

1st October 2021

October

“I’ll sing you this October song. Oh, there is no song before it.

The words and tune are none of my own, for my joys and sorrows bore it.”

Palmer and Williamson, The Incredible String Band, ‘The October Song’

The Incredible String Band were a UK psychedelic folk band founded in Edinburgh in 1966. In its original line-up of Clive Palmer, Robin Williamson and Mike Heron, the band produced a series of albums which were to become cult classics – *The 5000 Spirits or the Layers of the Onion*, *The Hangman’s Beautiful Daughter* and *Wee Tam and the Big Huge*. The track I remember most comes from their first album, *Incredible String Band*. Like most of the songs on the album, *October Song* was penned by Palmer and Williamson. It seems appropriate to make reference to it now that the month of October is upon us – hence the opening verse quoted above.

October Song is one of these pieces from the genre in which you can find whatever meaning you choose. No one’s quite sure what significance the writers sought to point to in its lyrics. Like the classic *Whiter Shade of Pale* by *Procol Harum*, the meaning of the lyrics of such songs will be forever open to interpretation. So I’ll give you my take on only a few words from *October Song*. In the middle, it has this verse:

*The fallen leaves that jewel the ground
They know the art of dying
And leave with joy their glad gold hearts
In the scarlet shadows lying*

October is the transition month that epitomises our autumn, the bridge between the end of summer and the beginning of winter. Leaves turn from green to reds, browns and yellows. There is beauty in that, of course, especially when the sun still shines. But eventually, the leaves will fall and “jewel the ground” to teach us “the art of dying” as they lead us into the darkness of winter. But will their “glad gold hearts” not give us hope for new life? Will the fallen leaves not regenerate our lives and offer us the prospect of new growth? Will winter not pass in time?

That’s October’s song for me. We *must* deal with death and give ourselves to grieving if need be. But we must also listen to the voices of hope and believe that the new life we are promised *will* come again.

A prayer for today

Lord, in all the changes October brings, let me be constant in my trust in you. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>