

তুলনামূলক
সাহিত্য
ও
সংস্কৃতি
জার্নাল



বঙ্গবন্ধু তুলনামূলক সাহিত্য ও সংস্কৃতি ইনস্টিটিউট
Bangabandhu Institute of Comparative Literature and Culture

তুলনামূলক সাহিত্য ও সংস্কৃতি জার্নাল
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বঙ্গবন্ধু তুলনামূলক সাহিত্য ও সংস্কৃতি ইনস্টিটিউটের গবেষণা পত্রিকা 'তুলনামূলক সাহিত্য ও সংস্কৃতি জার্নাল'-এর দ্বিতীয় সংখ্যা প্রকাশিত হলো। বিশ্বসাহিত্য ও সংস্কৃতি বিষয়ক গবেষণালব্ধ রচনা প্রকাশিত হয়ে থাকে এই জার্নালে। এটি একটি দ্বিভাষিক গবেষণা পত্রিকা। উচ্চতর পর্যায়ে তুলনামূলক সাহিত্য ও সংস্কৃতি বিষয়ক চর্চাটি বাংলাদেশে জাহাঙ্গীরনগর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়েই প্রথম সূচিত হয়। জাতির পিতা বঙ্গবন্ধু শেখ মুজিবুর রহমানের নামে প্রতিষ্ঠিত এই প্রতিষ্ঠানের লক্ষ্য জাতীয় সাহিত্য ও সংস্কৃতির ক্ষেত্রে উচ্চতর পর্যায়ের তুলনামূলক গবেষণা পদ্ধতির মাধ্যমে পাঠদান ও গবেষণা সম্পন্ন করা।

বঙ্গবন্ধু বাংলাদেশ রাষ্ট্র প্রতিষ্ঠার শুরু থেকেই সাংস্কৃতিক গুরুত্বটি উপলব্ধি করেছিলেন। তিনি তাঁর সহজাত প্রজ্ঞায় বুঝতে পেরেছিলেন, একটি জাতির সার্বিক মুক্তির জন্য কেবল রাজনৈতিক ও অর্থনৈতিক মুক্তিই যথেষ্ট নয়, এর জন্য প্রয়োজন সাংস্কৃতিক স্বাধীনতাও। ফলে তিনি বলেছিলেন, 'সাংস্কৃতিক স্বাধীনতা ছাড়া রাজনৈতিক ও অর্থনৈতিক স্বাধীনতা কোনো সুফল বয়ে আনে না'। এই দিকে থেকে আমরা দেখতে পাই আমাদের দেশের ভাষা ও সংস্কৃতির গবেষণায় পশ্চিমা ছক ও পদ্ধতিকেই চূড়ান্ত মানদণ্ড ধরে নেওয়া হয়েছে। নিজস্ব ঐতিহ্যের ক্ষেত্রটি রয়ে গেছে অচর্চিত। তুলনামূলক পাঠের ভিত্তিতে এটি দিনে দিনে আরো স্পষ্ট থেকে স্পষ্টতর হয়ে উঠেছে। সেই সঙ্গে আমরা বুঝতে পারছি যেকোনো ক্ষেত্রেই নিজস্ব নিরিখ ছাড়া অগ্রগতির হওয়া আদতে সম্ভব নয়।

ফলে সাহিত্যে সমস্ত ক্ষেত্রে— কবিতা, উপন্যাস, ছোটগল্প, প্রবন্ধ, নাটকের জন্য চাই নিজস্ব নান্দনিক দৃষ্টি, তেমনই সমাজ ও সংস্কৃতি বিষয়ে গবেষণার ক্ষেত্রেও চাই নিজস্ব গবেষণা পদ্ধতি, যা হবে সমস্ত রকমের আধিপত্যবাদী চেতনা ও আত্মশ্লাঘার হাত থেকে মুক্ত। পশ্চিমা বা ইউরোয়ামেরিকা ছক বা মতাদর্শ অবশ্যই গণ্য হবে, কিন্তু সেটি আমাদের জন্য কোনোভাবেই চূড়ান্ত হতে পারে না। এ অঞ্চলের ভূপ্রকৃতি, উৎপাদন ব্যবস্থা, গণমানুষের জীবনযাপন এবং সামগ্রিকভাবে এর সাংস্কৃতিক বাস্তবতা ঐতিহাসিকভাবে ঐতিহ্যমণ্ডিত যা বিশ্বে অর্থনৈতিকভাবে উন্নত বহুদেশের নেই। ফলে সেই ভিত্তিভূমি থেকে জাত শিল্পসাহিত্য ও সংস্কৃতিকে কোনোভাবেই হীনভাবে দেখবার যৌক্তিকতা নেই। তদুপরি সারাবিশ্বের সমস্ত উন্নতর চিন্তাচেতনারকে আত্মীকৃত করে এবং নিজস্ব সাংস্কৃতিক নিরিখে আমাদের এগিয়ে যেতে হবে।

Reading between the Lines: A Timeless Expression of Life in Keats' "To Autumn"

Rahman M. Mahbub*

Abstract:

While praise of the poem "To Autumn" has always been glowing, why has it received less critical attention than most of Keats's other odes? Perhaps there is merely a failure to bring together the core of the poem, its critical extensions and its timeless expressions. The older view of the poem as a static portrait of 'Autumn' may seem to have been discarded of paying consideration and attention among Keats' odes. The researcher belief in the complete understanding of the poem must take into consideration. The poem embodies the flow of life on a micro level; that is why its story helps us understanding its message. This paper is an attempt to analyze the Keatsean concept of life, death, and reality. While, the "Ode to a Nightingale" and the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" are about the process of transcending to an ideal world, "To Autumn" is about the real world which is changed by imagination. The poet unpacks his ideas around the year being a metaphor for a human life and that Autumn is the time of maturity and harvest. This is a narrative research that follows descriptive-cum analytical method; and, the textual references are given as evidence to support the argument of this study. It is found that an acceptance of mortality is not destructive to an appreciation of beauty and to glean wisdom by accepting the passage of time. The understated sense of inevitable loss in the final line makes it one of the most moving moments in all of poetry. This ode can be read as a simple uncomplaining summation of the entire human condition.

Keywords: romanticism; imagination; reality; cycle of life; death

We know that Romanticism is a movement in literature that came as a result of a revolt against the previous period of "Classicism". William Wordsworth, a noteworthy figure during the period Romanticism, termed it as liberalism in literature, meaning that the artist was free from restraints and rules, and was encouraged to write about his/her own experiences, rather than being a passive narrator praising an event or person. Romanticism emphasizes passion rather than reason, imagination

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rather than logic, and intuition rather than science. The Romantics were drawn to the medieval past, myths and legends, supernatural beings, and Nature. Keats who was one of the most important Romantic poets, led a very tragic life. His poems can often be related back to his bitter and sad personal experiences in life. Many of the ideas in Keats's works are characteristically of Romantic nature - imagination and creativity, beauty of nature, magical creatures or experience, and true sufferings of human life. But, "To Autumn" is different in nature in many different ways. This poem sings the songs of life.

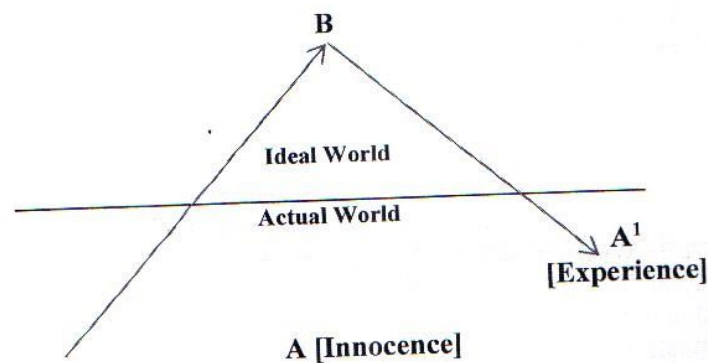
"To Autumn" is an ode about the real world of harvest, maturity, and fruitfulness, which is transfigured by imagination. This poem was one of the last poems Keats wrote before his death. It is believed that in this ode Keats acknowledges that his life is near the end. So, he accepts that beauty is in all things around him. The theme of this ode is one of the most popular one used by the Romantic poets. The narrator opens the poem and Stanza I by addressing Autumn as a dear friend of the sun 'Close bosom-friend' of the mature sun. They plot to load the vines with fruits, bend trees with apples, fill all fruit with ripeness, plump the pumpkins, and fill flowers with honey for the bees. In Stanza II, the narrator describes Autumn as a woman sitting on a granary floor, or on a half-reaped grain field, while watching juice from apples being squeezed by a cider press. Stanza III associates Autumn as the season on the brink of desolated winter; the songs and sounds of summer are sad and quiet now. Our lives can also be described in terms of seasons: spring is the beginning, summer is the peak, autumn refers to the maturing years, and, winter is the final stage of life. Among, the various forms of poetic development noticed in the "To Autumn", sequential process and development has received more attention than all the others with full justification.

This poem also takes up the themes of other odes, including temporality, mortality, and change, but it is full of warm, rich, and calm images. Keats establishes the serene tone by the use of enjambment, onomatopoeia, and personification. In Stanza I, Autumn and the sun are given human qualities. The sun is personified by its maturity. A feeling of plentiful and abundance is created by what Autumn and the sun are conspiring to do. In Stanza II, Autumn is completely personified. Here it is being described as a woman, sitting, sleeping, and doing all the things we that humans do. This creates feelings of warmth and familiarity. In Stanza III, we get the description that the day is personified as the "soft-dying day", small gnats "mourn" in a "wailful choir", and the light wind "lives or dies". These images convey a quiet, peaceful sleep (death).

Keats demonstrates that in nature there is the constant cycle of life and death and that death is a perfectly normal, peaceful process. From this poem, we can learn that the act of accepting our fate, destiny, and mortality does not affect our ability to appreciate beauty in our mortal world.

Primordial

On the other hand, Keats's two other significant poems "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale" - epitomize one of the basic structures of the lyric of English Romantic period and principal theme of the era - excursion and return to truth. After the excursion to the artistic and imaginative world of the urn and the nightingale, Keats has to return in his own world of love - his home in the mortal world. Keats's metaphysical excursion from the real world to the ideal one can best be presented by the following diagram, as shown in the "Introduction: Imagination and Reality in the Odes of Keats", Jack Stillinger, in *Twentieth Century Interpretations*:



The horizontal line stands for a boundary that separates the actual from the ideal world. Characteristically, the poet in a Romantic lyric begins in the world (A), takes off in a mental flight to visit the ideal (B), and then - for a variety of reasons, but most often, because he finds something incomplete in the imagined ideal world or because, being a native of the real world, he discovers that he does not or cannot belong permanently in the ideal - returns home to the real (A¹). But, he has not simply arrived back from where he started his journey for he has acquired something - a better understanding of a situation, a change in attitude toward it - from the experiences of the flight. So, he is never again quite the same person who spoke at the beginning of the journey. Here the poet is like the

ancient mariner who undergoes a change after his voyage out to the unknown and subsequent journey home to the real world and turns "A sadder and a wiser man" (The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, L 624).

Keats' poems - "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale" - follow the above-mentioned pattern of flight and return all the way through. "Ode to a Nightingale" is the first ode to bring the poet back to reality. The nightingale has finally been proved to be a "deceiving elf"; "the fancy" (imagination) cheats; and, he does not seem sorry to return from the final emptiness that he has discovered to be "forlorn". The poem, "Ode on a Grecian Urn", also shows the attempt to escape into the realm of art which parallels that found in the "Ode to a Nightingale". To comprehend the meaning of this journey appropriately, we must take into consideration the outcome of the opposition presented in the ode. The "green altar" to which they are going is not even shown on the urn, nor is the "little town", the location of which is unknown. This permanent emptiness of the unseen town strikes the poet much and makes him unbearably sad:

"[...] thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate" (Ode on a Grecian Urn).

This perpetual mid-wayness of the procession reflects back on the situation of the piper, the lovers, and the trees, where the process is frozen to a standstill and there is no fulfillment.

While the poems "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" - are about the process of transcending to an ideal world,

Keats' ode "To Autumn" is about the real world which is changed by imagination. In short, the moral of the Odes is that there may be temporary escape from grimness of human life, but in the end everyone has to return to reality and accept mortality. And, this acceptance won't affect our capability to appreciate beauty.

It seems that acceptance is the key idea in Keats' poem "To Autumn". Many readers find in the poem the culmination of Keats' works. From the beginning to the end it celebrates the world of process - of "maturing", "ripeness", "budding" - not just with innocent delight in the beauties of nature, but rather with a mature understanding, that this is "the very world, which is the world / Of all of us, - the place where, in the end, / We find our happiness, or not at all" (*The Prelude*, XI, 142-44). A momentary yearning for the other worlds - by the nightingale and the urn is expressed at the beginning of the third stanza thus: "Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?" (To Autumn). But, it is

immediately put down by the next line, "Think not of them, thou hast thy music too"; and the remainder of the poem, even while hinting of death among the sounds of life, is unambiguously affirmative in nature.

In the "Ode on a Grecian Urn", the contrast leads or permits the poet to rebel against the process in the wish to hold the spring forever. This rebellion, however, is now explicitly denied - "Ay, where are they? / Think not of them, thou hast thy music too". There follows an image of the day, which, like the autumn, as well as like life, is "soft-dying", and the death is accompanied by a fulfillment; for as it dies the day blooms or flowers with the warm color of the rose. The stanza proceeds with the images of death or withdrawal, and of song. And the songs are a funeral dirge for the dying year. The objectivity of the last few lines suggests an acceptance which includes even the fact of death. But, death here is neither a pining for an "easeful" escape nor is it intensity, - a blind, climatic outpouring and release parallel to the song of the nightingale. Rather, it is recognized as something that is woven in the course of things, the condition and price of all fulfillment, having like the spring and summer of life its own distinctive character or "music" which is also to be prized and appreciated. The poet's own fears, ambitions, and passions are not directly engaged; hence, he can relatively withdraw himself. And, because spring is also subsumed in the context, he seems to suggest that life, in all its stages, has got a certain identity and beauty which man can appreciate by disengaging his own ego. Thus, the symbol permits, and the poem as a whole expresses, an emotional reconciliation with the human experience of process without any rhapsody.

The 'gathering swallows twitter in the skies' - the departing birds, seeking different warmth, close the poem, which has climaxed in an acceptance of the process beyond the possibility of grief. The last seven lines are all about sound; natural music appears to be so varied and intense that it prohibits even natural lament. We now feel that we might be at the end of tragedy or epic, just having read a short ode. Which the Nightingale, Urn, and Melancholy odes left us with the contraries, "To Autumn" fulfills the promise of the "Ode to Psyche" - to let warm love in, to resolve contraries, because there is no further need for progression.

The imagination is now devoted not to any visionary flight, but to a detailed examining of every natural sight and sound at hand; and, the focus and attitude show that the speaker reconciles himself with the real world in which he lives.

Basically, there have been two groups of answers: some critics have read the poem as a progress from life towards death and, thus, as a

premonition of the poet's personal fate; others have stressed the character of acceptance inherent in the poem's even quietness and lack of emotional outbursts. To quote an unjustly ignored reader: "The senses see, hear, smell, but are at rest. They make no demand. They seek no response. They are active and silent. ... The Imagination urges no activity. It works and it is idle.... Truth is proclaimed. But, Truth does not speak" (Thekla 188). These are only partial truths; and, they are not mutually exclusive. David Perkins has effortlessly merged the central arguments of both the positions thus:

"... the repeated suggestions of gentleness and softness - "small gnats," "light wind," "lambs," "treble soft," "twitter"- suffuse the stanza with a tone of tenderness; and the objectivity of the last few lines suggests an acceptance which includes even the fact of death. But death here is . . . recognized as something in woven in the source of things, the condition and price of all fulfillment, having like the spring and summer of life its own distinctive character or "music" which is also to be prized and relished. In the last analysis, perhaps, the serenity and acceptance here expressed are aesthetic. The ode is after all a poem of contemplation. . . . The symbol permits, and the poem as a whole expresses, an emotional reconciliation to the human experience of process"(Perkins 282).

This sophisticated combination of traditional opinions may be worth questioning. The "emotional reconciliation" is a little too definitive; the end of the poem is actually blank. The question and the answer in the third stanza should not be taken too easily at face value. The emphasis here is that one should "Think not of them"- which points towards something that is second best in nature, and also offers solace, but dares not actually compare the value of the seasons. The answer may even be read as: thou too has what we may choose to call songs - for example, whirring and bleating - and other such "mechanical" sounds. If this last contention seems exaggerated (as may well be claimed by those who want to read the poem in the light of written biographical evidence (Rollins 167),¹ then one should at least pause and consider the strength of the repeated question, particularly of its second, quasi-affirmative part ("Ay, where are they?"). Any straightforward reading of the third stanza should be at terrible pains to find the slightest hint of "fulfillment" there: certainly, if there is any implicit praise of the close of life, one must look for it in the second stanza, not in the third stanza, as by that time we are already past the now futile-looking growth-fulfillment duality (Leavis 263).² Keats is now a "mystic" of sorts. He leaves the sensual world and its objects, hence even fulfillment. Certainly, there is no evidence that any of the things recorded in the stanza are to be "prized and relished." The only fulfillment occurring is a fulfillment towards nothingness, although it cannot be denied that the

"transcendence" implicit in such a situation is at least dubious: it is a transcendence without transcendence.

Now we can and should ask ourselves: Who is saying what to whom in Keats's "Autumn"? The fairest way to answer the question is to take a close look at the construction of the stanzas, which is strikingly symmetrical. Autumn itself unrolls in response to the inquiry. The answer lies in the passing itself, and the unfolding of the season's potentialities. In other words, the season is displaying the potentialities of human life as well.

But, who is asking the questions? The "poet" is asking in a sense, obviously, but the poet as who or what? Does he have any face or any sort of consciousness? The answer given by J. Lott in this regard seems artificial; he would try to convince us that the poem is, in fact, dramatic, that "it depicts in the first two stanzas a kind of slumbering, passive conscience, which for some unexplained reason suddenly wakes up to frantic creativity in the last stanza, comparing, appraising, and objectively analyzing what it has been and what it is seeing" (Lott, p.71). Rather than accepting this dubious break, one should examine some of Lott's remarkably perceptive observations. He says that in many of the images "the speaker . . . is both himself and the objects of his perception" and that what we have in the first stanza is "a union of the perceiver and perceived." (The same 'kind of situation is revealed in the second stanza.) Lott justly notes that "'To Autumn,' unlike the Spring odes, has no 'I' to react immediately and overtly to the character of autumn" and that Keats uses "as a poetic device a perceiver who is highly receptive throughout the poem to concrete images of autumn" (Lott, p. 72). After accepting this position, we may, perhaps, go one step further: the "I" is a mere device, or writing (as opposed to poetic) convention, to allow the smooth unfolding of autumn: the questioning is fictitious, rhetorical, a gentle prodding-perhaps an attempt to punctuate elegantly an otherwise shapeless natural flow. In other words, "To Autumn" reflects the self-consciousness of Autumn – in one way or another the life journey of human beings is depicted through the consciousness of the season called autumn. Like us, Nature is questioning itself and also answering itself by its own movements and objects. Ultimately, we reach a point where the reading of the poem and the reading of its readings seem to merge together. The deep structure of the poem discloses itself as one thick and mute fundamental curve: "nature in process." It carries all the other movements, or incorporates them, even when they are not unidirectional.

As we now read the question in Stanza III, line 1 of the poem, a touch

of anguish may be detected there. The expression "Think not of them" - can be taken as a warning to avert the gaze. We can at least acknowledge the effort for a balanced presentation of two different states of mankind. Even if there is no music, no harmonious interrelation of the parts in the social whole, it must be hypothesized.

This is all somewhat hypothetical, though all the interpretations are certainly not absurd. Certainly the poem "To Autumn" must not be read as a mere mixture of connotative signs, rather as a juxtaposition of suggestions.

The researcher thinks that the poem, "To Autumn" takes up while the other odes left off. Like the other odes, it shows Keats' speaker who is paying homage to a particular goddess; in this case, the deified season of Autumn - in other words to the human life itself on micro level. The selection of this season implicitly takes up the other odes' themes of temporality, mortality, and change. Autumn in Keats' ode is a time of warmth and plenty, but it is perched on the brink of winters' desolation, as the bees enjoy 'later flowers', the harvest is gathered from the fields, the lambs of spring are now 'full grown'. In the final line of the poem, we see that the swallows are gathering now for their winter migration. The understated sense of inevitable loss in the final line makes it one of the most moving moments in all of poetry; it can be read as a simple summation of the entire human condition.

Keats's speaker is able to experience the beauties of nature in a sincere and meaningful way because of the lessons he has learned in the previous odes. He is now no longer apathetic, or no longer committed to the isolated Imagination (as in "Psyche"), no longer attempting to escape the pain of the world through ecstatic rapture (as in "Nightingale"). He is no longer frustrated by the attempt to eternalize mortal beauty or subject eternal beauty to time (as in "Urn"), and no longer able to frame the connection of pleasure and the sorrow of loss only as an imaginary heroic quest (as in "Melancholy").

In the poem, "To Autumn" the speaker's experience of beauty refers back to the earlier odes (the swallows recall the nightingale, the fruit recalls joy's grape, the goddess drawing among the poppies recalls Psyche and Cupid's acts laying on the grass), but it also recalls a wealth of earlier poems. Most importantly, the image of the Autumn winnowing and harvesting (in a sequence of odes often explicitly about creativity) recalls an earlier Keats poem in which the activity of harvesting is an explicit metaphor for artistic creation and cycle of human life. In his Sonnet, "When I have Fears that I May Cease to Be", John Keats makes this connection directly:

"When I have fears that I may cease to be
 Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
 Before high piled books, in charact'ry,
 Hold like rich garnerers the full-ripen'd grain." (Lines.1-4)

In this sonnet, the act of creation is portrayed as a kind of self-harvesting; the pen harvests the fields of the brain, and the books are filled with the resulting 'grain'. In the poem "To Autumn", the metaphor is developed further; the sense of coming loss that infuses the poem confronts the sorrow underlying the season's creativity. When Autumn's harvest is all over, the fields will be bare, the swaths with their "twined flowers" cut down, the cider-press dry, the skies empty. But, the connection of this harvesting to the seasonal cycle softens the edge of the tragedy. In time, spring will come again, the fields will grow again, and the birdsong will return. The speaker knew in "Melancholy", abundance and loss, joy and sorrow, song and silence are as intimately connected as the twined flowers in the fields. What makes the poem "To Autumn" so beautiful is that it brings an engagement with that connection out of the realm of mythology and fantasy and into the everyday world. The development that the speaker so strongly resisted in "Indolence" is at last complete; he has learned that an acceptance of mortality is not destructive, to an appreciation of beauty and has gleaned wisdom by accepting the passage of time.

Here, in "To Autumn" the poet unpacks ideas around the year being a metaphor for a human life and that Autumn is the time of maturity and harvest. Keats seems to portray a total acceptance to the change of the world – the life as it is, and the futility to regret or to delay the changing of time. There is no resentment at the way humans are ultimately tied to the earth. Instead, Keats chooses to celebrate the richness that keeps us alive, expressing gratitude rather than hostility. The need to live in harmony with nature is stressed vividly with the scenes in the second stanza. Here the characters are not described as people, but as Autumn itself.

"Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
 Thee sitting carelessly on a granary floor...
 '... Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep.'" (Lines 1- 4. Stanza III)

This suggests that the essence of Autumn is in everybody and with it maturity and 'mellowing' age come. The activities suggested are all connected with the harvest which is the time when the earth's gifts can be collected and used to survive - the gathering of the wheat and corn, and the pressing of the apples to produce a luxurious drink. The poet sees this time as one for joy and festivity, despite winter's deathly grip on the

verge of tightening. Destroying nature would literally destroy the essence of survival; so, co-existence is an important theme here. This attitude towards nature, and especially towards this particular season, speaks much of Keats' attitude to life itself. To celebrate fertility, as he does, is to celebrate new life. Why, then, does he choose the sun where death begins to make itself known? The rich colors of the leaves add to the glory of the season, but they are like a swan song - a sign that the vegetation is dying.

"Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun." (Line 2, Stanza I)

'Maturing' is the key word here that unlocks the deeper meaning of the text 'To Autumn'. It denotes experience, wisdom, knowledge, and an ability to accept the inevitable. If Autumn were a metaphor for life, then it would represent those of middle age, who have the benefit of perceptions and the wisdom of years of experience to draw from. The old are often overshadowed by the energy and vitality of the young; yet Keats, by richly describing the glory and blessings of Autumn, tells us that maturity or experience can offer just as much, if not more. The final stanza makes this point clear:

"Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too" (Lines 1-2, Stanza III).

The reaping of the harvest is symbolic of reaping the benefits of such qualities or the 'music' of the season. However, death is an important factor here as well. As with winter ever closer as Autumn draws on, so maturity and age beckon the inevitable. Here Keats reveals the full extent of his acceptance. He takes a broad, cinematic view of the earth, expanding on the close description of the first two stanzas to reflect on the passage of time as Autumn - or ultimately life - draws to a close:

"While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day
And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue." (Lines 3-4, Stanza III)

The poem ends with the sounds of various creatures and birds. Here we find a stubborn message that the cycle of the seasons will continue and that life will return, as the poet reminds us in his final line:

"And gathering swallows twitter in the skies" (Line 11, Stanza III).

It seems that the poet suggests that 'Life' is a beautiful thing that should not be wasted. We will never fully understand life, not even in a million years. So, the theme of John Keats' "To Autumn" is to enjoy life, even as one grows old and even while it begins to move away from him or her. Keats spreads his message through the time frame, imagery, and diction in the three stanzas as well.

The first stanza contains active imagery, while the second uses

passive. The third stanza is expected to contain even more passive diction; but, instead here he uses a mixture of both active and passive images. The active diction is used a little bit more. The diction in the third stanza is what makes this poem so great. If one adds this proof to the first two, s/he will get life slipping away as it progresses, with the individual being active even as s/he is dying. In other words, the person is enjoying his life as it slips into death's hands, which is one of the themes of the poem.

The argument in John Keats's poem "To Autumn", is to live our life actively until darkness consumes our body. The time frame, imagery, and diction in the stanzas prove this much. The time frame shows that life is progressing, while the imagery is paralleled to life being taken away from the individual. The diction proves that the person is active during the childhood, passive during the period of adulthood and slightly active during the elderly years of life. The proofs clearly show that the theme of the poem is demonstrating every part of it thoroughly. John Keats' poem "To Autumn" gives a great message which is what everyone should learn and live by.

Notes

¹ "How beautiful the season is now-How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather-Dian skies-I never lik'd stubble fields so much as now-Aye better than the chilly green of the 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." Letter to Reynolds of 21 Sept. 1819, in *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), II, 167.

² Contraries are surpassed, as pointed out by Bloom, p. 425, but the idea that the poem could be summarized as "ripeness is all" has been dismissed since Leavis' rebuttal of Middleton Murry in *Revaluation* (1936; rpt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1953), p. 263. In fact, by now even the physical and sensuous ripeness to which Leavis subscribed seems an exaggeration: at least the third stanza represents a post-ripeness phase.

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