

# To Autumn



## POEM TEXT

- 1 O Autumn, laden with fruit, and stained
- 2 With the blood of the grape, pass not, but sit
- 3 Beneath my shady roof; there thou mayst rest,
- 4 And tune thy jolly voice to my fresh pipe,
- 5 And all the daughters of the year shall dance!
- 6 Sing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers.
  
- 7 "The narrow bud opens her beauties to
- 8 The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins;
- 9 Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, and
- 10 Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve,
- 11 Till clust'ring Summer breaks forth into singing,
- 12 And feather'd clouds strew flowers round her head.
  
- 13 "The spirits of the air live in the smells
- 14 Of fruit; and Joy, with pinions light, roves round
- 15 The gardens, or sits singing in the trees."
- 16 Thus sang the jolly Autumn as he sat,
- 17 Then rose, girded himself, and o'er the bleak
- 18 Hills fled from our sight; but left his golden load.

the harvest."



## THEMES



### THE BEAUTY OF AUTUMN

William Blake's "To Autumn" marvels at the natural world—and specifically, as the title suggests, the beauties of fall. The speaker invites Autumn, [personified](#) as a male figure, to sit "beneath my shady roof" and tell the story of his creation ("Sing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers"). Autumn, in this poem, is a time of celebration and harvest, and the speaker delights in its sensual beauty. The speaker acknowledges that Autumn is ultimately a season of transformation—one that follows the growth of summer and leads to the death of winter—but finds joy in its fleeting abundance nonetheless.

Autumn, in this poem, is a time of plenty and drunkenness, when human beings revel in nature's bounty. Autumn is lush and lovely, an important period of harvest and celebration. The season is depicted as "laden with fruit" and "stained / With the blood of the grape," an image that suggests intoxicating abundance.

And when the personified Autumn himself begins to sing his "lusty song" of the other seasons, he depicts the whole cycle of the seasons as glorious. Buds open to reveal their "beauties" to the sun, "Morning" and "Eve" are decorated with blossoms, and Summer itself—like Autumn—breaks into song. The world is full of life, passion, and desire, all born from nature.

But once "jolly Autumn" has sung his celebratory song, he gets up, puts his coat back on, and runs off, leaving his "golden load" behind and fleeing over hills that suddenly seem "bleak." His departure thus hints at the inevitability of winter. Perhaps, then, the poem has a subtle but familiar message coursing through its lines—that life is short. Nature's power provides beauty and bounty, which soon enough turn to bitter cold and scarcity. But that's what makes the speaker—and the poem—cherish Autumn so deeply: its arrival, in a way, heralds its own ending. Nature is thus tinged with the electric excitement of growth and change, never static—and this is what makes it all seem so impossibly majestic and beautiful.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-18



## SUMMARY

The speaker addresses Autumn, saying: "You who carry so much fruit, and are stained with the blood-red juice of grapes! Don't pass by, but sit and take shelter under my shaded roof. You can relax, and sing a cheerful song, accompanied by my refreshing flute music. All the daughters of the seasons (perhaps the fruit of the harvest) will dance to our tune! Sing us your lively, vigorous song about fruits and flowers in bloom."

So Autumn sings a song of the seasons: "A little flower bud reveals her beautiful petals to the sun, with love coursing through her excited veins. The Morning wears flowers in her hair, and flowers hang over the cheeks of the humble Evening, too. Soon enough, Summer bursts into song, with feathery clouds forming a garland on her head.

"The air-spirits themselves live in the scent of fruit. Joy is like a soft-feathered bird, roaming the gardens or singing in the trees." Now the speaker pipes up again, saying: "That's the song cheerful Autumn sang as he sat down. When he had finished, he got up, put his coat back on, leapt over the melancholy hills, and disappeared from view. But he left us the golden treasure of



## LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

## LINES 1-3

*O Autumn, laden with fruit, and stained  
With the blood of the grape, pass not, but sit  
Beneath my shady roof;*

The poem doesn't waste any time getting to its main subject: the beauty and bounty of Autumn. In fact, the speaker begins by addressing the season itself, here [personified](#) as a godlike male figure. The first three lines use [apostrophe](#), a direct address: the speaker stops Autumn in his tracks and asks the season to "sit" for a while. It's as though the speaker admires Autumn and wants to be in his company, imploring him to "pass not."

The first few lines characterize Autumn as a time of plenty. It's that point in the year (or at least, it used to be!) when people harvest their crops and celebrate their bounty. Autumn, the speaker says, is "laden with fruit" and "stained / With the blood of the grape." Both [images](#) evoke growth, beauty, and richness. But they also suggest a kind of seasonal release: Autumn represents the *culmination* of a hard few months' work, an ending.

The [metaphor](#) of the "blood of the grape" refers to wine, setting an earthy, bodily (and perhaps [Eucharistic](#)) tone that will run all through the poem. The idea that this wine will "stain" also suggests spilled cups and drunken revelry. To this speaker, there's something both spiritual and lusty about Autumn.

These first three lines are full of [caesurae](#) and sound patterning:

O Autumn, || laden with fruit, || and stained  
With the blood of the grape, || pass not, || but sit  
Beneath my shady roof [...]

The /d/ and /n/ [consonance](#) and long /ay/ [assonance](#) here creates a sonic feast: these lines overflow with harmonious sounds. The caesurae contribute to this effect, making the lines feel like they might spill out of the poem's form—its container—and thus evoking both abundance and indulgence.

## LINES 3-6

*there thou mayst rest,  
And tune thy jolly voice to my fresh pipe,  
And all the daughters of the year shall dance!  
Sing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers.*

After inviting the [personified](#) Autumn to sit down and relax for a moment under a "shady roof," the speaker asks Autumn to sing its "lusty song of fruits and flowers"—so everyone can have a great big party! The autumn is, traditionally, a time to celebrate the harvest: a time to let loose before the chill of winter sets in. Here, the speaker treats Autumn as the guest of

honor at the festivities, without whom there would be no reason to "dance."

Listen to the lively music of lines 5-6:

And all the daughters of the year shall dance!  
Sing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers.

[Alliteration](#), [assonance](#), and [consonance](#) make these lines vibrant and colorful, evoking autumn's fertile bounty.

Not only the speaker and Autumn, but the "daughters of the year" will join in the party. It's worth noting that the poem doesn't specify the identity of the "daughters of the year," but perhaps they're [personified](#) representatives of the "fruits and flowers" of a harvest festival. Either way, these lines are all about enjoying nature's bounty, and having a good time in the process!

They're also about *music*. The speaker doesn't just ask Autumn to sing, but offers to play a "fresh pipe" in accompaniment. Perhaps this poem itself could be read as the speaker's autumnal piping. The poem's swinging, melodious [blank verse](#) fits right in with that idea.

## LINES 7-8

*"The narrow bud opens her beauties to  
The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins;*

At the start of the second stanza, the poem switches speakers. Now, the reader is treated to the "lusty song of fruits and flowers" as performed by the [personified](#) Autumn himself.

Interestingly, Autumn doesn't sing about his own season at first; instead, he recaps Spring and Summer, reinforcing the idea that Autumn marks the *culmination* (and celebration) of hard work done earlier in the year by both humanity and nature. Autumn's song feels rather like a love song: nature, the poem suggests, is animated by "beaut[y]" and desire.

To this end, lines 7 and 8 personify a flower bud, making it into the sun's lover:

"The narrow bud opens her beauties to  
The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins;

The bud actively *wants* to reveal itself and to give itself to the warmth of the sun. Everything in this image is linked and in balance, given productive energy by the "love" which flows through everything. Though neither speaker nor Autumn directly mentions God, there is a kind of vision of divine love at work here: through exquisite design and the balance of numerous elements, "love" creates a harmonious whole.

## LINES 9-10

*Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, and  
Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve,*

Lines 9 and 10 continue Autumn's song, describing the passage of Spring to Summer. As the year goes on, Spring's tentative beginnings become more confident:

Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, and  
Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve,

Here, both "Morning" and "Eve" (that is, evening) are [personified](#). Though one might expect them to be opposites, Morning and Eve are really like two dancers, each supporting the other to make their moves. Notice how the [enjambment](#) between the two lines (highlighted above) suggests continuity and partnership. Both Morning and Eve, these lines suggest, are essential parts of nature's rhythms.

The /b/ [alliteration](#) of "Blossoms" and "brows" suggest natural beauty and abundance: they are bold, bright sounds that fit with the imagery of blossoms "hang[ing]" and "Flourish[ing]" round Morning and Eve.

Notice, too, how both of these lines start with [trochees](#) ("Blossoms" and "Flourish"). This variation in the poem's [iambic pentameter](#)—lines of five iambs, metrical feet with a da-DUM rhythm, the opposite of trochees—creates a sense of urgency and momentum that evokes Spring's ability to transform a landscape.

Likewise, check out the unusual combination of [caesura](#) and [enjambment](#) in line 9:

Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, | and  
Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve,

In combination, the comma just before "and" and the subsequent line break give the impression that the poem might burst its form, like a flower suddenly emerging from its bud.

### LINES 11-15

*Till clust'ring Summer breaks forth into singing,  
And feather'd clouds strew flowers round her head.  
"The spirits of the air live in the smells  
Of fruit; and Joy, with pinions light, roves round  
The gardens, or sits singing in the trees."*

Now, Autumn gives a musical account of the transition from Spring to Summer. Like Autumn, Summer is [personified](#) as a lively, vital, and beautiful singer—and this time, a female figure, adding a gender balance to all the other images of harmony and rhythm here.

Strong sound patterning again evokes the loveliness of the seasons:

Till clust'ring Summer breaks forth into singing,  
And feather'd clouds strew flowers round her head.

The feathery, [sibilant](#) /s/, the soft /d/ [consonance](#), the /u/ and /o/ [assonance](#)—the sounds in these lines are like the notes of a beautiful melody. And as these lines are part of a song that *describes* even more singing, musical sounds only make sense!

At last, in lines 13-15, Autumn's song comes to an end. These closing lines show the world suffused with a kind of natural magic. The air is full of "spirits" which can be detected in the "smells/ Of fruit." Joy, presented [metaphorically](#) as a winged creature—perhaps a bird, perhaps an angel—sings in the trees. In short, these lines depict a kind of paradise, an ideal natural world with no corrupting influences in sight, bursting with rich, beautiful life.

These lines, again, are full of music. The [alliteration](#) between "spirits" and "smells" links the two together, fragrant aromas providing proof of mystical life. Joy's "pinions" (or feathers) are "light," the /t/ sound echoing the delicacy of the earlier "fruit." And Joy itself "sits singing" in the trees.

In short, this is a song that is itself *full* of song. Perhaps the music of these lines suggests the perfect natural harmony the speaker imagines: songs, just like the seasons, have both rhythm and beauty.

### LINES 16-18

*Thus sang the jolly Autumn as he sat,  
Then rose, girded himself, and o'er the bleak  
Hills fled from our sight; but left his golden load.*

In the last three lines of the poem, things change: "jolly" Autumn's song is over. He gets up, puts his coat back on, and disappears over the hills just as quickly as he appeared.

Here, the poem perhaps speaks to the way nature—and life more generally—is in constant flux. Autumn can only stick around for so long, and the time of celebration is seemingly short-lived. Meanwhile, Winter lurks behind the curtain, awaiting its cue to take the stage.

Like Autumn itself, then, the poem is tinged with melancholy. As Autumn departs, the nearby hills seem "bleak" and lifeless, and the verb "fled" feels startling. The sharp [enjambment](#) between lines 17 and 18 emphasizes (and mimics) Autumn's sudden departure.

Autumn hasn't left the human world empty-handed, however. He leaves behind the "golden load"—that is, the rewards of the harvest, the food and produce that will help people through another year, and the memory of his lovely song.

The poem thus emphasizes the beauty and the melancholy of the seasons. Through images of fruit, flowers, and song—all responding to the warm "love" of the sunlight—it suggests that nature is always doing its beautiful dance. Even though any one season is short-lived, another kind of beauty always follows on its heels. And each season has its own rewards.



## POETIC DEVICES

## ALLITERATION

Like a garden full of flowers bursting into life, "To Autumn" is packed with [alliteration](#). Its main effect is musical and decorative: harmonious repeating sounds give the poem a playful, joyful, and celebratory atmosphere.

The poem features a lot of singing, and alliteration helps make this more noticeable. Check out the second stanza, for example, which features alliteration in most lines:

"The narrow bud opens her beauties to  
The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins;  
Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, and  
Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve,  
Till clust'ring Summer breaks forth into singing,  
And feather'd clouds strew flowers round her head.

Notice how these plosive /b/ sounds are like little pops of color, evoking the visual beauty of opening buds and flourishing blossoms. The /f/ sounds in line 12 are light and gentle, matching the [metaphor](#) of feathery clouds as flowers around Summer's head.

And listen to the /s/ sounds in line 6:

Sing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers.

The /s/ in "Sing" and "song" chimes with the internal /s/ of "lusty," creating a seductive, exciting, whispery sound that fits right in with the poem's sensuous tone.

## Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "blood," "but"
- **Line 3:** "Beneath"
- **Line 5:** "daughters," "dance"
- **Line 6:** "Sing," "song," "fruits," "flowers"
- **Line 7:** "bud," "beauties"
- **Line 9:** "Blossoms," "brows"
- **Line 11:** "Summer," "singing"
- **Line 12:** "feather'd," "flowers"
- **Line 13:** "spirits," "smells"
- **Line 14:** "roves round"
- **Line 15:** "sits singing"
- **Line 16:** "sang," "sat"
- **Line 18:** "left," "load"

## JUXTAPOSITION

[Juxtaposition](#) appears in lines 9 and 10, in which the different parts of spring days are [personified](#) as part of Autumn's "lusty song":

Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, and  
Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve,

"Morning," which stands in for all spring mornings, and "Eve," all spring evenings, are both decorated in the lovely "Blossoms" of the season. This juxtaposition between different times of day thus doesn't highlight the *difference* between morning and evening, but shows how they belong together. They are their own cyclical rhythm which, ultimately, brings about the rhythm of the seasons. Though morning and evening are technically opposites, here the poem emphasizes their continuity and companionship.

The poem makes that point even clearer by having Autumn sing about his fellow seasons, Spring and Summer. By lining all these different seasons up in the same song, the poem observes that, in some ways, seasonal differences are just another part of seasonal continuity: spring's buds become summer's flowers, and summer's flowers become autumn's fruit. (Of course, it's also worth noting that Winter doesn't appear in this cheerful parade—though the poem implies that it's on its way when Autumn departs at the end of the poem.)

## Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- **Lines 9-10:** "Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, and / Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve,"

## APOSTROPHE

Together with [personification](#), [apostrophe](#) allows the poem to bring Autumn to life as a living, "jolly"—and busy!—being.

In the first stanza, the speaker uses apostrophe to address the personified figure of Autumn directly. The speaker's words work rather like a summoning spell or a classical invocation to a god: the speaker praises Autumn, offers him "rest," and asks him to sit down for a sing-song. There's something both grand and cozy about this address: it makes Autumn sound at once like a god and a friendly neighbor.

On the one hand, the use of apostrophe—the same device with which an ancient Greek poet would summon up the help of the muses—creates a sense of mythology and mysticism. This speaks to other traditions and rituals in which human beings call on the gods, nature, or both to help them live their lives. Here, for example, the speaker wants Autumn to usher in a period of abundance and revelry—which is exactly what Autumn arrives on cue to do!

On the other hand, apostrophe introduces a more human element to the poem, allowing the speaker to present Autumn as a vivid and charming character—a guy whom one can speak to like any neighbor. That more homey side suggests the speaker's comfortable delight in Autumn's company. Autumn might be a grand, godlike natural force, but he's also a reliable

friend.

#### Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-6:** "O Autumn, laden with fruit, and stained / With the blood of the grape, pass not, but sit / Beneath my shady roof; there thou mayst rest, / And tune thy jolly voice to my fresh pipe, / And all the daughters of the year shall dance! / Sing now the lusty song of fruits and flowers."

## ASSONANCE

Together with [alliteration](#) and [consonance](#), [assonance](#) helps make the poem vibrant and musical. That's fitting for a poem in which music and song play such an important role: sound patterning helps to create a poem's melody, rhythm, and dynamics.

For example, listen to the assonant sounds in lines 7-8:

The narrow bud opens her beauties to  
The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins;

A soft /uh/ sound courses all through these lines, mimicking the image of "love" running through the "veins" of flowers.

Meanwhile, at the end of the poem, the /oh/ sounds of "golden load" feel round and full, capturing the plenty and abundance of the harvest season in all its glory.

#### Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "laden," "stained"
- **Line 2:** "grape"
- **Line 5:** "all," "daughters"
- **Line 7:** "bud"
- **Line 8:** "sun," "love," "runs"
- **Line 9:** "round," "brows"
- **Line 10:** "down," "cheek," "Eve"
- **Line 11:** "clust'ring Summer," "into singing"
- **Line 12:** "clouds," "flowers round"
- **Line 15:** "sits singing"
- **Line 16:** "jolly Autumn"
- **Line 18:** "fled," "left," "golden load"

## CAESURA

[Caesura](#) helps to evoke the overflowing natural abundance of Autumn. By slowing lines down and allowing them to fill up with more and more description and action, caesurae create a fitting sense of bounty and musicality.

There is a kind of swagger and sway to the sound of the first two lines, for example, that seems to fit with the suggestion of drunkenness:

O Autumn, || laden with fruit, || and stained  
With the blood of the grape, || pass not, || but sit

The caesurae here give these lines a singsong quality. Their rhythmic effect makes it easy to imagine Autumn as a jolly, rotund figure with a big swinging walk and an overflowing cup. Line 9's caesura is particularly unusual and lively:

Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, || and

This energetic caesura, which comes just before the last syllable of this [enjambed](#) line, creates tension that doesn't release until the first word of the following line. It's like pulling back on a spring and then letting it go.

At the end of the poem, caesura creates a dramatic pause before the final phrase:

Hills fled from our sight; || but left his golden load.

This caesura appears just at the moment of Autumn's sudden departure: the second his song is finished, he's out of there! But, as this caesura emphasizes, he hasn't left his companions empty-handed. The strong semicolon here gives Autumn's "golden" harvest special weight.

#### Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Autumn, laden," "fruit, and"
- **Line 2:** "grape, pass," "not, but"
- **Line 3:** "roof; there"
- **Line 8:** "sun, and"
- **Line 9:** "Morning, and"
- **Line 14:** "fruit; and," "Joy, with," "light, roves"
- **Line 15:** "gardens, or"
- **Line 17:** "rose, girded," "himself, and"
- **Line 18:** "sight; but"

## CONSONANCE

"To Autumn" is full to the brim with musical [consonance](#), which fits with the abundance of the season. (Much of the is also [alliteration](#), for which there is a separate entry in this guide.)

For example, the consonance of the words "feather'd clouds strew flowers round her head" makes this lovely image overflow with [euphonious](#) melody. The same can be said for "And that makes sense, since the poem is full of song; in fact, half of it is a song. Consonance provides a kind of parallel "jolly" music to accompany Autumn's own singing.

#### Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Autumn," "laden," "fruit," "and," "stained"
- **Line 2:** "blood," "grape, pass," "not, but sit"

- **Line 3:** “there thou,” “mayst rest”
- **Line 5:** “daughters,” “dance”
- **Line 6:** “Sing,” “lusty song,” “of fruits,” “flowers”
- **Line 7:** “bud,” “beauties”
- **Line 8:** “sun,” “runs in,” “veins”
- **Line 9:** “Blossoms,” “brows,” “Morning”
- **Line 10:** “bright,” “modest”
- **Line 11:** “clust’ring Summer,” “breaks,” “singing”
- **Line 12:** “feather’d clouds,” “strew,” “flowers,” “round,” “head”
- **Line 13:** “spirits,” “smells”
- **Line 14:** “roves round”
- **Line 15:** “gardens,” “sits singing”
- **Line 16:** “sang,” “Autumn,” “sat”
- **Line 17:** “rose, girded,” “bleak”
- **Line 18:** “Hills,” “fled,” “left,” “golden load”

## ENJAMBMENT

"To Autumn" uses [enjambment](#) often. In a poem all about natural abundance, enjambment makes the poem feel as if it, too, is bursting with life.

This effect is especially noticeable at the start:

O Autumn, laden with fruit, and stained  
With the blood of the grape, pass not, but sit  
Beneath my shady roof[...]

Notice how the enjambment (and [caesura](#)) make this opening feel dynamic and unpredictable. It's like Autumn is intoxicated with its own beauty, both graceful and merrily clumsy.

In the second stanza, enjambment suggests the steadily emerging beauty of Spring:

"The narrow bud opens her beauties to  
The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins;  
Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, and  
Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve,

Here, continuous lines reflect a sense that everything is sprouting into life. Line 9's enjambment is particularly radical because of the caesura that comes just before—notice how much vigor and strength that combination gives to the word "Flourish"! That strength evokes nature's own powerful desire to grow and spread.

The final enjambment, though, has a different function:

Then rose, girded himself, and o'er the bleak  
Hills fled from our sight; but left his golden load.

Here, Autumn suddenly disappears, almost as soon as he arrived. He has work to do, after all! The enjambment between

"bleak/ Hills" feels abrupt and shocking, reminding readers that the chill of winter is on its way.

### Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** “stained / With”
- **Lines 2-3:** “sit / Beneath”
- **Lines 7-8:** “to / The”
- **Lines 9-10:** “and / Flourish”
- **Lines 13-14:** “smells / Of”
- **Lines 14-15:** “round / The”
- **Lines 17-18:** “bleak / Hills”

## IMAGERY

Fruits, flowers, dancers, clouds, birds, gardens, trees—this poem is a feast for the eyes and ears! [Imagery](#) courses through the lines like the "love" flowing through the opening buds of Spring. By packing the poem with imagery, Blake mirrors the way that nature packs the world with bounty, beauty, and nourishment.

Just look how Autumn's "lusty song" brings Spring to life on the page in the second stanza:

"The narrow bud opens her beauties to  
The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins;  
Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, and  
Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve,  
Till clust’ring Summer breaks forth into singing,  
And feather’d clouds strew flowers round her head.

This passage paints a vivid picture of a world coming to full, glorious, colorful life. Not only that, it also suggests harmony, with everything happening at the right time and in the right place. The [personified](#) bud *wants* to reveal herself to the sun, and both morning and night are hung with blossoms. Summer sings boldly, and the clouds form flowery garlands on her head. In a word, the world is beautiful!

And the poem's closing image of the "golden load" Autumn leaves behind suggests that the end-products of the harvest (e.g., crops) are a brightly shining treasure.

The poem's imagery, then, evokes a kind of natural paradise.

### Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-2
- Lines 4-5
- Lines 7-15
- Line 18

## METAPHOR

The entire poem is built on a central [metaphor](#)—Autumn as a person or god—and packed with even more metaphors besides.

Firstly, the unidentified speaker receives Autumn as their guest, and bids the season to sing his song. This song, which can only be sung because Autumn is [personified](#), takes up half the poem. The whole poem, then, hinges on treating August as a human- or god-like figure. Other seasons and times get a similar treatment: Summer "breaks forth into singing," and "Morning" and "Eve" are decked out in flower crowns. (See the entry on Personification for more.)

Summer wears her own kind of crown, too: "feather'd clouds strew flowers round her head." There's a double-layered metaphor here. The clouds are like feathers—e.g. light, gentle, airborne—but they also form a garland of flowers around Summer's head.

Meanwhile, in line 2, the "blood of the grape" seems to refer metaphorically to wine. Using "blood" as a metaphor portrays wine as something vital and bodily, and speaks to its connection with nature—which, after all, is alive. Perhaps there's also an [allusion](#) to the Christian [Eucharist](#) here, a suggestion that the natural world is deeply connected to the divine.

Finally, in the last stanza of the poem, "Joy" appears as a bird or an angel, a figure with "pinions light"—that is, airy wings—that flits through gardens and perches "singing in the trees." This metaphor suggests, once more, that nature, divinity, and delight are all part of the same beautiful package.

#### Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "O Autumn"
- **Line 2:** "the blood of the grape"
- **Lines 7-12:** "'The narrow bud opens her beauties to / The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins; / Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, and / Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve, / Till clust'ring Summer breaks forth into singing, / And feather'd clouds strew flowers round her head."
- **Lines 14-15:** "Joy, with pinions light, roves round / The gardens, or sits singing in the trees."

## PERSONIFICATION

[Personification](#) (a type of [metaphor](#)) plays a central role in the poem, bringing Autumn to life on the page. Half of the poem is a song sung by Autumn, and that wouldn't be possible without this device!

Personification portrays Autumn as "jolly" figure who sings "lusty song[s]" about the passage of the seasons. Like a human being, he has certain duties that he has to perform: bringing about the harvest, transforming the landscape into a tapestry of gold, setting up the transition to Winter, and so on.

Personification, then, allows the speaker to directly address Autumn, treating it not as an abstract entity but as someone that can understand and be understood by human beings. The speaker can then request that Autumn sing his song and usher

in a period of abundance and celebration. In other words, Autumn is the guest of honor at humanity's party!

But it's not just Autumn that is personified. Singing about Spring, Autumn personifies a "bud" which opens to reveal its "beauties" to the warm light of the sun. "Morning" and "Eve," both personified, are decorated with beautiful "Blossoms." "Summer," too, is a goddess, breaking into song and wearing a garland of clouds.

All of this personification grants nature an agency, implying that seasonal marvels are mysterious, mystical—and *intentional*. There is a beautiful intelligence to the natural world, each aspect linking up with the other, spreading "Joy."

#### Where Personification appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-18



## VOCABULARY

**Laden** (Line 1) - Heavily loaded.

**Pass not** (Line 2) - "Don't go by."

**Mayst** (Line 3) - Can.

**Thy** (Line 4) - Your.

**Jolly** (Line 4) - Cheerful and lively.

**Lusty** (Line 6) - Vigorous, lively.

**Thrilling** (Line 8) - In this context, the word means "tingling," with some [connotations](#) of excitement.

**Flourish** (Line 10) - Grow with vigor and strength and/or make a bold gesture.

**Clust'ring** (Line 11) - Clustering—growing closely together.

**Strew** (Line 12) - Scatter.

**Pinions** (Line 14) - Feathers.

**Roves** (Line 14) - Roams about the place.

**Girded** (Line 17) - This can mean "belted" or just "dressed," with connotations of preparations to go; in other words, Autumn is tightening his belt or putting his coat back on, on his way out.



## FORM, METER, & RHYME

### FORM

"To Autumn" is an ode, a poem of praise. It consists of three stanzas, each one six lines in length (a.k.a. [sestets](#)). The opening and closing of the poem are in the speaker's voice, while lines 7 to 15 represent Autumn's song.

These regular stanzas overflow with bounteous music and description. Autumn's abundance and festival spirit plays out in the tension between the poem's tight form on the page and its

unpredictable use of [enjambment](#) and [caesura](#); sentences often burst the bounds of lines! The poem, then, feels like it's as "laden with fruit" as Autumn itself.

The poem also shares common ground with pastoral poetry, which stretches all the way back to the literature of ancient Greece. In pastoral poems, nature is presented as an idyllic utopia, with all its different elements working together. The harmony between Autumn and his predecessors Spring and Summer here fits right in with that tradition.

## METER

"To Autumn" uses a playful, varied [meter](#) that fits its celebratory mood.

Most of the poem uses a loose [iambic](#) pentameter—that is, lines of five iambs, metrical feet with a da-DUM rhythm. Line 5 is one good clear example:

And all | the daugh- | ters of | the year | shall dance!

It seems appropriate this line has a satisfyingly regular rhythm, given that it refers to dancing!

But many other lines in the poem are less reliable. Look at the meter in the very first lines, for instance:

O Autumn, laden with fruit, and stained  
With the blood of the grape, pass not, but sit

These lines are in an irregular, bouncy tetrameter, with only four stresses per line.

And even in passages that are closer to pentameter, there's a lot of variation—as in lines 9-10:

Blossoms | hang round | the brows | of Morn- | ing,  
and  
Flourish | down the | bright cheek | of mod- | est Eve,

These lines are like vines on which little stress-flowers are opening up willy-nilly—with a wildness appropriate for the song of a nature spirit!

The sheer amount of variation in the poem makes it feel dynamic and unpredictable. The tension between the iambic pentameter—or the *suggestion* of iambic pentameter—and the surprising shifts makes the poem feel exuberant, "lusty" as Autumn itself.

## RHYME SCHEME

Unlike much of his later work, Blake's four season poems, written early in his career, don't use a [rhyme scheme](#). Perhaps rhyme might feel too restrictive here, at odds with the vision of wild nature, freedom, and desire that the poem creates.

But the poem does play with musical patterns of sound. For

instance, the [internal rhyme](#) between "sun" and "runs" in line 8 creates an appropriately "thrilling" sense of acceleration, fitting for the image of a bud with "love" running through its veins.



## SPEAKER

The speaker in this poem acts more as a framing device than a character. In the first stanza, the speaker calls out to the [personified](#) figure of Autumn, asking him to "sit" for a while and sing his "lusty song of fruits and flowers." Implicitly, then, the speaker sees Autumn as a friend or a neighbor, and views it as a critical period in the rhythm of the seasons. The speaker is also a musician, playing a pipe accompaniment to Autumn's song. The speaker clearly respects nature and wants to celebrate the bounty of the harvest.

The real star of the show—and the speaker of half of the poem—is Autumn himself. He sings about nature in all its glory, charting a course from Spring to Summer that culminates in his own arrival. He is a "jolly" soul who takes his duties seriously—up to and including clearing off once his song is complete and it's time for Winter to take the stage.

In lines 16-18, the poem reverts to its original speaker. This makes Autumn a kind of present absence, there one moment and gone the next, the speaker suddenly alone as a witness to his departure.



## SETTING

The poem's setting is, as the title suggests, autumn in the countryside. It's a time of beauty and bounty, and perhaps a little harvest-induced partying!

The speaker beckons to the [personified](#) figure of Autumn himself, inviting him to come and sit under a "shady roof," and to sing his "lusty song of fruits and flowers." The whole poem is full of references to nature and growth, evoking an idyllic natural environment that is notably lacking in human figures (even if the poem personifies most of the things it talks about). It's practically a vision of heaven.

Interestingly, though, half of the poem is devoted not to Autumn, but to Autumn's own song about Spring and Summer. His song effectively charts the course of the year, the "narrow bud" of Spring leading to the "break[ing] forth" of Summer. This portrays Autumn as a kind of peak or culmination, the point in the year when much hard agricultural labor is rewarded and celebrated. Lurking in the background, of course, are the long, deathly fingers of Winter.





## CONTEXT

## LITERARY CONTEXT

Though largely ignored in his own lifetime, William Blake (1757-1827) is now considered one of the most original, visionary, and passionate poets in the history of poetry. He is best known for his collection *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, first published in 1789 by Blake himself.

"To Autumn" is one of Blake's earliest poems. It forms part of a quartet based on the seasons, each of which, like this poem, relies heavily on [personification](#) and [imagery](#). "To Spring" portrays its season as angelic and holy; "To Summer" shows Summer as fierce but inspiring (and male, unlike Summer in this poem); "To Winter" depicts its season as harsh, unforgiving, and deadly. All four poems appear in Blake's early collection *Poetical Sketches*; it's worth reading them all to see how they connect.

Scholars tend to view *Poetical Sketches* as uneven, more of a work in progress than a masterpiece like *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. That said, poems like "To Autumn" offer an early insight into Blake's poetic habits. Already there is a kind of mysticism at work that, though informed by classical mythology and Christianity, shows a startling ability to create something new. In the four personified seasons, Blake prefigures his later creations—deities like Urizen in *The Book of Urizen*, or Orc in *America: a Prophecy*.

Nature features heavily throughout Blake's poetry, as it did in the poetry of many of his Romantic contemporaries like [William Wordsworth](#) and [Samuel Taylor Coleridge](#). For Blake, nature's beauty and benevolence often stands in contrast to the worst aspects of humanity. Notably, there aren't many people in this poem!

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

William Blake lived in an era of considerable upheaval. The very nature of human existence was being transformed through the technological innovations of the Industrial Revolution. An increase in mechanized labor changed many aspects of life, forcing many to flock to the cities for work.

Blake was highly critical of the Industrial Revolution in poems like "[London](#)." But "To Autumn," like many of the poems in *Songs of Innocence*, doesn't really show any signs of the era in which it was written. Instead, it presents an early version of one of Blake's mystical spirit-worlds—an autumnal paradise that feels more mythic than agricultural. This paradise seems to depend on a lack of human activity to spoil it.

The poem also perhaps shows the influence of the philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg was the leader of the New Church, an unorthodox spiritual group that emphasized the divinity of the natural world. Blake grew up in a Christian environment but was highly critical of institutionalized religion,

feeling that it [restricted and denied](#) expression and joy. While Blake would also grow more critical of Swedenborg's thought later on, he was deeply influenced by the elder thinker's belief that some aspect of God is knowable through humanity's interaction with nature.



## MORE RESOURCES

## EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [Blake's Radicalism](#) — Watch an excerpt from a documentary in which writer Iain Sinclair discusses Blake's radicalism. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1OyBrI24XM&t=1s>)
- [The Art of William Blake](#) — Take a look at some of Blake's visionary paintings; he was a groundbreaking visual artist as well as a poet. (<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/william-blake-39>)
- [Blake and Swedenborg](#) — Read an article on the influence of the Swedish theologian on Blake's work and thought. (<http://bq.blakearchive.org/13.2.paley>)
- [Blake's Poetical Sketches](#) — Explore the full text of the collection in which this poem appeared. (<http://public-library.uk/ebooks/15/33.pdf>)
- [Blake's Visions](#) — Watch an excerpt from a documentary in which writer Iain Sinclair discusses Blake's religious visions. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8hcQ\\_jPIZA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F8hcQ_jPIZA))

## LITCHARTS ON OTHER WILLIAM BLAKE POEMS

- [A Dream](#)
- [A Poison Tree](#)
- [London](#)
- [The Chimney Sweeper \(Songs of Experience\)](#)
- [The Chimney Sweeper \(Songs of Innocence\)](#)
- [The Clod and the Pebble](#)
- [The Divine Image](#)
- [The Ecchoing Green](#)
- [The Garden of Love](#)
- [The Lamb](#)
- [The Little Black Boy](#)
- [The Sick Rose](#)
- [The Tyger](#)



## HOW TO CITE

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