twitter. This suggests that it is the heavenly region from which is derived the natural plenitude and human peace which autumn has apparently brought to the world.

The poem is not subjective but impersonal objective treatment of natural phenomena.

Self-effacement of the poet's personality.

The poem is one of Keats' best poems and shows the perfection of his poetic art.