

Ode on Melancholy

BY [JOHN KEATS](#)

No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist
 Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;
Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd
 By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
 Make not your rosary of yew-berries,
Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
 Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;
 For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
 And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.

But when the melancholy fit shall fall
 Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,
That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,
 And hides the green hill in an April shroud;
Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,
 Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
 Or on the wealth of globed peonies;
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
 Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
 And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.

She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die;
 And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips
Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
 Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:
Ay, in the very temple of Delight
 Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
 Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
 Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
His soul shalt taste the sadness of her might,
 And be among her cloudy trophies hung.

Summary

The three stanzas of the “Ode on Melancholy” address the subject of how to cope with sadness. The first stanza tells what not to do: The sufferer should not “go to Lethe,” or forget their sadness (Lethe is the river of forgetfulness in Greek mythology); should not commit suicide (nightshade, “the ruby grape of Proserpine,” is a poison; Proserpine is the mythological queen of the underworld); and should not become obsessed with objects of death and misery (the beetle, the death-moth, and the owl). For, the speaker says, that will make the anguish of the soul drowsy, and the sufferer should do everything he can to remain aware of and alert to the depths of his suffering.

In the second stanza, the speaker tells the sufferer what to do in place of the things he forbade in the first stanza. When afflicted with “the melancholy fit,” the sufferer should instead overwhelm his sorrow with natural beauty, glutting it on the morning rose, “on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,” or in the eyes of his beloved. In the third stanza, the speaker explains these injunctions, saying that pleasure and pain are inextricably linked: Beauty must die, joy is fleeting, and the flower of pleasure is forever “turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips.” The speaker says that the shrine of melancholy is inside the “temple of Delight,” but that it is only visible if one can overwhelm oneself with joy until it reveals its center of sadness, by “burst[ing] Joy’s grape against his palate fine.” The man who can do this shall “taste the sadness” of melancholy’s might and “be among her cloudy trophies hung.”

Keats suggests that **Joy and Melancholy are interlinked** and cannot be experienced one without the other.

Form

“Ode on Melancholy,” the shortest of Keats’s odes, is written in a very regular form that matches its logical, argumentative thematic structure. Each stanza is ten lines long and metered in a relatively precise iambic pentameter. The first two stanzas, offering advice to the sufferer, follow the same rhyme scheme, ABABCDECDE; the third, which explains the advice, varies the ending slightly, following a scheme of ABABCDEDCE, so that the rhymes of the eighth and ninth lines are reversed in order from the previous two stanzas. As in some other odes (especially “Autumn” and “Grecian Urn”), the two-part rhyme scheme of each stanza (one group of AB rhymes, one of CDE rhymes) creates the sense of a two-part thematic structure as well, in which the first four lines of each stanza define the stanza’s subject, and the latter six develop it. (This is true especially of the second two stanzas.)

Analysis

If the “Ode to Psyche” is different from the other odes primarily because of its form, the “Ode on Melancholy” is different primarily because of its style. The only ode not to be written in the first person, “Melancholy” finds the speaker admonishing or advising sufferers of melancholy in the imperative mode; presumably his advice is the result of his own hard-won experience. In many ways, “Melancholy” seeks to synthesize the language of all the previous odes—the Greek mythology of “Indolence” and “Urn,” the beautiful descriptions of nature in “Psyche” and “Nightingale,” the passion of “Nightingale,” and the philosophy of “Urn,” all find expression in its three stanzas—but “Melancholy” is more than simply an amalgam of the previous poems. In it, the speaker

at last explores the nature of transience and the connection of pleasure and pain in a way that lets him move beyond the insufficient aesthetic understanding of "Urn" and achieve the deeper understanding of "To Autumn."

For the first time in the odes, the speaker in "Melancholy" urges action rather than passive contemplation. Rejecting both the eagerly embraced drowsiness of "Indolence" and the rapturous "drowsy numbness" of "Nightingale," the speaker declares that he must remain alert and open to "wakeful anguish," and rather than flee from sadness, he will instead glut it on the pleasures of beauty. Instead of numbing himself to the knowledge that his mistress will grow old and die (that "Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes," as he said in "Nightingale"), he uses that knowledge to feel her beauty even more acutely. Because she dwells with "beauty that must die," he will "feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes."

In the third stanza, the speaker offers his most convincing synthesis of melancholy and joy, in a way that takes in the tragic mortality of life but lets him remain connected to his own experience. It is precisely the fact that joy will come to an end that makes the experience of joy such a ravishing one; the fact that beauty dies makes the experience of beauty sharper and more thrilling. The key, he writes, is to see the kernel of sadness that lies at the heart of all pleasure—to "burst joy's grape" and gain admission to the inner temple of melancholy. Though the "Ode on Melancholy" is not explicitly about art, it is clear that this synthetic understanding of joy and suffering is what has been missing from the speaker's earlier attempts to experience art.

"Ode on Melancholy" originally began with a stanza Keats later crossed out, which described a questing hero in a grotesque mythological ship sailing into the underworld in search of the goddess Melancholy. Though Keats removed this stanza from his poem (the resulting work is subtler and less overwrought), the story's questing hero still provides perhaps the best framework in which to read this poem. The speaker has fully rejected his earlier indolence and set out to engage actively with the ideas and themes that preoccupy him, but his action in this poem is still fantastical, imaginative, and strenuous. He can only find what he seeks in mythical regions and imaginary temples in the sky; he has not yet learned how to find it in his own immediate surroundings. That understanding and the final presentation of the odes' deepest themes will occur in "To Autumn."

To Autumn

BY [JOHN KEATS](#)

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 oozy 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.

INTRODUCTION TO THE POEM TO AUTUMN: “To Autumn” is a poem by John Keats, an English Romantic poet. It was written in 1819 and published in 1820. It is the last poem in a series of six odes that Keats wrote in that year. The poem praises the season of autumn and its beauty, abundance, and transition into winter. It uses vivid imagery and sensory details to create a rich and harmonious picture of nature. The poem is divided into three stanzas, each with eleven lines and a rhyme scheme of ABABCDEDCCE.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POEM TO AUTUMN: The first stanza of To Autumn by John Keats is a celebration of the season’s abundance and richness. The speaker personifies autumn as a close friend of the sun, who conspires with him to produce a bountiful harvest. The speaker uses imagery of fruits, flowers, and nuts to describe how autumn fills everything with ripeness and sweetness. The speaker also mentions the bees, who are still collecting nectar from the late-blooming flowers, as if they think summer will never end. The speaker admires autumn’s generosity and productivity in this stanza. The second stanza of To Autumn by John Keats depicts autumn as a personified figure who is engaged in various activities related to the harvest. The speaker asks rhetorically who has not seen autumn among her stores of grains, fruits, and flowers. The speaker then describes autumn in different scenarios: sitting on a granary floor, sleeping on a furrow, sparing the flowers from her sickle, carrying her load across a brook, or watching the cider press. The speaker uses imagery of labor, sleep, and patience to portray autumn as a calm and contented figure who enjoys her work and leisure. The third stanza of To Autumn by John Keats shifts the focus from autumn to the sounds of the season. The speaker asks where are the songs of spring, and then answers his own question by saying that autumn has its own music too. The speaker then lists various sounds that create a musical harmony in autumn: the clouds, the gnats, the lambs, the crickets, the robin, and the swallows. The speaker uses imagery of dying, mourning, and fading to suggest that autumn is a time of transition and change, but also of beauty and joy.

THEME OF THE POEM: The main themes of the poem “To Autumn” by John Keats are:

- The beauty and richness of autumn, as well as its transience and connection to death. Keats praises autumn as a season of abundance, harvest, and ripeness, but also hints at the impending winter, the end of the year, and the end of his own life.

- The power and influence of nature, both on human life and on itself. Keats expresses reverence and awe for the great changes wrought by nature as autumn brings its riches to the landscape. He also depicts the many ways in which humanity is dependent on nature for its survival and enjoyment.
- The passage of time and the acceptance of change. Keats uses the three stanzas of the poem to illustrate the stages of autumn, from ripening to harvesting to the turn towards winter. He also reflects on the cycles of life and death, and the inevitability of time's passing. He shows that he can embrace the present moment, while being aware of its fragility and imperfection.
- The consolation of beauty and music. Keats's lines celebrate the great beauty of autumn even as they evoke a somber sensibility. He also finds solace in the sounds of nature, such as the songs of birds, insects, and animals. He suggests that autumn has its own music that can rival that of spring.

SETTING OF THE POEM: The setting of the poem "To Autumn" by John Keats is the season of autumn in the countryside of England, where Keats was living in 1819. He wrote the poem after an evening walk near Winchester, Hampshire, in southern England, and was inspired by the sights and sounds of nature that he observed¹². The poem describes various aspects of autumn, such as the fruit, flowers, grains, animals, and insects that populate the landscape. The poem also captures the mood and atmosphere of autumn, such as the mist, the mellow light, the soft wind, and the wailful choir of gnats. The poem does not specify a precise location or time of day, but rather creates a general impression of autumn as a season of beauty and abundance, as well as decay and change.

LITERARY DEVICES; Some of the literary devices used in the poem "To Autumn" by John Keats are:

- **Apostrophe:** The poem directly addresses the season of autumn as a personified figure, using the second person pronoun "thou" and asking rhetorical questions such as "Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?"
- **Personification:** The poem gives human qualities and actions to autumn, such as sitting, sleeping, keeping, watching, and conspiring. It also personifies other aspects of nature, such as the sun, the wind, the clouds, the gnats, and the swallows
- **Imagery:** The poem uses vivid and sensory language to describe the sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of autumn, such as the fruit, flowers, grains, birds, insects, and animals. The poem appeals to all five senses

and creates a rich picture of autumn in the reader's mind. • Alliteration: The poem uses the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words or syllables to create rhythm and emphasis, such as "mists and mellow", "close bosom-friend", "soft-dying day", "stubbleplains", and "wailful choir" • Rhyme: The poem uses a complex rhyme scheme of ABAB CDEDCCE in each stanza, creating a musical effect and a sense of harmony. The rhyme scheme also varies slightly in each stanza, reflecting the changes and variations of autumn. • Metaphor: The poem uses implicit comparisons between different things to create meaning and symbolism, such as comparing autumn to a friend of the sun, a gleaner, a patient watcher, and a musician. It also compares the clouds to flowers that bloom in the sky. • Simile: The poem uses explicit comparisons using words like "like" or "as" to create imagery and contrast, such as comparing autumn to a person sitting careless on a granary floor or sleeping on a half-reaped furrow. It also compares the gnats to a choir that mourns.

Conclusion The conclusion of the poem "To Autumn" by John Keats is that autumn is a season of beauty and abundance, as well as decay and change. The poet celebrates the present moment, while being aware of its fragility and imperfection. He embraces both the light and the dark aspects of nature and human existence. He shows that beauty can be found even in the face of mortality. The poem is also a reflection of Keats's own life, as he was suffering from tuberculosis and knew that he did not have much time left to live. The poem is an ode to autumn, but also an ode to life itself