

An Analysis of "Ode to Autumn" by John Keats (1795-1821)**'Season of Mists and Mellow Fruitfulness!'**

I love the changing seasons here in England but early Autumn is one of my favourites. There is both an atmosphere of nostalgia for the warmer, sunny days of summer and of anticipation. It's when the new academic year begins, bringing new opportunities for both young and old. When I was a child there were a few fruit trees at the bottom of my father's garden. I still recollect the perfume of the newly harvested Cox' s Orange Pippins; helping to separate the apples into boxes for storage in the shed, where they gradually mellowed throughout the following months. Clouds of wasps buzzed around the Victoria plum tree, drilling into the ripe fruit and making we children reluctant to approach though we loved the delicious sweetness of fruit fresh from the branch, and the plum pies that mother would later bake. When we strolled along the lane to the nearby hamlet and church on Sunday mornings, the wheat crops had been gathered and the hay was piled in stacks in amongst the stubbled fields. (Who could forget the frequent reports of self-ignited hay stack fires in the local newspaper). This poem is a reminder of those days. It was the first to which I was introduced after entering secondary education. I hope that you enjoy it as much as I.

Definition of an Ode

An ode is a poem in exalted praise of something or someone. It usually a direct address, in the case of Ode to Autumn to the personified Autumn season, and an exclamation mark normally punctuates the end of the first line.

Some Background Information About Ode to Autumn by John Keats

In a letter to a friend, Keats wrote that the fields of stubble that he saw when walking reminded him of a painting. I think the poem has a melancholy tone, which I too feel during the Autumn months, but which in his case is perhaps an indication of the personal problems that Keats was experiencing at the time of writing. It was the last poem he wrote because circumstances forced him to give up the life of a poet to earn a living. One year later the poet died in Rome, at the age of twenty-six. On the advice of his doctor, he had left England for warmer climes because he was suffering from tuberculosis. He is buried in the same cemetery in Rome as Shelley. Some have read this poem as an allegory of death.

'A half reaped furrow sound asleep'

The Corn Harvest by Pieter Breugel the Elder

The Corn Harvest by Pieter Breugel the Elder | Source

'Gathering swallows Twitter in the sky'

Definition of Personification

Personification is a figure of speech that ascribes human qualities to an object or animal. Keats has personified autumn in his poem Ode to Autumn.

Some Technical Details of Ode to Autumn

1. The form of Ode to Autumn is three stanzas, each stanza comprising eleven lines
2. Each line is ten syllables in length. The metre is largely iambic pentameter (da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM da-DUM) - the rhythm said to most closely resemble natural speech patterns and, incidentally, the rhythm often employed in Shakespeare's plays)
3. In terms of rhyme, each stanza is split into two parts. The first four lines following an ABAB pattern. The rhyme pattern of the following seven lines is varied in each stanza
4. The first four lines of each stanza introduces a theme, which is then developed and mused about in the following seven lines
5. The tone of the poem is celebratory, lauding Autumn's abundance, but it also reflects upon how transitory life is.

Summary of the First Stanza of Ode to Autumn

The first line ends with an exclamation mark, the traditional way of starting a declamatory poem. The line addresses one of the four seasons, which we already know from the title of the poem is autumn, and connects it with the ripening effect of the summer sun.

Note the extensive alliteration and the personification of autumn and of the sun.

There is poetic imagery, deployed to stimulate one or more of the five senses (vision, hearing, smell, taste and touch) in each of the following seven lines, which brim with fecundity and fruitfulness. References to ripe apples weighing down the branches of trees, all fruits and nuts mature and sweet, bees feasting on flowers. Note the allusion to honeycombs in the last two lines that create an image of honey oozing from the comb in the phrase o'erbrimmed their clammy cells.

Summary of the Second Stanza of Ode to Autumn

The first line of the second stanza is a direct rhetorical question, addressed to Autumn, suggesting that the signs of autumn are everywhere. The next three lines describe the process of threshing grain, a process carried out after the autumn harvest. There is both a metaphor and alliteration in the fourth line image of the cloud of dust thrown up by the process - Thy hair soft-lifted hair by the winnowing wind

Note of explanation - The ancient process of wind winnowing, still used in England when Keats wrote this poem, and still used in undeveloped societies today, throws a cloud of hairs, fine dust and straw, into the air.

Lines 5-7 describe a half-harvested field, which in the days before chemical controls would have been awash with wild poppies, and when the fields were hand-harvested with hooked scythes.

Lines 10-11 describe the process of pressing juice from harvested apples, using a cloth and wooden press, for the making of cider. A number of orchards in Somerset, England, have reverted to this traditional way of making cider.

Summary of the Third Stanza of 'Ode to Autumn'

The third stanza repeats the device, employed in the second stanza, of a rhetorical question to personified autumn. It starts with a statement that autumn is just as beautiful as spring and an urge not to look backwards. This is a melancholic verse - note the adjectives soft-dying and wailful.

It speaks of living or dying and ends with the migratory flight of swallows and the appearance of robins, symbols of winter. The sentence might be read as allegorical. Keats must have known at this stage of his life that he had tuberculosis, in those days incurable. One year after the publication of the poem, in 1820, he was dead.

1.Question:How is the poem "Season of Mists and Mellow Fruitfulness" related to human life?

Ans: This poem Season of Mists and Mellow Fruitfulness progresses through images of the pattern of nature's seasons - birth and planting in spring, growth during the summer months, and harvest in the autumn. After the harvest of fruits and grains, plants have served their purpose - at least until the following springtime. Birds fly away to spend the winter in warmer climates.

Like everything in nature, human life has its seasons.. We are born, grow to maturity, produce offspring, and eventually die. Viewed within this context, the poem is an analogy for the human life cycle. Notice that the pace of the poem slows in the last few lines, representative of the way in which a human life slows down as it nears the end. T.the imagery of migrating birds can be interpreted as an analogy for a person dying i.e. leaving and his soul flying off to another place.

2.Question:Why is autumn a 'bosom friend of the sun' in "Ode To Autumn" by John Keats?

Ans: The sun frequently shines in England during the autumn season. Without the sun the crops would not ripen and the autumn harvest could not take place. In other words the autumn harvest depends upon the sun. Keats has chosen to describe this relationship in poetic terms as a friendship. Poetic language, the adjectives close and bosom, and personification of the autumn and the sun - have all been used to draw attention to pleasant climatic conditions on an autumn day, encouraging a mental image in the audience for the poem of a sunny autumn scene.

3.Question:Who is the bosom-friend of the sun in John Keats' poem "Ode to Autumn"?

Ans: The answer to this question is in the first line of the poem: Autumn the 'season of mists and mellow fruitfulness' is the bosom-friend of the maturing sun. Autumn and the sun have been personified in these lines. The reason why the relationship between them is phrased in this way is because the fruits of autumn rely upon the warmth of the sun so that they can ripen. Analogous to how a person might rely upon a close friend to provide support