

AUTUMNAL PROSE

“Her *pleasure* in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn--that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness—that season which has drawn from every poet worthy of being read some attempt at description, or some lines of feeling. She occupied her mind as much as possible in such like musings and quotations.” ~Jane Austin (from novel *Persuasion*)

“The gilding of the Indian summer mellowed the pastures far and wide. The russet woods stood ripe to be stripped, but were yet full of leaf. The purple of heath-bloom, faded but not withered, tinged the hills... Field head gardens bore the seal of gentle decay; its time of flowers and even of fruit was over.”
~ Charlotte Brontë (from novel *Shirley*)

It has been said that in human life there are moments worth ages... in the climate of England there are, for the lover of Nature, days which are worth whole months, — I might say — even years. One of these favoured days sometimes occurs in spring-time, when that soft air is breathing over the blossoms and new-born verdure... But it is in autumn that days of such affecting influence most frequently intervene... the lights and shadows are more delicate; the colouring is richer and more finely harmonized; and, in this season of stillness, the ear being

unoccupied, or only gently excited, the sense of vision becomes more susceptible of its appropriate enjoyments... The happiest time is when the equinoxial gales are departed; but their fury may probably be called to mind by the sight of a few shattered boughs, whose leaves do not differ in colour from the faded foliage of the stately oaks from which these relics of the storm depend: all else speaks of tranquility; — not a breath of air, no restlessness of insects, and not a moving object perceptible — except the clouds gliding in the depths of the lake... ~ William Wordsworth

How plain that death is only the phenomenon of the individual or class! Nature does not recognize it; she finds her own again under new forms without loss. Yet death is beautiful when seen to be a law, and not an accident. It is as common as life... Every blade in the field, every leaf in the forest, lays down its life in its season, as beautifully as it was taken up. It is the pastime of a full quarter of the year. Dead trees, sere leaves, dried grass and herbs — are not these a good part of our life? And what is that pride of our autumnal scenery but the hectic flush, the sallow and cadaverous countenance of vegetation? its painted throes, with the November air for canvas?

When we look over the fields we are not saddened because these particular flowers or grasses will wither; for the law of their death is the law of new life.

Will not the land be in good heart because the crops die down from year to year? The herbage cheerfully consents to bloom, and wither, and give place to a new. So it is with the human plant. We are partial and selfish when we lament the death of the individual, unless our plaint be a pæan to the

departed soul, and a sigh, as the wind sighs over the fields, which no shrub interprets into its private grief.

One might as well go into mourning for every sere leaf; but the more innocent and wiser soul will snuff a fragrance in the gale of autumn, and congratulate Nature upon her health.

~ Henry David Thoreau (Letter to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1842)

My house completed, and tried and not found wanting by a first Cape Cod year, I went there to spend a fortnight in September. The fortnight ending, I lingered on, and as the year lengthened into autumn, the beauty and mystery of this earth and outer sea so possessed and held me that I could not go. The world to-day is sick to its thin blood for lack of elemental things, for fire before the hands, for water welling from the earth, for air, for the dear earth itself underfoot. In my world of beach and dunes these elemental presences lived and had their being, and under their arch there moved an incomparable pageant of nature and the year.” ~ Henry Beston, *The Outermost House: A Year of Life On The Great Beach of Cape Cod*

The days may not be so bright and balmy — yet the quiet and melancholy that linger around them is fraught with glory. Over everything connected with autumn there lingers some golden spell — some unseen influence that penetrates the soul with its mysterious power. There is no season in all the year so beautiful, so radiant with glory, as the early autumn. There is no time when the human soul drinks in so fully the glory and beauty of nature. All objects of beauty are more beautiful while

passing away from us. The closing up of a beautiful life — the fading of the holy stars in the dim light of morning — the ending of a quiet summer day and the passing away of the bright summer glory, are all more sweet and lovely as they are lost to us. The death-glow always beautifies anything that wears the trace of beauty ere it goes back to nothingness. We do not understand the secret of this principle, yet we know that it is some law of the infinite mind. ~Northern Advocate

“It was in the declining flush of a beautiful autumn evening, that I stood alone in the quiet solitude of a stately forest’s edge. I had wandered long, in the spirit of deep and solemn meditation, through scenes which might well arouse the soul of the poet, or quicken the painter’s eye.... The forest was full of rich coloring and exuberant foliage. Scarlet, purple, gold — the different shades of brown, from its darkest and reddest duskiness, to the palest fawn hue — a soft and saddening intermixture of greyish tints, contrasting with the glossy green of the yet unchanged oak, the monarch of trees, and his many and strong wood relatives — and with the bluer verdure of the pines, the silver-lined laurel leaves, and the feathery cedar — all these were mingled to make a splendor gorgeous, yet harmonious, and as I gazed upward at the sun, which beamed, mild and red, through an atmosphere of blue and softening mist, I caught his ruby glance down the glossy green ash-leaves, and thought in my soul that there ought to be, if there were not, an inhabiting spirit for every leaf in the forest, and for every rich sun-gleam that colored and rayed the air, in this glowing and glorious Indian summer!” ~ Mary Howard, “Mr. Lindsay’s Manuscript”

“Then what is Durin’s Day?” asked Elrond.

“The first day of the dwarves’ New Year,” said Thorin, “is as all should know the first day of the last moon of Autumn on the threshold of Winter. We still call it Durin’s Day when the last moon of Autumn and the sun are in the sky together. But this will not help us much, I fear, for it passes our skill in these days to guess when such a time will come again.” ~ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

Does a leaf, when it falls from the tree in winter, feel defeated by the cold? The tree says to the leaf: That’s the cycle of life. You may think you’re going to die, but you live on in me. It’s thanks to you that I’m alive, because I can breathe. It’s also thanks to you that I have felt loved, because I was able to give shade to the weary traveller. Your sap is in my sap; we are one thing. ~ Paulo Coelho

The sweltering summer of the Negro’s legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. ~ Martin Luther King, Jr.