

Autumnal Poetry (20th and 21st Centuries)

While every season lends itself to poetry, the wistful, wind-swept trees of autumn help us to notice more deeply the beauty of life even in its “final” stages. Autumn is a time for artistry and awe, the structural details of a landscape coming alive in its dying, a bittersweet mixture of melancholy and fulfillment. This season can inspire feelings of loneliness and sorrow, though it can also help us to feel the sacredness of sharing that solitude with each other. It shows the beauty of release, acting as a catalyst to our own introspective nature.

Thomas Hardy

“An Autumn Rain-Scene” (1904)

There trudges one to a merry-making
With sturdy swing,
On whom the rain comes down.

To fetch the saving medicament
Is another bent,
On whom the rain comes down.

One slowly drives his herd to the stall
Ere ill befall,
On whom the rain comes down.

This bears his missives of life and death
With quickening breath,
On whom the rain comes down.

One watches for signals of wreck or war
From the hill afar,
On whom the rain comes down.

No care if he gain a shelter or none,
Unhired moves on,
On whom the rain comes down.

And another knows nought of its chilling fall
Upon him at all, on whom the rain comes down.

Charles Hamilton Sorely

“Autumn Dawn” (1919)

And this is morning. Would you think
That this was the morning, when the land
Is full of heavy eyes that blink
Half-opened, and the tall trees stand
Too tired to shake away the drops
Of passing night that cling around
Their branches and weigh down their tops:
And the grey sky leans on the ground?
The thrush sings once or twice, but stops
Affrighted by the silent sound.
The sheep, scarce moving, munches, moans.
The slow herd mumbles, thick with phlegm.
The grey road-mender, hacking stones,
Is now become as one of them.

Old mother Earth has rubbed her eyes
And stayed, so senseless, lying down.
Old mother is too tired to rise
And lay aside her grey nightgown,
And come with singing and with strength
In loud exuberance of day,
Swift-darting. She is tired at length,
Done up, past bearing, you would say.
She'll come no more in lust of strife,
In hedges' leap, and wild birds' cries,
In winds that cut you like a knife,
In days of laughter and swift skies,
That palpably pulsate with life,
With life that kills, with life that dies.
But in a morning such as this
Is neither life nor death to see,
Only that state which some call bliss,
Grey hopeless immortality.
Earth is at length bedrid. She is
Supinest of the things that be:
And stilly, heavy with long years,
Brings forth such days in dumb regret,
Immortal days, that rise in tears,
And cannot, though they strive to, set.

Maurice Lesemann

“To Himself in Autumn” (1920)

Take bitterness into your wailing;
Be like the rock, the hard gray stone;
See there is hunger in your ailing,
Walk scornfully and alone.
Walk scornfully on the fall-brown hills;
And maybe where the wind heaves
And scatters the littered poplar leaves,
Releasing tardy ones to the ground,
You will hear the faint authentic sound
And remember why the wind grieves.

Francesca Rios

“Autumn” (1922)

My maple tree is yellow green
Against a blue-gray sky.
In little groups of three and four
I see the restless pigeons fly.

The air is rain-washed--fresh and sweet,
Mingled with pungent scent of pine.
Kissed by the faintest glint of sun,
Amber and bronze the poplars shine.

He knew the woods—how many times
I’ve seen him tramping in the rain,
Singing among the trees he loved
The songs I’ll never hear again!

Jessica Nelson North

“First Autumn” (1922)

All in our pearl-pale window
The moon’s aroma hung.

My love and I together
Our heads upon one pillow,
Looked out where an elm upflung
A branch like a peacock feather.

Heigho, first autumn weather!

Yvor Winters

“Static Autumn” (1923)

Inimitably quick
To taut deceit, I
Note a bird
Amid the autumn,

And my glossy bitch
Shatters leaves
Like water,

And the air

Is resonant

With pain.

I wait like one

Who has stood here before

With sunken head

In dropping leaves.

Frances Shaw

“Autumn Road-Song” (1923)

I fling my thoughts along the road

As we ride—

Smoothly, as the river flows,
over the autumn country-side.

Silent my friend at the guiding wheel,
Silent I,

Flinging thoughts along the road
As the hills roll by.

Young passion was a heavy load
Left far back

(Calm-eyed to face the shadows
Of the forest track).

Young passion was a heavy load
And better gone,

But in this singing autumn wind
Fair to think upon.

*I have given my daughter
A flame-colored gown,
With sash of gold And flower crown.
She shall be fair
To companion her lover
As over this road
They start together,
Casting young fancies
On wind like wine-
And across their cheeks
Shall blow thoughts of mine.*

Russet and red are the whirling leaves;
The hill-side is ripe with garnered sheaves;
Clouds are speeding on every side;
With youth behind how safely we ride!
Silent my friend at the guiding wheel,
Silent I,
Flinging thoughts along the road
As the world rolls by.

Sara Teasdale

“Autumn Dusk” (1924)

I saw above a sea of hills

A solitary planet shine,
And there was no one, near or far,
To keep the world from being mine.

Polly Chase

“Autumn Walk” (1926)

A maple, frost-ignited, was a sword
Of fame
That reared itself between them. The fine cord
Which bound their wrists was severed.

When they came
Upon a tree in autumn, the soft word,
The gentle speech of fingers, were a shame
Challenged by that weapon of the Lord.

Hands that had clung so closely were cut free
To beat with helpless fury the blue air,
To storm the portals of eternity
With wrists as cold as moon-light, and as bare.

And all because a flaming maple tree
Rose like a sword between them . . .
Or a prayer.

Glenn Ward Dresbach

“A Toast In Autumn” (1928)

This last pale water-lily leaf I shape
Into a cup and fill it at the springs
And drink a toast, O season of the wings
Departing, and of frail designs that drape
This beauty soon to tremble in the rape
Of roistering winds! To each flushed leaf that flings
Itself against the haze, to downy things
Air-tossed, I drink the gestures of escape.

“Autumn Crickets”

A drowsy music drifts across the dusk
Where crickets fiddle fore wings out of tune
With half heard threnodies of grass and husk
And leaf-waves breaking on the low red moon.
This is the music that we heard below
The opened rose, in harmony with all
The fragrant rhythms of the night, the slow
Dance of the moonlight on a flowered wall.

Beneath the shadow-dances of the grass
Earth-pulses throbbed in these articulate wings.
They stay . . . though on this night the witch-clouds pass
Above the pathways of departing things.
We find, where shadow circles now are drawn,
The music playing . . . and the dancers gone.

Edward Sapir

“Autumn Raindrops” (1931)

From bough to bough the raindrops fly
As the winds wing under an autumn sky.
The earth is darkly overbent
With the vast heavy firmament.

O beautiful wet leaves and bark
That glow within the cloudy dark,
You are as fleet with lovely light
As raindrops shimmering in flight.

You are as softly bright and rounded
As the bright heart in darkness hounded
The heart too falls from a cloudy birth
Into the darkenings of earth.

Oscar Brynes

“Autumnal” (1932)

The night is so clear that the stars have come down to us;
All day the leaves have been falling.
I am cold for the end of the year. I have heard you calling,
And come to you quite old and still with fear.

The grass is tinsel, the stalks are tangled in frost;

And I am afraid, for the stars have been saying
That this is the end of the year, and I am lost
In ways where the winds have been playing.

Do you think they will return, the leaves and the deep
white air?
I have lost count, and I am weary of days
That burn in the forest until the trees are bare,
And fume in the west, and smoke in the morning haze.

Walter Van Tilburg Clark

“Strength Of Autumn End” (1933)

This is not today’s pain that is in me,
This ache of dying autumn in the drum of my chest,
This longing in the marrow tubes of my hidden bones,
This crying that watches the blackbirds flurry and eddy,
full of intention,
That sees the armor of frost on the pale grass at dawn
And hears the mountain streams in bells of ice
Going down through the fire-storm of trees turned and now
passing.
Somewhere out of my searching eyes the strong precursor
looks
From a high rock ledge. With this pain in his sky-turned
face,
With the cold wind steadily blowing the hair of his
shoulders,

He watches the arrowhead of the wild swan shooting
south,
Diminishing under the low bed of the clouds;
And gropingly seeking the ease of his tangled strength,
He also moves among the crags, in the continual over-
passing of birds
Down from the northern edge of summer.
I, remaining under the chatter of leaves, must die with the
year.

Margaret Fraser

“To The Poet In Autumn” (1933)

Now be the sharpened cold
That startles drowsy ground—
With words alert and bold,
Inflict a frosty wound!
Come freeze our breath to stone,
O tingling mind, and splinter
The sleep of the stolid bone
And the dreamy blood—be Winter!

Dylan Thomas

“Especially When The October Wind” (1934)

Especially when the October wind
With frosty fingers punishes my hair,
Caught by the crabbing sun I walk on fire
And cast a shadow crab upon the land,
By the sea's side, hearing the noise of birds,
Hearing the raven cough in winter sticks,
My busy heart who shudders as she talks
Sheds the syllabic blood and drains her words.
Shut, too, in a tower of words, I mark
On the horizon walking like the trees
The wordy shapes of women, and the rows
Of the star-gestured children in the park.
Some let me make you of the vowelled beeches,
Some of the oaken voices, from the roots
Of many a thorny shire tell you notes,
Some let me make you of the water's speeches.
Behind a pot of ferns the wagging clock
Tells me the hour's word, the neural meaning
Flies on the shafted disk, declaims the morning
And tells the windy weather in the cock.
Some let me make you of the meadow's signs;
The signal grass that tells me all I know
Breaks with the wormy winter through the eye.
Some let me tell you of the raven's sins.
Especially when the October wind
(Some let me make you of autumnal spells,
The spider-tongued, and the loud hill of Wales)
With fists of turnips punishes the land,
Some let me make you of the heartless words.
The heart is drained that, spelling in the scurry
Of chemic blood, warned of the coming fury.
By the sea's side hear the dark-vowelled birds.

“Poem In October”

It was my thirtieth year to heaven
Woke to my hearing from harbour and neighbour wood
And the mussel pooled and the heron
Priested shore
The morning beckon
With water praying and call of seagull and rook
And the knock of sailing boats on the net webbed wall
Myself to set foot
That second
In the still sleeping town and set forth.
My birthday began with the water-
Birds and the birds of the winged trees flying my name
Above the farms and the white horses
And I rose
In rainy autumn
And walked abroad in a shower of all my days.
High tide and the heron dived when I took the road
Over the border
And the gates
Of the town closed as the town awoke.

A springful of larks in a rolling
Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling
Blackbirds and the sun of October
Summery
On the hill's shoulder,
Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly
Come in the morning where I wandered and listened
To the rain wringing
Wind blow cold

In the wood faraway under me.

Pale rain over the dwindling harbour
And over the sea wet church the size of a snail
With its horns through mist and the castle
Brown as owls
But all the gardens
Of spring and summer were blooming in the tall tales
Beyond the border and under the lark full cloud.
There could I marvel
My birthday
Away but the weather turned around.
It turned away from the blithe country
And down the other air and the blue altered sky
Streamed again a wonder of summer
With apples
Pears and red currants
And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's
Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother
Through the parables
Of sun light
And the legends of the green chapels

And the twice-told fields of infancy
That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart moved in mine.
These were the woods the river and sea
Where a boy
In the listening
Summertime of the dead whispered the truth of his joy
To the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide.
And the mystery
Sang alive

Still in the water and singingbirds.
And there could I marvel my birthday
Away but the weather turned around. And the true
Joy of the long dead child sang burning
In the sun.
It was my thirtieth
Year to heaven stood there then in the summer noon
Though the town below lay leaved with October blood.
O may my heart's truth
Still be sung
On this high hill in a year's turning.

Marie Luhrs

“Autumnal” (1934)

More beautiful than summer is green, this yellow;
More beautiful than spring is pale, this scarlet of leaves;
The airs of day in autumn are sweet, nevertheless I weep;
The moon of night in autumn is mellow,
But under the leaf of the moon I can not sleep.
The tree of autumn burns so intensely that I hold my breath,
Knowing too well its silver skeleton of death,
Knowing that leaves put on fire but to drift down the sky...
Because I am so happy with you, beloved, I can only cry.

Israel Citkowitz

“The Prodigals Of Summer” (1934)

When every leaf will be irrevocable,
With autumn squandering verdure everywhere,
We'll not find laden branches trivial,
As now, when heavy wealth crowds on the air

“Autumn”

Though autumn severs
The golden fruit
And bares the tree
From branch to root,

Mournful therefore,
Sha we mourn
The broken vine
The fallen corn,

And failure from
The golden wing
Where autumn goes
Hovering?

And when we find
The trees go lean
Shall we think it
Unforeseen?

Norman Macleod

“Autumn” (1937)

There is a touch of sadness in the air this fall,
Such as recurs to fellows of melancholy:
Memory of its passage out of time
Follows the year’s progression,
Ash that settles a twister of flame
On mountaintops.
Autumn is quick to remember
And passes like a sunbeam in the wave.

Delmore Schwartz

“Words For A Trumpet Chorale Celebrating The Autumn”
(1938)

“The trumpet is a brilliant instrument.” ~ Dietrich Buxtehude

Come and come forth and come up from the cup of
Your dumbness, stunned and numb, come with
The statues and believed in,
Thinking this is nothing, deceived.

Come to the summer and sun,
Come see upon that height, and that sum
In the seedtime of the winter’s absolute,
How yearly the phoenix inhabits the fruit.

Behold, above all, how the tall ball
Called the body is but a drum, but a bell
Summoning the soul
To rise from the catacomb of sleep and fear
To the blaze and death of summer,

Rising from the lithe forms of the pure
Furs of the rising flames, slender and supple,
Which are the consummation of the blaze of fall and of all.

William Pillin

“In Autumn’s Wake” (1938)

QUIETLY waking, I am no longer tense.
I vow to catalogue no longer the unrest
that wasted me and spent my winter strength.

Autumn is here; fragrant with bronze leaves burning
and spiraled smoke and wide air winged with gusts
of spirit flinging poems to the hills.
Anew, anew! I am no longer haggard;
pale autumn slowly moves to palliate
the kindled blood, to scour with plunging rains

Henry Rago

“Autumnal” (1939)

O grieving heart, believe, be told,
These did not die but were enchanted;
And trees became still founts of gold,

And earth fell dreaming, twilight-haunted.
In breathless bloom this loveliness
Is held until the spell be ended;
The swift dream taken motionless,
Just as we dreamed it, wild and splendid.

This land now charmed with secret light
Will stand untouchable and lonely,
And death that creeps beneath the night
Find dust and windy ruin only.

Mary Lou Healy (1927-2021)

“Troubadours Of Autumn”

Raven-black,
their chitinous shells
shining like rare obsidian,
my autumn crickets
sing the sunset down and
welcome the white moon’s rising.

Drunk with the joy of being,

themselves the instruments they strum,
they touch my heart with sadness.
I am suddenly aware
of this season's fading beauty,
of the swift passing
of many precious things.

Carolyn Kizer

“Complex Autumnal” (1956)

I let the smoke out of the windows
And lift the hair from my ears.
A season of birds and reaping,
A level of light appears.

Sun lies in urns on the terrace
Like the cat on the chimney. Near
Fall stirs the curtains, narrow

Ribbons of air nip my fingers.
Warm under foot, the carpet
Reminds my skin I am here.

All things begin together:
Weather and love. The ear
Hears the earth turn; we make an adjustment

To that motion: the dip of the sphere

Into autumn, and rustling music
As the leaves are shaken away . . .

All things begin together,
Here, as I shake, at the day's
Beginning, with pleasure and fear,

Numb with night's dip and turning
When I weathered love-in-a-sphere,
Like the siamese cat on the chimney

Leonard Clark

“Fog In November” (1962)

Fog in November, trees have no heads,
Streams only sound, walls suddenly stop
Half-way up hills, the ghost of a man spreads
Dung on dead fields for next year's crop.
I cannot see my hand before my face,
My body does not seem to be my own,
The world becomes a far-off, foreign place,
People are strangers, houses silent, unknown.

Theodore Roethke

“The Far Field” (1964)

I have come to a still, but not a deep center,
A point outside the glittering current;
My eyes stare at the bottom of a river,
At the irregular stones, iridescent sand grains,
My mind moves in more than one place,
In a country half-land, half-water.
I am renewed by death, thought of my death,
The dry scent of a dying garden in September,
The wind fanning the ash of a low fire.
What I love is near at hand,
Always, in earth and air.

Edgar Bowers

“Autumn Shade” (1965)

1

The autumn shade is thin. Grey leaves lie faint
Where they will lie, and, where the thick green was,
Light stands up, like a presence, to the sky.
The trees seem merely shadows of its age.
From off the hill, I hear the logging crew,
The furious and indifferent saw, the slow
Response of heavy pine; and I recall
That goddesses have died when their trees died.
Often in summer, drinking from the spring,

I sensed in its cool breath and in its voice
A living form, darker than any shade
And without feature, passionate, yet chill
With lust to fix in ice the buoyant rim—
Ancient of days, the mother of us all.
Now, toward his destined passion there, the strong,
Vivid young man, reluctant, may return
From suffering in his own experience
To lie down in the darkness. In this time,
I stay in doors. I do my work. I sleep.
Each morning, when I wake, I assent to wake.
The shadow of my fist moves on this page,
Though, even now, in the wood, beneath a bank,
Coiled in the leaves and cooling rocks, the snake
Does as it must, and sinks into the cold.

2

Nights grow colder. The Hunter and the Bear
Follow their tranquil course outside my window.
I feel the gentian waiting in the wood,
Blossoms waxy and blue, and blue-green stems
Of the amaryllis waiting in the garden.
I know, as though I waited what they wait,
The cold that fastens ice about the root,
A heavenly form, the same in all its changes,
Inimitable, terrible, and still,
And beautiful as frost. Fire warms my room.
Its light declares my books and pictures. Gently,
A dead soprano sings Mozart and Bach.
I drink bourbon, then go to bed, and sleep
In the Promethean heat of summer's essence.

Awakened by some fear, I watch the sky.
 Compelled as though by purposes they know,
 The stars, in their blue distance, still affirm
 The bond of heaven and earth, the ancient way.
 This old assurance haunts small creatures, dazed
 In icy mud, though cold may freeze them there
 And leave them as they are all summer long.
 I cannot sleep. Passion and consequence,
 The brutal given, and all I have desired
 Evade me, and the lucid majesty
 That warmed the dull barbarian to life.
 So I lie here, left with self-consciousness,
 Enemy whom I love but whom his change
 And his forgetfulness again compel,
 Impassioned, toward my lost indifference,
 Faithful, but to an absence. Who shares my bed?
 Who lies beside me, certain of his waking,
 Led sleeping, by his own dream, to the day?

If I ask you, angel, will you come and lead
 This ache to speech, or carry me, like a child,
 To riot? Ever young, you come of age
 Remote, a pledge of distances, this pang
 I notice at dusk, watching you subside
 From tree-tops and from fields. Mysterious self,
 Image of the fabulous alien,
 Even in sleep you summon me, even there,
 When, under his native tree, Odysseus hears

His own incredible past and future, whispered
By wisdom, but by wisdom in disguise.

5

Thinking of a bravura deed, a place
Sacred to a divinity, an old
Verse that seems new, I postulate a man
Mastered by his own image of himself.
Who is it says, I am? Sensuous angel,
Vessel of nerve and blood, the impoverished heir
Of an awareness other than his own?
Not these, but one to come? For there he is,
In a steel helmet, raging, fearing his death,
Carrying bread and water to a quiet,
Placing ten sounds together in one sound:
Confirming his election, or merely still,
Sleeping, or in a colloquy with the sun.

6

Snow and then rain. The roads are wet. A car
Slips and strains in the mire, and I remember
Driving in France: weapons-carriers and jeeps;
Our clothes and bodies stiffened by mud; our minds
Diverted from fear. We labor. Overhead,
A plane, Berlin or Frankfurt, now New York.
The car pulls clear. My neighbor smiles. He is old.
Was this our wisdom, simply, in a chance,
In danger, to be mastered by a task,
Like groping round a chair, through a door, to bed?

7

A dormant season, and, under the dripping tree,
Not sovereign, ordering nothing, letting the past
Do with me as it will, I savor place
And weather, air and sun. Though Hercules
Confronts his nature in his deed, repeats
His purposes, and is his will, intact,
Magnificent, and memorable, I try
The simplest forms of our old poverty.
I seek no end appointed in my absence
Beyond the silence I already share.

8

I drive home with the books that I will read.
The streets are harsh with traffic. Where I once
Played as a boy amid old stands of pine,
Row after row of houses. Lined by the new
Debris of wealth and power, the broken road.
Then miles of red clay bank and frugal ground.
At last, in the minor hills, my father's place,
Where I can find my way as in a thought—
Gardens, the trees we planted, all we share.
A Cherokee trail runs north to summer hunting.
I see it, when I look up from the page.

9

In nameless warmth, sun light in every corner,
Bending my body over my glowing book,
I share the room. Is it with a voice or touch

Or look, as of an absence, learned by love,
Now, merely mine? Annunciation, specter
Of the worn out, lost, or broken, telling what future.
What vivid loss to come, you change the room
And him who reads here. Restless, he will stir,
Look round, and see the room renewed and line,
Color, and shape as, in desire, they are,
Not shadows but substantial light, explicit,
Bright as glass, inexhaustible, and true.

10

My shadow moves, until, at noon, I stand
Within its seal, as in the finished past.
But in the place where effect and cause are joined,
In the warmth or cold of my remembering,
Of love, of partial freedom, the time to be
Trembles and glitters again in windy light.
For nothing is disposed. The slow soft wind
Tilting the blood-root keeps its gentle edge.
The intimate cry, both sinister and tender,
Once heard, is heard confined in its reserve.
My image of myself, apart, informed
By many deaths, resists me, and I stay
Almost as I have been, intact, aware,
Alive, though proud and cautious, even afraid.

John Updike

“A Child’s Calendar” (1965)

The stripped and shapely
Maple grieves
The ghosts of her
Departed leaves.

The ground is hard,
As hard as stone.
The year is old,
The birds are flown.

And yet the world,
In its distress,
Displays a certain
Loveliness.

Sandra McPherson

“Autumnal” (1969)

Wind carries you away like a leaf.
A thousand leaves
Begging, begging,

So extravagant.
What’s to
Hold out for?

Feel the ice, little
Blades ganged precariously
In air,

Fall. Rainlike, you never
Tire of a descent, of
Going no-hands. If

You were
Water what
Miracle would you do?

I'm evaporation--just
Try making
Me visible. Or yourself

Green leaf. Time for
The disappearance of everything
From cars to
Color. Time for the cold
Shoulder of snow.
And if we

John Fairfax

“Adrift On The Star Brow Of Taliesin” (1974)

Outside November night gathers
With a harmony of autumn leaves

Blown down a wind.
Quietly by the fire Taliesin
Humming from within his closing hood
Places the seeing child on to a chair.
And the glowing head is clothed
In a vestment with bright
Colours spreading.
Together two voices rise
Until at the end of breath one soars
And one falls away.....echoing
—Circle of Gold.

Ted Hughes

“Leaves” (1975)

Who’s killed the leaves?
Me, says the apple, I’ve killed them all.
Fat as a bomb or a cannonball
I’ve killed the leaves.

Who sees them drop?
Me, says the pear, they will leave me all bare
So all the people can point and stare.
I see them drop.

Who’ll catch their blood?
Me, me, me, says the marrow, the marrow.
I’ll get so rotund that they’ll need a wheelbarrow.

I'll catch their blood.

Who'll make their shroud?

Me, says the swallow, there's just time enough

Before I must pack all my spools and be off.

I'll make their shroud.

Who'll dig their grave?

Me, says the river, with the power of the clouds

A brown deep grave I'll dig under my floods.

I'll dig their grave.

Who'll be their parson?

Me, says the Crow, for it is well-known

I study the bible right down to the bone.

I'll be their parson.

Who'll be chief mourner?

Me, says the wind, I will cry through the grass

The people will pale and go cold when I pass.

I'll be chief mourner.

Who'll carry the coffin?

Me, says the sunset, the whole world will weep

To see me lower it into the deep.

I'll carry the coffin.

Who'll sing a psalm?

Me, says the tractor, with mu gear grinding glottle

I'll plough Up the stubble and sing through my throttle.

I'll sing the psalm.

Who'll toll the bell?

Me, says the robin, my song in October
Will tell the still gardens the leaves are over.
I'll toll the bell.

“The Seven Sorrows”

The first sorrow of autumn is the slow good-bye of the garden that stands so long in the evening—a brown poppy head, the stalk of a lily, and still cannot go.

The second sorrow is the empty feet of a pheasant who hangs from a hook with his brothers. The woodland of gold is folded in feathers with its head in a bag.

And the third sorrow is the slow good-bye of the sun who has gathered the birds and who gathers the minutes of evening, the golden and holy ground of the picture.

The fourth sorrow is the pond gone black, ruined, and sunken the city of water—the beetle's palace, the catacombs of the dragonfly.

And the fifth sorrow is the slow good-bye of the woodland that quietly breaks up its camp. One day it's gone. It has only left litter—firewood, tent poles.

And the sixth sorrow is the fox's sorrow, the joy of the huntsman, the joy of the hounds, the hooves that pound; till earth closes her ear to the fox's prayer.

And the seventh sorrow is the slow good-bye of the face with its wrinkles that looks through the window as the year packs up like a tatty fairground that came for the children.

Robert Penn Warren

“The Heart Of Autumn” (1978)

Wind finds the northwest gap, fall comes.
Today, under gray cloud-scud and over gray
Wind-flicker of forest, wild geese, in perfect formation,
Head for a land of warm water, the boom, the lead pellet.

Some crumple in air. Some stagger, recover control,
Then take the last glide for a far glint of water. None
Knows what has happened. Now, today, watching
How tirelessly V after V arrows the season's logic,

Do I know my own story? At least, they know
When the hour comes for the great wing-beat, Sky-strider,
Star-strider-they rise, and the imperial utterance,
Which cries out for distance, quivers in the wheeling sky.

That much they know, and in their nature know
The path of pathlessness, with all the joy
Of destiny fulfilling its own name.
I have known time and distance, but what more?

Path of logic, path of folly, all

The same?—And now I stand, face skyward.
Hearing the high beat, my arms outstretched in the tingling
Process of transformation, and soon feel tough legs,
With folded feet, trail in the sounding vacuum of passage,
And my heart is impacted with a fierce impulse
To the unwordable—
Now toward sunset, at a great height.

A. R. Ammons

“Late November” (1978-2005)

The white sun
like a moth
on a string
circles the southpole

J.W. Cullum

“Roses, Revisited, In A Paradoxical Autumn” (1980)

Poets have been writing about the death of flowers
at least since Ausonius, but these November roses
defy all images of autumn gardens. The Michaelmas
daisies

left with the death of September, and the last late
sunflowers
drooped and went dark three weeks ago.
These silly roses bloom like a hysterical couplet out of Rilke,
and new buds still blush like conventional metaphors.
Undisciplined endings like this offend us. We want cold
in November,
petals dropping like autumn leaves, earth slipping into
seasonal sleep
decently and in order, as in a late Latin epic
or a universe ordained by Thomas Aquinas.
Flowers and the bright day fail. What's left, we embody
in elegies.
That's how we made sense of life, and the death of
women
These roses and hot sunlight in early November
decline responsibility for their scheduled mortality,
leaving us with old sonnets and our own uncertain wrists.

Rick Lott

“Nocturne For Autumn” (1986)

Sitting on the front porch when the evening
Is spilt light soaking into the ground,
I come after many years

To a book that is an abandoned house
Where darkness sings in the corners, a house

That echoes the silence of other lives.

Like winter grass, mold grows on the cover,
And faces line the pages in rows
Even as headstones. After the light

Goes, my fingertips touch a face
In the warped and musty paper
The way a blind man's touch a lover.

Astonishing as the moon
That swam into Galileo's lens,
She once commanded the tides of my body.

Now the harvest moon looms above
The elms, the pale face of a stranger
Who comes as in a dream to say:

*I am your lost youth, risen
From its bed of dust to startle you
With the ageless faces of the forgotten;*

*I am the one you love, though you will never
Know, the black tracks in snow that lead
Nowhere, though you follow until you wake.*

Rose Styron

(Untitled) (1995)

Each crisp autumn
there are fewer leaves, more clarity—
light cycles of the haymound
odors of late roses
rivers rushing where we
once meandered
content in the casual chaos of each
season, plotting no espionage
because we did not know
the world as terror then.

Jay Parini

“The Lake House In Autumn” (1996)

A silence in the house at summer’s wake:
the last leaves fall in one night’s wind,
the mice are eaten, and the cats begin
a rumbling sleep. There’s nothing much at stake.
It’s not quite cold enough to stoke
the furnace, and the neighbors never seem to mind
if leaves are raked. I’m staring through a blind
at less and less beside a cooling lake.

I keep forgetting that this absence, too,
must be imagined. I cannot just frown
or fill the vacancy with stately rue.
The mind is darker, deeper than a windblown
lake that tries to mirror every hue

of feeling as the dusky season takes me down.

Jay Wright

“The Cradle Logic Of Autumn” (2000)

*En mi país el Otoño nace de una flor seca,
de algunos pajaros; . . .
o del vaho penetrante de ciertos rios de la llanura.
~ Molinari, “Oda a una larga tristeza”*

Each instant comes with a price, the blue-edged bill
on the draft of a bird almost incarnadine,
the shanked ochre of an inn that sits as still
as the beavertail cactus it guards (the fine
rose of that flower gone as bronze as sand),
the river’s chalky white insistence as it
moves past the gray afternoon toward sunset.
Autumn feels the chill of a late summer lit
only by goldenrod and a misplaced strand
of blackberries; deplores all such sleight of hand;
turns sullen, selfish, envious, full of regret.

Someone more adept would mute its voice. The spill
of its truncated experience would shine
less bravely and, out of the dust and dunghill
of this existence (call it hope, in decline),
as here the blue light of autumn falls, command
what is left of exhilaration and fit

this season's unfolding to the alphabet
of turn and counterturn, all that implicit
arc of a heart searching for a place to stand.
Yet even that diminished voice can withstand
the currying of its spirit. Here lies—not yet.

If, and only if, the leafless rose he sees,
or thinks he sees, flowered a moment ago,
this endangered heart flows with the river that flees
the plain, and listens with eye raised to the slow
revelation of cloud, hoping to approve
himself, or to admonish the rose for slight
transgressions of the past, this the ecstatic
ethos, a logic that seems set to reprove
his facility with unsettling delight.
Autumn might be only desire, a Twelfth Night
gone awry, a gift almost too emphatic.

Logic in a faithful light somehow appeases
the rose, and stirs the hummingbird's vibrato.
By moving, I can stand where the light eases
me into the river's feathered arms, and, so,
with the heat of my devotion, again prove
devotion, if not this moment, pure, finite.
Autumn cradles me with idiomatic
certainty, leaves me nothing to disapprove.
I now acknowledge this red moon, to requite
the heart alone given power to recite
its faith, what a cradled life finds emblematic.

Srečko Kosovel

“An Autumn Landscape” (2002)

The sun is autumn calm
as though in mourning;
behind the slender cypress trees
behind the white wall of the graveyard. –

The grass all red in the sun. –
Do you wear the clogs of dogma?
A bicycle abandoned on an autumn road.
You ride through a dying landscape.

A staid man walks the field,
he is as cold as autumn,
he is as sad as autumn.
Faith in humanity.
To me it is a sacred thought.
A speechless silence is like sorrow.
I am no longer sad
for I do not think of myself.

Raymond A. Foss

“Autumnal Diorama” (2003)

Early morning
Crisp Air

Gray ridged bark
Green lawn, leaf clutter underfoot

Wisps of fog off the pond

Green trees
Orange trees
Juxtaposed
Splash of sunlight

Clouds pasted
For accent
Backdrop of blue
Pure, unblemished, unbroken
Screens, curtains, stagesets
Transparency overlays
Layers placed
Scene set

Mary Oliver

“Song For Autumn” (2005)

Don’t you imagine the leaves dream now
how comfortable it will be to touch
the earth instead of the
nothingness of the air and the endless
freshets of wind? And don’t you think
the trees, especially those with

mossy hollows, are beginning to look for

the fires that will come—six, a dozen—to sleep
inside their bodies? And don't you hear
the goldenrod whispering goodbye,
the everlasting being crowned with the first
tuffets of snow? The pond
stiffens and the white field over which
the fox runs so quickly brings out
its long blue shadows. The wind wags
its many tails. And in the evening
the piled firewood shifts a little,
longing to be on its way.

“August”

When the blackberries hang
swollen in the woods, in the brambles
nobody owns, I spend
all day among the high
branches, reaching
my ripped arms, thinking
of nothing, cramming
the black honey of summer
into my mouth; all day my body

accepts what it is. In the dark
creeks that run by there is
this thick paw of my life darting among

the black bells, the leaves; there is
this happy tongue.

Jacqueline Osherow

“Autumn Psalm” (2005)

A full year passed (the seasons keep me honest)
since I last noticed this same commotion.
Who knew God was an abstract expressionist?

I’m asking myself—the very question
I asked last year, staring out at this array
of racing colors, then set in motion

by the chance invasion of a Steller’s jay.
Is this what people mean by speed of light?
My usually levelheaded mulberry tree

hurling arrows everywhere in sight—
its bow: the out-of-control Virginia creeper
my friends say I should do something about,

whose vermilion went at least a full shade deeper
at the provocation of the upstart blue,
the leaves (half green, half gold) suddenly hyper

in savage competition with that red and blue—
tohubohu returned, in living color.
Kandinsky: where were you when I needed you?

My attempted poem would lie fallow a year;

I was so busy focusing on the desert's
stinginess with everything but rumor.

No place even for the spectrum's introverts—
rose, olive, gray—no pigment at all—
and certainly no room for shameless braggarts

like the ones that barge in here every fall
and make me feel like an unredeemed failure
even more emphatically than usual.

And here they are again, their fleet allure
still more urgent this time—the desert's gone;
I'm through with it, want something fuller—

why shouldn't a person have a little fun,
some utterly unnecessary extravagance?
Which was—at least I think it was—God's plan

when He set up (such things are never left to chance)
that one split-second assignation
with genuine, no-kidding-around omnipotence

what, for lack of better words, I'm calling vision.
You breathe in, and, for once, there's something there.
Just when you thought you'd learned some resignation,
there's real resistance in the nearby air
until the entire universe is swayed.
Even that desert of yours isn't quite so bare

and God's not nonexistent; He's just been waylaid
by a host of what no one could've foreseen.

He's got plans for you: this red-gold-green parade
is actually a fairly detailed outline.
David never needed one, but he's long dead
and God could use a little recognition.

He promises. It won't go to His head
and if you praise Him properly (an autumn psalm!
Why didn't I think of that?) you'll have it made.

But while it's true that my Virginia creeper praises Him,
its palms and fingers crimson with applause,
that the local breeze is weaving Him a diadem,

inspecting my tree's uncut gold for flaws,
I came to talk about the way that violet-blue
sprang the greens and reds and yellows

into action: actual motion. I swear it's true
though I'm not sure I ever took it in.
Now I'd be prepared, if some magician flew

into my field of vision, to realign
that dazzle out my window yet again.
It's not likely, but I'm keeping my eyes open

though I still wouldn't be able to explain
precisely what happened to these vines, these trees.
It isn't available in my tradition.

For this, I would have to be Chinese,
Wang Wei, to be precise, on a mountain,

autumn rain converging on the trees,

a cassia flower nearby, a cloud, a pine,
washerwomen heading home for the day,
my senses and the mountain so entirely in tune

that when my stroke of blue arrives, I'm ready.
Though there is no rain here: the air's shot through
with gold on golden leaves. Wang Wei's so giddy

he's calling back the dead: Li Bai! Du Fu!
Guys! You've got to see this—autumn sun!
They're suddenly hell-bent on learning Hebrew

in order to get inside the celebration,
which explains how they wound up where they are
in my university library's squashed domain.

Poor guys, it was Hebrew they were looking for,
but they ended up across the aisle from Yiddish—
some Library of Congress cataloger's sense of humor:

the world's calmest characters and its most skittish
squinting at each other, head-to-head,
all silently intoning some version of kaddish

for their nonexistent readers, one side's dead
(the twentieth century's lasting contribution)
and the other's insufficiently learned

to understand a fraction of what they mean.
The writings in the world's most spoken language

across from one that can barely get a minyan.

Sick of lanzmen, the yidden are trying to engage
the guys across the aisle in some conversation:
How, for example, do you squeeze an image

into so few words, respectfully asks Glatstein.
Wang Wei, at first, doesn't understand the problem
but then he shrugs his shoulders, mumbles Zen

... but, please, I, myself, overheard a poem,
in the autumn rain, once, on a mountain.
How do you do it? I believe it's called a psalm?

Glatstein's cronies all crack up in unison.
Okay, groise macher, give him an answer.
But Glatstein dons his yarmulke (who knew he had one?)

and starts the introduction to the morning prayer,
Pisukei di zimrah, psalm by psalm.
Wang Wei is spellbound, the stacks' stale air

suddenly a veritable balm
and I'm so touched by these amazing goings-on
that I've forgotten all about the autumn

staring straight at me: still alive, still golden.
What's gold, anyway, compared to poetry?
a trick of chlorophyll, a trick of sun.

True. It was something, my changing tree
with its perfect complement: a crimson vine,

both thrown into panic by a Steller's jay,

but it's hard to shake the habit of digression.
Wandering has always been my people's way
whether we're in a desert or narration.

It's too late to emulate Wang Wei
and his solitary years on that one mountain
though I'd love to say what I set out to say

just once. Next autumn, maybe. What's the occasion?
Glatstein will shout over to me from the bookcase
(that is, if he's paying any attention)

and, finally, I'll look him in the face.
Quick. Out the window, Yankev. It's here again.

Robert Savino

"October's Opal" (2009)

October is here, once again,
barely transcending the threshold of autumn.
The maple is turning yellow to orange, to red,
soon to be bared by winter.

Ah winter, when blankets of bliss
cover spoon-fit bodies,
flickering sparks to flames. . .

until love of spring gardens
becomes the rapture of summer bloom.
And looking from outside-in,
beyond recognizable beauty,
the ruby of jewels glows bright,
pumping currents of rivers red,
deep into the wells of every extremity.
Our chest fills with laughter.

When apart, even so brief,
this season stays with you,
whether I am or not
and your voice with me,
through wind's immutable breath.

Clarence Michael James Dennis

“Autumn Song” (2012)

With the advent of the Autumn
Trees behave as Nature taught ‘em;
Maple, Sumach, Plum and Poplar, and the Chestnut known as
Horse,
Ere they shed the Summer fashion,
Break into a perfect passion
Of sweet rivalry in color (if deciduous, of course).

Autumn comes, and Claret Ashes,
Liquidambars, showing splashes

From her palette, don the motley—Joseph's coats of many a hue:

Russet-red and golden-yellow

As the season waxes mellow.

As for me, like certain gum-trees, I perversely grow more blue.

I would quaff in ample measure

Every draught of Autumn's pleasure

Were it not a grim foreboding spreads its color thro' the mind.

And I know that Autumn breezes

Bring the first hint of the wheezes;

For, when Fall the Summer follows, Winter is not far behind.

Would I were like lucky mortals

Who, with Winter at the portals,

Shed their ills like Autumn leaves and welcome days of snow
and ice.

Still, why not accept the present?

Fall brings favors amply pleasant.

Seat me - Ishoo! - in the sunlight. Autumn could be very dice.

Judith A. Lawrence

“Autumn Offering” (2013)

I shall be Autumn

this Halloween,

with leaf draped skirt,

and folds of

boysenberry velvet wine
flowing to the ground.

Brown stained face,
eyes rimmed in gold,
nails dripping sunset,
a crown of twigs
to cover my head.
You may gather from me
the spring of my youth,
my summer of maturity,
and hold onto with me,
the solace of these days
of remembering
before the frost.

Andrea Dietrich

“Fall In Love” (2014)

F eeling enraptured, Autumn dances in the wind, then
undresses.

A s bright robes fall to the ground, her passion paints the
twilight skies.

L ike a nymph, she beckons, tossing her fiery auburn tresses.

L ongingly she sighs—September’s bliss lingering in her eyes.

I ndian summer days come; then they go.

N ights though chill, embrace her in indigo.

L ater, in November, her sweetness wanes.
O ctober cannot stay forever loving her.
V acantly she gazes through freezing rains.
E ndearments whispered—cease—when Fall loses ardor.

“Fall Into Fall”

memories sweetly
swirling like cotton candy
let them melt away
in Indian summer’s gleam
succumb to fall’s new flavors

Katherine Towers

“Whim Wood” (2019)

into the coppery halls
of beech and intricate oak
to be close to the trees
as they whisper together
let fall their leaves,
and we die for the winter

Didi Jackson

“Fall” (2019)

It is a goldfinch
one of the two

small girls,
both daughters

of a friend,
sees hit the window

and fall into the fern.
No one hears
the small thump but she,
the youngest, sees

the flash of gold
against the mica sky

as the limp feathered envelope
crumples into the green.

How many times
in a life will we witness

the very moment of death?
She wants a box

and a small towel
some kind of comfort

for this soft body
that barely fits

in her palm. Its head
rolling side to side,

neck broke, eyes still wet
and black as seed.

Her sister, now at her side,
wears a dress too thin

for the season,
white as the winter
only weeks away.
She wants me to help,

wants a miracle.
Whatever I say now

I know weighs more
than the late fall's

layered sky,
the jeweled leaves

of the maple and elm.
I know, too,

it is the darkest days
I've learned to praise —

the calendar packages up time,
the days shrink and fold away

until the new season.
We clothe, burn,

then bury our dead.
I know this;

they do not.
So we cover the bird,

story its flight,
imagine his beak
singing.
They pick the song

and sing it
over and over again.
