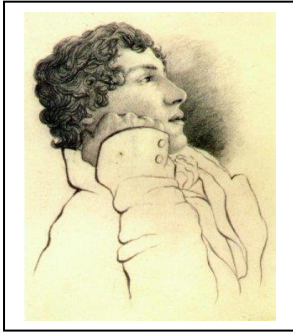


John Keats, “An Ode to Autumn”

(Written on 19 Sept. 1819)



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.

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 shallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge-cricket sing; and now with treble soft
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.



In a letter of 21 Sept. 1819 written to his friend John Hamilton Reynolds, Keats gave an account of the composition of the poem, which came to him while walking by the river Itchen near Winchester two days earlier. In the spring of that year he had written a series of odes including chiefly “To a Nightingale” and “To a Grecian Urn” – probably his best-loved poems. This is a simpler, more purely descriptive piece, though not devoid of emotional depth occasioned by the personal troubles building up around him at the time. To Reynolds he said: ‘How beautiful the season is now – How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it [...] I never lik’d stubble fields so much as now [...] 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.’ The poem, published in 1820, is widely regarded as a work of consummate verbal art and the most evocative word-painting of the English countryside in the language.