

'To Autumn'

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The criticism of 'To Autumn' has articulated a clear discrepancy between the apparent denial of historical and political analysis in the poem and the events of the second decade of the nineteenth century, including economic and political crisis, the suspension of Habeas Corpus, the Spa Fields riot, Luddism, sporadic but widespread food riots in rural areas, and, most specifically, the Peterloo Massacre of August 1819, just one month before the composition of Keats's poem. The apparent silence of 'To Autumn' on the subject of politics tends to be read as evidence of a Keatsian desire to abstract poetic language from history, a desire to write perfected language into which the disruptions of history do not intrude. 'To Autumn' has been read as a poem of perfection, a poem in which language is perfected in form and in the exclusion of history. A. C. Swinburne classed it with 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' as the 'nearest to absolute perfection' of Keats's odes;¹ more recently, Walter Jackson Bate has called 'To Autumn' 'one of the most nearly perfect poems in English', Aileen Ward has remarked that it is Keats's 'most perfect and untroubled poem', and Douglas Bush has stated that the poem is 'flawless in structure, texture, tone, and rhythm'.² This 'perfection of language, a perfection apparently undaunted by contemporary political events, has led politically minded critics to describe 'To Autumn' as an escape from history. Attempting to account for the discrepancy between the perfected language of the poem and the contemporary disruptions of politics, Jerome McGann, for example, has analysed 'To Autumn' as 'an attempt to "escape" the period which provides the poem with its context'.³

Similarly, in a recent essay which has perceptive things to say about politics in Keats's poetry, Vincent Newey has argued that 'To Autumn' celebrates a capacity quite opposite to that of political engagement.⁴ In this chapter, I attempt to situate 'To Autumn' within its political context of agrarian economics in the early nineteenth century in order to suggest ways in which the perfected critical response to 'To Autumn' is both figured by the text, and, crucially, disrupted by the subtextual pressures of politics on the poem. Figures of reading become, literally, economic figures and the silencing of politics and history in 'To Autumn' is repeated in the silence of critical response to the implicit political 'subtext' of the poem.

'To Autumn', then, is embedded within both the context of a Keatsian anxiety over the economics of writing which I have outlined in my discussion of the letters written between May and September [in ch. 2 of Bennett's book. Ed.], and a more general anxiety of economics in England in 1819. The Keatsian rhetoric of harvesting in 'To Autumn' may be read both as a figure of political discourse and as a self-description of poetry and poetic making. On a number of occasions in his poems and letters, Keats inscribed the economics of harvesting within the terms of the economics of poetic writing: in a letter of July 1819, for example, in reference to the publication of his poetry, Keats says 'the very corn which is now so beautiful, as if it had only <taken> took to ripening yesterday, is for the market: So, why shod I be delicate' (*Keats's Letters*, II, 129). The rhetoric of gleaning also provides an amphibology of harvesting and writing in a number of poems, most clearly expressed in the desire to glean the poet's 'teeming brain' in 'When I have fears that I may cease to be'.⁵ 'To Autumn', as a poem of harvesting, represents Keats's most fully worked nexus of such homologies: among other things the poem is an articulation of the politics and economics both of agriculture and of writing.

In this chapter, I shall depart somewhat from the dual focus of this book – narrative and audience, what I term 'figures of reading' – in order to suggest ways in which Keats's most 'perfected' of poems engages with the discourses of politics and economics. Implicit in such a reading is the recognition that increasingly during 1819 the question of writing for a living, and thus of finding a public, becomes more and more urgent. But this chapter also presents an exercise in reading 'against the grain': by reading 'To Autumn' intertextually, through intertexts which fracture the

surface poise of the poem, I shall suggest that one way to read a poem which so signally represses solecism is to make of reading itself a solecism.

As I have suggested, 'To Autumn' has been read as a poem of perfection, a poem which suppresses the cacophonous noises of history: it is a poem which seems to exclude the language of politics from its rhetoric, to silence the noise of history, politics, economics. Without such purchase on the text, readers stand powerless in front of the irrefragable beauty of language, they are left to luxuriate in the fecund textuality of words, and, in the face of such poetry, critics generally speak in languid autumnal tones, in extended nostalgic periods, intoning the litany of perfection, the organic, the whole. To historicise Keats's poem, however, would be to read against the grain, to listen to the fractious intertextual cacophony of history, politics, economics, noises which Autumn seems to silence. My analysis of Keats's letters in terms of the relationship between writing, work, and economics, suggests that, on one level, 'To Autumn' was generated out of the ideological tensions to which the writer in the early nineteenth century was subject. Written just before the letters announcing his abandonment of the notion of writing for money, 'To Autumn' may be read as a crucial text in Keats's developing economics of writing. The perfection of language which critics have discerned in the poem is fractured by the economics of writing.

Part of the perfection of language in 'To Autumn' involves a density of intertextuality, an inclusion of other voices into a univocal exclusivity of Keatsian voice, which both textures and textualises the poem. Although, as Helen Vendler has noted, 'To Autumn' denies specific allusion,⁶ the echoes that critics have heard in the poem are legion: they include, for example, echoes from Virgil, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Thomson, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Chatterton. Rather than disrupting the univocality of Keats's poem, these echoes are seen as texturing the poem's literariness and homogenising its monolithic voice – the voice of the literary. Keats's 1816 sonnet 'How many bards gild the lapses of time' provides, in itself, an intertextual commentary on the intertextuality of 'To Autumn'. The earlier poem explicitly argues for the 'pleasing chime' of the literary tradition – a music which 'occasions' 'no confusion, no disturbance rude' – as a generating impulse for writing, and compares such music to 'the unnumber'd sounds that evening store[s]' which 'Make pleasing music, not wild uproar'. The sonnet

interacts fruitfully with the later ode in a number of ways, not least in the economics of the opening line's 'gild' (a word which, as I show below, will be erased in/by 'To Autumn'), and in the 'lapses of time', the discontinuities of history, which such gilding suppresses. But Keats's crisis of writing during the summer and autumn of 1819 means that such an aesthetics of literary perfection/exclusion is deeply fractured by the intrusive discourses of economics. By focusing on a different set of 'intertexts', it is possible to describe 'To Autumn' as an intervention in a series of discourses, literary and political, which both disrupt the poem's 'perfection' and situate it within the political events of autumn 1819.

There is, then, a double intertextuality of 'To Autumn': an intertextuality of the literary, and an intertextuality – still mediated to a large extent by literary texts – of the historical. The literary intertextuality of 'To Autumn' posits an ideology of literary language as separated from history precisely through its exclusion of other voices: the literary is presented as a closed and enclosed discursive space immune to the infringements of other discourses. In this model of intertextuality the text is enclosed, an enclosure bounded by the limits of a specifically literary history. The boundaries of the literary exclude the illicit incursions of transgressive (non-literary) language into the space of poetry. The poem's historical intertextuality, on the other hand, involves the antagonistic intertexts which the poem's literariness attempts to suppress – the texts of economics, history, politics. The fractures in the poem's literary logic – the famous syntactical suspension in stanza 1, the thematic laziness of the workers in stanza 2, the semantic ambivalence of the word 'conspiring', the use of the apostrophic convention in a poem which otherwise refuses the outworn formulations of the eighteenth-century ode⁷ – all suggest fault-lines which mark the repression of history by textuality. By attending to a number of intertextual echoes we might discern a number of ideological fault-lines in Keats's poem in which we might trace the text's engagement with the discourses of history.

The politics of 'To Autumn' are most explicitly articulated within the terms of the contemporary politics of agriculture. The politics of agriculture had potentially revolutionary implications in the early nineteenth century due to the repeated minor uprisings of rural workers agitating against the 1815 corn law, enclosures, and generally against oppressive economic conditions. In 'To Autumn', however, these matters are displaced into a mythological figure of

Ceres. A number of critics have recently suggested that Ceres, the goddess of corn and harvests, is a pervasive absent presence in 'To Autumn', a presence which is unstated, unspecified, and disseminated throughout both the pastoral tradition and Keats's poem.⁸ The agrarian politics of the early nineteenth century are mediated by the unnamed mythological discourse 'Ceres': by looking closely at this mythological substitution, we may be able to position 'To Autumn' within contemporary political discourses.

Keats's contemporary poem 'Lamia' offers an intriguing insight into the significance of Ceres in the lines 'and the store thrice told / Of Ceres' horn' (part 2, ll. 186–7). The phrase 'Ceres' horn', which is an expansion of the word 'cornucopia' (literally, 'horn of plenty') represents an example of Keats's generative solecisms. Ceres, goddess of abundant food (particularly corn) is not, in any of Keats's sources, nor in the mythological tradition, described as possessing a horn: the cornucopia, in fact, belongs to an entirely unrelated deity, Amalthea.⁹ Keats's reference to 'Ceres' horn' is, then, a kind of corny illicit pun on cornucopia, which is 'thrice told' in that 'cornucopia' may be translated into 'Ceres' horn' in three different ways: plenty of corn; horn of plenty; Ceres' [corn's] horn. Unravelling this ravelled pun we find a tautology in the association of 'Ceres' horn' with cornucopia: Ceres = corn (by metonymy); horn = cornus (by translation); so the pun reads 'Corn's (Ceres') corn[us] (horn)' – and 'copia' is omitted except in the copious linguistic play involved. Ceres' horn is thrice-told as well as thrice-counted in this cornucopia of linguistic compression.

Within the context of an economic analysis of 'To Autumn', this paronomastic [dealing with punning or wordplay. Ed.] play on Ceres is significant because of the figure's relationship with property, law, and the politics of agriculture. In classical mythology, Ceres represents not only agrarian plenitude but also the transition from a pre-monetary and, indeed, communistic, economy to a fully commercial and proto-capitalist economy of monetary exchange, a transition which brought with it the institution of the law. The seventeenth-century encyclopaedist Andrew Tooke explains this in his *Pantheon* in a passage which reverberates with significance for the discourse of agricultural politics in the early nineteenth century:

This you may learn from *Ovid*, who tells us that *Ceres* was the first that made laws; provided wholesome food; and taught the art of husbandry, of ploughing and sowing. For before her time, the earth lay

rough and uncultivated, covered with briars, and unprofitable plants; when there were no proprietors of land, they neglected to cultivate it; when nobody had any ground of his own, they did not care to fix landmarks: but all things were common to all men, till *Ceres* who had invented the art of husbandry, taught men how to exercise it; and then they began to contend and dispute about the limits of those fields, from the culture of which they reaped so much profit: and hence it was necessary that laws should be enacted to determine the rights and properties of those who contended. For this reason *Ceres* was named the foundress of laws.¹⁰

Ceres, then, represents the origins of lawful and economic exchange and of topographical boundaries, and we might gloss Keats's illicit paronomastic play on cornucopia in 'Lamia' as a subtextual, and perhaps subliminal, revolt against such order, exchanging the illicit coinage of puns for the true currency of etymology: Keats presents the reader with a 'Pun mote' (*Keats's Letters*, II, 214). If, as seems to be the case, Ceres is the pervasive unstated presence in 'To Autumn', then the perfected language of pastoral description is invaded by political questions of lawful exchange, agricultural boundaries, private property and labour relations. That critics have noted Ceres' pervasive but unnamed presence in 'To Autumn' is suggestive: Keats appropriates the mythology but explicitly excludes the nominal property of the mythological originator of private property. Indeed, this denial of Ceres's name is particularly remarkable in a poet who, as John Clare wryly commented, 'keeps up a constant a[ll]usion or illusion to the grecian mythology' and who 'behind every rose ... looks for a Venus & under every laurel a thrumming Apollo'.¹¹ The exclusion of Ceres' proper name – her property – in the poem represents a transgression of the law of property.

Furthermore, the association of the origins of law with the demarcation of boundaries in the mythology of Ceres is particularly significant in a poem based on the boundary season, autumn.¹² Between the eighteenth-century analysis of the origins of property (mythologised in Ceres) and the contemporary controversy over enclosures, there is a homology in the movement from a communistic pre-agrarian past before the law of Ceres and its transmutation into 'modern' agriculture on the one hand, and the movement from common agricultural usage to the privatisation of land in enclosures on the other. Other things being equal (and the history of enclosures is, of course, far more complex than this

reduction allows), enclosure reproduces the structure of the mythological origins of (agricultural) private property, the bounding of land ownership.¹³ As a boundary, however, autumn is unbounded, as the poem's notorious ambivalence over the precise temporal location of the season suggests: the poem is located within both summer and autumn, and points forward to winter, it is located at the beginning as well as at the end of harvest, the bees in stanza 1 are dislocated in their sense of time, and the lambs in stanza 3 are ambivalent sheep. Similarly, these temporal transgressions of bounding-lines are repeated in the topographical violation of boundaries as the poem moves out in space from the cottage to the garden to the fields to the hills and finally upwards to the unbounded skies. This movement, in itself, suggests a denial of enclosure, a political gesture of defiance against the appropriation of public property in the contemporary enclosure movement.

It is, of course, the second stanza of 'To Autumn', with its images of rural workers, which most clearly articulates the discourse of agricultural labour relations. Although the unstated figure of the goddess Ceres activates the discourses of labour, property, lawful exchange, and legal boundaries, it is possible to hear in 'To Autumn' the noise of the politics and economics of agriculture in a hitherto unnoticed verbal echo of Pope's *Epistle to Bathurst*. It has been well documented that, in preparing to write 'Lamia' in the summer of 1819, Keats had been rereading Dryden's poetry to get the feel of a 'flint-worded' poet (*Keats's Letters*, II, 214).¹⁴ But the fact that Keats appears to quote Pope at least three times in the letters of that summer (*Keats's Letters*, II, 133, 164, 210), including a quotation from *Eloisa to Abelard* on the day he wrote 'To Autumn', strongly suggests that he was also reading the poet who had previously been something of a Keatsian *bête noire*. Pope's *Epistle to Bathurst*, one of his 'Moral Essays' whose 'Argument' is subtitled 'Of the Use of Riches', satirically examines the knotty question of whether, as the Argument has it, 'the invention of Money has been more commodious, or pernicious to Mankind'.¹⁵ In particular, Pope attacks the extremes of Avarice and Prodigality. A personification occurs at a key point in Pope's poem in order to satirise avaricious hoarding:

Riches, like insects, when conceal'd they lie,
Wait but for wings, and in their season, fly.

Who sees pale Mammon pine amidst his store,
Sees but a backward steward for the Poor
(ll. 171-4¹⁶)

Although the first two lines might provide a secondary echo of the last stanza of 'To Autumn', which moves from insects to flight, the third line offers an echo which, in rhythm and verbal cadence, is a precise model for the opening to stanza 2 of Keats's poem:

Who sees pale Mammon pine amidst his store

in Pope is translated into the rhetorical question of

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?

in Keats. 'Seeing' this hidden intertext within the Keatsian store of Romantic luxuriance allows us to discern a rich economic and political subtext within Keats's overtly naturalistic and 'disinterested' poem: it alerts us to the fact that the turbulent, fractious subtext of 'To Autumn' involves a problematic relationship between, on the one hand, the capital accumulation of stanza 1 – loading, bending, filling, swelling, budding – a kind of 'natural' accumulation which constitutes a displaced representation of financial accumulation, and, on the other hand, work and its negation in stanza 2 – expressed in the phrases 'sitting careless', 'sound asleep', 'thy laden head', 'with patient look / Thou watchest'.

The echo of Pope's Moral Essay not only activates the subtextual economics of 'To Autumn' but also suggests an ideological explanation of aristocratic accumulation: 'pale Mammon' who 'pine[s] amidst his store' is a 'backward steward for the Poor'. Similarly, the representation of rural leisure is double-edged in that not only are the workers incongruously leisurely but their lassitude reflects the seasonal nature of the work and the fact that their relaxation will soon become unemployment: if the bees are seduced into believing that warm days will never cease, the workers have similarly confused the seasons.¹⁷ Just as the full granaries will soon start to empty, the warm days will soon turn cold. The third stanza already – even within the frame of this pressingly plenitudinous and affluent poem – marks a declining repletion (or, indeed, an over-repletion) in its diction ('soft dying', 'wailful', 'mourn', 'lives or dies') and imagery. Indeed, we might argue that it is precisely because of the plenitude, the generosity, of autumnal days, that work is left

undone, just as Keats's poem, with its slow, lush, plenitudinous generosity almost convinces its readers that the work of history may be abandoned in aesthetic contemplation. And, indeed, the act of writing 'To Autumn' was specifically recorded by Keats as a leisurely affair, engendered by a walk which constituted a break from writing – a holiday not only from the more serious business of rewriting 'Hyperion' but also from work proper.

But the silent intertextual echo of Pope's Mammon also suggests that money may be silenced, may be barred from Keats's poem in significant ways, and we might ask what is invested in this silent barring of money from 'To Autumn'. Money is explicitly suppressed by Keats in an alteration to line 25: 'barred clouds bloom' was, in the first draft of the poem, altered from 'a gold cloud gilds': the alteration – from 'gold' to 'barred', from 'gilds' to 'bloom' – bars the noisy intrusion of economics into the poem. The suppressed word 'gilds' threatens to open up a number of semantic seams in 'To Autumn': one archaic sense of 'gild' is a noise or clamour;¹⁸ 'gild' also involves the payment of taxes and the covering of an object with a thin layer of gold, as well as the common metaphorical development of this latter sense in the idea of giving a specious brilliance to an unworthy object. These noisy economic sememes of 'gild', however, are literally barred – they are crossed out – by the final text: they are explicitly barred by the word 'barred'. The verb 'to bar' is associated with exclusion, with the law, with property, with limiting, confining, and enclosing: in order to read these sememes of 'barred' in Keats's poem, however, we must read the text as a palimpsest – literally, because 'barred ... bloom' is written over 'gold ... gilds'¹⁹ – we must transgress the space of words in the poem, and deny the law of authorial exclusion. Similarly, 'barred' gives us a key to the poem's attempted exclusivity of intertextuality, its barring of heterogeneous noises from its perfected surface – a barring which is represented phonetically by the alteration from the harsh noise of the velar to the softer harmony of the bi-labial plosives, and which is represented throughout the poem by Keats's notoriously mellifluous harmonics. And to say, as we might want to, that 'barred clouds bloom' is simply more beautiful, more perfect, than 'a gold cloud gilds', is both to register the aesthetic force of the 'natural' plenitude which structures the poem and, at the same time, to beg the question of the poem's engagement with the economics of the aesthetic.

John Clare's poetry provides an interesting commentary on the relationship between law, wealth, and enclosure in the early nineteenth century which helps to illuminate the subtextual economics of Keats's poem. In a number of poems,²⁰ Clare comments nostalgically on the damage done by enclosures to the rural scene, but he also writes perceptively on the economic matrix of values that produces such ecological damage. In the early poem 'Helpstone', for example, Clare laments the destruction caused by enclosures and comments:

Accurs'd wealth o'er bounding human laws
Of every evil thou remainst the cause
Victims of want those wretches such as me
Too truly lay their wretchedness to thee
Thou art the bar that keeps from being fed
And thine our loss of labour and of bread
(ll. 127–32)

Although 'Helpstone', written in 1812, was not published until 1820, reading Keats's poem through the perspective of Clare's helps to elucidate the complex ideological matrix in the verbal cluster 'wealth', 'bounding', 'laws', 'victims', 'bar', 'fed', 'labour', 'bread', explicit in Clare's poem, and fracturing the surface poise in Keats's: if one of the subtextual pressures of 'To Autumn' is the refusal of the physical, economic, and legal limitations of enclosure, we might read Keats's poem as in some sense correlative with the explicit denunciation of the transgression of humanitarianism and the picturesque which Clare's poem articulates. In 'The Mores' Clare is even more explicit in his locution 'lawless laws' (l. 178), a formulation which expresses the fundamental injustice of enclosures (fundamental because the rationale for enclosure – private property and legal ownership – deconstructs itself in its gesture of legalising such appropriation; the change from public to private ownership reveals the arbitrary basis of private property: Clare's point is that the arbitrary legality of enclosures deconstructs the very concept of legality upon which laws are founded). As Robert Malcolmson has noted, the justification for private property seems to have undergone a conceptual shift during the eighteenth century (generated, in part at least, by the enclosure movement), from the notion of use-right to that of absolute property ownership: Malcolmson points out that it is in practices such as gleaning that the conflict between the two conceptions of rights is most clearly articulated.²¹ Clare's 'lawless

laws' points to the fact that from one perspective, at least, enclosures involved the institution of, for example, gleaning as robbery through, precisely, robbery – as E. P. Thompson has commented, 'Enclosure (when all the sophistications are allowed for) was a plain enough case of class robbery, played according to fair rules of property and law laid down by a Parliament of property-owners and lawyers'.²²

Although the mythological figure of Ceres, representing copious luxury, property, proper boundaries, and the law, is ambiguously absent from 'To Autumn', Keats explicitly includes the reciprocal figure of the anonymous gleaner in stanza 2. The figure of the gleaner activates the vocabularies of want, the appropriation of property, the violation of proper boundaries, and the transgression of the law. The affluence suggested by the richness of literary language in the poem is undercut by the discourse of gleaning: the pressures of linguistic plenitude, the wealthy luxuriance of language, are counter-pointed by this explicit reference to the plight of the poor.

When we examine the contemporary discourse of gleaning, then, we discover a final intertextual pressure on the perfected language of 'To Autumn'. Gleaning was particularly controversial in the autumn of 1819 due to a contemporary controversy over its legality. It was an ancient custom, ideologically overdetermined by the biblical story of Ruth, producing a symbolic significance which reinforced its practical importance for the diet of agricultural workers. The gleaner was a common figure in poetry and painting up to and indeed throughout the nineteenth century as a signifier of the balancing of avarice and charity. Although gleaning was sanctioned by the Bible and traditionally permitted by landowners, at the end of the eighteenth century landowners began to claim that gleaning transgressed laws of property, and started to bring prosecutions against gleaners. The nineteenth century saw numerous attempts by landowners to restrict the practice through the use of the law, by prosecution for trespass and theft. The inclusion of the gleaner figure in stanza 2 of 'To Autumn', together with the stanza's silence over the political question of gleaning, may be understood to mark a reappropriation of the figure for poetry and simultaneously for agricultural workers.²³ By presupposing the legitimacy of the gleaner figure for poetry, Keats also assumes the legality of gleaners. At the same time, however, Keats's representation of the gleaner – as with other nineteenth-century pictorial

representations of this pastoral figure²⁴ – involves a nostalgic objectification and elision of the suffering which gleaning involved: not only was gleaning generated by poverty, but physically it was extremely demanding.²⁵ The poised steadiness of Keats's gleaner only hints – with 'laden', and perhaps with the assertion of steadiness in its negated implication of unsteadiness, weariness, fatigue – at the physical exertions involved in gleaning.

I would like to suggest that gleaning is the constitutive trope in an intertextual reading of 'To Autumn': indeed, the older word 'leasing' expresses the whole gamut of concerns in my reading of Keats's poem – as a legal term 'leasing' involves the letting of property and at the same time a legally binding or constricting contract; as a synonym for gleaning it involves the (re)appropriation of others' property; etymologically the word also signifies reading. In 'To Autumn' Keats gleans anterior texts, exterior discourses: the Keatsian text is, like all texts, a tissue of gleanings. The opposition of the unnamed Ceres to the anonymous gleaner figures the poem's play of property: such an opposition may itself be read as an allegory of intertextual interpretation. In its various manifestations and transformations in the work of critics such as M. M. Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes and Michael Riffaterre, intertextuality tends to demand a dual reading: on the one hand it is understood as a strategy of dissemination, a radical dispersal of origins, and on the other hand it seems to be constituted by a precise specificity of intertextual location and filiation:²⁶ in 'To Autumn' this play of absence and presence is figured in the dual nominality of the unnamed Ceres and the anonymous gleaner. And the duality of Ceres and the gleaner also reminds us that the gleanings of intertextuality constitute an illicit appropriation of others' property – that, as T. S. Eliot would have it, 'mature poets steal'.²⁷ Keats's text no longer properly demarcates itself and is no longer properly demarcated: as the extending boundaries of the last stanza suggest, it eliminates all textual boundaries. The poem is unbounded in a movement which refuses (en)closure as it enacts the structure of illicit appropriation implicit in intertextuality.

'To Autumn' ends with noise, and with the question of noise: 'Where are the songs of spring?' 'The noises made in the third stanza by gnats, sheep, hedge-crickets, birds, are the attenuated sounds of buzzing, bleating, whistling, twittering, noises which Keats enumerates as poetically illicit – they are not the noises of spring nor are they the noises of the literary tradition – and which

are specifically presented as an alternative music. These noises provide a final model for our intertextual reading of the poem. If textuality is to be defined in terms of intertextuality, then we should recognise that poems include the noise made by textual imposters in the literary tradition, imposters which impose illicit sounds on poetry. Similarly, we should recognise that, because, as Roland Barthes says 'any text is an intertext' and 'any text is a new tissue of past citations'²⁸ – because textuality is intertextuality – in their turn, poems constitute just such illicit noises, the tintinnabulous noises of language disempowered, made by poetic language within the discourse of history. By attending to the disruptive intertextual noises of history, politics, economics we find that the attempt to silence the noise of history in 'To Autumn', rather than an escape from the historical, is itself a strategic silencing, a silencing which echoes most profoundly the political effacement, which we might call the 'noise', of the oppressed. And the recuperative reading which is figured in intertextuality should also be understood to figure the political dynamics of 'To Autumn'. The peculiar resistance to the political which has been read into 'To Autumn' can be disfigured by the transgressions which constitute the politics of intertextuality in the poem: in order to read the politics of 'To Autumn' we must transgress the boundaries of authorial property, we must refuse to be figured within, or by, the bounds of the text.

From Andrew Bennett, *Keats, Narrative and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 159–71, 224–8.

NOTES

[This essay on Keats's late poem 'To Autumn' is taken from Andrew Bennett's recent book on Keats's poetry which argues that the poet's writing contains certain 'figures of reading' which have determined the ways future readers will respond to the text. There are two schools of thought on the politics of Keats's 'To Autumn': some comment on the silence of the ode on questions of the turbulent agrarian political unrest that characterised the early nineteenth century. These critics argue that Keats uses an abstract poetic discourse to write a perfected language into which the disruptions of history do not intrude. Other critics, however, who comment on the repression of historical events in the poem, then go on to show how the poem relates to these events and the contemporary commentary upon them. Bennett adopts a different stance: he suggests ways in which the critical response to 'To Autumn' is

figured by the text and disrupted by the subtextual politics of the poem. Bennett's essay is informed by poststructuralist theories of literature and he makes particular use of theories of 'intertextuality'. Intertextuality is a view of the text particularly associated with the contemporary critics Roland Barthes and Julie Kristeva, who argued that we must not think in terms of the intention of the author when reading a text. Rather we must be aware that each text is really a site or intersection of the language of other texts that exist within and around the text under consideration. 'Any text', writes Barthes, 'is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognisable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture' (Barthes, 'Theory of the Text' in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young [London, 1981], p. 39). Using intertextuality, Bennett as a reader of Keats can find echoes and punning allusions to agrarian political discourse in the poem (see, in particular, his discussion of the puns on Ceres' horn and the cornucopia). For Bennett, the most significant 'figure of reading' which Keats's poetry engages is that of 'Solécism'. Bennett defines Solécism as 'an impropriety of language, a violation of the rules of grammar or syntax, a breach of good manners or etiquette, a social blunder, an error, incongruity or inconsistency' (*Keats, Narrative and Audience*, p. 2). He argues that 'To Autumn' so obviously represses incongruous political meanings (which themselves would constitute a 'Solécism' in the poem) that it forces the reader of the poem to read 'against the grain' (itself also a 'Solécism'). Bennett, in short, is interested in the 'fault lines' which mark the repression of history by the literary textuality of the poem. Ed.]

1. Quoted in G. S. Fraser (ed.), *John Keats: Odes, A Casebook* (London, 1971), p. 48.
2. Walter Jackson Bate, *John Keats* (Cambridge, MA, 1963), p. 58; Aileen Ward, *John Keats: The Making of a Poet* (London, 1963), p. 321; Douglas Bush, *John Keats: His Life and Writing* (New York, 1966), p. 176.
3. Jerome J. McGann, 'Keats and Historical Method' in *The Beauty of Inflections. Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford, 1985), p. 61. See Paul H. Fry, 'History, Existence, and "To Autumn"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 25 (1986), 211–19, for a response to McGann's reading which argues for an understanding of the poem as concerned with 'the ontology of the lyric moment'; while McGann argues that Keats suppresses history, Fry asserts its irrelevance, but both read the poem in terms of the exclusion of the historical.
4. Vincent Newey, "'Alternate uproar and sad peace": Keats, Politics, and the Idea of Revolution', *MHRA Yearbook of English Studies*, ed. J. R. Watson, 19 (1989), p. 288. William Keach's political reading of the bees in stanza 1 of 'To Autumn' is, perhaps, the nearest that critics have come to a 'political' reading of the poem ('Cockney Couplet: Keats and the Politics of Style', *Studies in Romanticism*, 25 [1986],

- pp. 193–6). For recent more general considerations of Keats and politics, see Marjorie Levinson, *Keats's Life of Allegory: The Origins of a Style* (Oxford, 1988); Paul Hamilton, 'Keats and Critique', in Marjorie Levinson et al., *Re-Thinking Historicism: Critical Readings in Romantic History* (Oxford, 1989); and Daniel Watkins, *Keats's Poetry and the Politics of Imagination* (Princeton, NJ, 1988).
5. See also Keats, 'Sleep and Poetry', lines 290–3, and 'The Fall of Hyperion', l. 467; see also *Keats's Letters*, II, 211.
 6. Helen Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), p. 276.
 7. See John Creaser, 'From "To Autumn" to Autumn in Keats's Ode', *Essays in Criticism*, 38 (1988), 190–214, for an analysis of the disruptive implications of the use of apostrophe in the poem.
 8. See Ian Jack, *Keats and the Mirror of Art* (Oxford, 1967), p. 236; Annabel M. Patterson, "How to load and...bend": Syntax and Interpretation in Keats's "To Autumn" PMLA, 94 (1979), 449–58; McGann, *The Beauty of Inflections*, p. 54; Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats*, ch. 7; Richard Macksey, 'Keats and the Poetics of Extremity', *Modern Language Notes*, 99 (1984), 845–84 (875, 879); Creaser, 'From "To Autumn" to Autumn' pp. 211–12; Kara Alwes, 'Moneta and Ceres: The Final Relationship Between Keats and the Imagination', *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 43 (1988) 212–19.
 9. In a sense it might be argued that the solecism is that of the critical tradition, in that Keats does not explicitly mention the cornucopia and it is various annotated editions of Keats's poems that gloss the line in terms of the equation of Ceres and cornucopia: see, for example, M. Robertson (ed.), *Keats: Poems Published in 1820* (Oxford, 1980), p. 209; Roger Sharrock (ed.), *Keats: Selected Poems and Letters* (Oxford, 1964), p. 212; D. G. Gillham (ed.), *John Keats: Poems of 1820* (London, 1969), p. 141; Miriam Allott (ed.), *The Poems of John Keats* (London, 1970), p. 642; John Barnard (ed.), *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth, 1980), p. 702 (but see Douglas Bush (ed.), *John Keats: Selected Poems and Letters* (Boston, 1959), p. 354: 'The horn of plenty is usually associated with Amalthea'). Annotators tend to give similar glosses to 'The Fall of Hyperion', I, ll. 35–7 where Proserpine and 'the fabled horn' are mentioned together. The absence of any connection between Ceres and the cornucopia in the mythology or the iconography of Ceres (she is generally described as having a crown made from ears of corn and as holding a lighted torch in one hand and poppies in the other) seems to suggest that it was Keats's own invention, and one which involves a significant redescription of the figure: Ceres taught men how to work in order to gain abundance, whereas the horn of plenty simply produces abundance without the need for work. On the importance of

- Ceres for Keats, see Helen Vendler's comment that 'Keats's mind was never far from Ceres' (*The Odes of John Keats*, p. 234).
10. Andrew Tooke, *The Pantheon, Representing the Fabulous Histories of the Heathen Gods and Most Illustrious Heroes* (1698), 31st edn (London, 1803), p. 162; this is only the most convenient of the formulations provided by a number of classical dictionaries available in the early nineteenth century, all of which provide similar descriptions. Significantly Jean-Jacques Rousseau makes a very similar analysis in *A Discourse Upon the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality among Mankind* (1761): 'To the tilling of the Earth the Distribution of it necessarily succeeded, and to Property once acknowledged the first Rules of Justice: for to secure every Man his own, every Man must have something... The Ancients, says Grotius, by giving to Ceres the Epithet Legisatrix, and to a Festival celebrated in her Honour the name *Thesmophoria*, insinuated that the Distribution of Lands produced a new kind of Right; that is, the Right of Property different from that which results from the Law of Nature' (pp. 124–6).
 11. G. M. Matthews (ed.), *Keats. The Critical Heritage* (London, 1971), pp. 155, 156.
 12. See Arnold Davenport, 'A Note on "To Autumn"' in Kenneth Muir (ed.), *John Keats: A Reassessment* (Liverpool, 1958), p. 96 on autumn as a boundary season.
 13. Tooke's mythological explanation of the origins of private property, agriculture, and law, should be read in the context of other eighteenth-century explanations of the origins of property, such as that of Rousseau, quoted above, note 10. For accounts of the enclosure movement in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see W. A. Armstrong, 'Rural Population and Growth, Systems of Employment and Incomes', ch. 7 in G. E. Mingay (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: Volume VI, 1750–1850* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 721–8; Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London, 1973), pp. 96–107; Michael Turner, *Enclosures in Britain, 1750–1860* (London, 1984); Pamela Horn, *Life and Labour in Rural England, 1760–1850* (London, 1987), pp. 46–51, *The Rural World, 1780–1850: Social Change in the English Countryside* (London, 1980), pp. 51–7.
 14. See, for example, Bate, *John Keats*, pp. 546–7, on Keats's use of Dryden in 'Lamia'.
 15. *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt, 7 vols (London, 1961), III, pt. 2, 107.
 16. On the importance and significance of lines 155–78, see, for example, Earl R. Wasserman, *Pope's Epistle to Bathurst: A Critical Reading with an Edition of the Manuscripts* (Baltimore, MD, 1960), p. 40; and

- John Barrell and Harriet Guest, 'On the Use of Contradiction: Economics and Morality in the Eighteenth-Century Long Poem', in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York, 1987), p. 124.
17. See, Patterson, "How to load and ... bend": Syntax and Interpretation in Keats's "To Autumn", pp. 454-6.
 18. The most recent example of this usage given by the OED is from a 1599 poem by the poet Alexander Hume: 'Throw all the land great is the gild/Of rustik folks that crie'.
 19. See, *The Odes of John Keats and Their Earliest Known Manuscripts in Facsimile*, ed. Robert Gittings (London, 1970), pp. 58-9, which shows that in the first Keats drew a line through 'gold' and 'gilds', and then wrote 'barred' and 'blooms' just above.
 20. For examples of Clare on enclosures, see 'Helpston Green'. 'The Lamentations of Round-Oak Waters', 'The Lament of Swordy Well' (esp. lines 183-91), 'The Fens' (lines 69-116), 'Remembrances' (lines 41-50): quotations from *The Oxford Authors: John Clare*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Oxford, 1984). On Clare and enclosures, see John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 110-20, 189-215; and Bob Heyes, 'John Clare and Enclosures', *John Clare Society Journal*, 6 (1987), 10-19.
 21. Robert W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England, 1700-1780* (London, 1981), pp. 34, 144, 166, note 30; see also Heyes, 'Enclosures', p. 16.
 22. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1964), p. 218. Compare Williams's comment on enclosures as a 'form of legalised seizure enacted by representatives of the beneficiary class' (*The Country and the City*, p. 98). Both comments are somewhat controversial, but have the advantage of echoing contemporary (radical) opposition to enclosures - expressed, for example, by Clare. For a more 'balanced' recent analysis of the evidence, see, for example, W. A. Armstrong, 'Rural Population Growth', pp. 721-8.
 23. See Andrew Bennett, 'The Politics of Gleaning in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" and "To Autumn"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 39 (1990), 34-8, in which I attempt to show, through reference to a very specific articulation of the discourse of gleaning in the early nineteenth century, the engagement of 'To Autumn' in the debate. For biblical references to gleaning and charity, see Ruth ii, 9-17; Leviticus xix, 9-10, xxiii, 22; Deuteronomy xxiv, 19-21. On the history of gleaning in the nineteenth century see W. A. Armstrong, 'Food, Shelter and Self-Help, The Poor Law, and the Position of the Labourer in Rural Society', ch. 8 in Mingay, *Agrarian History*, pp. 734-5; and David

- Hoseason Morgan, *Harvesters and Harvesting, 1840-1900: A Study of the Rural Proletariat* (London, 1982), pp. 151-61.
24. See, for example, John Constable's 'The Gleaners: Brighton' (1823), Samuel Palmer's 'The Gleaning Field' (c.1833), Jean-François Millet's 'Des glaneuses' (1857), and Jules Breton's 'Le rappel des glaneuses (Artois)' (1859).
 25. See Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (London, 1930), p. 103.
 26. M. M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, TX, 1981), pp. 259-422; Julia Kristeva, *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (London, 1986), p. 111; Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Bloomington, IN, 1978); Roland Barthes, 'Theory of the Text' in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London, 1981), pp. 31-47. See Jonathan Culler, 'Presupposition and Intertextuality', in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (London, 1981), pp. 169-87, on the ambivalent status of intertextual referents.
 27. *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot*, ed. Frank Kermode (London, 1975), p. 153.
 28. Barthes, 'Theory of the Text', p. 39.