

'To Autumn': A Critical Appreciation

Among the wonderful Odes of Keats, 'To Autumn' occupies a distinct place of its own. In its execution, it is the most perfect of his Odes. Dr. Leavis and Robert Bridges agree in ranking To Autumn first among Keats' Odes. Its three eleven-line stanzas ostensibly do nothing more than describe the season; no philosophical reflections intrude. His simple love of Nature without any tinge of reflectiveness and ethical meaning finds ample expressions in this poem. Although the poem contains only three stanzas, Keats has been successful in expressing the beauty, the charm, the symphony of Autumn, and the ageless human activities in the lap of Nature.

The first stanza beautifully delineates the ripening fruits right during the autumn season. It is a season of mist. The bright sun shines clearly in the sky, and various fruits such as apples, grapes etc., are ripened to their core in the light of sun. There is a plentiful crop of fruits and vegetables.

The vines are covered with grapes and the moon-covered

trees of the cottage bend with the weight of the ^{ripened} apples. The flowers bloom abundantly. Bees suck up their pollen and go on collecting honey from these flowers into their sticky hives.

In the second stanza, Autumn is personified in the manner of the Greeks. It presents four pictures of Autumn. One may see Autumn like a farmer sitting carefree on the granary floor, with the lock of hair waving the winnowing air.

Autumn is also seen in the form of a reaper who has been induced to sleep by the fumes of poppies amidst the half-reaped furrows. ~~Autumn is~~ The reaper with a scythe is presented as leaving the next line of corn unscaped and the tender flowers encircling them are left unharmed. Autumn is, further, seen in the character of a gleaner, with sheaves of corn on the head and crossing a brook with steady steps. Again, Autumn is seen in the form of a cider-presser sitting by the cider-press and watching the apple juice coming out of the press drop by drop for hours.

The last stanza reminds the people, who are enamoured of sweet and charming songs by merry birds such as cuckoo and nightingale in the spring season, that Autumn has also its

own songs and music which are no less lovely and fascinating than the songs of spring. Autumn presents many lovely and beautiful sights of nature, besides the chirping of crickets and the mourning sounds of quots. The clouds tinge the plains. The gnat flock is lifted and dropped by the light silver wind.

'To Autumn' is the most Shakespearean of Keats' poems. It is Shakespearean in its rich and opulent serenity of moods, in its lovely and large periodic movement. This poem is totally devoid of any suggestion beyond itself. It is a picture and nothing more. Its emotion is the more delight of sensation received through the senses. It is impersonal, as no other poem of Keats is impersonal; for he is, in this ode, merely an exquisitely sensitive recording medium. He gives us a vivid description of ~~this season~~ an English autumn with all the warmth and richness of the season; and the poem breathes a spirit of happy contentment which is not always present in Keats' work.

The End

Trish