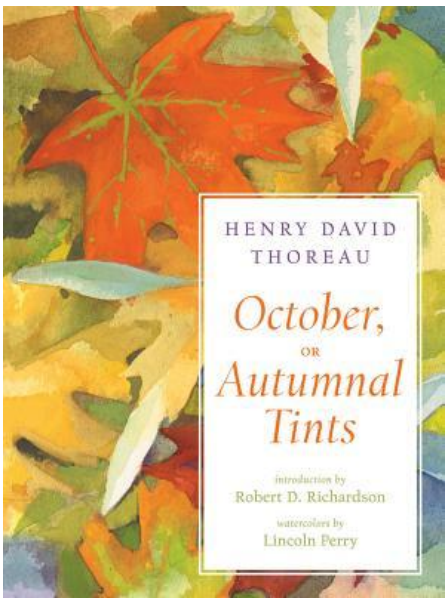

October, or Autumnal Tints

Henry David Thoreau , Lincoln Perry (Illustrator) , Robert D. Richardson Jr. (Introduction)

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Originally delivered as a lecture shortly before the writer's own death, Henry David Thoreau's classic *Autumnal Tints* is an ode to autumn not as the season of death and decay, but of ripeness, fullness, and maturity.

Thoreau's astute meditations are framed by a biographical essay by acclaimed scholar Robert D. Richardson that delves into the events and relationships influencing Thoreau's philosophy. Sensuous watercolors by Lincoln Perry bring to life the fall colors described so ecstatically by Thoreau, allowing longtime Thoreau fans and leaf-peepers alike to feel as though they are walking among the falling leaves alongside one of our best observers of the natural world.

October, or Autumnal Tints Details

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Author	:	Henry David Thoreau , Lincoln Perry (Illustrator) , Robert D. Richardson Jr. (Introduction)
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From Reader Review October, or Autumnal Tints for online ebook

Casey Bush says

On his deathbed, Henry David Thoreau penned this book about fall colors, with special attention to the red leaves of several varieties of maples and the scarlet oak. This beautiful hard cover Norton publication is graced with an introduction by Robert Richardson and water color illustrations by accomplished artist Lincoln Perry. Richardson is an historian, born in Wisconsin but raised in Concord, Massachusetts. He married Annie Dillard after she wrote him a fan letter about his 1986 book “Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind”.

Richardson provides the reader with a sketch of the solitary and morose Thoreau, plagued by his failures in love and the death of his brother as well as others, especially Emerson’s infant son. Thoreau first contracted TB in 1835 but it came back with a vengeance twenty-five years later. Sensing that his demise was at hand, Thoreau gave up an epic work about the natural world surrounding Concord based on his journals and used his last energies to document observations about the brilliance of New England’s autumn. Reader beware, death is the mother of beauty. Richardson and Perry embrace Thoreau with a grip that is as bittersweet as it is tender. Thoreau’s last book is properly presented as a gift for the season, including several pages at the end designed to hold the reader’s own collection of pressed leaves.

Casey Bush
Senior Editor, The Bear Deluxe Magazine
“exploring environmental issues through the literary and graphic arts”

Eleriel says

Sono felice che Thoreau si divertisse così tanto a guardare ogni singola foglia e me lo immagino mentre vaga per la campagna fermandosi ad osservare in estasi una bacca, e apprezzo che abbia voluto scriverne in proposito... Purtroppo però, per quanto io ami i boschi e la natura in autunno, finire questo libretto di 70 pagine è stata una pena... c'ho impiegato meno tempo per leggere "I pilastri della Terra".
Penso che il problema sia il lessico. Da questi suoi pensieri non trapela alcuna poesia, è pura descrizione... ed è una descrizione ripetitiva fino all'esasperazione.
Avevo iniziato Walden un po' di tempo fa e in futuro lo riprenderò in mano per finirlo: ma ricordo le sensazioni che mi dava... in quel caso Thoreau sembrava molto più ispirato.

Mike says

Remarkably description of fall foliage. Would probably ring more true reading on a porch swing surrounded by trees changing color.

Tom says

Every fall, my partner and I pick a crisp sunny day to sit in her back yard, a pair of golden maple trees rising above us, the Blue Ridge Mountains visible on the horizon, and read aloud to each to each other from Thoreau's marvelous essay, "Autumnal Tints." I especially like the section "Fallen Leaves": "How many flutterings before they rest quietly in their graves!They that soared so loftily, how contentedly they return to the dust again, and are laid low, resigned to lie and decay at the foot of the tree, and afford nourishment to new generations of their kind, as well as to flutter on high! They teach us how to die. One wonders if the time will ever come when men, with their boasted faith in immortality, will lie down as gracefully and as ripe, -- with such an Indian-summer serenity will shed their bodies, as they do their hair and nails."

Nicole R says

This book suffered from misplaced expectations, so please take my review with a grain of salt! In fact, maybe don't even read it....I am just including it for my records.

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Okay, I totally thought Thoreau was a poet. But, according to Wikipedia, he is an " author, poet, philosopher, polymath (I don't even know what this means), abolitionist, naturalist, tax resister, development critic, surveyor, and historian". Well, this is not poetry, which I would have noticed by simply cracking the book before diving in, but I don't really care for poetry so I thought a preview would just scare me away. So, I was already biased against it when I thought it was poetry but was then further disappointed when it wasn't. I think I need therapy....

These musings on autumn were fine. Whatever. I am not writing home about them or anything but it was less painful than the fairy tales I read before it.

I am just in a reading rut. And bitter. And have a lot going on. And am tired. And, am apparently having a pity party.

It is time to bust out the cheesy Christmas books.

Carrie Ridgeway says

Thoreau is one of my favorite authors to read or to read about his short life. I thoroughly enjoyed the introduction to the book written by Robert D. Richardson. Therein, I learned much about Thoreau's life that either I was previously unaware of, or had simply forgotten. Then, Thoreau's essay was delightfully descriptive. This is a repeat read for Fall.

Justin says

A wonderful meditation on the colors and character of autumnal New England.

Bioteo says

Per molte persone l’autunno è una stagione triste, foriera di pensieri negativi, un periodo in cui il sopraggiungere dei primi freddi induce i più a ritirarsi nelle proprie case. I canti degli uccelli cessano, gli alberi perdono le foglie, tutto sembra sopito e pronto per il rigore invernale. Henry Thoreau non provava tutto questo quando passeggiava nei boschi autunnali del Massachusetts; il maestro trascendentalista americano scorgeva la vera essenza di questa stagione suggestiva e magica. Con “Tinte autunnali”, prima traduzione italiana dell’opera “Autumn Tints” pubblicata nell’ottobre del 1862, l’autore offre una sessantina di pagine ricche di riflessioni sulla natura e sull’uomo. La foresta in autunno non viene percepita da Thoreau come una realtà morta e priva di significato ma come l’apice di un processo naturale di maturazione, che tocca il picco proprio nel periodo di ottobre-novembre. “I più sembrano confondere le foglie che hanno cambiato colore con quelle secche, come se confondessero le mele mature con quelle marce” Leggendo tinte autunnali si percepisce il colore mutevole delle foglie, il fruscio delle stesse, la grazia con le quali si staccano dall’albero per depositarsi al suolo, nutrimento per l’albero stesso. La foresta in autunno è pura bellezza, una bellezza che è a nostra disposizione; attende solo di essere percepita, non aspetta altro che il nostro sguardo. “Gli oggetti si nascondono alla nostra vista, non tanto perché sono fuori dalla portata del nostro raggio visivo, quanto perché non portiamo le nostre menti e i nostri occhi a relazionarsi con loro” Per questa ragione, ci ammonisce Thoreau, la maggior parte dei fenomeni della Natura sono a noi nascosti per tutta la vita. Leggete “Tinte autunnali” e vedrete che la vostra percezione cambierà radicalmente durante le vostre passeggiate autunnali nei boschi.

Renee says

I listened to the audio book edition read by Brett Barry. It was a joyful romp through the memories of fall on the East Coast. He posited that until we have the idea of something in our mind we do not see it even though it is often right in front of us. Examples of this that he gave were a sportsman who has the idea of the game in front of him and the sea is it where others do not see it. He spoke of finding rare plants only after he had carefullyheld the idea of that plant in his mind. Only then Among the myriad of other plants could he distinguish the one he was looking for.

Dennis Noson says

A beautifully done edition of one of Thoreau's later natural history essays... in praise and thanks for the phenomenon of New England's forest leaves turning passionate before the Fall.

Paul Haspel says

October would *not* have been a melancholy, death-of-the-year time on the calendar for Henry David Thoreau; the great transcendentalist from Concord, Massachusetts, was having none of *that* nonsense. Perhaps Thoreau’s celebration of autumn came about in part because Concord, like every other wooded

region of New England, is just so surpassingly beautiful in the autumn. And yet, beyond that, Thoreau embraced everything about life, including death – even his *own* death – in a way that harmonized wonderfully with his philosophy. And all of those aspects of Thoreau's life and work come together quite pleasantly in *October, or Autumnal Tints*, the last thing Thoreau ever wrote.

By the time Thoreau composed and delivered the 1860 lecture that became *October, or Autumnal Tints*, he knew how ill he was with the tuberculosis that would take his life within just a couple of years. As Thoreau scholar Robert Richardson explains in a helpful foreword appropriately titled "The Last Leaves of Henry Thoreau," this last work of Thoreau's is characteristically counterintuitive, original, and contrarian in its thinking.

Richardson sets forth the "common view", from Thoreau's time and ours, "that autumn is the time of dying and decay, the season of endings", and reveals the daring, original qualities of Thoreau's perception of the season: "[T]he idea that death is not annihilation and something to be feared but rather a necessary stage in the continuing cycle of nature, and thus something to be welcomed as much as any other aspect of nature, is vintage Thoreau" (pp. 19-20). Vintage Thoreau indeed – and quite characteristic of the serene philosopher who, when asked by a devoutly religious and Puritan-minded relative, "Have you made your peace with God?", replied, "I was not aware we had quarreled."

October, or Autumnal Tints is short – really short. The W.W. Norton edition that I have here before me is 127 pages long *in toto*. Richardson's introductory essay is just about as long as Thoreau's essay – a piece that was originally supposed to be part of a much larger work that Thoreau's failing health prevented him from writing. Much of the rest of the book is taken up by Maine artist Lincoln Perry's engaging watercolor paintings of autumn leaves and landscapes. It is too small to be a coffee-table book, but nonetheless it feels rather like one.

Yet don't let that stop you from enjoying *October, or Autumnal Tints*. Thoreau's iconoclastic originality and his poetic gift for language are all very much on display here, as when he describes how the sight of a red maple in autumn affects him:

"How beautiful when a whole tree is like one great scarlet fruit, full of ripe juices, every leaf, from lowest limb to topmost spire, all a-glow, especially if you look toward the sun. What more remarkable object can there be in the landscape? Visible for miles, too fair to be believed. If such a phenomenon occurred but once, it would be handed down by tradition, and get into the mythology at last." (p. 74)

It is a lovely, poetic passage, characteristically Thoreauvian in its direct appeal to the senses, and in the musicality of its language. It is also strongly representative of Transcendentalism, a philosophy in which the natural world, like human nature, is intrinsically good. In this philosophical system, the source of corruption can be found in the groups or institutions that human beings form; from political parties to churches, they encourage group-think and conformity.

It follows, then, in Thoreau's value system, that the way to move closer to some sort of higher truth – to get back in touch with the best part of oneself – is, quite literally, to get out of town. Leave the town-hall meeting and the Congregational church, Thoreau would say, and walk in the autumn woods, and you will find truth and inner peace there.

Thoreau returns frequently to such themes throughout *October, or Autumnal Tints*; and this passage regarding the leaves of the Scarlet Oak tree seems especially representative of his Transcendentalist view of life:

"The leaves of very young plants, are, like those of full grown oaks of other species, more entire, simple and lumpish in their outlines, but these, raised high on old trees, have solved the leafy problem. Lifted higher and higher and sublimated more and more, putting off some earthiness and cultivating more intimacy with the light each year, they have at length the least possible amount of earthy matter, and the greatest spread and grasp of skyey influences. There they dance, arm in arm with the light, tripping it on fantastic points, fit partners in those aerial halls. So intimately mingled are they with it, that what with their slenderness and their glossy surfaces, you can hardly tell at last what in the dance is leaf and what is light." (p. 101)

Thoreau is quite clear here in drawing an analogy between autumn leaves and human existence. Like the leaves of the scarlet oak tree, he tells us, we can cast off what is less worthy within us, and can ascend ever closer toward where we are, spiritually speaking, pure light, pure spirit, pure sky.

When Thoreau's friend and mentor, Ralph Waldo Emerson, set forth his idea of achieving through nature a pure and complete communion with the natural world – "Standing on the bare ground…all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God" – he was criticized harshly for it. Some accused Emerson of blasphemy; others simply thought he was being pretentious or silly. Thoreau, by contrast, presents his transcendentalist ideas more subtly; he grounds his insights so firmly in the natural world that they seem less transgressive, more reasonable, and are therefore likely to be more persuasive to many readers.

Thoreau's essay is sublime; Richardson's scholarly introduction is sound; and Perry's soft-focus watercolors provide a fine visual complement. Looking out the patio window on this mild October evening, I see the leaves that are still in the trees going every shade of purple and red and orange and gold; and I reflect that Thoreau's *October, or Autumnal Tints* can quite effectively place any reader, in any locale, at any time of year, firmly amidst the glories of a New England autumn.

Jules says

Methodical descriptions of the Red Maple, Elm and the Sugar-Maple, not to mention painstaking depictions of the Scarlet Oak make for a very dull read, sadly. This is not Thoreau at his best and certainly this meditation on the colours of fall is no Walden.

Lauren says

"Autumnal Tints" was one of Henry Thoreau's last pieces of published literature. He finished its writing as he was dying of Tuberculosis. When I learned the context in which this essay had been written, it took on even greater significance for me. "Autumnal Tints" is a great essay, not only because Thoreau so wonderfully captures the beauty and detail of fall, but because he seeks a symbolic meaning in the season. He writes of the autumn leaves, "How beautifully they go to their graves! How gently lay themselves down and turn to mould!—Painted of a thousand hues and fit to make the beds of the living… They that soared so loftily, how contentedly they return to dust again, and are laid low, resigned to lie and decay at the foot of the tree, and afford nourishment to new generations… They teach us how to die" (35). For Thoreau, an autumn leaf is not just an autumn leaf. Rather, it is a symbol that helps him confront the idea of his own death with the hope that he would live on in some way, much as the dying leaves of fall go on to be a part of future

forests. One of the reasons I admire Thoreau so much is his ability to notice the beauty of nature and yet also move beyond that physical beauty to meditations of a symbolic, often spiritual import.

In noting the spiritual significance of nature, Thoreau also urges us in “Autumnal Tints” to not merely look, but truly see when we go into the autumn woods. He writes, “We do not realize how far and widely, or how near and narrowly, we are to look. The greater part of the phenomena of Nature are for this reason concealed from us all our lives… The Scarlet Oak must, in a sense, be in your eye when you go forth. We cannot see anything until we are possessed with the idea of it… And so it is with him that shoots at beauty; though he wait til the sky falls, he will not bag any, if he does not already know its seasons and haunts, and the color of its wing” (58-60). For me, Thoreau always serves as a good reminder to try to be truly present in each moment. As he writes, we will not truly see any of the myriad beauties of nature if we are not already aware of them in our minds.

“Autumnal Tints” is not the best-known of Thoreau’s writings, but it is just as powerful and gorgeous as any of his more famous works. Though my heart aches for Henry, who died at age 44 from a disease that is quite preventable today, in reading this I know that he wouldn’t want me to feel that way. In the autumn leaves he finds potential to understand the meaning of human life—and death. Thoreau does not see autumn as merely a time of loss and decay, but rather a season carrying the eventual promise of spring. Though the autumn leaves die, they do so gracefully and without sadness. They provide the rich soil in which to grow new trees. Thoreau’s writing was not particularly well-known during his short life, but I think that he would be quite pleased to know how many people continue to read, admire, and strive to live by his works today, over 150 years after his death. I can only speak for myself, but I know they’ve changed my life. Like his beloved autumn leaves, I think Henry Thoreau has succeeded in providing a rich soil of ideas to grow in future generations.

Lachlan Pezet says

"The trees are now repaying the earth with interest what they have taken from it. they are discounting. they are about to add a leaf's thickness to the depth of the soil. This is the beautiful way in which Nature gets her muck.....We are all richer for their decay."

A very strong contender for my desert Island book judging by how often I return to Thoreau's wonderful survey of the changing world.

Antje says

Is it worth writing an essay just about the shape and colour of autumn? Is it possible to fill 60 pages with that? - Yes, it definitely is. Thoreau made it work.
He was not only an outstanding observer and knew nature, but he also was a man of fine words. I just loved the way he described the autumnal tinted trees and plants. Sometimes he even created poetic scenes and most beautiful autumnal images.

"The whole tree [Scarlet Oak] is much like a heart in form, as well as color. Was not this worth waiting for? Little did you think, ten days ago, that that cold green tree would assume such color as this. Its leaves are still

firmly attached, while those of other trees are falling around it. It seems to say, -'I am the last to blush, but I blush deeper than any of ye.'"

"On causeways I go by trees here and there all bare and smoke-like, having lost their brilliant clothing; but there it lies, nearly as bright as ever, on the ground on one side, and making nearly as regular a figure as lately on the tree. (...) A queen might be proud to walk where these gallant trees have spread their bright cloaks in the mud."

It was such a great pleasure to join him on his walk through Concord, Massachusetts, and to watch all the trees changing. Besides I learned the names of all the species there and lots of new old words. His antiquated language meant a huge challenge for me and so were his typical complex sentences with dozens of commas.

All in all it is a fine book about the beauty of autumn and let me finish it with Thoreaus words:

"Let us have Willows for spring, Elms for summer, Maples and Walnuts and Tupeloes for autumn, Evergreens for winter, and Oaks for all Seasons."

Kathryn says

This is a small book documenting the changes of the leaves to autumn colors. He took specific trees and or bushes and described the "bright tints in the order of which they present themselves". An interesting concept for a book. I didn't read this page for pages but read a little here and there. His descriptions made me feel as if the leaves were right in front of me.

Brian Hurst says

It's good if you ever wanted to listen to someone wax sentimental about trees. Maybe I'd give it a 3.5, to be honest..not exactly something I'll probably remember 20 years from now.

Mark says

The essay that introduces Thoreau's last magazine piece austutely shows how he comes to terms with his own death.

Interleaved art keeps you on the present as you read Robert Richardson's account of Thoreau's visionary synthesis.

Silvery says

Es admirable como Henry David Thoreau en sus notas, puede sentir tal admiración y regocijo por el nacimiento de un brote o una hoja caida.

"Aquí no se trata del mero amarillo de los granos, sino casi todos los colores que conocemos, sin exceptuar el azul más brillante: el arce temprano ruborizado, el zumaque enarbolado sus pecados escarlata, la morera, el rico amarillo cromado de los álamos, el rojo brillante de los árandanos que pinta el fondo de las montañas".

Kristi says

Thoreau's eloquent and evocative elegy to the Autumn of life as it is manifested in a New England Autumn. Stunning and breathtaking. Thoreau at his best.
