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# To Autumn

## ◆ In this poem...

- Keats celebrates autumn's richness, ripeness, and gentle golden light.
- He personifies the season as a calm worker resting among harvests.
- Its quiet music accepts time's passing and finds beauty in endings.

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John Keats

Nationality:

[English](#)[Poet Guide](#)

John Keats was an English poet and one of the most important of the Romantics.

His work is often compared to Lord Byron's and Percy Bysshe Shelley's.

[Biography](#)[Poems](#)

# Key Poem Information

-  **Central Message:** Appreciate life's quiet changes and natural cycles.
-  **Speaker:** An admiring observer

 **Poetic Form:** Ode

 **Themes:** Aging, Celebration, Death, Nature, Spirituality

 **Emotions Evoked:**

Contentment, Gratitude, Hope, Joyfulness, Relief

 **Time Period:** 19th Century

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Keats captures the beauty and quiet movement of autumn through soft and detailed language. The poem feels calm on the surface but also gently reminds the reader of time passing and things coming to an end.

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Poem Guide by Elise Dalli





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Although some scholars differ on this point, the view is more or less that 'To Autumn' is the last of [John Keats](#)' famous 1819 [odes](#). Composed after an evening walk near Winchester, it is also one of the last poems that Keats ever wrote: his money fast running out, he devoted himself to travel, and just over a year later, died in Rome.

He wrote to his friend John Hamilton Reynolds, describing the scene:

**“** *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—Aye better than the chilly green of the Spring. Somehow, a stubble-field 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.*

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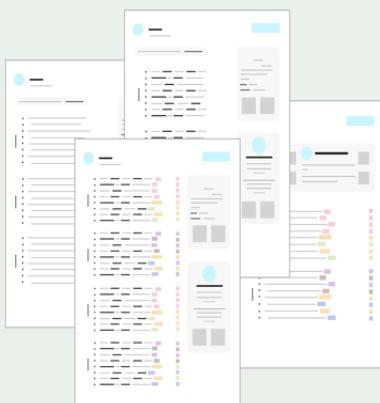
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### To Autumn

*John Keats*

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,

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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.

## Explore To Autumn

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## Summary

*'To Autumn'* is one of Keats' most sensual, image-laden poems. It is a sumptuous description of the season of autumn in a three-stanza structure, each of eleven lines, and of an [ABAB rhyme scheme](#). The first [stanza](#) deals primarily with the [atmosphere](#) of autumn, while the second addresses autumn in the [style](#) of a female goddess, with a trace of the homemaker about her, and the third stanza goes back to the beauty of autumn, advising her not to mourn the loss of springtime, for there is ample life in autumn.



## Expert Commentary

Insights by [Angel Nicolin](#)

Bachelor of Secondary Education in English  
and M.A. in English

What stays with me in this poem is how it finds something lasting in the everyday. It does not try to impress with big emotions or grand ideas. Instead, it moves slowly and gently, letting the season speak for itself. Autumn feels like more than just a time of year. It becomes a way of seeing endings without fear. What I admire most is how the poem makes peace with change. There is a calm acceptance in every line that feels honest and full.

## Analysis, Stanza by Stanza

### Stanza One

“ 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.

Keats has always been considered as the poem of the senses, but in this, his final work, it is all the more clear why this attribute is so strongly tied to him. The first stanza is a celebration of autumn: note the gorgeous, long-vowelled imagery that accompanies the writing, the reference to abundance; although autumn has been taken, in much of British literature, as the start of death, as a

melancholy time, Keats has taken it here as a fruitful period of existence. There is strong evidence of energy and beauty in the poem ('with fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run; / To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees'), and the atmosphere that is created in the first stanza is ultimately one of peacefulness. That is not to say that there is not an undercurrent of misery running through the poem – of course, there is.

The idea, for example, of being full of 'ripeness to the core' produces the parallel imagery of a climax; this is the ultimate glory of autumn, the last hurrah before the freezing grip of winter. The flow of sibilant sounds in lines 9-11 creates an easy, flowing rhythm. However, the reader does get the sense that Keats is building up to something grand. Also, note the relaxed tone of voice – Keats was never considered one of the high-brow poets, and in fact was criticized for his adherence to simple language (he believed, quite honestly, that poetry did not need to be complicated to be worth something), but the overall simplicity of '*To Autumn*' is staggering. Even the imagery is clear-cut, something that Keats has occasionally struggled with in previous poems.

## Stanza Two

“ 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.

The feeling of freedom in '*To Autumn*' goes on well into the second stanza, but here, Keats leans in closer. He does not view autumn still from a wider perspective, but personifies the season itself, to

make it, perhaps, easier for his reader to empathize with the season that he is so painstakingly bringing to life. In the second stanza, Autumn is viewed as a fertile female goddess – however, like the 'faery's child' in '*La Belle Dame Sans Merci*', there remains a hint of cruelty to Autumn. Keats' dichotomy of beautiful women with an edge of cruelty to them is hardly something staggering, as it is one of the ideas that is brought up quite strongly in his poetry; it could be because Keats himself was unlucky in love, and so drew on his experiences to draft the women in his poems.

Here, it is the word 'hook' that provides much of the idea that Autumn is a cruel, and kind, woman.

Although 'hook' is a harsh implement, a sound of war, the very next line is 'spares the next swath and all its twined flowers', implying a sense of fairness and kindness. The use of the phrase 'oozing' also implies a certain level of cruelty – there is a sinister, drawn-out sound to the word, which makes it seem far more threatening than the previous few lines.

## Stanza Three

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 sallops, 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.

In the last stanza, Keats addresses Autumn herself, physically, implying that Autumn is mourning the loss of spring, and considers herself at odds with

her far more beautiful counterpart. Keats writes, 'think not of them, thou hast thy music too', explaining that Autumn is just as beautiful as spring is and perhaps even more so: he shows this by diving again into gorgeous imagery, describing the sun setting over the land, the stubbled land and the insects that come out at night, the animals that were born in springtime and are now full-grown, and the birds that one can find in autumn. However, as with all of Keats' poems, that melancholy shows up again in the last stanza, as Keats' use of words such as 'soft-dying' and 'rosy' implies a bloody end, despite his best allusions to the contrary.

Throughout the poem, Keats alludes to the pastoral tradition in poetry, a form of poetic writing that celebrates the idea of the countryside and focuses primarily on the description of the surroundings.

Although one of the simplest of Keats' poems, and one of the quietest in terms of plot, it remains one of his most lauded works – although nothing much happens in it (it is, after all, following on from the pastoral tradition), the beauty of Keats' language and the skill of his mastery show that Keats' talent was really just beginning at the time of his death.

# Historical Background

From the letter that John Keats wrote to John Hamilton Reynolds:

“ I shall beg leave to have a third opinion in the first discussion you have with Woodhouse—just half-way, between both. You know I will not give up my argument—In my walk to-day I stoop’d under a railing that lay across my path, and asked myself “Why I did not get over.” “Because,” answered I, “no one wanted to force you under.” I would give a guinea to be a reasonable man—good sound sense—a says what he thinks and does what he says man—and did not take snuff. They say men near death, however mad they may have been, come to their senses—I hope I shall here in this letter—there is a decent space to be very sensible in—many a good proverb has been in less—nay, I have heard of the statutes at large being changed into the Statutes at Small and printed for a

*watch paper.*

Scholars have unanimously decreed that 'To Autumn' is one of the most perfect poems in the English language, despite being his last. Walter Evert called it 'the only perfect poem that Keats ever wrote'.

## Poetry+ Review Corner

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**John Keats**

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John Keats wrote 'To Autumn' near the end of his short life, and many consider it his most carefully written and complete poem. It shows a deep appreciation for nature, time, and change, but in a soft and accepting way. The poem is well-known for its calm tone and detailed description of the season. Among all his works, 'To Autumn' stands out for its balance, beauty, and emotional depth without being too dramatic.

**Poet:**

[John Keats \(poems\)](#)

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## John Keats (Poems)

### Period:



### Nationality:



### Themes:



### Emotions:



### Topics:



### Form:



### Genre:



### Rhyme Scheme:



Meter:

Iambic Pentameter

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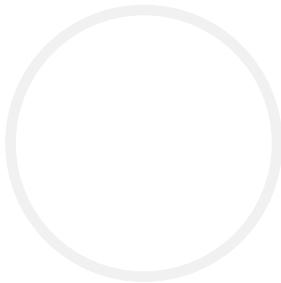
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## About [Elise Dalli](#)

Elise has a B.A. Honors Degree in English and Communications, and analyzes poetry on

Poem Analysis to create a great insight and understanding into poetry from the past and present.

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