

subject and object are given equal status: two poles of one universe. And such awareness is made possible through the transformative energy of speech: through the living power of the mother tongue as it catches the various shifts of mood and feeling. The creative word opens and enhances the world.

To Autumn advances like a short symphony in three movements. Each movement, made up of only eleven lines, depicts a different facet of the season, which in turn embodies a particular aspect of being. The first stanza evokes the sensuous abundance of autumn. Its theme: an incomparable surplus. The many one-syllabled verbs ('load', 'bless', 'fill', 'swell', 'plump', 'bud') and concrete nouns ('core', 'gourd', 'kernel', 'cell') work cumulatively to create the textured music of super-abundance. Here there is no romantic desire to escape, no desire to leave the world unseen, no anxiety about being left forlorn. Here the self belongs intimately to its world, is part of its plenitude.

The second stanza shifts unexpectedly into personification. It is less cosmic, more psychological. It presents a figure representing the qualities of the season. At first, this figure is seen as passive, careless on a granary floor or sound asleep drugged by the perfume of poppies, but then as active, either alert as a gleaner (a word Keats often used to convey the urgent quest of the poet for the right word), or a patient observer watching the cider press as it transforms apples into cider. The ecological and alchemical implications of autumn for the creative life are impossible to miss. In the personification, masculine and feminine come together. They belong to one harmonious state. The figure is without gender. Neither 'he' nor 'she', 'god' nor 'goddess' is used in the poem. The stanza is a celebration of the androgynous mind at one with the natural world it inhabits.

The final stanza is more philosophical. It recognises the co-existence of light and shade, of life and death, of being and non-being. Once again, opposites are brought almost imperceptibly together: "barred clouds bloom ... the stubble plains have a rosy hue..." and almost simultaneously the wind "lives and dies". By joining past and present, even the oxymoron "full-grown lambs" points to a fusion of differences. Unquestionably there is an embracing of the tragic dimension of life in this closing movement, the feeling that whatever is, so be it. The beautiful, dialectical phrase "barred clouds bloom" can be related back to an earlier letter by Keats in which he wrote: "Circumstances are like Clouds continually gathering and bursting – While we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events – while we are laughing it sprouts it grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck." But in the poem the clouds are embraced as part of a larger encompassing reality: not a poison to be plucked, but a necessary element of "the soft-dying day". The dominant mood is that of *amor fati*. It finds its climactic expression in the last image: "And gathering swallows twitter in the skies". The line graphically suggests inevitable change, departure, endings. But there is no despair. The poet affirms the natural world in which, through the power of language, he encounters himself. **R**

Peter Abbs is Poetry Editor for *Resurgence & Ecologist*.
www.peterabbs.net

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To Autumn

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

John Keats

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