

appear dizzily bright and clear on a sunny fall day: The anthocyanin flashes like a marquee.<sup>4</sup> **D**

Not all leaves turn the same colors. Elms, weeping willows, and the ancient ginkgo all grow radiant yellow, along with hickories, aspens, bottlebrush  
50 buckeyes, cottonweeds, and tall, keening poplars. Basswood turns bronze, birches bright gold. Water-loving maples put on a symphonic display of scarlets. Sumacs turn red, too, as do flowering dogwoods, black gums, and sweet gums. Though some oaks yellow, most turn a pinkish brown. The farmlands also change color, as tepees of cornstalks and bales of shredded-wheat-textured hay stand drying in the fields. In some spots, one slope of a hill may be green and the other already in bright color, because the hillside facing south gets more sun and heat than the northern one.

An odd feature of the colors is that they don't seem to have any special purpose. We are **predisposed** to respond to their beauty, of course. They  
60 shimmer with the colors of sunset, spring flowers, the tawny buff of a colt's pretty rump, the shuddering pink of a blush. Animals and flowers color for a reason—**adaptation** to their environment—but there is no adaptive reason for leaves to color so beautifully in the fall any more than there is for the sky or ocean to be blue. It's just one of the haphazard marvels the planet bestows every year. We find the sizzling colors thrilling, and in a sense they dupe us. Colored like living things, they signal death and disintegration. In time, they will become fragile and, like the body, return to dust. They are as we hope our own fate will be when we die: Not to vanish, just to sublime<sup>5</sup> from one beautiful state into another. Though leaves lose their green life, they bloom  
70 with urgent colors, as the woods grow mummified day by day, and Nature becomes more carnal, mute, and radiant. **E**

We call the season “fall,” from the Old English *feallan*, to fall, which leads back through time to the Indo-European *phol*, which also means to fall. So the word and the idea are both extremely ancient, and haven't really changed since the first of our kind needed a name for fall's leafy abundance. As we say the word, we're reminded of that other Fall, in the garden of Eden, when fig leaves never withered and scales fell from our eyes. Fall is the time when leaves fall from the trees, just as spring is when flowers spring up, summer is when we simmer, and winter is when we whine from the cold.

80 Children love to play in piles of leaves, hurling them into the air like confetti, leaping into soft unruly mattresses of them. For children, leaf fall is just one of the odder figments of Nature, like hailstones or snowflakes. Walk down a lane overhung with trees in the never-never land of autumn, and you will forget about time and death, lost in the sheer delicious spill of color. Adam and Eve concealed their nakedness with leaves, remember? Leaves have always hidden our awkward secrets. **F**

But how do the colored leaves fall? As a leaf ages, the growth hormone, auxin, fades, and cells at the base of the petiole divide. Two or three rows of

**D AUTHOR'S PURPOSE**

Using scientific **diction**—the terms *anthocyanin* and *carotenoids*—helps Ackerman explain the difference between the pigments found in leaves. How do they differ?

**predisposed**

(prē'dī-spōzd') *v.*  
inclined to something in advance

**adaptation**

(ăd'ăp-tā'shən) *n.*  
the process of adjusting to suit one's surroundings

**E AUTHOR'S PURPOSE**

Reread lines 65–71. Here Ackerman reflects on the deaths of living things, including human beings. What does she say we hope for ourselves?

**F AUTHOR'S PURPOSE**

Reread lines 72–86. What seems to be Ackerman's purpose in each paragraph? Cite specific words and phrases to support your answers.

4. **marquee**: a lighted billboard, such as those used at movie theaters.

5. **sublime**: to transform directly into another state.