**Keats in his letters, on distance and illness**

“that it would be no bad thing to be the favourite of some Fairy, who would give one the power of seeing how our friends got on, at a Distance.”

“I should wish to give you a picture of our Lives here whenever by a touch I can do it; even as you must see by the last sentence our walk past Whitehall all in good health and spirits.”

“You did not say a word about your Chilblains—Write me directly and let me know about them—Your Letter shall be answered like an echo.”

“every man who can row his boat and walk and talk seems a different being from myself—I do not feel in the world.”

“When I send this round I shall be in the front parlour watching to see you show yourself for a minute in the garden. How illness stands as a barrier betwixt me and you!”

“take it calmly—and let your health be the prime consideration. I hope you will have a Son, and it is one of my first wishes to have him in my Arms—which I will do please God before he cuts one double tooth.”

“I look forward, with a good hope, that we shall one day be passing free, untrammelled, unanxious time together.”

“sometimes I fancy an immense separation, and sometimes, as at present, a direct communication of spirit with you. That will be one of the grandeurs of immortality—there will be no space and consequently the only commerce between spirits will be by their intelligence of each other—when they will completely understand each other—while we in this world merely comp[r]ehend each other in different degrees—“

**To Autumn**

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,

Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;

Conspiring with him how to load and bless

With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;

To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,

And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;

To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells

With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,

And still more, later flowers for the bees,

Until they think warm days will never cease,

For summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?

Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find

Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,

Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;

Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,

Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook

Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:

And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep

Steady thy laden head across a brook;

Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,

Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?

Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—

While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,

And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;

Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn

Among the river sallows, borne aloft

Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;

And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;

Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft

The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;

And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

**Oliver Burkeman on the news**:

for a certain segment of the population, the news has come to fill up more and more time—and, more subtly, to occupy centre stage in our subjective sense of reality, so that the world of national politics and international crises can feel more important, even more truly real, than the concrete immediacy of our families, neighbourhoods and workplaces. It’s not simply that we spend too many hours glued to screens. It’s that for some of us, at least, they have altered our way of being in the world such that the news is no longer one aspect of the backdrop to our lives, but the main drama.

[…] According to a principle dating back to the Enlightenment, responsible democratic citizens are those who strive to keep informed about the nation and the wider world—a duty that has been held to be especially critical during times of rising authoritarianism. Today, though, this principle is often taken to imply a duty not to turn away from the news. The instinct to look elsewhere is treated as both a sign of privilege and an obliviousness to that luxury. If you’re not outraged, you’re not paying attention. It is increasingly taken as a given that in order to help, or even just signal solidarity with, those most directly affected by the events reported in the news—undocumented immigrants facing the Trump administration’s cruelties, say—it is morally obligatory to remain immersed in the news itself.

It’s becoming clear, however, that there is a problem with this attitude, quite apart from the impact on our personal happiness. There are reasons to believe that a society in which so many people are so deeply invested in the emotional dramas of the news is far from the embodiment of an ideal democracy—that, on the contrary, this level of personal engagement with news is a symptom of the damage that has been done to our public life.

If our interest in news has evolutionary origins, that’s because there are obvious survival advantages in staying aware of local and immediate threats to one’s own life and tribe. One major achievement of civilisation is that we’ve expanded our capacity for caring to include news that doesn’t affect us personally, but where we might be able to make a difference, whether by voting or volunteering or donating. But the modern attention economy exploits both these urges, not to help us stay abreast of threats, or improve the lives of others, but to generate profits for the attention merchants. So it pummels us ceaselessly with incident, regardless of whether it truly matters, and with human suffering, regardless of whether it’s in our power to relieve it. The belief that we’re morally obliged to stay plugged in—that this level of time commitment and emotional investment is the only way to stay informed about the state of the world—begins to look more and more like an alibi for our addiction to our devices.

**Keats on social media (sort of!) and cancelled happiness:**

“Twelve days have pass’d since your last reached me—what has gone through the myriads of human Minds since the 12th we talk of the immense number of Books, the Volumes ranged thousands by thousands—but perhaps more goes through the human intelligence in 12 days than was ever written.”

“I have never known unalloy’d Happiness for many days together: the death or sickness of some one has always spoilt my hours.”

It is a flaw

In happiness to see beyond our bourn—

It forces us in summer skies to mourn,

It spoils the singing of the Nightingale.

**Nissim Ezekiel:**

Writing is and has always been a solitary business. But history is a sweep of events, a sweep of people, and so by its nature history can never be solitary. As a poet, it is a contradiction that I have felt most strongly: that the nature of my avocation demanded withdrawal and that simultaneously events that were taking place outside demanded that I be connected with them.

**Jerome McGann:**

I do not mean to derogate from Keats’s poem, but to suggest what is involved in so illusive a work as “To Autumn” and in all the so-called escapist poetry which so many readers have found so characteristic of Romanticism […] This is the reflexive world of Romantic art, the very negation of the negation itself, wherein all events are far removed from the Terror, King Ludd, Peterloo, the Six Acts, and the recurrent financial crises of the Regency, and where humanity escapes the inconsequence of George IV, the absurd Prince Regent, the contemptible Wellington.

**Claudia Rankine, from *Citizen*:**

The rain this morning pours from the gutters and everywhere else it is lost in the trees. You need your glasses to single out what you know is there because doubt is inexorable; you put on your glasses. The trees, their bark, their leaves, even the dead ones, are more vibrant wet. Yes, and it’s raining. Each moment is like this—before it can be known, categorized as similar to another thing and dismissed, it has to be experienced, it has to be seen. What did he just say? Did she really just say that? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth? The moment stinks. Still you want to stop looking at the trees. You want to walk out and stand among them. And as light as the rain seems, it still rains down on you.

**from Martin Carter’s “Ode to Midnight” and “Defining Freedom and the Nation Under Question”:**

O, midnight hour, why must thy time be sad?

What stands out most forcibly during slavery and at the abolition of slavery? The flight of the slave from the plantation. Who has not read of slaves escaping from estates and attempting to set up homesteads in the jungle? Who has not heard of the desperate flight of the slaves from the plantation and the hunting down of these slaves by Amerindians hired for the purpose by the slave owners? […] I suggest that this general flight from the plantation is not only a simple flight but also a profound search. It is, I contend, not only a search for identity as such, but indeed a search for the self lost in the circumstances of slavery.

Art thou not like the other hours of night?

E’en though the day and all its hours had

The smile of sunbeams, thou too has thy light.

For every even when the sun declines

And takes its couch beyond the western world

The stars awake and Venus first doth glow

Why, darkened hour, must all joy be furled

Or sorrow show?

Hark! now I hear a wind’s quick tongue outpour

A tale of grief into the listening leaves

No! ‘tis not like a saddened lover’s poor

And stammering voice while as he grieves

He speaks, and burdens every ear and heart.

No, it is like defiance ‘gainst black fate

And it is like the spirit’s mighty quest

Of Truth and Life which never shall abate

Or seek for rest.

**Keats on the defencelessness of the present moment:**

“This is the world—thus we cannot expect to give way many hours to pleasure—Circumstances are like Clouds continually gathering and bursting—While we are laughing the seed of some trouble is put into the wide arable land of events—while we are laughing it sprouts it grows and suddenly bears a poison fruit which we must pluck”

**from *Isabella***

With her two brothers this fair lady dwelt,

Enriched from ancestral merchandize,

And for them many a weary hand did swelt

In torched mines and noisy factories,

And many once proud-quiver'd loins did melt

In blood from stinging whip;—with hollow eyes

Many all day in dazzling river stood,

To take the rich-ored driftings of the flood.

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,

And went all naked to the hungry shark;

For them his ears gush'd blood; for them in death

The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark

Lay full of darts; for them alone did seethe

A thousand men in troubles wide and dark:

Half-ignorant, they turn’d an easy wheel,

That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel.

Why were they proud? Because their marble founts

Gush'd with more pride than do a wretch's tears?—

Why were they proud? Because fair orange-mounts

Were of more soft ascent than lazar stairs?—

Why were they proud? Because red-lin’d accounts

Were richer than the songs of Grecian years?—

Why were they proud? again we ask aloud,

Why in the name of Glory were they proud?

**Frederic Jameson on colonialism:**

colonialism means that a significant structural segment of the economic system as a whole is now located elsewhere, beyond the metropolis, outside of the daily life and existential experience of the home country […] Such spatial disjunction has as its immediate consequence the inability to grasp the way the system functions as a whole.

**and finally, two pictures of us glued to our phones?**

with hollow eyes

Many all day in dazzling river stood,

To take the rich-ored driftings of the flood.

And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep

Steady thy laden head across a brook;

Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,

Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.