

WAGOLL 1 – Task 1

7a. 'To Autumn' is a poem written by John Keats in 1820. This poem reflects his admiration of the natural world as summer change to autumn and then to winter, representing the cycle of the seasons and in turn perhaps commenting on the cyclic nature of life, as at the time of writing Keats was suffering from tuberculosis and knew that he was coming to the end of his life.

In the opening stanza Keats creates a sense of bountifulness and of nature giving to the world by describing the abundance of fruits she is serving up to all around. He describes how the trees branches 'bend' with 'apples' and how the 'hazel shells' are 'plump'. The poem is personified as a woman, which gives it a more approachable, personal feel, who is gone from her energetic, youthful summer days to autumn, where the sun begins to 'mature' and has begun its gradual decent into darkness and the cold of winter, which is possibly a metaphor for Keats's decent into a slow death from tuberculosis. While she is not mentioned as a 'she' in the first stanza, she is in the others, and she works with the more manly 'He' of summer to make a great harvest. There are quite a lot of sensual, touch-related, textural references as well, with words like 'moss'd' and 'clammy', which evoke powerful feelings of summers and autumns past.

In the second stanza the mood changes from the previous excitable tone, overflowing with the goods of nature, to a more mellow, relaxed tone, with the hair of autumn being 'soft-lilted' and with the furrows in the fields only being 'half-reaped' as if no-one has the energy to do the job fully. There are a lot more references to Autumn as a woman, with her 'hair' being mentioned and a soft femininity being inferred by the way she is 'sitting carelessly'. As the tone gets slower, and the season begins to wind down and take stock, it is reminiscent of the writer beginning to slow and look back upon his life as it comes to an end. There are fewer references to nature and things growing, which suggests that the season is coming to an end.

The last stanza becomes a lot more melancholy and depressed, as Autumn begins to turn to winter, as the long nights go from light to dark and as things once living begin to die. The living things in nature are in mourning, as the 'gnats' sing a 'wailful choir'. However there is a more upbeat tone, as the 'full-grown lamb' bleating and the beautiful music of the 'hedge-crickets' and 'swallows' suggests that there is hope for the future, and that while there is death the cycle of nature will bring round new life. The woman of nature is again mentioned here, in a wistful, more appreciative tone, saying that she has 'music' too, just like the music of the birds and nature. The cyclic nature of this last stanza suggests that Keats is thinking about his death and that while it is very soon and all seems grey, like the approaching winter, but new life shall prevail and the next generation shall come through, as is the nature of life.