Abstract – This paper attempts to establish a conceptual connection between Keats’s historicism and his pastoral idealization of the pre-industrial English countryside and English yeomanry. The Keats scholar Ronald A. Sharp, for example, correctly notes the “purely pragmatic” nature of Keats’s “new humanized religion” of poesy, that is, the instrumental role Keats ascribes to poetry and art and aesthetics generally in affirming the pain and suffering of life. However, Sharp fails to notice the theoretical relationship between the instrumentalism of Keats’s historicism and his romantic idealization of the pre-industrial pastoral world. I argue that the uniqueness of Keats’s historicism lies not only in its radical secular humanism and lack of transcendentalism, as Sharp correctly argues. Rather, the English poet’s historicism is unique in that it is also predicated upon a recognition of the necessity and even desirability of radical social and economic dissolution, a dissolution that makes a romantic elegy such as “To Autumn” possible and necessary and even desirable.

Keywords: historicism; pastoral; aesthetics; industrialism, transcendentalism