

Subject - English

English Hons. Core Course

Paper - ENGH-H-CC-T-9 (Semester IV)

"Ode to Autumn"

Analysis and Commentary:

'Ode to Autumn' is John Keats' last

of the great odes. This poem describes

the season of autumn in its plenty. This poem is written in September 1819 at a

season whose bounty contains both

fulfillment and incipient decay. In

the first stanza, Autumn is viewed as

the season itself ^{doing all the season's working}. It brings all the

fruits of the earth to maturity in readiness

for harvesting. It is the autumn's mysterious

union with the sun that fills 'all fruit with

ripeness to the core'. The different fruits of

The earth — grapes, apples and others — are presented as attaining fullness of growth and the stress on the heavy weight of the fruits (the cottage-bees bend under the load of apples) points to the furthest limit of development. The reference to the thatched cottage connects the world of bees and fruits with the human world and the bee-image establishes a further link to with the animal world: Autumn

... to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'erbrimm'd their clammy cells.

Autumn emerges as a deity or earth-goddess leading natural objects to fulfil their generative urge, and both men and animals

have a share in the rich fruitage. The bees, certain flowers bloom in Autumn. The bees suck the sweetness of these flowers. To the bees, it seems that these flowers represent a continuation of summer. The bees, ~~at~~ sucking honey out of the flowers, believe that summer is continuing and it has not ended. The bees, are dazed in delight; and as they do not feel the distance in time in which autumn has replaced summer, they are equally ~~un~~unaware of the ineluctable fact that autumn will give place to winter. The disturbing question whether the untroubled placidity of autumn is itself illusory is not raised, but the question is implicit.

In the second stanza, Autumn, personified in woman's shape is present at the various operations of the harvest and the vintage. The poet depicts the scene after the harvest, the granary, where the harvest grains are kept. Autumn has been personified as a woman whose hair are soft and lifted ~~with~~ by a gentle wind. The season is personified as the harvester and the gleaner. ~~She is conceived as a cider-press~~ ^{appears to} She fosters the growth of the corn and the fruits, and she also directs the harvesting and the vintage that involve the destruction of the corn and apples. She is life and she is death, and in the presence of this mysterious deity motion and repose, time and eternity seem to converge. The

The season viewed in stasis exhibits

a fullness of beauty, but the wistful ~~into~~ retrospection brings thoughts of impermanence. The thought of flux and cyclic change is also built into the two preceding stanzas: the bees enjoy a deceptive bliss, and the operations of harvesting and vintage involve destruction. A sense of uncertainty counterpoints the sense of fulfilment and there is the overhanging thought that the stasis achieved is precarious and brief. The music of autumn is feeble when compared with the vibrant sonority of the songs of spring, and the rich luxuriance of the season does not quite compensate the loss. The doubt is sought to be silenced immediately in the following line:

"Think not of them; Thou hast thy music too, ~~to~~

The line is addressed to autumn and the

Poet attributes his own sentiments to the season which is unafflicted by change or any sense of loss. The rest of the stanza offers a catalogue of chiefly auditory and visual images. Conceived in stasis, autumn appears as a season of mellow fruitfulness, of serene, ripened beauty. But seen as a part of the revolving cycle of seasons, autumn acquires a different character: it is preceded by summer and spring and followed by winter. ~~A~~ ~~Dea~~ This ~~is~~ thought^{of} winter brings the idea of death and death is ~~is~~ implicit in fulfilment. The serene beauty of autumn is thus in the nature of an illusion. The ^{season of} autumn is in time and bears the full load of agony inherent in process, but she is also above time ~~with~~ watching the ceaseless and yet unhurried movement on the temporal plane. The poet says, "~~On~~ ~~by~~ a cyder-press, with patient look; / Thou

Watches the last ooziings, hours by hours."

John Keats presents the seasonal cycle, the moment of fruition and opulence, and the harvesting operations ~~into the framework~~ with remarkable objectivity and he also incorporates into the framework his own doubts and pangs.