

John Keats in Sensing:
Poetry, Perception, and
Phenomenology

Dissertation
zur
Erlangung des akademischen Grades
Doktor der Philosophie
in der Philosophischen Fakultät
der Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

vorgelegt von

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Hongkong

2022

Gedruckt mit Genehmigung der Philosophischen Fakultät
der Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

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Tag der mündlichen Prüfung: 23. Juli 2021

Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen: TOBIAS-lib

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Acknowledgements

This project can morph into the current shape because of a series of delightful serendipities throughout my four-year doctoral study in Tübingen. I was very fortunate from the very beginning to have Professor Christoph Reinfandt to be my primary supervisor. From our first meeting back in 2015 to the final stage of the dissertation, Christoph showed unwavering support for my study and was always available when I needed help. Crucially, from his impressively wide-ranging knowledge and systematic way of thinking, I learned how to situate my arguments in larger contexts to make the findings more valuable to other researchers. Together with Christoph, my secondary supervisor Professor Ingrid Hotz-Davies gracefully disentangled many Gordian knots of my project. Her comments on my very first draft helped me tremendously improve the methodology of this phenomenological reading of Keats from the outset. Her acumen and resourcefulness always impressed me. My external examiner Professor Angela Esterhammer at the University of Toronto read my dissertation with care and wrote her report with warmth and great generosity. Her kindness and expert comments are valuable for me as an early career researcher. I also thank Professor Christoph Bode for his suggestions and encouragement at various stages of my research. The whole project began with a hunch after my exchange in Freiburg in my undergraduate days. It was Professor Michael O’Sullivan at my alma mater the Chinese University of Hong Kong who first suggested Merleau-Ponty to me when my ideas were still embryonic. As this study is on Keats, I am indebted to my first teacher of English Literature Professor Li Ou, who introduced me to Keats’s “To Autumn” in my first year of studies and later shepherded me to be a Keatsian when I wrote my MPhil thesis.

When it came to phenomenology, I felt a sense of belatedness, which was luckily compensated by the fruitful research stay at the Centre for Subjectivity Research in Copenhagen in September 2019. The Director Professor Dan Zahavi and other members showed me hospitality and genuine interest in my project, and their feedback on my presentation and drafts strengthened my philosophical framework. I was also very fortunate to be a junior fellow at the Center for Interdisciplinary and Intercultural Studies in Tübingen, and the fabulous programme on the topic of

belonging allowed me to learn from other dedicated phenomenologists. The Director Dr. Niels Weidtmann promotes interdisciplinary research with vision and passion.

Many ideas developed from stimulating conversations with friends and colleagues. I am grateful to everyone in the colloquium who carefully read my drafts and offered me useful feedback. Lukas Müsel and Mascha Wieland were very generous to be my comrades to read Merleau-Ponty together; our friendship and exchange of ideas went beyond the reading group. Todd Dearing, Sally Jin, Flora Mak, and Gregor Bös read my drafts with their expertise and gave me helpful recommendations. Florian Neuner was always ready to help when I had questions about philosophy. Natalie Walker, my first friend in the English Department, was supportive and caring throughout my study. Beyond the immediate academic circle, I got inspiration and benefited from the friendship with Leendert van Doorn, Justus Dries, Jordi Jordana, and Robert Stenzel, whose intellectual curiosity reminded me of the sheer joy of reading.

The whole project was funded by the German Academic Scholarship Foundation (*Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes*). Their generous financial and research support allowed me to present my ideas in many international conferences, conduct research in Denmark, and take a language course in France. The Foundation also provided me with networking opportunities to meet many brilliant students and fellow researchers.

A version of Chapter One first appeared in *Philosophy and Literature*, Volume 45, Number 2, October 2021, pages 279-294, © 2021 Johns Hopkins University Press; a shorter version of Chapter Four was published in the special issue of *Keats's Odes, 200 Years On* of *Études Anglaises*, Volume 73, Number 2, 2020, pages 186-202; Chapter Five develops from an article published in *The Keats-Shelley Journal*, Volume 69, 2020, pages 57-81. I thank the editors and anonymous readers for their meticulous reading and constructive feedback.

Abbreviations

Works by John Keats:

- CP* *Complete Poems*, edited by Jack Stillinger, The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1982; all citations of Keats's poetry refer to this edition.
- KC* *The Keats Circle*, edited by Hyder Edward Rollins, Cambridge UP, 1965. 2 vols.
- KL* *The Letters of John Keats*, edited by Hyder Edward Rollins, Cambridge UP, 1958. 2 vols; misspellings and grammatical mistakes are original; Rollins uses square brackets ([]) for editorial insertions and curly brackets ({ }) for fillings of missing letters; the angle brackets (< >) for Keats's cancellations are replaced by a ~~strikethrough~~.
- KPP* *Keats's Poetry and Prose*, edited by Jeffrey N. Cox, W. W. Norton, 2009.

Works by Maurice Merleau-Ponty:

- PP* *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Donald A. Landes, Routledge, 2012; words in square brackets are added by Landes.
- PW* *The Prose of the World*, edited by Claude Lefort, translated by John O'Neil, Northwestern UP, 1964.
- S* *Signs*, translated by Richard C. McCleary, Northwestern UP, 1964.
- WP* *The World of Perception*, translated by Oliver Davis, Routledge, 2004.
- VI* *The Visible and the Invisible*, edited by Claude Lefort, translated by Alphonso Lingis, Northwestern UP, 2000.

The page numbers in square brackets refer to the French editions.

Works by Others:

- BT* Martin Heidegger. *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Harper & Row, 2008.
- Crisis* Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: an Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*. Translated by David Carr, Northwestern UP, 1970.
- Ideas I* Edmund Husserl, *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*,

translated by Daniel O. Dahlstrom, Hackett, 2014.

NA Wallace Stevens, *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and Imagination*, Faber & Faber, 1951.

OP Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*, edited by Samuel French Morse, Faber & Faber, 1957.

Introduction: The Sense of Sensing

In a letter dated 22 November 1817, Keats avows to his would-be clergyman friend Benjamin Bailey, “O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!” (*KL* 1: 185) Notwithstanding this well-known proclamation, Keats also enumerates many of his thoughtful speculations about truth. One “truth” that preoccupies his mind is a lately found defining quality of “Men of Genius,” who, in contrast to “Men of Power,” are endowed with malleable individuality and character that can be compared to “certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect” (1: 184). While the adjective “certain” betrays that this speculation is but a thought in the making, Keats has more certitude when speaking about a second credo: “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart’s affections and the truth of Imagination—What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not” (1: 184). Suspending metaphysical skepticism about objects’ existence, Keats proposes an alternative to the “truth by consequitive reasoning,” that is the intuitive truth of imagination as in “Adam’s dream—he awoke and found it truth” (1: 185). It is, in other words, a perceptual truth that precedes reflection and doubt, and Keats further conjectures that even philosophical inquiries presuppose this possibility of truth: “Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever ~~when~~ arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections” (1: 185). With this alternative truth, Keats offers “another favorite Speculation” of his—the hereafter is nothing more than an accentuation of the experience of the here and now: “we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated—And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation rather than hunger as you do after Truth” (1: 185). Keats’s evocation of the afterlife is less a concession to a Christian belief than an affirmation of this life of experience: “Adam’s dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its spiritual repetition” (1: 185). The mind that Keats seeks thinks in a relational manner and partakes in the sensible world, where, as Keats describes, “The setting sun will always set me to rights—or if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel” (1: 186). Keats “sometimes feel[s] not the influence of a Passion or Affection during a whole week” (1: 186), but what he means is that, even in numbness, he feels

not enough rather than nothing. The truth that this sensing mind arrives at has an experiential aspect, and this directedness of the mind towards the world not only permeates Keats's poetry and poetics but also hints at a central concern of phenomenology in the twentieth century—the intentionality of consciousness.

In spite of his elevation of sensation over thought, Keats in fact postulates a way of thinking that can understand human experience as truth instead of its opposition, for his ideal is ultimately “a complex Mind—one that is imaginative and at the same time careful of its fruits—who would exist partly on sensation partly on thought” (*KL* 1: 186). This self-reflexive, imaginative mind, on the one hand, ties in with the hallmark of the subjective turn in modern philosophy; on the other hand, with its awareness of its “fruits” and capabilities of “sensation” and “thought,” such a mind also exposes a fundamental problem in the Cartesian *cogito* that phenomenology aims to rectify. Edmund Husserl, the founding father of phenomenology, in his Paris Lectures “Introduction to Transcendental Phenomenology” in 1929, which later developed into *Cartesian Meditations*, pays tribute to Descartes. Considering phenomenology as a rigorous science that inquires into the structure of the first-person experience, Husserl acknowledges Descartes as the trailblazer of the “radical conversion from naive objectivism to *transcendental subjectivism*” and regards phenomenology as “a new, a twentieth century, Cartesianism” (5, 3).¹ For Husserl, Descartes's method of doubt demonstrates a philosopher's task to unlearn all prior knowledge in order to “to discover an absolutely secure starting point and rules of procedure” (3-4). Every genuine philosophical inquiry begins within the philosophers themselves.

Yet, Husserl sets out to go further than Descartes. He holds that philosophy in its radical sense can live up to “the spirit of science” that demands indisputable evidence (6). Whereas positive scientists unreflectively accept the sensible world as their foundation of knowledge, Husserl argues that the validity of the experience of this world cannot be simply accepted as such and still calls for further verification (6-7). Subjected to this critical scrutiny, the phenomenal world however does not vanish but manifests itself as the very reality, for any repudiation needs to admit its true existence in the first place for such a denial (7). Through this reflection, the world, together with “the whole stream of experienced life and all its particulars, the

¹ Conceptual terms in German are added by me in square brackets.

appearances of objects, other people, cultural situations, etc.,” does not change, but this reality is no longer naively taken for granted but anchored in the foundation of *cogitationes*, i.e., thinking: “*The whole meaning [Sinn] and validity of being [Seinsgeltung] rests exclusively on such cogitationes*” (7-8, translation modified). In exercising this phenomenological epoché, a suspension of the naïve natural attitude that takes the everyday world for granted,² Husserl seeks to return to intentional acts of experiencing, perceiving, remembering, thinking, judging, and believing, to reveal Descartes’s serious neglect in *ego cogito*, that is *cogitatum*, the object of consciousness, and to refashion the schema as *ego cogito cogitatum*: “I will learn that the world and how the world is for me the *cogitatum* of my *cogitationes*” (12, 14-15). A full portrayal of *ego cogito* demands an account of the directedness or intentionality of consciousness. As Husserl puts it, “Consciousness is always consciousness of something” (13). This phenomenological undertaking should also equally avoid a psychological interpretation of consciousness as a composite of sense data, since an “honest description of the unadulterated data of experience” first and foremost begins with the subjective perspective of appearance (13, 19). In rejecting an objective view according to which the world can be understood in a depersonalised way, Husserl reinterprets the notion of evidence as “showing itself” (*Selbsterscheinung*) and thereby posits truth as a correlate of the subjective intentionality (22-23). It is this phenomenological sense of truth that characterises the intuitive givenness of Adam’s dream that Keats describes: Adam awakes and experiences his world as true prior to any objectification.

Such great emphasis on the subjective aspect of consciousness may impart a solipsistic impression of phenomenology, a possible misunderstanding that Husserl himself also anticipated. In the Lectures, Husserl stresses that phenomenology is never a solipsistic enterprise, since this world is not private but intersubjective; the investigation of *ego* will ultimately lead to further reflection on *alter ego*: “I experience the world not as my own private world, but as an intersubjective world, one that is given to all human beings and which contains objects accessible to all. In it

² Husserl in *Crisis* further clarifies that philosophers also live with this natural attitude of everyday life but the phenomenological epoché suspends such an attitude and allows them to gain “a new way of experiencing, of thinking, of theorizing” but “lose[] nothing of their being and their objective truth” (152; §41).

others exist as others, as well as for each other, as being there for anyone” (34-35). This sensible world is therefore open not only to me but also to the others as my real “co-experienced” minds (35). Only with regard to this intersubjective understanding of the world can one meaningfully speak of “a universal philosophy” in the sense that Descartes envisions (36). These themes of embodied experience and intersubjectivity are of growing importance in Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology and become the central concerns in his last major work *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, in which he develops the concept of a life-world (*Lebenswelt*) that is experienced by a “living body” (*Leib*) instead of a physical one (*Körper*), and serves as the basis of validity (107, §28). It is this later Husserl that inspired another influential phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who not only attended Husserl’s lectures in 1929 but also later took the trouble to travel to Louvain in April 1939 to consult the then unpublished materials in the new Husserl Archives.³ Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception* decisively centres phenomenology on the subject’s embodiment, a move that will facilitate this study’s ensuing discussion of the philosophical implications of Keats’s poetics of sensuousness.

Merleau-Ponty’s preface to *Phenomenology of Perception* is a defence not only of Husserl’s phenomenological reduction and intentionality but also of his own

³ Out of the premonition of the Nazi anti-Semitism, the Franciscan Father Van Breda transported Husserl’s manuscripts from Freiburg to Louvain in the fall of 1938. Merleau-Ponty was the first researcher outside Louvain to consult these materials. In a letter to Van Breda dated 20 March 1939, he requested to study Husserl’s unpublished materials and his posthumous work *Experience and Judgement* (*Erfahrung und Urteil*) for his work *Phenomenology of Perception*. Merleau-Ponty remained a steadfast supporter of disseminating Husserl’s late philosophy in France and saw through the establishment of the Centre for Husserl Archives at the Sorbonne in 1958. For further details of Merleau-Ponty’s research at the Husserl Archives in Louvain and their collaboration, see H. L. Van Breda, “Merleau-Ponty and the Husserl Archives at Louvain” in *Texts and Dialogues: On Philosophy, Politics, and Culture*, pp. 150-61. There was a circulating view among early scholars of Merleau-Ponty that Husserl was a solipsistic idealist; for a revisionary account and the influence of Husserl on Merleau-Ponty, see the collected volume *Merleau-Ponty’s Reading of Husserl* edited by Ted Toadvine and Lester Embree.

philosophical interest in the milieu of the opaque sensible world, an aspect not so much foregrounded in Husserl's philosophy. For Merleau-Ponty, it is a distortion to interpret phenomenological reduction as a "return to a transcendental consciousness in front of which the world is spread out in an absolute transparency" and to equate the reduction with a "transcendental idealism [that] strips the world of its opacity and its transcendence" (*PP* lxxiv-lxxv). Such "reflective analysis is unaware of the problem of others [*autrui*], just as it is unaware of the problem of the world," and the desired transparency presents a world and others "without *haecceity* [thisness], without place, and without a body" (lxxv). For Merleau-Ponty, such an idealist interpretation is a disservice to the "true sense" of Husserl's phenomenological reduction, as he points out: "For Husserl, however, we know that there is indeed a problem of others, and the *alter ego* [the other myself] is a paradox" (lxxiv, lxxvi). This promising paradox in Husserl's analysis of intersubjectivity for him is the valuable recognition of the very embodiment of the *ego* and *alter ego*, who "are defined by their situation and are not set free from all inherence" (lxxvi). Husserl's phenomenological reduction for Merleau-Ponty therefore reveals the opacity of existence rather than the certainty of thought:

The true *Cogito* does not define the existence of the subject through the thought that the subject has of existing, does not convert the certainty of the world into a certainty of the thought about the world, and finally, does not replace the world itself with the signification "world." Rather, it recognizes my thought as an inalienable fact and it eliminates all forms of idealism by revealing me as "being in the world." (lxxviii)

In doing so, Merleau-Ponty not only puts an existentialist spin on phenomenological reduction but also shows Heidegger's indebtedness to Husserl.

This paradoxical nature of phenomenology is more telling regarding Merleau-Ponty's own concerns than Husserl's philosophy. For Merleau-Ponty, what lies at the core of Husserl's phenomenology is the paradox of perpetual phenomenological reduction: "The most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction. This is why Husserl always wonders anew about the possibility" (lxxviii). Husserl in the Paris Lectures mentions that "beginning philosophers" (*anfangende Philosophen*) strive to overcome the prejudice of sciences and attend to the "immediate and mediate evidences" of a "pre-scientific life" (6). Yet, it is Merleau-Ponty who, in light of Husserl's unpublished materials of *Crisis*, foregrounds

the notion of “the philosopher [as] a perpetual beginner,” highlighting the self-reflexivity of phenomenology (*PP* lxxviii). Merleau-Ponty insists that “philosophy is an ever-renewed experiment of its own beginning, that it consists entirely in describing this beginning, and finally, that radical reflection is conscious of its own dependence on an unreflected life that is its initial, constant, and final situation” (lxxviii). In stressing the foundation of the “unreflected life” for reflection, Merleau-Ponty further elaborates on Husserl’s distinction between “act intentionality” and “operative intentionality”: while the former is “the intentionality of our judgments and of our voluntary decisions,” the latter designates the more primordial pre-reflective and pre-linguistic experience:

Operative intentionality is the one that provides the text that our various forms of knowledge attempt to translate into precise language. The relation to the world, such as it tirelessly announces itself within us, is not something that analysis might clarify: philosophy can simply place it before our eyes and invite us to take notice. (lxxxii)

Merleau-Ponty thereby ascribes an ironic quality to phenomenology: “The unfinished nature of phenomenology and the inchoate style in which it proceeds are not the sign of failure; they were inevitable because phenomenology’s task was to reveal the mystery of the world and the mystery of reason” (lxxxv). Much less concerned about the transcendental subjects that are “the mature and normal human beings” than Husserl (*Crisis* 187; §55), Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, complains about “classical authors[?] indifferen[ce] to animals, children, madmen and primitive peoples” (*WP* 71). With opacity and mystery, *vis-à-vis* transparency and reason, as the watchwords of phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty arguably proposes a strand in phenomenology that engages with what Keats famously calls “*Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason” (*KL* 1: 193). As this study will show, what lies behind this verbal resonance is the philosopher’s and the poet’s shared concerns about the primacy of an embodied consciousness that permeates a life of sensations.

This study is an endeavour to philosophise Keats’s sensuousness, which has often been regarded more as a literary style rather than as a fully developed poetics, in light of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of embodiment, an aspect that has not been

expounded in previous phenomenological interpretations.⁴ The earliest attempt to read Keats through Merleau-Ponty is Marjorie Norris's article "Phenomenology and Process: Perception in Keats's 'I Stood Tip-Toe'" (1976), which derived from her doctoral dissertation, a comparative phenomenological study of Keats and Wallace Stevens. Norris in the article highlights the experiential aspect of reality and shows how "[t]he perceiving subject . . . and the perceived world . . . are linked through the body" in the poem (44). Yet, given inadequate elaboration and contextualisation of some philosophically loaded concepts such as "reality" and "meaning-giving" (*Sinngebung*), the argument is generally valid to all poetry that depicts perceptual experience. The most extensive phenomenological analysis of Keats so far is Shahidha Bari's *Keats and Philosophy: The Life of Sensations* (2012), which offers many new insights into the phenomenality of Keats's less canonical poems. For Bari, Keats is "thoughtful as well as sensuous" and his poetry suggests "a relational subjectivity," "a self-sensing subject that is bound by its complex relationships both with others and to the places in which it finds itself" (xiii, xvi). Surprisingly, in spite of drawing on a wide array of philosophers in the phenomenological tradition, such as Martin Heidegger, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Luc Nancy, there is a curious absence of Merleau-Ponty, as Carmen Casaliggi points out in her book review. Covering themes of "the nature of touch, the evocation of presence, the poetics of ecology, the thinking of freedom, and the weight of grief" (Bari xiii), the scope of Bari's work is impressive but at the expense of coherence. As Bari herself remarks, the reading of each chapter is "discrete and detachable from the broader argument" (xiii). In order to maintain a more forceful and sustained argument, this study, similar to the design of Tom Marshall's recently published monograph on Husserl and Coleridge (2020), mainly draws on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to examine the philosophical underpinnings of the embodied experience in Keats's poetry. The poems discussed are mostly canonical, for a reappraisal of a sensuous

⁴ See, for example, Pison, "A Phenomenological Approach to Keats's 'To Autumn'" (1976); Rajan, "Teaching Keats from the Standpoint of a Deconstructive Phenomenology" (1991); Gonsalves, "The Encrypted Prospect: Existentialist Phenomenology, Deconstruction and Speculative Realism in 'To Autumn'" (2013); Kosky, "For a Phenomenology of Happiness: John Keats and the Practice of Epoché" (2015); Falke, "Negatively Capable Reading" (2019).

Keats necessitates a return to the origin of this persistent idea in these familiar works. It is however less a comparison between Keats and Merleau-Ponty than a phenomenological inquiry into the ontological questions in Keats's poetry and poetics. This rereading of Keats pursues a twofold goal: on the one hand, Merleau-Ponty's comprehensive account of perceptual experience offers a conceptual framework for bringing Keats's sensuousness into a dialogue with central philosophical topics such as thingness, reality, alterity, language, and temporality; Keats's poetry, on the other hand, accentuates the poetic quality of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology for further deliberation on the relationship between phenomenology and aesthetics.

A phenomenological account with a focus on the ontological rather than physiological aspect also helps advance the current study of the body in Romantic scholarship that mainly adopts a historicist approach. As Keats was an exceptional medical student who managed to pass the qualifying exam in a short time to practise as an apothecary, a physician, and a surgeon, there is a long tradition of research on the influence of his medical knowledge of sick bodies on his poetry, from Donald C. Goellnicht's *The Poet-Physician: Keats and Medical Science* (1984) and Hermione de Almeida's *Romantic Medicine and John Keats* (1991) to Nicholas Roe's recently edited volume *John Keats and the Medical Imagination* (2017), Hrileena Ghosh's *John Keats' Medical Notebook: Text, Context, and Poems* (2020), and Robert White's *Keats's Anatomy of Melancholy: Lamia, Isabella, the Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems (1820)* (2020). Nevertheless, it would also be beneficial to differentiate between an objectified body in a medical context and a lived body in lived experience in the transference of concepts, for the poet, while very knowledgeable about science, first and foremost communicates human experience. Alan Richardson's *British Romanticism and the Science of Mind* (2001) shows how a materialist account of the mind in brain science in the late 18th century challenges the mind-body dualism and informs Romantic poetry, yet the "embodied mind" that Richardson refers to is synonymous with the neurophysiological brain. Although the "Romantic psychologies" advocated by the brain scientists for Richardson concurred with an active mind that is "biological rather mechanistic," this mind is described as "an active processor" (6). Noel Jackson's *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry* (2008) similarly situates the Romantic aesthetics of sensation in "an empiricist intellectual context" but further highlights its political and social dimensions (4).

While Jackson proposes “a unique phenomenology of literary experience” and a “phenomenology of literary valuation” in Keats (172, 188), his interchangeable use of the terms “senses,” “sensation,” “sensuousness,” and “sensibility” obfuscates phenomenology’s rejection of the empiricist take on sense experience as sense data. These valuable historicist studies illuminate the previously submerged embodied aspect of Romantic subjectivity but too strong an emphasis on a materialist mind also runs the risk of reducing the lived experience in poetry to states of mind.

Hence, the verbal noun “sensing” in this study’s title aims to distance its agenda from the empiricist and physiological accounts of sensation by highlighting an embodied subject in experience. For Merleau-Ponty, the term “sensation,” although “seemingly clear and straightforward,” is “the most confused notion” (*PP* 3). On the one hand, empiricism reduces perceptual experience into determinate sense data, mistaking “the sensibles” like colours for “sensations” and “a property of the object” for “an element of consciousness”; on the other hand, physiologists endorse a “constancy hypothesis” inherent in the reflex-arc theory, “assuming an anatomical trajectory that leads from a determinate *receiver* through a definite *transmitter* to a recording post, which is itself specialized” (*PP* 3-8). Far from being determinate as these two positions hold, the perceived is on the contrary ambiguous. With Müller-Lyer’s illusion, in which two straight lines of equal length appear differently, Merleau-Ponty illustrates that perception always involves a perceptual field and there is no figure without a background (*PP* 4). The equal or unequal length of the lines in the optical illusion from an objective point of view makes no sense in “natural” perception (*PP* 11). In the actual sensing experience, “the nature of the perceived is to tolerate ambiguity, a certain ‘shifting’ or ‘haziness’ [*bougé*], and to allow itself to be shaped by the context” (*PP* 11). In Keats’s words, the classical notion of sensation lacks the negatively capable quality: “The theory of sensation, which composes all knowledge out of determinate qualities, constructs objects for us that are cleansed of all equivocation, that are pure, absolute, and that are the ideal of knowledge rather than its actual themes” (*PP* 11). The indeterminacy of the sensible in fact defines the sense of sensing. As Donald Landes in his new translation of *Phenomenology of Perception* notes, the denotations of the French word *sense* are equally ambiguous, as it can refer to “meaning,” “sense,” and “direction” (*PP* xlviii). Nevertheless, this polysemous word also tellingly connotes the central tenet of this study of a

phenomenological Keats: the intentionality of a sensing life is always meaningfully directed at a sensible world.

To philosophise Keats is however not to subsume his thoughts to one specific school but to uncover the potential of poetic language for addressing human existence. While Keats's avowal of "a Life of Sensation rather than of Thought" is the basis for a "philosophic Mind" after years (*KL* 1: 185-86), Merleau-Ponty flirts with metaphorical expression in his philosophical writings, since philosophy and literature for him both creatively exploits the limits of language to communicate the mystery of Being. Merleau-Ponty regards "philosophy as supreme art: for art and philosophy *together* are . . . contact with Being precisely as creations. Being is *what requires creation of us* for us to experience it" (*VI* 197). Poetry, in particular with its self-reflexivity, epitomises such interdependence between visible materiality and invisible meaning in expression. Contending that form is meaningful, this investigation of Keats's proto-phenomenological thought, although not aspiring to be a study of poetic form *per se* that has already been remarkably undertaken by Stuart Curran, Susan Wolfson, and David Duff, pays attention to how Keats refashions poetic genres to reflect on philosophical problems related to perception that are not necessarily specific to Keats or Romanticism.

Keats's notion of the vale of soul-making remains his most coherent and thoughtful philosophical inquiry into the suffering body in the world, thus providing an entry point to his existential view of a sensing life. Chapter One shows that Keats's secular view of suffering attends to the potentiality of a mortal body in fashioning identities for a modern subject. Understanding suffering as a sense-making process, Keats thereby exhibits the notion of the body that shows more affinity with Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the primary role of perception in knowledge than with Locke's empiricist account of sensation. Turning to the ever-unfolding pre-reflective experience, Merleau-Ponty concedes the limits of reasoning in the face of an opaque world and things' plenitude that Keats also dramatises in his *Endymion*. Chapter Two contrasts Endymion's abstraction of the moon-goddess and the narrator's celebration of earthly things that evade the hero's idealisation. Meta-poetically, Keats's *Endymion* itself is also a thing that cannot be exhausted in one single reading. This chapter hence situates Keats's famous line "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever" in Merleau-Ponty's view of things' indeterminacy for a perceiving subject. Endymion's quest romance therefore is also a tension between the abstract and the real. Chapter

Three continues this thread of the experiential reality of things but shows how Keats shifts the focus from subjectivity to intersubjectivity and complicates the problem by juxtaposing contrasting frameworks of reality in his new romances. These romances portray the dreaming, mourning, or enthralled worlds as the subjects' first and foremost real worlds, whose structures however rely on the validation of other co-experiencing subjects. *Lamia*, in particular, captures how the world of romance is subject to the challenge of the world of reason, dramatising the eclipse of experiential reality in the face of the preponderant scientific discourse of objective reality. These three chapters revolve around Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the transcendence of the sensible world, paving the way for later discussions of the human world.

Chapter Four highlights how Keats's humanised addressees bring forth the ethics of perception. Situating Keats in "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on a Grecian Urn" in the lyric tradition, this chapter argues that these two odes display an acute sense of alterity, through which Keats refashions lyric poetry into a genre predicated on the expression of intersubjectivity. In dramatising an antithetical nightingale and an enigmatic urn, Keats's odes portray a heightened self-consciousness of being the other, exemplifying Merleau-Ponty's concept of the reversibility between perceiver and perceived, self and other in his notion of flesh. Attending to the resistance of the other, Keats further shows the potential of lyric poetry for addressing alterity. The issue of alterity extends to the problem of representing the other in narrative in Keats's *Hyperion* project. Chapter Five draws a parallel between Keats's struggle to overcome the representational illusion in narrative and Merleau-Ponty's experiential understanding of expression. The narrator's and the Titans' failed signification in the *Hyperions* prefigures Merleau-Ponty's dialectics between expression and silence. Keats's epics enact the ironies of telling that which cannot be told in words and discoursing about that which resists discourse, exhibiting critical self-reflexivity of language. Keats's depiction of a language in process ties in with the experiencing moment that he traces in "To Autumn." Chapter Six discusses the phenomenology of the lyric present in this last great ode and broadens the notion of historicity. In spite of the absent self-references of the speaker, this poem skilfully condenses a wide temporal field in a lyric moment that is intertwined with the subject's temporal experience in perception. Drawn to the very present, Keats shares Merleau-Ponty's idea of temporal experience not as a series of time segments but as a living moment that pre-reflectively carries the past and points to the future. The personified autumn

as a temporal object furthermore suggests how a perceived world transcends and feeds into an embodied subject's sense of historicity. Building on the earlier chapters, the conclusion then offers a reappraisal of a sensuous Keats and positions him alongside T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens, who have been extensively read phenomenologically. This comparison shows that Keats's sensuousness anticipates the Modernist preoccupation with the mystery of the world that demands Keats's negative capability and Merleau-Ponty's recognition of the unfinished nature of phenomenology.

Chapter One: Making Sense of the Mortal Body

Among many of Keats's memorable aphorisms, the passage of the vale of soul-making in a letter to his brother and sister-in-law, George and Georgiana, in 1819 remains his most extended meditation on the transient human existence in the mutable world. Keats begins his inquiry by pondering, "How far by the persevering endeavours of a seldom appearing Socrates Mankind may be made happy" in spite of haunting mortality (*KL* 2: 101). For Keats, Socrates's capability of letting the happiness of a virtuous life allay the fear of death seems a rarity. Death lurks in every living moment and is brought to mind by sickness and pain, so the pressing question for Keats is whether possible meanings exist behind suffering. Religiously sceptical, Keats does not divert his attention from the present earthly existence to the hereafter to procure a ready answer. Instead of striving after an ascribed meaning of suffering as in Christian theodicy, Keats proffers his secular "vale of Soul-making": "Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways!" (*KL*, 2: 102) Keats's view of a world of pains and troubles as a school for the soul repudiates the traditional take on suffering as a deviation from the ideal in philosophy and theology. As Mary Rawlinson points out,

Western philosophy, or at least a tradition extending from Plato to Kant through Christian Platonism, proves inappropriate for a treatment of suffering insofar as it fails to locate suffering with respect to the purposive activity of a human subject, identifying it instead with distance or alienation from an ideal order. (40)

Keats affirms that no ideal is to be restored and that suffering is inherent in the world. In the face of inevitable death, Keats does not envision a heavenly refuge but anchors the relationship between human existence and the world in the failing mortal body. Keats's system of the vale of soul-making proposes that one need not fret over the meaning of suffering as in Christianity but can make sense of suffering by thinking through a body susceptible to suffering. This body is not merely a passive receptor of sense data but creates its sense through human interaction with the world.

Phenomenology in the Romantic Tradition

A year earlier, Keats was already struck by Bailey's question, "*Why should Woman suffer?*" and wondered, "Aye. Why should she?" (*KL* 1: 209) Keats's question sounds like mere reverberation, but similar wording does not necessarily convey similar meanings. Unlike his Christian friend Bailey, Keats has to figure out the meaning of suffering in a secular framework and his vale of soul-making is such an attempt. As suffering is the long-standing problem of evil, Keats's search for the meaning of suffering is philosophical, and his return to the contingency of human existence, when compared with Merleau-Ponty's philosophical view, is phenomenological. For Merleau-Ponty, the task of phenomenology goes beyond "the study of essences" and, more essentially, "places essences back within existence and thinks that the only way to understand man and the world is by beginning from their 'facticity'" (*PP* lxx). Merleau-Ponty borrows the term "facticity" from Heidegger, a term to designate the existential character of thrownness of Dasein in contrast to the objectivity of "factuality," *factum brutum* (*BT* 174). The meaning of existence is inseparable for humans' situatedness in the world: "man is in and toward the world, and it is in the world that he knows himself. When I return to myself from the dogmatism of common sense or of science, I do not find a source of intrinsic truth, but rather a subject destined to the world" (*PP* lxxiv). As self-knowledge comes from a continuous life in the world, Merleau-Ponty argues, "The unfinished nature of phenomenology and the inchoate style in which it proceeds are not the sign of failure; they were inevitable because phenomenology's task was to reveal the mystery of the world and the mystery of reason" (*PP* lxxxv). Phenomenology is thus an ongoing sense-making process, which aspires to "reveal" rather than to dispel "the mystery of the world and the mystery of reason." With this candid acknowledgement and acceptance of the opacity of the world, Merleau-Ponty hints at the quality of negative capability "of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (*KL* 1: 193). It is this shared undogmatic temperament towards a world of pains and troubles that suggests an affinity between Keats and Merleau-Ponty. Instead of resorting to causal thinking, Keats with his negative capability understands the engagement with the mysterious world as a process of self-fashioning, recognizes the contingency of the modern subject, and hence anticipates Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.

The resonance between Keats and Merleau-Ponty is therefore not a simple coincidence but belongs to a continuous movement that responds to the schism in modernity between the subject and the world from Romanticism down to phenomenology. Henry H. H. Remak regards Romanticism as a struggle with “an increasing realization of the incurability of the split of the universe”: while the earlier Romanticism “tr[ie]d to heal this breach,” later Romanticism “tended perhaps to see the breach for what it was, to accept it, and to tell mankind to grit its teeth and to proceed on its own” (45-6). Isaiah Berlin in *The Roots of Romanticism* suggests that, in “the more pessimistic version” of Romanticism, there is a sense of “paranoia” about an untameable universe regardless of individuals’ desire for liberation: “There is something behind, there is something in the dark depths of the unconscious, or of history; there is something, at any rate, not seized by us which frustrates our dearest wishes” (106-7). On this affective level, the “Romantic vision,” as Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre describe, is also “characterized by the painful and melancholic conviction that in modern reality something precious has been lost, at the level of both individuals and humanity at large; certain essential human values have been alienated” (21). More specifically in British Romanticism, this sense of lost contact with the world felt by Romantics results from the contestation between Descartes and Locke in the eighteenth century. According to M. H. Abrams, Coleridge, for instance, endeavours to achieve the coalescence of the subject and the object out of his intolerance of Cartesian dualism and Lockean elementarism (94). Michael O’Neil suggests that “the possibility of imaginative life” in Romantic poetry sprouts from the tension between “an absolute self” and “a post-Humean fear that the ‘self’ consists of ‘nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions’” (xvii). This Romantic struggle to come to terms with the alienated self anticipates the philosophical concerns of Merleau-Ponty, who regards phenomenology as an undertaking to resolve the tension between Descartes and Locke from the eighteenth century down to the twentieth century:

Phenomenology’s most important accomplishment is, it would seem, to have joined an extreme subjectivism with an extreme objectivism through its concept of the world or of rationality. Rationality fits precisely to the experiences in which it is revealed. There is rationality—that is, perspectives intersect, perceptions confirm each other, and a sense appears. (*PP* lxxxiv)

Merleau-Ponty's notion of intersection establishes a "phenomenological world," which is "not pure being, but rather the sense that shines forth at the intersection of my experiences and at the intersection of my experiences with those of others through a sort of gearing into each other" (*PP* lxxxiv). This "sense" in the moment of sensing hence cannot be reduced to empiricist or neurophysiological sensations but has to be understood, according to Merleau-Ponty, in the Romantic tradition:

"Sensing" has again become a question for us. Empiricism had emptied sensing of all mystery by reducing it to the possession of a quality, which it could only do by moving away from its normal meaning. Common experience establishes a difference between sensing and knowing that is not the difference between the quality and the concept. This rich notion of sensing is also found in Romantic usage and, for example, in Herder. (*PP* 52)

The resonance Merleau-Ponty finds is Herder's challenge to the belief of the precedence of thought over sensing: "the soul *cognizes* that it *senses*" (208). Accordingly, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology not only addresses similar concerns but also descends from the lineage of Romantic thought of sensing, which is also pursued by Keats in his early contemplation of a "Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts" (*KL* 1: 185) and in his later more elaborate vale of soul-making where identities are formed through the interaction with the world of pains and troubles.

Natural Evil and Being in the World

To understand the interrelationship between human existence and the world in its nascent state, Keats's vale of soul-making grapples with natural rather than moral evil and delves into the contingency of the human condition. In theodicy, the distinction between natural and moral evil designates nonhuman- and human- caused suffering. Keats is aware of this distinction in his inquiry into the problem of evil. In his reading of William Robertson's *The History of America* and Voltaire's *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, which depict two contrasting states of human society, Keats concludes that humans cannot escape "mortal pains" although they are remote from the moral evils such as "Baliffs, Debts and Poverties of civilised Life" (*KL* 2: 100-1). For Keats, suffering constitutes human beings' very existence, as he explains with an echo of Lear's words, "Man is *originally* 'a poor forked creature' *subject* to the same mischances as the beasts of the forest, *destined* to hardships and disquietude of some

kind or other” (2: 101; emphases added). The improvement of “bodily accommodations and comfort” cannot alter the susceptibility of the body to “annoyances” (2: 101). The transience of human existence conditioned by the temporality of a mortal body (“he *is* mortal”) stands in stark contrast with the timelessness of nature (“there *is still* a heaven with its Stars abov[e] his head”). Humans, who perceive themselves as subjects in the modern world, are at the same time subject to the background of the world against which they perform their culture and history.

Cognizant of inescapable natural evil, which inflicts pain on the body, Keats questions the possibility of a co-existence of happiness and the consciousness of death. In this inquiry, Keats thinks of Socrates, who, in spite of his imminent death, proclaims in his apology that death is not an evil but either a mere, single night or a passage to a more just world (35-36). However, what unsettles Keats is not death itself but the haunting consciousness of death:

I can imagine such happiness carried to an extreme—but what must it end in?—Death—and who could in such a case bear with death—the whole troubles of life which are now frittered away in a series of years, would the[n] be accumulated for the last days of a being who instead of hailing its approach, would leave this world as Eve left Paradise—But in truth I do not at all believe in this sort of perfectibility—the nature of the world will not admit of it—the inhabitants of the world will correspond to itself. (*KL* 2: 101)

For Keats, death would be as unbearable as Eve’s expulsion from Paradise if the destination to death were concealed by “happiness carried to an extreme” only until “the last days of a being.” One may still be “hailing [death’s] approach” when “the whole troubles of life” are now seen as a process of being “frittered away in a series of years.” The temporality of human experience is essentially bound up with the consciousness of death; or, in Heidegger’s words, the ontological character of *Dasein* is Being towards death (*BT* 277). Thus, unlike his friend Charles Dilke, “a Godwin perfectibil[it]y Man” (*KL* 1: 397), Keats feels dubious about any claim of perfectibility through social improvements, for mortals always live on the horizon of impending death.

As natural evil constantly brings the shadow of death back to consciousness, Keats is sceptical about a nonchalant attitude towards the suffering in the world that comes with human existence. On the one hand, Keats refuses to seek consolation in

redemption; on the other, he questions the efficacy of philosophical indifference towards suffering:

Let the fish philosophise the ice away from the Rivers in winter time and they shall be at continual play in the tepid delight of summer. Look at the Poles and at the sands of Africa, Whirlpools and volcanoes—Let men exterminate them and I will say that they may arrive at earthly Happiness. (*KL 2: 101*)

Given the frailty of a mortal body, extreme and perilous environments, instead of being exterminated, announce the imminent death of human existence. As part of the “inhabitants of the world,” humans are conditioned by their corporeal bodies as well as the material world. There will be no absolute “earthly Happiness” when life is so vulnerable that it can be crushed at any moment.

The Existential Sense of Sensation

Suffering as a human condition therefore goes beyond pains as a physiological sensation and betrays a wider existential concern. For Locke, pain “signifie[s], whatever . . . molests us; whether it arises from the thoughts of our Minds, or any thing operating on our Bodies” and is “annexed [by God] to the application of many things to our Bodies, to warn us of the harm that they will do; and as advices to withdraw from them” (128-30). Pain for Locke is essentially a causal factor explaining the motivation of humans’ behaviour. This mechanistic understanding of pain is in line with Locke’s idea of passive perception and the mind as a *tabula rasa*: “For in bare naked Perception, the Mind is, for the most part, only passive; and what it perceives, it cannot avoid perceiving” (143). Taught by the famous surgeon Astley Cooper, who “endorsed a brain-based, corporeal approach to mind” (Richardson 120), Keats was also well aware of a physiological explanation of sensation, as he jotted down in his notebook when attending a class on the nervous system at Guy’s Hospital: “[Sensation] is an impression made on the Extremities of the Nerves conveyed to the Brain. . . . Volition is the contrary of sensation it proceeds from the internal to the external parts” (55-56). Yet, the sharp distinction between sensation and volition in Keats’s medical notebook reflects more the materialist inclination in medicine than Keats’s view of human perception. As Stuart Sperry remarks, Keats’s loose use of the term “sensation” “habitually encompasses much more—feeling, sensibility, and the world of interior consciousness” (5-6). Stacey McDowell also

meticulously lists that “sensation” can connote a cluster of cognates such as “the senses,” “sensibility,” “sensitivity,” “sensuousness,” and “sensuality” while the word “sense” can refer to “sensory perception, meaning, intuition, reason, sound judgement” (188). A fuller account of the sensing experience that Keats describes in the vale of soul-making thus has to go beyond the term “sensation” in a medical context in order to highlight its rich suggestiveness and larger existential implications.

For Keats, humans are plagued by the mutability of the world and, as inhabitants of this world, have to endure both pleasure and pain like other creatures:

The point at which Man may arrive is as far as the parallel state in inanimate nature and no further—For instance suppose a rose to have sensation, it blooms on a beautiful morning it enjoys itself—but there comes a cold wind, a hot sun—it can not escape it, it cannot destroy its annoyances—they are as native to the world as itself: no more can man be happy in spite, the world[1]y elements will prey upon his nature.” (*KL 2*: 101)

The inescapable “annoyances” of the “worldly elements” suggest the incessant interaction between the receptive body and the world, which not only brings forth sensations but also heightens awareness of the worldliness of human existence. Keats observes that the sensations brought forth by these “worldly elements” are more than neurotic stimulations, but are experienced as enjoyments or annoyances in the first place, suggesting that the world is meaningfully lived by an embodied subject. With this worldly attitude, Keats deems that the redemption Christianity offers as a refuge from suffering is escapist: “The common cognomen of this world among the misguided and superstitious is ‘a vale of tears’ from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven—What a little circumscribe[d] straightened notion!” (*KL 2*: 101-2) On the contrary, Keats holds that the world is far more than an abode for an immortal soul, discerning the formative influence of the world on the soul: “Call the world if you Please ‘The vale of Soul-making’ Then you will find out the use of the world” (2: 102). From the vale of tears to the vale of soul-making, Keats affirms the interdependence between the soul and the world. With “the use of the world” in his mind, Keats turns his eyes from the ideal to the here and now when contemplating human immortality and remarks, “I am speaking *now* in the highest terms for human nature admitting it to be immortal which I will *here* take for granted for the purpose of showing a thought which has struck me concerning it” (2: 102; emphases added). Keats’s propositional tone also intimates

that the meaning of immortality, which is at the moment elusive and uncertain, hinges on a firm grasp of the present moment in this world of pains and troubles. Immortality is an extension of the horizon of the presence in both temporal and spatial senses.

Nonetheless, this presence does not reside in pure subjectivity since humans are, in Keats's words, "inhabitants of this world," which pre-exists, conditions, and transcends the subjects. Keats's inquiry into "the use of the world" in relation to the subject accordingly aligns with Merleau-Ponty's investigation of "the problems of transcendence": "Whether it is a question of my body, the natural world, the past, birth or death, the question is always to know how I can be open to phenomena that transcend me and that, nevertheless, only exist to the extent that I take them up and live them" (*PP* 381). In short, the transcendence of the world is revealed only when the subjects see the world through their horizons. The differentiation between the interior and the exterior indicates more a shift in emphasis, and these two points of view cannot be distinguished in absolute terms since "[t]he interior and the exterior are inseparable. The world is entirely on the inside, and I am entirely outside of myself" (*PP* 430). The consciousness of a transcending world gives rise to the senses of immortality and mortality: while the gaze of the present moment into the future anticipates immortality, the perspective of the living moment simultaneously announces temporality and contingency:

Established within life, propped up by my thinking nature, placed within that transcendental field that opened with my first perception and in which every absence is merely the other side of a presence, or every silence a modality of sonorous being, I have a sort of theoretical ubiquity and eternity, I feel destined to a flow of inexhaustible life whose beginning and whose end I cannot think, since it is still my living self who thinks them, and since thus my life always precedes itself and always survives itself. Nevertheless, this same thinking nature that fills me with being opens the world to me through a perspective, I receive along with it the feeling of my contingency, the anxiety of being transcended, such that, even if I do not think of my death, I still live within an atmosphere of death in general, there is something of an essence of death that is always on the horizon of my thoughts. Finally, just as the instant of my death is an inaccessible future for me, I am certain to never live the presence of another to himself (*PP* 381-82).

Suffering is intrinsic to the existence of an embodied subject: “illness, deprivation, pain, or disability may obstruct our access to the world so as to occlude or constrict ordinary horizons. When this occurs, we suffer” (Rawlinson 42-43). The physician Eric Cassell succinctly pinpoints that suffering goes beyond physical pains and interrogates the quintessence of its relation to personhood: “Suffering must inevitably involve the person—bodies do not suffer, persons suffer” (v). Keats’s firm belief in the therapeutic function of poetry lies in his similar insight into the existential nature of suffering, which can be addressed not only by medicine but also by arts. In “Sleep and Poetry,” written in 1816 around the time when he decided to abandon medicine for poetry, Keats holds that “the great end / Of poesy . . . should be a friend / To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man.” (245-47). Keats’s early aspiration to understand the mystery of suffering for humanity anticipates his later inquiry into the use of suffering in the vale of soul-making.

Since an embodied subject cannot avoid suffering, Keats turns away from the ideal world to the actual world so as to figure out the relationship between suffering and the schooling of the soul. Keats differentiates between an individuated soul and an unengaged intelligence: “I say ‘*Soul making*’ Soul as distinguished from an Intelligence” (*KL* 2: 102). To describe the process of identity formation as soul-making, Keats insinuates that the soul, in contrast to intelligences, can truly take shape only through an encounter with the world, before which there are only intelligences. Keats thereby moves away from the Platonic sense of the immortal soul. Whereas Plato calls for a transcendence of the soul from the failing body, leaving scholars a difficult task to reconcile such an immortal soul with a personal one imprinted with traces of the body (Duncan 306-8), Keats argues that souls by definition have identities formed in this world: “There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions—but they are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself. I[n]telligences are atoms of perception” (*KL* 2: 102). The British Hegelian Barnard Bosanquet’s dismissal of Keats’s introduction of “intelligence” as the antecedence of the soul as “superfluous” is in a sense pertinent (66), for Keats himself also intimates that the idea of an antecedent soul is merely secondary and speculative (“may be”). Yet, the two possible readings of “intelligence” as either spiritual (“sparks of the divinity”) or empiricist (“atoms of perception”) can suggestively reveal the poet’s dissatisfaction with both.

The spiritual and empiricist understandings consider intelligence as self-sustaining consciousness. While the former conceives an immaterial soul that migrates from the divine to the terrestrial, the latter postulates a constant consciousness unsusceptible to any change in substance. Keats's indiscriminate conflation of these two meanings would seem egregious for Locke: "[n]telligences are atoms of perception—they know and they see and they are pure, in short they are God" (*KL* 2: 102). For Locke, in contrast to God who is "without beginning, eternal, unalterable, and every where," finite intelligences are characterised by their temporality and spatiality, which condition their identities: "Finite Spirits having had each its determinate time and place of beginning to exist, the relation to that time and place will always determine to each of them its Identity as long as it exists" (329). To resolve the conundrum of the continuity of the identity despite the change in substance over time, Locke grounds personal identity in consciousness: "*Self* is that conscious thinking thing . . . which is sensible, or conscious of Pleasure and Pain, capable of Happiness or Misery, and so is concern'd for it *self*, as far as that consciousness extends" (341). Intending to account for the continuity of the identity, Locke reduces myriad experiences in the world to various states of the mind. As Merleau-Ponty criticizes, "Sensualism 'reduces' the world by saying that ultimately we have nothing but states of ourselves" (*PP* lxxix). The existential anxiety about suffering however is a problem for an embodied self that is not merely a "conscious thinking thing," as Locke describes, but is fundamentally situated in the world.

Keats sees the soul as an outgrowth of the interaction with the sensible world, and therefore has no pure consciousness in itself. For Locke, personal identity instead emanates solely from consciousness, to which the material body is subsidiary. Locke hence bizarrely deduces that a severed finger would also possess personhood if it acquired consciousness: "Upon separation of this little Finger, should this consciousness go along with the little Finger, and leave the rest of the Body, 'tis evident the little Finger would be the *Person*, the *same Person*; and *self* then would have nothing to do with the rest of the Body" (341). What is evident for Locke is, however, inconceivable for Keats. In the fragmentary poem "This living hand now warm and capable," Keats envisions how the vibrancy of such a hand would be resuscitated through the textual communion between the absent body and the reader (1, 8). Signalled by the subjunctive verb "were," the imagination of this living hand being "cold / And in the icy silence of the tomb" reminds readers of a bygone

existence (2-3). This hand can function as a metonym of the poet for the reader because it stands for a consciousness enmeshed with bodily existence. Keats's living hand points forward to Merleau-Ponty's example of the phantom limb, which patients continue to feel even after amputation. The patients live in a world where the limb is still integral to their experience despite their knowledge of its physical absence. Highlighting the phenomenological idea of intentionality as the defining feature of consciousness, Merleau-Ponty argues, "Sensation is certainly intentional; that is, it does not remain in itself like a thing, it intends and signifies beyond itself" (*PP* 221). Merleau-Ponty understands "sensation as coexistence or as communion" (*PP* 221); thus, a pointing finger, unlike Locke's little finger detachable from consciousness, is a gesture conveying a vision of a shared world: "My friend Paul and I point to certain details of the landscape, and Paul's finger, which is pointing out the steeple to me, is not a finger-for-me that I conceive as oriented toward a steeple-for-me; rather, it is Paul's finger that itself shows me the steeple that Paul sees" (*PP* 428). Similarly, Keats's living hand extends to the future reader ("I hold it towards you," 8) to communicate the bodily existence. The signification of this living hand is entangled with the temporality of the failing body, which defines humans' mortal existence.

From the Ideal to the Worldly Soul

Taking the mortal body into account, Keats regards its encounter with the mutable world as a necessary condition of the process of self-fashioning and of any sense-making. No matter whether the intelligences are "sparks of divinity" or "atoms of perception," the soul carries an existential sense in that it has to be created not before but in the world:

how then are Souls to be made? How then are these sparks which are God to have identity given them—so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each ones individual existence? How, but by the medium of a world like this? This point I sincerely wish to consider because I think it a grander system of salvation than the chrystain religion—or rather it is a system of Spirit-creation (*KL* 2: 102)

In calling his vale of soul-making "a system of Spirit-creation," Keats turns away from a predetermined meaning of suffering to relocate the soul to the world of experience. Situating the soul in a world constantly in a state of flux, Keats resolves

the conundrum of the continuity of identity, which troubled Locke as well as many theologians in the eighteenth century. The sameness of identity in the afterlife is not crucial for Keats since the soul is destined to undergo changes, which yield diverse identities in accordance with each individual's circumstances.

With this turn to the world in spite of its mutability, Keats elevates the centrality of embodiment, whose role both idealism and empiricism tend to dismiss with regard to self-identity. In his metaphorical description of the vale of soul-making, Keats illustrates how this world can school an intelligence to become a soul with an identity:

This [system] is effected by three grand materials acting the one upon the other for a series of years—These three Materials are the *Intelligence*—the *human heart* (as distinguished from intelligence or Mind), and the *World* or *Elemental space* suited for the proper action of *Mind and Heart* on each other for the purpose of forming the *Soul* or *Intelligence destined to possess the sense of Identity*. . . . I will call the *world* a School instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read—I will call the *human heart* the *horn Book* used in that School—and I will call the *Child able to read, the Soul* made from that *school* and its *hornbook*. Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul? A Place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways! Not merely is the Heart a Hornbook, It is the Minds Bible, it is the Minds experience, it is the teat from which the Mind or intelligence sucks its identity—As various as the Lives of Men are—so various become their souls, and thus does God make individual beings, Souls, Identical Souls of the sparks of his own essence—This appears to me a faint sketch of a system of Salvation which does not affront our reason and humanity (*KL* 2: 102-3)

By calling the intelligence/mind, human heart, and world “three grand materials,” Keats mitigates the potential idealist undertone of the soul (*KL* 2: 102). The world of pains and troubles like a school renders possible the intelligence/mind and human heart, which are comparable to an unschooled child and a hornbook respectively, to interact with each other to nurture a soul as a child learning to read. In this school of soul-making, the heart as a hornbook also outweighs the intelligence or mind since the heart is the medium for the interaction with the world and the guiding force, called “the Minds Bible” and “the Minds experience.”

Keats's emphasis on the heart in the vale of soul-making parallels his long contemplation of its relation to poetical truth: "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination—What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not" (*KL* 1: 184). The heart does not go after *the* truth and *the* reality but receives what it immediately perceives, for what Keats means by truth is a form of creation, and therefore "whether it existed before or not" is secondary. The holiness of the heart stems from its encompassing receptivity at the very moment of its encounter with the world of mystery, which cannot be easily explained away by the intellect. Given the diverse circumstances in the world, the soul take on numerous identities: "As various as the Lives of Men are—so various become their souls, and thus does God make individual beings, Souls, Identical Souls of the sparks of his own essence." Absorbed in the generative process of the identity, Keats almost treats the intelligences, God, sparks of divinity, and atoms of perception as synonyms to the extent that the heart, receptive of experiences, outshines these predominant elements in metaphysics. This worldly school in Keats's mind is thus reminiscent of his own childhood schooling rooted in the dissenting tradition at Enfield, which did not adhere to a strictly programmatic curriculum but encouraged freedom and diverse disciplinary explorations (Roe, *John Keats: A New Life* 23). Rejecting a definite destination for the development of the soul, Keats conjures up a contingent modern subject as to how pupils at Enfield develop their talents according to their natural callings.

Keats's comparison between the intelligence without any identity and unschooled children is also theologically informed. Christianity promises redemption but also engenders more uncertainties such as the salvation of children. Keats conjectures that his vale of soul-making can solve the difficulties without "affront[ing] our reason and humanity," since intelligences without any personhood have no original sin and can therefore return to God: "I am convinced that many difficulties which christians labour under would vanish before it—There is one wh[i]ch even now Strikes me—the Salvation of Children—In them the Spark or intelligence return to God without any identity—it having had no time to learn of, and be altered by, the heart—or seat of the human Passions" (*KL* 2: 103). Yet Keats's rudimentary theological proposition need not be taken too seriously, for what concerns Keats most is how religions around the world bespeak humans' shared impulse to understand their existence and mitigate their anxiety about mortality:

It is pretty generally suspected that the chr[i]stian scheme has been copied from the ancient persian and greek Philosophers. Why may they not have made this simple thing even more simple for common apprehension by introducing Mediators and Personages in the same manner as in the hethen mythology abstractions are personified—Seriously I think it probable that this System of Soul-making—may have been the Parent of all the more palpable and personal Schemes of Redemption, among the Zoroastrians the Christians and the Hindoos. For as one part of the human species must have their carved Jupiter; so another part must have the palpable and named Mediator and saviour, their Christ their Oromanes and their Vishnu (*KL 2: 103*)

Keats in a sense performs phenomenological reduction to inquire into the common motif of incarnation in various religions so as to understand how humans ascribe a redemptive power to suffering in order to make sense of this world of contingency. The vale of soul-making is a return to the very origin of human imagination in the world in order to offer a system of sense-making deeply grounded in actual experience without religious dogmas.

Towards the conclusion of his contemplation of the vale of soul-making, Keats reminds George and Georgiana that the very starting point of his reflection is this world of circumstances, which they together inhabit and by which their identities are formed: “I will put you in the place where I began in this series of thoughts—I mean I began by seeing how man was formed by circumstances” (*KL 2: 103*; “but” for “put” in Rollins’s edition). This “series of thoughts” is not limited to this letter but runs through Keats’s reflection on such a sensing life. While Keats exalts “a Life of Sensations,” he is also aware that “the world is full of troubles” (1: 185-86). In this human life like “a Large Mansion of Many Apartments,” Keats describes in a darker tone, “the World is full of Misery, Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression” (1: 281). The vale of soul-making not only acknowledges “uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts” in the world but also sketches out how negative capability can be made possible to cope with and make sense of the mystery of human existence (1: 193). Although John Hick links Keats’s vale of soul-making to Irenaeus’s theodicy (259), Keats’s system of salvation is, strictly speaking, no theodicy. For Keats sees how causal thinking like theodicy can fall short of acknowledging human contingency and result in “irritable reaching after fact & reason.”

With this non-reductionist attitude towards suffering, Keats conducts what Merleau-Ponty calls a phenomenological method: “Seeking the essence of the world is not to seek what it is as an idea, after having reduced it to a theme of discourse; rather it is to seek what it in fact is for us, prior to every thematization” (*PP* lxxix). To “seek what it in fact is *for us*” (emphasis added) is to understand the interrelationship between the subject and the world, in the same way that Keats figures out the meanings of the world of pains and troubles for mortals. Philosophy has to capture the bounteousness of experience without reducing it to a few tenets since “axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses” (*KL* 1: 279). The task of philosophers to feel the pulses is similarly felt by Merleau-Ponty: “We should have to return to this idea of . . . intuition as auscultation or palpitation in depth” (*VI* 128). For Keats, honest philosophical reflection upon human life does not dispel the mystery but sheds light on the irrationality of suffering. Merleau-Ponty, like Keats, does not see suffering as a fallen state but understands that the meaning of suffering begins with the recognition of the mortal body as an intrinsic aspect of human existence: “My body is this meaningful core that behaves as a general function and that nevertheless exists and that is susceptible to illness” (*PP* 148). In doing so, Keats and Merleau-Ponty make sense of suffering in a secular age. While Keats aspires to replace the Christian system of salvation with his vale of soul-making, Merleau-Ponty argues, “Absolute Thought is no clearer for me than is my finite mind, since it is through my finite mind that I conceive of absolute Thought. . . . The belief in an absolute spirit or in a world in itself and detached from us is no more than a rationalization of this primordial faith” (*PP* 431). Both the poet and the philosopher see the situatedness in the world as the central quality of human existence; therefore, no sense of suffering exists in itself unless one makes sense of it through living this world. With the benefit of hindsight garnered from the vale of soul-making, even Keats’s most seemingly idealist work like *Endymion* can reveal a phenomenology that sees such a finite mind as a promise.

Chapter Two: Tending Towards Things in *Endymion*

Keats's *Endymion* is one of the books that Jorge Luis Borges describes in his Harvard Norton Lecture series *The Craft of Verse*: "there are many books whose essence lies in their being lengthy" (101). The conception of this long meandering narrative began, not with a full-fledged idea, but with its very length, as Keats writes in a letter to Benjamin Bailey dated 8 October 1817: "it will be a test, a trial of my Powers of Imagination and chiefly of my invention which is a rare thing indeed—by which I must make 4000 Lines of one bare circumstance and fill them with Poetry" (*KL* 1: 169). The existence of these 4000 lines, which turn out to be 50 lines longer in the end, is the poem's essence; the materiality of this "rare thing" defines its meaning. To defend its lengthiness, Keats likens the textual world of *Endymion* to "a little Region," which "the Lovers of Poetry like to have . . . to wander in where they may pick and choose" (*KL* 1: 170). His *Endymion*, materially speaking, resists one single reading and spurs rereading: "the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second Reading" (1: 170). The inexhaustible meanings of "a long Poem" for Keats serve as "a test of Invention which [he] take[s] to be the Polar Star of Poetry, as Fancy is the Sails, and Imagination the Rudder" (1: 170). These maritime metaphors echo Cortez's wonder at the Isthmus of Darien in Keats's sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." Great works will withstand the test of rereading, as Keats tells Reynolds about the inexhaustible Shakespeare, "Whenever you write say a Word or two on some Passage in Shakespeare that may have come rather new to you; which must be continually happening, notwithstanding^e that we read the same Play forty times" (*KL* 1: 133). While Keats might not yet be confident enough to proclaim, "I think I shall be among the English Poets after my death" (*KL* 1: 394), its length could at least justify "THIS STRETCHED METER OF AN ANTIQUE SONG," a line from Shakespeare's Sonnet XVII, on its title page. In "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill," which opens his first published volume *Poems*, the hero Endymion is a wanderer in "some wond'rous region" (193), and so are the poet and the reader this time in *Endymion*. This wondrous wandering first and foremost characterises his poetic romance as a thing of wonder and transcendence.

From Intention to Intentionality Towards Things

Endymion's thingness problematises the tension between textual autonomy and authorial intention. Paul Ricoeur points out that what is fixed from speaking to writing is not the "saying" but the "said," and this process of "intentional exteriorisation" yields a dialectics between "semantic autonomy" and "authorial meaning" (27, 30). Keats's wandering *Endymion* uncomfortably unsettles a fixed meaning and, upon its publication, hence first provoked taunts and jeers with regard to its intention. Under the pseudonym Z, John Gibson Lockhart, in the Tory *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, reduces the poem to its sheer length, professing "no patience for going over four books" and ascribing Keats's "loose, nerveless versification, and Cockney rhymes" to Leigh Hunt's "Cockney School of Politics, as well as Cockney School of Poetry" (*KPP* 275-76). Lockhart, only one year senior, patronises Keats by writing that he had better be "a starved apothecary than a starved poet" and snubs the poem's verbal profligacy: "for Heaven's sake, young Sangrado, be a little more sparing of extenuatives and soporifics in your practice than you have been in your poetry" (*KPP* 276). *Endymion*'s "stretched meter" offers a jibe to John Wilson Croker to launch another attack in *Quarterly Review*: "With the fullest stretch of our perseverance, we are forced to confess that we have not been able to struggle beyond the first of the four books" (*KPP* 277). Croker criticises the divorce between words and meanings and repeatedly claims that the author, the book, and the rhymes fail to convey any meaning (*KPP* 277-78). Lockhart's and Croker's derisive attitude however should not be simply dismissed as "intentional fallacy"; instead, a text, as Ricoeur points out, unlike a natural object, "remains a discourse told by somebody, said by someone to someone else about something" (30). Impatience and frustration with the meaning of the poem epitomises an anxiety about the indeterminate signification of cultural objects whose creators only have a ghostly presence.

To counteract the criticism of the poem's lack of meanings, well-intended Keats critics accept Croker's challenge to be "much more patient . . . to get beyond the first book . . . to find a meaning" (*KPP* 280). To determine this meaning, especially with the aid of an allegorical reading, nevertheless results in an ensuing difficulty in making the episodic and digressive poem more stable than it is. Walter Jackson Bate, for instance, regards it as an "allegory *manqué*," whose "allegorical intention . . . becomes thinned, distracted, and ultimately divided" (174). The

instability of the allegorical intention of *Endymion* can however also be a promising problem that highlights the ontology of figurative poetic texts (Bode, *John Keats* 78). Indeed, the hermeneutic act of allegorical interpretation interests Keats much more than the coded allegorical meanings:

very shallow people . . . take every thing literal A Man's life of any worth is a continual allegory—and very few eyes can see the Mystery of his life—a life like the scriptures, figurative—which such people can no more make out than they can the hebrew Bible. Lord Byron cuts a figure—but he is not figurative—Shakespeare led a life of Allegory; his works are the comments on it (*KL* 2: 67)

The view of a worthy life as “a continual allegory” aligns with his earlier ideas of negative capability and the chameleon-like poetical character, the Shakespearean qualities that accommodate mystery and multiple identities. What Keats finds fascinating is the difficulty of allegorical reading that embodies the opacity of life as well as figurative language. Croker, hence, in criticising *Endymion*'s lack of “a complete couplet inclosing a complete idea in the whole book” (*KPP* 278), ironically pinpoints the figurative aspect of *Endymion* as a thing that remains open and indeterminate.

Endymion evades the authorial intention but showcases the experiencing subject's intentionality, i.e. the directedness of consciousness towards things. Keats's narrative is much less straightforward than what he recounts for his sister Fanny:

Many Years ago there was a young handsome Shepherd who fed his flocks on a Mountain's Side called Latmus—he was a very contemplative sort of a Person and lived solitry among the trees and Plains little thinking—that such a beautiful Creature as the Moon was growing mad in Love with him—However so it was; and when he was asleep on the Grass, she used to come down from heaven and admire him excessively [for] a long time; and at last could not refrain from carying him away in her arms to the top of that high Mountain Latmus while he was dreaming (*KL* 1: 154; “from” for “for” in Rollins' edition)

This cursory plot summary can only serve as a prologue, for the narrative centres not so much on the moon-goddess as on the love-stricken Endymion, the one who “grow[s] mad” and has to venture deep into the underworld in Book II, into the sea in Book III, and up into the air in Book IV. Endymion's journey, which culminates in a

union with the moon, is a quest-romance only in appearance, since the object of his quest shifts between Cynthia, Diana, Phoebe, and most bewilderingly an Indian maid. The moon-goddess, as Shahidha Bari comments, “poses a perpetual challenge, constantly slipping from his grasp and moving beyond the range of his comprehension” (95). This “perpetual challenge” is also the perceptual nature of things. Patricia Parker describes Keats’s romance as “a liminal space before that object is fully named or revealed” (4-5). Yet Keats in *Endymion* has gone further than that, since even the hero’s object of quest cannot be fully named or revealed.

Merleau-Ponty in the chapter “The Thing and The Natural World” of *Phenomenology of Perception* inquires: “[O]n what basis . . . do we judge that a form or a size are the form of the size of *the object*?” (313) Things, like Endymion’s moon-goddess taking on different identities, present themselves in various appearances in the subject’s perceptual field. The manifold appearances of the same actual thing prompt Merleau-Ponty to pursue the foundation of a constant form and size of a real perceived object. Psychological and idealist accounts for him evade rather than answer the conundrum of objectivity. Psychologists propose that the objective form and size is the typical reference point of the body such that a true square refers to the one that is seen on the frontal plane rather than obliquely, but this explanation glosses over the problem of how one presentation becomes determinate over the others (*PP* 312-13). The idealist approach is equally unsatisfactory. Kant in his *Critique of Pure Reason* holds that space, instead of objects, is *a priori* of sensorial representation; thus, it is “in space [that] [objects’] form, magnitude, and relation to one another is determined, or determinable” (157-58). In interpreting the determinate form and size as an effect of “a context of relations,” Kant for Merleau-Ponty reduces “[t]he question of knowing how there are true, objective, or real forms or sizes for us . . . to the question of knowing how there are determinate forms for us” (*PP* 314). Yet, perception of true size and form does not posit a “constant law”; instead, it is the “evidentness of things” that renders “constant relations” possible and reveals a correspondence between the change in distance and orientation and the change in size and form (*PP* 315). A normativity for the perceiving subject is thus implied in the transcendent perceived objects, to which Merleau-Ponty suggestively assigns the predicates in active voice as the grammatical subjects: “For each object, just as for each painting in an art gallery, there is an optimal distance from which *it asks to be seen*—an orientation through which *it presents more of itself*—beneath or beyond

which we merely have a confused perception due to excess or lack” (*PP* 315-16; emphases added). Things have to be seen in a certain way, and this normative aspect underscores the persisting conflict between what Endymion intends and what modalities of things as intentional objects should be heeded.

As an intentional object, the moon is apprehended in Endymion’s sensorial perception, imagination, recollection, and erotic desire. Not all intentional acts however enjoy an equal footing for the hero pining for his love, and it is oftentimes the moon as an ideal that trumps its concrete presentation. Speaking also of moonlight, Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, attends not to things’ specific properties or attributes but to how the unity of things comes into being when taken up by the body’s synaesthetic experience. An object of gaze “awakens a certain motor intention,” which relegates “the movements of one’s own body” to the background but directs the gaze to “the thing itself upon which it somehow hangs” (*PP* 331). The knowledge of the object for Merleau-Ponty stems not from reflection but from perception of an “inter-sensory thing,” whose existence displays a style that signifies an organic whole, instead of *partes extra partes*:

if my hand knows hardness and softness, if my gaze knows moonlight, then it is as a certain manner of connecting with the phenomenon and of communicating with it. Hardness and softness, coarseness and smoothness, and moonlight and sunlight in our memory are presented before all else, not as sensory contents, but as a certain type of symbiosis, a certain manner that the outside has of invading us, a certain manner that we have of receiving it, and the memory does nothing here but bring out the framework of perception from which it was born. (*PP* 331)

The certainty of moonlight, as well as other things, does not contradict the ambiguous presentation of “a certain type of symbiosis” and “a certain manner,” since perception is first and foremost lived experience prior to reflection.

In contrast to Endymion’s obsession with the moon-goddess’s beauty in his memories, Merleau-Ponty’s analysis of the intentionality towards moonlight reveals the transcendence of things that cannot be possessed. To put it more emphatically, Merleau-Ponty stresses the absolute thingness that establishes the foundation of objectivity:

For our existence, the thing is much less a pole of attraction than a pole of repulsion. We do not see ourselves in it, and this is precisely what makes it a

thing. We do not begin by knowing the perspectival appearances of the thing; it is not mediated by our senses, our sensations, or our perspectives; we go straight to the thing, and only secondarily do we notice the limits of our knowledge and of ourselves as knowing. (*PP* 338)

In the experience of things, human knowledge comes as a belated recognition. Between things and humans lies a dialectics that is rooted in the givenness not of “the thing alone, but also [of] the experience of the thing, a transcendence in the wake of subjectivity, a nature that shines forth through a history” (*PP* 340). It is in the perceptual field that the subject, “without leaving his place or his point of view in the opacity of sensing,” “tend[s] toward things” and “open[s] up to an absolute Other” (*PP* 340). Merleau-Ponty thereby refutes the realist view of a purely materialist thing and the idealist account of perception as a process of synthesis: “To live a thing is neither to coincide with it, nor to think it straight through” (*PP* 340). Not only does things’ transcendence reveal the finitude of human mind, but it also more positively guarantees that, beyond “some definite milieu,” there is also “an infinity of possible milieu” in human life (*PP* 341). By analogy, *Endymion*, as “a rare thing,” can understandably baffle someone who looks for an intention when its very thingness resists delimitation; the poem as an exemplar of things as intentional objects also, according to Merleau-Ponty, “send[s] us beyond [its] determinate manifestations, and . . . promises[s] us always ‘something more to see’” (*PP* 348-49). While the somewhat digressive nature of *Endymion* suggests that the poet might not have made up his mind in the process, the poem’s openness reveals a processing mind in a yet determinate quest. Harold Bloom in his classical essay “The Internalization of Quest-romance” holds that “the Romantic poet turned away, not from society to nature, but from nature to what was more integral than nature, within himself,” resulting in “an acute preoccupation with self” (6, 15). Although *Endymion* self-absorbedly aspires to ascend to the ideal form of the moon and may conform to Bloom’s description of a poet-hero who internalises his quest, Keats makes his hero descend among things of the world, where the ideal that *Endymion* seeks after takes on a human sensible form.

A Thing of Beauty as A Thing of the World

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.” Keats opens his *Endymion* with a line so memorable that one can probably only approach it in a second reading. It evokes a

transcendence that seems to belong to a spiritual world. For the Spanish writer and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno, it is “the immortal line” that every “educated person . . . recollect[s]” and embodies “feats [that] are eternal and universal, and live outside of time and space” (418). This “thing of beauty,” if it does live on, however still lives in time and space although its significance and meaning need not be localised. The coupling of beauty and eternity can easily evoke the Platonic ideal that has no share in the sensible world, but what Keats presents at the outset is first and foremost a perceptible “thing”:

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:

Its loveliness increases; it will never

Pass into nothingness; but still will keep

A bower quiet for us, and a sleep

Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing. (book 1, lines 1-5)

Such a “thing” draws the subject’s gaze and gives rise to an aesthetic experience, evolving into “A thing of beauty,” which in turn proffers its perceiver “a joy for ever.” The everlastingness of such a “thing of beauty” is no hindrance for its loveliness to increase. It “will never / Pass into nothingness,” for its manifestation “for us” is as perceptually real as “A bower quiet for us, and a sleep / Full of sweet dreams, health and quiet breathing.” This is hence a fellowship in which humans partake in things’ existence. The body lends itself to the world in perceptual aesthetic experience, epitomising how Merleau-Ponty characterises the body’s situatedness and perpetual engagement with things in the world: “The body is the vehicle of being in the world and, for a living being, having a body means being unified with a definite milieu, merging with certain projects, and being perpetually engaged therein” (*PP* 84). This celebration of beauty is no escapism but secures an abode in the world through its soothing power.

The delightful tone about the promise of “a thing of beauty” thus intimates a haunting “nothingness,” and its constancy forebodes ephemerality. In “Sleep and Poetry,” Keats has already shown his awareness of the inhabited mutable world, which urges him to “pass” from the pastoral “[o]f Flora, and old Pan” to “find the agonies, the strife / Of human hearts” (1.101-2, 122-5). Similarly, in *Endymion*, the creation of art involves a consciousness of a flawed world:

Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing

A flowery band to bind us to the earth,

Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
 Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
 Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darkened ways
 Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,
 Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
 From our dark spirits. (1.6-13)

Human artefacts such as a flowery band abate “the inhuman dearth” and the like. The melancholy that comes along with the depressive darkness and gloom culminates with an affirmative “yes”: “in spite of all,” “some shape of beauty,” even though it does not eradicate all the “spite,” “moves away the pall / From our dark spirits,” the negative affects of embodied subjects. Beauty helps to turn, not away from, but towards the world:

Such the sun, the moon,
 Trees old, and young sprouting a shady boon
 For simple sheep; and such are daffodils
 With the green world they live in; and clear rills
 That for themselves a cooling covert make
 'Gainst the hot season; the mid forest brake,
 Rich with a sprinkling of fair musk-rose blooms (1.13-19)

Keats's sensitive ear would not fail to catch the paradoxical effect of his elision of the opening vowel of “'Gainst”: the “shady boon,” “the green world,” and the “cooling covert” *gain* “the hot season” in being *against* it as its co-existence. Between life and death, “blooms” and “dooms” (1.19-20) is the dwelling in this very world, from which one peers upwards at the sky: “An endless fountain of immortal drink, / Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink” (1.23-24).

These “essences” (1.25) for Keats thus do not refer to unchanging entities but designate something like Heidegger's usage of the verbal noun *Wesen*: “*The 'essence' [Wesen] of Dasein lies in its existence*” (BT 67). Taking this cue from Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty approaches essences existentially (PP lxx). The certainty of things in the world despite their uncertain appearances because of their “absolute plenitude” (PP 333, 360) is a continuous thread running throughout Merleau-Ponty's thinking until his death, as his working notes for the unfinished *The Visible and The Invisible* show:

The transcendence of the thing compels us to say that it is plenitude only by being inexhaustible, that is, by not being all actual under the look—but it promises this total actuality, since it *is there*.... (VI 191)

the essence, the Platonic idea, the object are the concretion of the *there is*, are *Wesen*, in the verbal sense, i.e., *ester*—Every *that* involves a *what* because the *that* is not nothing, hence is *etwas*, hence *west*— (VI 203)

In *Endymion*, the essences of the world given “unto our souls” and “bound to us” are also continuously becoming in the subject’s time-bound perceptual field:

Nor do we merely feel these essences
 For one short hour; no, even as the trees
 That whisper round a temple *become soon*
 Dear as the temple’s self, so does the moon,
 The passion poesy, glories infinite,
 Haunt us *till they become* a cheering light
Unto our souls, and bound *to* us so fast,
 That, whether there be shine, or gloom o’ercast,
 They always must be with us, or we die. (1.25-33; emphases added)

The certitude of “these essences” that “always must be with us” stems from their certain relationship with us, no matter “whether there be shine, or gloom o’ercast.” The narrator further induces readers to “feelingly . . . scan” Endymion’s embodied mind and to register the “lurking trouble” on his face, through his gestures, and in the slipping reins:

A smile was on his countenance; he seem’d
 To common lookers on, like one who dream’d
 Of idleness in groves Elysian:
 But there were some who feelingly could scan
 A lurking trouble in his nether lip,
 And see that oftentimes the reins would slip
 Through his forgotten hands: then would they sigh,
 And think of yellow leaves, of owlet’s cry,
 Of logs piled solemnly.—Ah, well-a-day,
 Why should our young Endymion pine away! (1.175-84)

To “feel” the essences and to “feelingly” experience the other is to form a communion with the world. Things are not merely out there in the world but exhibit a certain relationship, be it harmonious or alienated, between the subject and the world.

The problem Endymion faces is the interruption of his experience with the actual world that is brought about by his musing on ideal beauty. His fancy of the moon-goddess in his dream prevents him from partaking in the communal rites of Pan:

Soon the assembly, in a circle rang'd,
 Stood silent round the shrine: each look was chang'd
 To sudden veneration: women meek
 Beckon'd their sons to silence; while each cheek
 Of virgin bloom paled gently for slight fear.
 Endymion too, without a forest peer,
 Stood, wan, and pale, and with an awed face,
 Among his brothers of the mountain chase. (1.185-92)

The “Hymn to Pan,” which Wordsworth dismisses as “a Very petty piece of paganism” (KC 2: 143-44), in fact bespeaks the central theme of the poem: to seek the divine in the earthly presence of the natural and social world. Endymion, whose mind has soared into the sky, forgets his belonging to the earth: “But in the self-same fixed trance he kept, / Like one who on the earth had never stept” (1.403-4). It is only through the earthliness of his sister Peona’s bower that he can find repose in his dwelling and recuperate from his feverish dream. Contrary to the self-absorption of Endymion’s dream, friendship and fellowship characterise Peona’s bower, “to whose cool bosom she was used to bring / Her playmates, with their needle broidery, / And minstrel memories of times gone by” (1.433-35). Peona’s “favourite bower shade” (1.437) that “calm’d [Endymion] to life again” (1.464) is “[a] thing of beauty” (1.1) that “will keep / A bower quiet for us” (1.3-4); “her own couch, new made of flower leaves” (1.438) serves as another “flower band to bind us to the earth” (1.7). In this sense, *Endymion* destabilises the referential element of allegory by calling attention to the fact that the bower *is* “[a] thing of beauty.” Different from Peona’s bower that Endymion can feel and touch, the moon-goddess’s exceptional sensuous beauty is nothing but an ideal abstraction of a “completed form of all completeness” and “high perfection of all sweetness” (1.606-7). Deriding his home as a “stubborn earth” (1.608), Endymion describes to Peona himself as a pitiable vagabond and the world an alien place, a postlapsarian world after Adam and Eve’s fall:

Away I wander'd—all the pleasant hues
 Of heaven and earth had faded: deepest shades
 Were deepest dungeons; heaths and sunny glades
 Were full of pestilent light; our taintless rills
 Seem'd sooty, and o'er-spread with upturn'd gills
 Of dying fish; the vermeil rose had blown
 In frightful scarlet, and its thorns out-grown
 Like spiked aloe. If an innocent bird
 Before my heedless footsteps stirr'd, and stirr'd
 In little journeys, I beheld in it
 A disguis'd demon, missioned to knit
 My soul with under darkness; to entice
 My stumblings down some monstrous precipice:
 Therefore I eager followed, and did curse
 The disappointment. (1.691-705)

Peona's bower is a resting place for Endymion, representative of a wandering Jew, offering the tangible, earthly things that can calm his troubled mind with human fellowship:

These things, with all their comfortings, are given
 To my down-sunken hours, and with thee,
 Sweet sister, help to stem the ebbing sea
 Of weary life. (1.707-9)

On the one hand, Peona responds to Endymion's feverish quest for love in an ethereal world level-headedly, wondering, "Is this the cause? / This all?" (1.721-22); on the other hand, she sympathetically understands the torment of a lover "who through this middle earth should pass / Most like a sojourning demi-god" (1.723-24). Like "[a] thing of beauty" that prevents nothingness, her bower is similarly an antidote to dreams that are "more slight / Than the mere nothing that engenders them," tranquilising a yearning to "pierce high-fronted honour to the quick / For nothing but a dream" (1.755-56, 759-60). As the narrative proceeds, Endymion's quest for love reveals itself as a tug of war between heaven and earth, between nothingness and thingness.

Endymion's longing for the union with the celestial realm is in this sense an attempt to immortalise his dwelling on the earth. In response to his sister's reprimand

for his chase after nothingness, Endymion maintains that, although he gazes above, his ambition is rooted in the earth:

Peona! ever have I long'd to slake
 My thirst for the world's praise: nothing base,
 No merely slumberous phantasm, could unlace
 The stubborn canvas for my voyage prepar'd—
 Though now 'tis tatter's; leaving my bark bar'd
 And sullenly drifting: yet my higher hope
 Is of too wide, too rainbow-large a scope,
 To fret at myriads of earthly wrecks. (1.769-76)

What follows is for Keats, as he told his publisher John Taylor, “a preface . . . necessary to the Subject” (*KL* 1: 218):

Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks
 Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
 A fellowship with essence; till we shine,
 Full alchemiz'd, and free of space. Behold
 The clear religion of heaven! (1.777-781)

Despite the loaded phrase “fellowship divine” that could imply some Neoplatonic thoughts, the emphasis lies however more on the grammatical subject “that which.” As Bate points out, “essence,” when read in the plural as in “Nor do we feel these essences” (1.25) and together with “Feel we these things?” (1.795), is “equivalent to ‘existence,’” designating “a sympathetic sharing in the existence of the ‘things’” (182). As “[a] thing of beauty” is an intentional object in aesthetic experience, “[a] fellowship with essence” also requires “ready minds” that belong to the world to establish a rapport with “fellowship divine.” Such an encounter goes far beyond passive sensations but instigates alchemy, a qualitative transformation that happens in the interaction between the experiencing “we” and the “essence.” Although the goal is to be “free of space,” the divination takes place on the earthy realm. If there is any allusion to classical philosophy, the “essence” here comes closer to the Aristotelian thought of things as the compound of form and matter than to Platonic idealism.

The philosophical underpinning of “essence” is thus less important than the process of creation depicted in the poem. In his letter to Taylor, this passage for Keats suggests “a regular stepping of the Imagination towards a Truth” and “the gradations of Happiness even like a kind of Pleasure Thermometer” (*KL* 1: 218). The search for

“a Truth,” rather than “the Truth,” and the sensation of “the gradations of Happiness” highlight the experiencing moment. His veneration of experience is also comparable to *Endymion* itself, seen by the poet as “an endeavour than a thing accomplished” (*KPP* 148) and his first step towards the chief Attempt in the Drama—the playing of different Natures with Joy and Sorrow” (*KL* 1: 218-19). In brief, the act of intentionality towards a thing to be accomplished rather than the accomplishment itself defines this writing project. In a similar vein, as the path to truth for Keats is experience not objective thought, imagination as a way of living the world is no opposition to truth but a step towards truth. The primordial pre-reflective experience of living the world hence aligns with Merleau-Ponty’s view of the world as the origin of truth:

The world is not an object whose law of constitution I have in my possession; it is the natural milieu and the field of all my thoughts and of all my explicit perceptions. Truth does not merely “dwell” in the “inner man”; or rather, there is no “inner man,” man is in and toward the world, and it is in the world that he knows himself. (*PP* lxxiv)

As the poem continues, it becomes clear that “that which becks / Our ready minds to fellowship divine” is nothing more than the givenness of things in this very world, and the heaven is in fact on this affective earth of “Joy and Sorrow”:

Behold

The clear religion of heaven! Fold
 A rose leaf round thy finger’s taperness,
 And soothe thy lips: hist, when the airy stress
 Of music’s kiss impregnates the free winds,
 And with a sympathetic touch unbinds
 Eolian magic from their lucid wombs:
 Then old songs waken from enclouded tombs;
 Old ditties sigh above their father’s grave;
 Ghosts of melodious prophecyings rave
 Round every spot where trod Apollo’s foot;
 Bronze clarions awake, and faintly bruit,
 Where long ago a giant battle was;
 And, from the turf, a lullaby doth pass
 In every place where infant Orpheus slept. (1.780-94)

The “essence” comes into being as the mind responds to the world, not a physical but a lived one, saturated with imagination, history, mythology, and faith.

As things are also open not only to myself but also to others, this world is also a field of intersubjective experience. Keats favours the first-person plural over the first-person singular to convey a sense of togetherness (“a bower quiet for *us*,” “are *we* wreathing / A flowery band to bind *us* to the earth,” “Nor do *we* merely feel these essences,” “Unto *our* souls,” “bound to *us* so fast,” and “must be with *us*, or *we* die”; emphases added). In the passage of the “Pleasure Thermometer,” Endymion asks for sympathetic understanding and attention to shared experience: “Feel *we* these things? —that moment have *we* stept / Into a sort of oneness, and *our* state / Is like a floating spirit’s” (1.795-797; emphases added). For Keats, things are not only for “me” but also for “us”; their essence is inseparable from intersubjective experience that saves one from nothingness:

But there are
 Richer entanglements, enthrallments far
 More self-destroying, leading, by degrees,
 To the chief intensity: the crown of these
 Is made of love and friendship, and sits high
 Upon the forehead of humanity. (1.797-802)

Keats again depicts an ongoing process, in which the “entanglements” and “enthrallments” of “love and friendship” will gradually transcend the solipsistic ego and lead to an enlarged self. The concrete and tangible imagery once more suggests an intersubjective world to which humans are bound. This “chief intensity” and “forehead of humanity” echo the “burning forehead” and the “parching tongue” of the earthly “human passion” in “Ode on a Grecian Urn” (27, 30). The “essences” are shared experiences, through which Endymion’s sympathy for Alpheus, Arethusa, and Glaucus later in Book II and Book III is possible. Turning love into a thing, Keats further showcases the existential aspect of thingness:

[Love’s] influence,
 Thrown in our eyes, genders a novel sense,
 At which we start and fret; till in the end,
 Melting into its radiance, we blend,
 Mingle, and so become a part of it,—
 Nor with aught else can our souls interknit

So wingedly: when we combine therewith
 Life's self is nourish'd by its proper pith,
 And we are nurtured like a pelican brood. (1.807-15)

Love is not a constituent but a constituting being that “gender[s] a novel sense” for us. This self is thereby an intersubjective self that is “nurtured” by the other’s “pelican brood” or sacrificial love. Keats’s “entanglements” and “enthralments” are what Merleau-Ponty describes as the “inexhaustible” quality of the world that is not possessed by a Cartesian *cogito* but transcends it (*PP* lxxx-lxxxii). This enmeshed self reveals the fact that the I does not own but owes the world.

Things Beyond the Objective Sense

Living things of the world implies living along an ambiguity unbeknown to objective thought. As part of the world, things exist in the perceptual field before they are objectified and thematised. Lighting, for instance, although of paramount importance in vision, normally remains at the background as the “auxiliary or the mediator of our perception” and “is not itself seen, but makes the rest be seen” (*PP* 323). The perceived hence for Merleau-Ponty is far more than an object to be known but “might be a ‘unit of value’ that is only present to me in practice” (*PP* 335). Drawing on Max Scheler’s metaphor of the environment (*Umwelt*)¹ as a great poem that is irreducible

¹ *Umwelt* is also a concept employed by the German biologist and behavioural scientist Jakob Johann von Uexküll. In his lecture course given at the Collège de France, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the concept “marks the difference between the world such as it exists in itself, and the world as the world of a living being” (*Nature* 167). Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of *Umwelt* as “an intermediary reality between the world such as it exists for an absolute observer and a purely subjective domain” aligns with his view of phenomenology as a task of overcoming “an extreme objectivism” and “an extreme subjectivism” laid out in the preface to *The Phenomenology of Perception* (lxxxiv). Different from Uexküll, the *Umwelt* of an animal for Merleau-Ponty is not a goal but “a theme that haunts consciousness” and it thus designates an ambiguous relationship between the world and the organism, wherein “we no longer see where behaviour begins and where mind ends” (*Nature* 178).

to the sum of sounds and letters, Merleau-Ponty further argues that everything, whether present or absent, “makes up part of my environment” (PP 334-35). Merleau-Ponty feelingly illustrates how absent things can also constitute the world, such as “the respect for other men, or that loyal friendship that I no longer even noticed, but that were nevertheless presence for me since, when they are withdrawn, I am left off-balance” (PP 335). In Balzac’s novel *Le Lys dans la vallée*, Félix de Vandenesse’s bouquet for Madame de Mortsauf is reified as love in the lover’s looking, and so do things signify their meanings in perception (PP 335-36). Natural perception, as Merleau-Ponty further comments, is not third-person scientific observation but “it lives among [things] . . . ; the being of the perceived is the pre-predicative being toward which our total existence is polarized” (PP 336). Turning the invisible into a “positive absence” rather than Husserl’s “perceptual absence” (S. Kelley 80), Merleau-Ponty foregrounds the transcendence of objects even in their opacity. This understanding of thingness as a style of existence elucidates the narrator’s portrayal of love in *Endymion* as an elusive but evident thing.

Endymion is a story more about a mortal falling in love with an immortal than *vice versa*, problematising the meaning of immortal love. The ambiguity of “immortal love” stems from whether immortality designates the immortal beloved as an intentional object, or the love *per se* for an immortal as an intentional act. The tension between these two interpretations arises from an unattainable synthesis that can make the mortal lover an immortal one. In the make-believe world, the moon-goddess’ immortality is beyond doubt, so the rub of immortal love lies in the legitimacy of calling his love immortal given human transient existence. A mortal’s love is objectively short-lived, but love understood in a more existential way for *Endymion* can transcend mortality:

Now, if this earthly love has power to make
Men’s being mortal, immortal; to shake
Ambition from their memories, and brim
Their measure of content; what merest whim,
Seems all this poor endeavour after fame,
To one, who keeps within his stedfast aim
A love immortal, an immortal too.
Look not so wilder’d; for these things are true,
And never can be born of atomies (1.843-51)

With this shift of emphasis from the metaphysics to the making of immortal love, immortality turns from a quality of a being into the being itself. The “earthly love” can hence be the immortal love since it is “A love immortal” itself that makes a mortal immortal. Owing to this existential take on love, the truthfulness of “these things” that can abate the nothingness of “atomies” refers not to an objective fact but to the evidentness of love for the subject. Endymion’s existential account is however far from certain since his whole proposition is undercut by the conditional “if.” His wavering belief, possibly weakened by his desire to unite with the moon-goddess factually, hints at a gap between the hero and the narrator. Book II continues to ponder this thingness of love, but the narrator speaks of love much more assertively than Endymion:

O sovereign power of love! O grief! O balm!
 All records, saving thine, come cool, and calm,
 And shadowy, through the mist of passed years:
 For others, good or bad, hatred or tears
 Have become indolent; but touching thine,
 One sigh doth echo, one poor sob doth pine,
 One kiss brings honey-dew from buried days. (2.1-7)

The “records” of major historical events ironically fail to record human experience in their fixed textual forms and become obsolete; by contrast, the momentary touch of love affirms that humanity “doth” exist in sighing, sobbing, and kissing. Whereas the glory and gore of the Trojan War “all dimly fades / Into some backward corner of the brain,” “we feel amain / The close of Troilus and Cressid sweet” as well as the feeling bodies of other star-crossed lovers such as Juliet, Imogen, and Pastorella (2.10-14, 27-32). These human passions, as the narrator proclaims, “[a]re things to brood on with more ardency / Than the death-day of empires” (2.33-34). In elevating invisible human passions over visible historical records, Keats highlights the experiential rather than objective aspect of things that amounts to their reality for a perceiving subject.

Endymion, the “[b]rain-sick shepherd prince” (2.44), however cannot ground his sense of reality in his experience of things. Keats juxtaposes the authorial narrator’s assertion of Endymion’s experience with things and the hero’s unawareness:

Now he is sitting by a shady spring,
 And elbow-deep with feverous fingering

Stems the upbursting cold: a wild rose tree
 Pavilions him in bloom, and he *doth* see
 A bud which snares his fancy: lo! but now
 He plucks it, dips its stalk in the water: how!
 It swells, it buds, it flowers beneath his sight;
 And, in the middle, there is softly pight
 A golden butterfly; upon whose wings
 There must be *surely* character'd strange things,

For with wide eye he wonders, and smiles oft. (2.53-63; emphases added)

The narration is focalised through Endymion and the lyric present dramatises his perception as an event; yet, the more the authorial narrator stresses the certainty of Endymion's sensual experience, the more the reader feels the hero's lack of insight into what he is experiencing himself. The butterfly that evokes wonder later reveals herself as a nymph, and her departure leaves Endymion in utter despair that results in an existential crisis:

... this is human life: the war, the deeds,
 The disappointment, the anxiety,
 Imagination's struggles, far and nigh,
 All human; bearing in themselves this good,
 That they are still the air, the subtle food,
 To make us feel existence, and to shew
 How quiet death is. (2.153-159)

Although Endymion regards the mutable human life in the world as a way to "feel existence," his philosophical contemplation on the necessity of suffering does not amount to an affirmation of life that Keats postulated in his vale of soul-making:

Where soil is men grow,
 Whether to weeds or flowers; but for me,
 There is no depth to strike in: I can see
 Nought earthly worth my compassing; so stand
 Upon a misty, jutting head of land—
 Alone! No, no; and by the Orphean lute,
 When mad Eurydice is listening to 't;
 I'd rather stand upon this misty peak,
 With not a thing to sigh for, or to seek,

But the soft shadow of my thrice-seen love,
 Than be—I care not what. (2.159-69)

Endymion's existential crisis results from the incongruity between his recognition of the fact of being in the world and his feeling of a world not "for me." The assertion of his active perception "I can see" is enjambéd and recedes into passive acquiescence of "nought earthly worth my compassing." The meaning of the world is paradoxically its meaninglessness for him. Endymion, as an embodied subject, still inevitably inhabits this alienated world, where he still "stand[s] / upon a misty, jutting head of land." As the subjunctive mood in the following lines ("I'd rather...") indicates, his agony comes from the contingency of "stand[ing] upon this misty peak" with "a thing to sigh for, or to seek," a thing that cannot coincide with his desire to peek at "the soft shadow of [his] thrice-seen love." It is in this deadlock that Endymion finds himself: he has to "be" to refuse to "be," and to "care" to "care not what." While Endymion avows, "There is no depth to strike in," Keats makes his hero follow an unknown voice and descend to the deepest of the earth, turning a propositional statement of things' non-existence into a phenomenological inquiry into how he feels things.

This underworld serves as a vale of soul-making for Endymion to learn to feel his existence with things. The narrator asks, "What misery most drowningly doth sing / In lone Endymion's ear, now he has raught / The goal of consciousness?" (2.281-83) Deprived of his familiar earthly surroundings, Endymion starts to recognise the things that he used to see through their absence; the negativity of the underworld is the affirmation of the sensuous experience of the earth:

Ah, 'tis the thought,
 The deadly feel of solitude: for lo!
 He *cannot* see the heavens, *nor* the flow
 Of rivers, nor hill-flowers running wild
 In pink and purple chequer, *no*, up-pil'd,
 The cloudy rack slow journeying in the west,
 Like herded elephants; *nor* felt, *nor* prest
 Cool grass, *nor* tasted the fresh slumberous air;
 But far from such companionship to wear
 And unknown time, surchag'd with grief, away,
 Was now his lot. (2.283-93; emphases added)

Through these absences, Endymion, when crying out to seek help from Diana to “[d]eliver [him] from this rapacious deep,” calls the earth the first time his “native bower” (2.331-32). Endymion even adorns his moon-goddess with terrestrial imagery, calling her “Haunter chaste / Of river sides, and woods, and heathy waste” and “woodland Queen” (2.302-3, 305). His earthly dwelling is the only place for him as a mortal to perceive her celestial shape, as he wonders, “Through what dark tree / Glimmers thy crescent?” (2.308) The transcendence of heaven is an accentuation of his sensual pleasure and displeasure of earth: “thou dost taste / Freedom as none can taste it, nor dost waste / Thy loveliness in dismal elements” (2.310-13). If Diana, “finding in our green earth sweet contents, / There livest blissfully,” Endymion now considers that, if this space could be Elysian for her, it would be even more exuberantly “rich to [him]” (2.314-15). His prayer is however futile, and he still has to have “a thousand mazes overgone” (2.387). Endymion comes upon the bower of Adonis, who is made to sleep by Venus for six months per year but about to wake up to reunite with her. This bowery scene, although drawn from Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen*, is different in its perspective, as Greg Kucich astutely puts it: “Where Spencer’s episode looks upward to the divine order that enfolds and transcends all mortal beauty, Keats’s looks downward on the virtues of transitory human love” (177). The bower is hence an earthly thing imbued with meanings. The lyricist tells Endymion that the “immortal bowers [are here presented] to mortal sense” (2.478). Unlike Endymion who exalts heavenly beauty, Venus adores Adonis’s human charm and finds “no trace / Of this in heaven” (2.569-70). Witnessing their departure after their reunion, Endymion is thrown back into solitude and pines again for his unrequited love. His loneliness however allows him to sympathise with the two voices of the river Alpheus and Arethusa, who were separated by Diana. Alpheus comforts his lover, “Sweet Arethusa! Dian’s self must feel / Sometimes these very pangs” (2.984-85). Diana could be “[s]evere before Arethusa,” but Endymion is moved and weeps and prays to Diana “to soothe, to assuage . . . these lovers’ pains; And make them happy in some happy plains” (2.1006, 1013-17). Endymion feels their love among the “things to brood on” suggested in the proem of Book II.

The Immortal World of the Here and Now

Book III continues to reflect on the true foundation of the certitude of human existence. It opens with an overtly political message of the evanescence of the oppressive ruling class and derides “[t]heir tip-top nothings” (3.15). All loud self-aggrandisement at last only “hums, / In wakeful ears, like uproar past and gone” (3.18-19). The narrator nevertheless asserts that:

... there are throned seats unscalable
 But by patient wing, a constant spell,
 Or by ethereal things that, unconfin’d,
 Can make a ladder of the eternal wind,
 And poise about a cloudy thunder-tents
 To watch the abysm-birth of elements. (3.23-28)

Although the “unscalable,” “constant,” “unconfin’d,” and “eternal” attributes may evoke the Platonic ideal world, what is in fact celebrated is the givenness of the sensual world, where “Our piece of heaven[’s] benevolence / Shakes hand with our own Ceres,” the goddess of agriculture (3.37-38). Suspending the metaphysical question of “the feud / ’Twixt Nothing and Creation” (3.40-41), the narrator highlights the becoming of things in the moment of experience:

O Moon! the oldest shades ’mong oldest trees
 Feel palpitations when thou lookest in:
 O Moon! old boughs lisp forth a holier din
 The while they feel thine airy fellowship.
 Thou dost bless every where, with silver lip
 Kissing dead things to life. (3.52-57)

Attending to the appearing moon, Keats shifts the focus of the moon itself onto the perceiving act: the goddess Cynthia seemingly “unobserved” ascendance to the sky is in fact observed by her brother Apollo’s “eye . . . bent / Towards her with the Muses in [his] heart” (3.45-46, 48-49). The assurance is not things’ invariable appearance but the irrefutable embodied experience of the inexhaustible world that manifests itself in finite perception. The celebration of “a thing of beauty” at the opening of *Endymion* is thus not so much a definite object than the certainty of a thing that appears. Hence, it is the love that transcends all kinds of waxing and waning:

Ah! surely that light peeps from Vesper’s eye,

Or what a thing is love! 'Tis She, but lo!
 How chang'd, how full of ache, how gone in woe!
 Is wan on Neptune's blue: yet there's a stress
 Of love-spangles . . .

.....
 O love! how potent hast thou been to teach
 Strange journeyings! Wherever beauty dwells,
 In gulf or aerie, mountains or deep dells,
 In light, in gloom, in star or blazing sun,
 Thou pointest out the way, and straight 'tis won. (3.79-83, 94-96)

Endymion's love is however directed at an unchanging ideal. He pines for the same moon in his childhood, inquires into her essence ("What is there in thee, Moon! that thou should move / My heart so potently," 3.142-43), and describes her in absolute terms ("No woods were green enough, no bower divine, / Until thou liftedst up thine eyelids fine," 3.151-52). At this very moment when Endymion indulges himself in "How his goddess was past all things fair" (3.190), it is however the cursed Glaucus with abhorrent appearance who meets his eyes.

Glaucus is an alien other who unsettles Endymion's preconceptions. Brooding over his moon-goddess's fairness, Endymion is indifferent to this man's repugnant appearance, saying, "I care not for this old mysterious man!" (3.280) Mysterious though he is, this visual encounter with Glaucus provokes unexpected sympathy in Endymion, who is estranged from his Latmian community in Book I:

He spake, and walking to that aged form,
 Look'd high defiance. Lo! his heart 'gan warm
 With pity, for the grey-hair'd creature wept.
 Had he then wrong'd a heart where sorrow kept?
 Had he, though blindly contumelious, brought
 Rheum to kind eyes, a sting to human thought,
 Convulsion to a mouth of many years?

He had in truth; and he was ripe for tears. (3.281-88)

Unlike the unchanging idealised moon-goddess, Glaucus before Endymion's eyes, as in an unfolding perceptual act, changes from a "form" to "creature" and to a true "human"; finally, when Endymion learns about Glaucus's suffering from his loss of Scylla and curse of Circe, he calls himself and Glaucus "twin-brothers" (3.712).

Glaucus's thralldom under Circe is a cautionary tale of idealisation for Endymion. Circe's bower, like Endymion's fairest moon-goddess, is "sweeter" than "sweet" and Circe's "honey-words" seem to promise "more bliss than all / The range of flower'd Elysium" to the extent that his soul becomes "o'er-sweeten'd" (3.421, 426-28, 445). The bower's deceptive overbrimming sweetness that "every spendthrift hour / Shed balmy consciousness" aligns with how the unceasingly budding flowers numb the bees' time-consciousness in "To Autumn." Endymion, the prophesised youth to deliver Glaucus and Scylla from the spell, thereby has to withstand "The spite of hell [that] is tumbling to its grave" and perform rituals that involve "files of dead" (3.760, 770), breaking Circe's fanciful bower by acknowledging the earthly despondence of the bower in Book I. There is no fixed symbolic meaning of bowers; instead, what matters is the recognition of the transcendence of things that defies thematisation.

Endymion's venture into the underworld and the sea paves the road for him to return to his earthly dwelling. The narrator in Book IV anglicises and historicises the geographical setting of the narrative (4.1-7). In calling this very place his "native land" like the narrator, Endymion recognises his final resting place (4.1, 313-18). The narrator warns the hero of further musing on his moon-goddess and reminds him of her earthly presence:

Thou, Carian lord, hadst better have been tost
 Into a whirlpool. Vanish into air,
 Warm mountaineer! for canst thou only bear
 A woman's sigh alone and in distress?
 See not her charms! Is Phœbe passionless?
 Phœbe is fairer far—O gaze no more:—
 Yet if thou wilt behold all beauty's store,
 Behold her panting in the forest grass! (4.52-59)

This shift of beholding beauty from the abstract onto the sensuous accords with the central theme that Keats has already laid out in the Book I: a "thing of beauty" is ultimately not an idealisation but a thing that appears but cannot be subsumed by thought. Somewhat abruptly, Keats introduces an Indian maid to make an earthly pair. The maid, in contrast to the distant moon-goddess, can sing a melancholic roundelay "Ode of Sorrow," and her impassioned sigh can make "quite dead to every worldly thing" (4.292). The moved Endymion begins to see his vain pursuit of an ideal in thought:

Alas, I must not *think*—by Phœbe, no!
 Let me not *think*, soft Angel! shall it be so?
 Say, beautifullest, shall I never *think*?
 O thou could'st foster me beyond the brink
 Of *recollection*! (4.303-8; emphases added)

Endymion's questions however betray his irresolute mind. He flies with his earthly lover into the air and, upon his encounter with Diana, is once again torn between the moon's ideal beauty and the maid's palpitating love. His indecision necessitates a plunge into the earth and undergoes the darkness of the "Cave of Quietude." Anticipating the dark passages of the large mansion of human life and the vale of soul-making Keats came up two years later, this cave is a place where one learns to come to terms with the unfathomable nature of the world such as gloom, suffering, and evil:

There lies a den,
 Beyond the seeming confines of the space
 Made for the soul to wander in and trace
 Its own existence, of remotest glooms.
 Dark of regions are around it, where the tombs
 Of buried griefs the spirit sees, but scarce
 One hour doth linger weeping, for the pierce
 Of new-born woe it feels more inly smart:
 And in these regions many a venom'd dart
 At random flies; they are the proper home
 Of every ill: the man is yet to come
 Who hath not journeyed in this native hell. (4.513-23)

This "Cave of Quietude" or "native hell" corresponds to the earthly bower in Book I: although it acknowledges the despondency of the world, the cave, despite its darkness, can however be as soothing as a shady bower against a hot sun: "But few have ever felt how calm and well / Sleep may be had in that deep den of all. / There anguish does not sting; nor pleasure pall" (4.524-26). Yet, the cave's telos towards a mature awareness of existence is not equivalent to a motivated quest:

Enter none
 Who strive therefore: on the sudden it is won.
 Just when the sufferer begins to burn,

Then it is free to him; and from an urn,
 Still fed by melting ice, he takes a draught (4.531-35)

This accepting attitude towards the opacity of things and the world is a continuing thread from Book I to Book IV. The narrator's envisioning of necessary engagement with mutability that cultivates a proper sense of being in the world also bespeaks his critical attitude towards Endymion's dream of idealisation, echoing Keats's idea about the maturing process of imagination: "The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life between, in which the soul is in a ferment, the character undecided, the way of life uncertain, the ambition thick-sighted: thence proceeds mawkishness" (*CP* 64). These words should not simply be read as Keats's strategy to pre-empt criticism of his own immature writing; instead, it highlights the poem's central concern about seeing things as they are in spite of their resistance to objectification and in spite of the "undecided," "uncertain," and "thick-sighted" characteristics that permeate life as well as perception.

Endymion's return to earth comes along with heightened sensitivity to the thingness of the here and now. He is now grounded here on this "happy earth," a place where he can say, "now I see / The grass; I feel the solid ground" (4.621-22, 625). Turning away from the ethereal moon, he develops ties with the terrestrial deity Pan, from whom he feels alienated in Book I: "Pan will bid / Us live in peace among / His forest wilderness" (4.634-36). The very thingness of the world that can be seen and felt leads to an epiphany of the nothingness that has deluded him:

I have clung
 To nothing, lov'd a nothing, nothing seen
 Or felt but a great dream! O I have been
 Presumptuous against love, against the sky,
 Against all elements, against the tie
 Of mortals each to each, against the blooms
 Of flowers, rush of rivers, and the tombs
 Of heroes gone! (4.636-43)

Endymion's identification with the "earth" bids adieu, although resignedly, to his earlier dreaming of the "[t]oo thin breathing," "cloudy phantasms," "air of visions," and "visionary seas," so as to re-join the immediate sensuous experience of "[t]he Indian bliss," "human kiss," and "one sigh of real breath" (4.650-53, 659, 663-65).

However, Endymion's wish-fulfilment still has to be once again set back when the Indian maid declares that their love is forbidden. The narrator focalises the despairing Endymion and dramatises how vision eludes interpretation that can misread love as treachery:

O treachery!

Why does his lady smile, pleasing her eye
 With all his sorrowing? He sees her not.
 But who so stares on him? His sister sure!
 Peona of the woods!—Can she endure—
 Impossible—How dearly they embrace!
 His lady smiles; delight is in her face;
 It is no treachery. (4.799-804)

The lesson of the "Cave of Quietude" is that things cannot be won at will but the boon will be bestowed when least expected. Endymion decides to be a hermit in a cave. His inward turn to "things of light from infancy" and "things for which no wording can be found" (4.958, 962) suggests a further recession to his own fancy. The Indian maid in their farewell all of a sudden transfigures into Cynthia, morphing from a mortal into an immortal. This happy ending by, as Bate describes it, "*deus ex machina*" (191), is no doubt hasty and abrupt but it equally suggests Keats's intention not so much to deify the mortal than to bring the immortal into the mortal sensual world: ultimately, Cynthia is a goddess that can be touched and felt. The last eight lines are focalised through Peona who belongs to the earthly realm: "Peona went / Home through the gloomy wood in wonderment." (4.1002-3) This juxtaposition of gloom and wonder is "[a] thing of beauty" that can "bind us to the earth" in "[s]pite of . . . gloomy days" (1.1, 7, 9), a thing from which the whole narrative sets off. Endymion has a quest but this quest constantly eludes him. What remains is the experience of the quest that takes place in a world that the hero inhabits.

Reading *Endymion* as an allegory of striving for idealism misidentifies Keats with the hero and obfuscates the narrator's critical, although sometimes sympathetic, stance towards idealistic fancy. Instead of Endymion's dreaming of his moon-goddess, it is the narrator's earthly attitude that runs through from Book I to Book IV and offers some coherence to this meandering narrative that centres not on the goal of the quest but on the quest itself. In the face of hostile criticism of *Endymion*, Keats reflects upon how the making of a poem brings forth the making of a poet:

Praise or blame but has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic on his own works. My own domestic criticism has given me pain without comparison beyond what Blackwood or the ~~Edinburgh~~ Quarterly could possibly inflict. and also when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary re-perception & ratification of what is fine. J.S. is perfectly right in regard to the slipshod *Endymion*. That it is so is no fault of mine.—No!—though it may sound a little paradoxical. It is as good as I had power to make it—by myself—Had I been nervous about its being a perfect piece, & with that view asked advice, & trembled over every page, it would not have been written; for it is not in my nature to fumble—I will write independently.—I have written independently *without Judgment*—I may write independently & *with judgment* hereafter.—The Genius of Poetry must work out its own salvation in a man: It cannot be matured by law & precept, but by sensation & watchfulness in itself—That which is creative must create itself—In *Endymion*, I leaped headlong into the Sea, and thereby have become better acquainted with the Soundings, the quicksands, & the rocks, than if I had ~~stayed~~ stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea & comfortable advice. I was never afraid of failure; for I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest.

(*KL* 1: 373-74)

Like *Endymion*, Keats has a “love of beauty in the abstract” but, instead of being another dreamer like his hero, Keats prioritises the actual over the ideal or “perfect.” His comparison of writing to the experience of things like “the Soundings, the quicksands, & the rocks” prior to “judgment,” “law & precept” but with “sensation & watchfulness in itself” figuratively illustrates Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of things’ transcendence over objective thought. Keats is aware that what gives him certainty and guarantees fruition is the poem not as an idea but as the very thing that can exist for his “own solitary re-perception & ratification of what is fine.” Experience is no thesis, and the certainty of things is not contradictory of their uncertain appearance, as Merleau-Ponty says, “each thing can, *après coup*, appear uncertain, but at least it is certain for us that there are things, that is, that there is a world” (*PP* 360). This understanding of the oxymoronic certainty of uncertain thingness exemplifies what Keats wrote about to his brothers in December 1817, one month after his first draft of *Endymion*: negative capability, a necessary quality in one’s

plunging into the mystery of world (*KL* 1: 193). *Endymion* is a symbolic leap for Keats to leave behind the “green shore” and the “silly pipe,” typical motifs of romance, to enter a world of concrete experience. In this poetic romance, Keats has expounded on things’ evidentness for one hero, but the question “Feel we these things” (I.795) is still hanging and demands further inquiry into the problem of reality in an intersubjective world.

Chapter Three: Perceiving Realities in New Romances

In a letter to his two brothers dated 23 January 1818, a few months before the publication of *Endymion*, Keats wrote a sonnet on reading King Lear once again, wherein he bids adieu to “golden-tongued romance, with serene lute, / Fair plumed syren” for “The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearean fruit” (1, 8). These avowals, often interpreted as Keats’s anti-romantic postures and his turn to tragedies, were curiously made when he busied himself with writing romances. His monumental 1820 volume *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes & Other Poems* was headed with the three romances and was advertised as works by the “Author of *Endymion*.” The discrepancy between Keats’s proclamation and his actual endeavour yields a further disagreement among critics on the romantic or anti-romantic proclivity in his romances, particularly *The Eve of St. Agnes*.¹ This point of contention mainly lies in the opposing interpretative standpoints: while the romantic readings follow the internal logic of romance as wish-fulfilment, the anti-romantic ones interpose a sceptical reader between the fictional romantic and the everyday modern worlds. In fact, not only do the readers stumble over the shifting frameworks of meanings, but the characters themselves also oscillate between reality and appearance, waking and dreaming, truth and illusion. Even Keats’s own attitude towards romance is ambivalent: on the one hand, he dramatises his very act of romancing in *Isabella*, regarding it as a trial to “stead [Boccaccio] as a verse in English tongue” (159); on the other hand, he de-romances the genre and calls it “old romance” in *The Eve of St. Agnes* (41). Although these much-discussed formulations attempt to characterise the indeterminacy of Keats’s romances, such binary oppositions cannot account for the

¹ Jack Stillinger in his essay “The Hoodwinking of Madeline: Skepticism in *The Eve of St. Agnes*” (1961) argues against earlier romantic interpretations and alleges that the hero Porphyro in fact rapes the heroine Madeline, and later in “Keats and Romance” (1968) reads the macabre realism in *Isabella* as anti-romantic. Stillinger in *Reading The Eve of St. Agnes: The Multiples of Complex Literary Transaction* (1999) summarises Earl Wasserman’s romantic, his own anti-romantic, and Stuart Sperry’s middleground readings as “The Three Bears” and proposes fifty-nine (and possibly sixty or even more) interpretations of *The Eve of St. Agnes* (35-77).

significance of dreaming, appearance, or illusion with regard to the experiencing subjects in their own right.

The indeterminacy of Keats's romances is a problem of modernity. In "Specimen of an Induction to a Poem," Keats feels obliged to "tell a tale of chivalry" (1), which is however set back by a later consciousness of the difficulty of such a revival of "the dying tones of minstrelsy" (11); his "daring steps" to follow Spencer's romance tradition are self-deprecated as his "own strange pretence" (31–32, 49, 57, 64). The apologetic title of a "specimen" of an "induction," as David Duff remarks, bespeaks "a romance about the impossibility of romance, the type of self-reflexive, self-defeating poem" (151). Keats's anxiety about the impossibility of romance is thus not only personal but also cultural. In his review on Edmund Kean's acting, Keats esteems Kean as "a relic of romance" when "romance lives but in books. The goblin is driven from the heath, and rainbow is robbed of its mystery" (*KPP* 105, 107). This crisis of romance for Keats heralds not only a change in literary taste, but also, more significantly, a modern disenchanting worldview.

Keats's ironic take on romance parallels Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, the hallmark of modern novels, wherein the subjective experience is measured against an objective reality. The clash of worldviews in Keats's romances is comparable to the tension between a romantic and an everyday world in *Don Quixote*, which, according to the socio-phenomenologist Alfred Schütz, problematises "how we experience reality" (136). Schütz argues that these clashes dramatise the intersubjective aspect of reality: "Each world, whilst it is attended to, is real after its own fashion, and any relation to our mind at all in the absence of a stronger relation with which it clashes, suffices to make an object real"; hence, Schütz lists, "[t]here is the world of Don Quixote's madness, the world of chivalry, a sub-universe of reality incompatible with the paramount reality of daily life, in which the barber, the priest, the housekeeper and the niece simply live along, taking it for granted beyond question" (136). Schütz is not alone in pondering how things appear to the subject in *Don Quixote*. When lampooning Wordsworth's "bull[ying]" of "a certain Philosophy engendered in the whims of Egoist," Keats satirically remarks that even the realist "Sancho will invent a Journey heavenward as well as any body" (*KL* 1: 224). Poetry for Keats is not a raucous expression of self with "a palpable design upon us"; instead, "Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject" (1: 224). It is this imperceptible and

unobtrusive influence of poetry on the soul that distinguishes “[m]odern poets” from “the Elizabethans” (1: 224). A Quixotic imagination of the modern world also embellishes Keats’s own: “I was making a day or two ago a general conflagration of all old Letters and Memorandums, which had become of no interest to me—I made however, like the Barber-inquisitor in *Don Quixote* some reservations” (*KL* 2: 112). On his sickbed in Rome, Keats might deem this amusing modern novel an alternative palliative and asked Severn to read it to him amongst Shakespeare and Maria Edgeworth. Although it is difficult to assess *Don Quixote*’s direct influence on Keats’s writings, Keats could not overlook the fact that *Don Quixote*’s buffoonery stems from the incongruity of his fantasy of a bygone romantic era with the presence of the emerging modern world. Instead, Keats’s evocations of “old Romance” in *Isabella* (387) and *The Eve of St. Agnes* (41) similarly hint at the obsolescence of the genre in the modern age.

The problem of Keats’s romances thus emanates from the modern framework that he himself self-reflexively introduces to this allegedly dated genre. While readers interpret the narrated worlds of romance that are temporally and spatially distant from their modern life, this distance reinforced by the authorial narrative voice further creates a vantage point of the everyday to critically look at the romantic. *Isabella* recasts Boccaccio’s old tale in a mercantile and exploitive world of Florence (stanza 14) that is brutal to a romantic love that cannot be kept secret. In *The Eve of St. Agnes*, the heroine Madeline has to face an unprepared reality in the actual world when her lover Porphyro “melt[s]” “into her dream” and consummates their love “as the rose / Blendeth its odour with the violet” (320-21). The blurred boundary between dreaming and waking also persists in Keats’s ballad romance “*La Belle Dame sans Merci*.” The truant knight, who alleges to have been enthralled by a *femme fatale*, “awoke and found [himself] *here*, / On the cold hill’s side,” “sojourn[ing] *here*, / Alone and palely loitering” (43-46; emphases added). The “cold hill’s side” is “there” in the dream (30-31, 33-34) as well as “here” when he is dreamily awake. The reality that Lamia and Lycius experience in their charmed world is challenged by Apollonius’ symbolic modern disenchanting view. The tension between the private romantic world and the highly communal modern world in Keats’s romances epitomises how reality relies on the intersubjective experience. The world hence, as Fredric Jameson suggests, is not “an object of experience or perception” but “the frame or the *Gestalt*,” the “supreme category which permits all experience or perception in the first place and must thus lie

outside them as their own first condition” (141). Due to its dissimilarity to the everyday world, romance, as Jameson succinctly puts it, is “that form in which the *world-ness* of *world* reveals itself” (142). In Keats’s romances, the dreaming, mourning, enthralled worlds are the subjects’ lived worlds, which appear first and foremost real and authentic at the moment of experience prior to reflection. Given its perspectival nature, perception is ever in a state of becoming and approximation, and the perceived world is never determinate. In his exploration of the multifacetedness of reality, Keats modernizes romance by heightening readers’ consciousness of their intersubjectively different lived world.

Illusion as Approximation to Reality

Appearance is not an opposite of reality, for illusion can only occur when things are first experienced as real. Keats believes that the truthfulness of imagination derives not from objective knowledge but from the immediate encounter with the world. Speaking of the reality of Adam’s dream, Keats maintains, “I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by consequitive reasoning” (*KL* 1: 185). Keats’s use of “perceive” is suggestive, anticipating how Merleau-Ponty similarly anchors his faith in “the moment he opens his eyes” like Adam:

We see the things themselves, the world is what we see: formulae of this kind express a faith common to the natural man and the philosopher—the moment he opens his eyes; they refer to a deep-seated set of mute “opinions” implicated in our lives. But what is strange about this faith is that if we seek to articulate it into theses or statements, if we ask ourselves what is this *we*, what *seeing* is, and what *thing* or *world* is, we enter into a labyrinth of difficulties and contradictions. (*VI* 3)

The mystery of the world requires “perceptual faith” (*VI* 3) before any “theses or statements” so as to be able to dwell amidst “a labyrinth of difficulties and contradictions.” Keats possesses such a faith when he correlates truth not with empirical facts but with the perceptive power. Keats’s certitude about the truth that originates from experience is thus shored up by a conscious suspension of the metaphysical question about the existence of the perceived.

This primordial faith in the experienced world is not solipsistic since the world is not a mental construct but open to and bound up with other subjects. Keats’s

characters of romances live on this threshold, and their subjective worlds are under pressure from their intersubjective ones: the secret love between Isabella and Lorenza is under her two brothers' surveillance; Madeline's dreaming world merges with Porphyro's waking consciousness in the feudal society; Lycius and Lamia's private world of enchantment is subject to their guests and Apollonius's gaze; the enthralled truant knight's tale is a response to the lyric speaker's inquiry, "O what can ail thee, knight at arms" (1, 5). The potentially illusionary nature of appearance does not invalidate but rather confirms perceptual faith. As Komarine Romden-Romuc explains, "[p]erceiving requires faith . . . because perceivers are fallible," and "whilst perceived things depend upon a perceiver, perceptual appearances are not independent of the transcendent world" (81-82). Perception is not once and for all and thus illusion does not oppose but approximates reality. Merleau-Ponty's perceptual faith accords with Keats's view of a maturing understanding of the world, as Keats suggests in the preface to *Endymion* that even "a Vision in the form of Youth" (*KL* 1: 184) has its place in human life: "The imagination of a boy is healthy, and the mature imagination of a man is healthy; but there is a space of life in between" (*CP* 64). In Keats's later romances, illusion partakes in the experience of reality and wakefulness redefines the reality experienced in dreams.

As sensation for Keats refers more to the experience of sensing rather than a mental state, his sense of reality is imbued with a gradational quality. In a letter to Benjamin Bailey, Keats proposes a scale of reality:

I am sometimes so very sceptical as to think Poetry itself a mere Jack a lantern to amuse whoever may chance to be struck with its brilliance—As Tradesmen say every thing is worth what it will fetch, so probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer—being in itself a nothing—Ethereal thing may at least be thus real, divided under three heads—Things real—things semireal—and no things—Things real—such as existences of Sun Moon & Stars and passages of Shakspeare—Things semireal such as Love, the Clouds &c which require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist—and Nothings which are made Great and dignified by an ardent pursuit—Which by the by stamps the burgundy mark on the bottles of our Minds, insomuch as they are able to "*consec[r]ate whate'er they look upon*" (*KL* 1: 242-43)

By introducing perception into the idea of reality, Keats here revises the division between reality and non-reality. “Ethereal,” which shares the same Latin root of *aetherius* of the Shakespeare character Ariel, not only denotes the celestial but also refers to the chemical substance ether from the eighteenth century onwards (*OED*). From the examples of Keats’s categories, the “ethereal things” include both the poetical and the scientific and are in general perceivable material objects. Keats’s examples of the real, the semi-real, and no things are not so definite to illustrate how one category differs from another, but Keats apparently correlates their level of reality to the perceiver’s mind. “Things real” are “existences” independent of the mind; “Things semireal” “require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist;” “Nothings” can be “made Great and dignified by an ardent pursuit.” Keats here does not resort to psychologism, which regards reality as mental representations, for he affirms that there are existences in themselves. “Things semireal” and “Nothings” can however gain their sense of reality provided “a greeting of the Spirit” and “an ardent pursuit” respectively as how tradesmen ascribe worth to things, a strikingly similar example used by Husserl to suggest the experiential aspect of truth: “The trader in the market has his market-truth” (*Formal and Transcendental Logic* 278). Keats also either deliberately or subconsciously appropriates Shelley’s idealism in “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” published in Leigh Hunt’s journal *The Examiner* in 1817. Whereas Shelley in the poem writes, “Spirit of BEAUTY, that dost consecrate / With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon / Of human thought or form” (13-15), Keats centres the sense of reality not on the idea beauty but on the human minds that “*consec[r]ate whate’er they look upon.*” Focusing on how an embodied mind interacts with perceived objects, instead of an idea of higher order, Keats’s concern is not so much metaphysical as phenomenological.

Keats’s gradient notion of reality hence aligns with Merleau-Ponty’s view of reality as a series of successive perceptions, in contrast to scientific realism that equates reality with objectivity independent of the mind. For Merleau-Ponty, the perception of an embodied subject is never complete, for the knowledge of the perceived world constantly undergoes renewal; the understanding of the reality is therefore not one single act. Given the finitude of human perception, there is no omniscient point of view, and the perceived object is never transparent:

[T]he system of experience is not spread out before me as if I were God, it is lived by me from a certain point of view; I am not the spectator of it, I am a

part of it, and it is my inherence in a point of view that at once makes possible the finitude of my perception and its opening to the total world as the horizon of all perception (*PP* 317)

Perception is by nature indeterminate and can be illusionary. Merleau-Ponty nonetheless does not understand reality and illusion as binary opposites since it is “the experience of dis-illusion, wherein precisely we learn to know the fragility of the ‘real’” (*VI* 40). As Merleau-Ponty further explains, “‘reality’ does not belong definitively to any particular perception, that in this sense it lies always further on” (*VI* 40-41). The relationship between *Schein* (semblance) and *Erscheinung* (appearance) is not oppositional but the latter is the deferred accomplishment of the former: “there is no *Schein* without an *Erscheinung* . . . every *Schein* is the counterpart of an *Erscheinung* . . . the ‘probable’ evokes a definite experience of the ‘real’ whose accomplishment is only deferred” (*VI* 41). Commenting on this passage, Hannah Arendt challenges the metaphysical bias against the surface: “The everyday common-sense world, which neither the scientist nor the philosopher ever eludes, knows error as well as illusion” (26). Illusion does not negate reality but reveals what reality is:

[T]he very fragility of a perception, attested by its breakup and by the substitution of another perception, far from authorizing us to efface the index of “reality” from them all, obliges us to concede it to all of them, to recognize all of them to be variants of the same world, and finally to consider them not as all false but as “all true,” not as repeated failures in the determination of the world but as progressive approximations. Each perception envelops the possibility of its own replacement by another, and thus a sort of disavowal from the things. But this also means that each perception is the term of an approach, of a series of “illusions” (*VI* 41)

The later realisation of the perceived does not imply the falsehood of earlier perception; instead, it showcases that perception is always in a state of becoming. In Keats’s words, perception involves “uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts” and thus perceptual faith requires one’s “content with half knowledge” (*KL* 1: 193-94).

Contestation of Two Kinds of Reality

Among the three romances that head the 1820 volume, *Isabella* was the one Keats finished first but considered his least satisfactory work. Keats began to write *Isabella* in February 1818 after his completion of *Endymion*. If Keats desired to “take refuge” “from detested moods” in the romance he was then writing (“Dear Reynolds, as last night I lay in bed,” 111-12), the macabre subject matter and pathos of *Isabella* were least effective in alleviating his portentous sense of loss with regard to his consumptive brother. In a letter to Woodhouse, the legal advisor of his publisher, Keats expresses his wish of not publishing *Isabella*:

I shall persist in not publishing The Pot of Basil—It is too smokeable. . . . There is too much inexperience of live, and simplicity of knowledge in it—which might do very well after one’s death—but not while one is alive. There are very few would look to the reality. It is possible to write fine things which cannot be laugh’d at in any way. *Isabella* is what I should call were I a reviewer ‘A weak-sided Poem’ with an amusing sober-sadness about it. (*KL* 2: 174)

Although Keats’s self-criticism of *Isabella* could be a sign of his resignation after the hostile reviews of *Endymion*, his dissatisfaction is not related to his Cockney style and versification. For Keats, *Isabella* is “too smokeable,” which can mean, as James Chandler suggests, “an act of *comprehension* that implies an act of *condescension*, towards ‘weakness’ or ‘inadequacy’” (399). The smokeability, or susceptibility to being “laugh’d at,” for Keats is owing to the poem being marked by “too much inexperience of live” and “simplicity of knowledge.” *Isabella*, Keats conjectures, “might do very well after one’s death—but not while one is alive,” since “[t]here are very few would look to the reality” (*KL* 2: 174). Given its traditional theme of tragic juvenile love, *Isabella* for Keats can easily draw too much attention to its “amusing sober-sadness” and be accordingly dismissed as “A weak-sided Poem.” Yet, what would be amiss in the public reception is the poem’s depiction of “the reality.” To enhance the effect of realism, Keats changes the original setting of Boccaccio’s narrative from Messina to Florence to dramatise the unforgiving capitalistic world and reduces the number of *Isabella*’s brothers from three to two to create two opposing pairs between passion and materialism. Nevertheless, despite some supernatural

elements such as Lorenzo's spectre, the characters' framework of reality remains coherent, and the tale is weak in respect of its thematisation of reality.

Keats notices his inadequate treatment of reality in *Isabella*, and he hence wrestles with this topic more overtly in *The Eve of St. Agnes* and further complicates the issue by juxtaposing competing frameworks of reality. Keats himself sees such a progression in his writing of romance: "There is no objection of this kind [of smokeability] to *Lamia*—A good deal to *St Agnes Eve*—only not so glaring" (*KL* 2: 174). In comparison with *Isabella*, the psychology of the characters in the other romances undergoes noticeable changes in their perceived worlds. When Madeline's dreaming world turns into reality, she immediately recognises her plight ("No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine!"), fearing that Porphyro will "leave [her] here to fade and pine . . . and forsake[] [her like] a deceived thing" (328-33). This sudden shift of framework of the world however occurs only to Madeline while Porphyro's remains undisturbed. Compared to the youths in *Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Lamia* and Lycius have more experience and knowledge of life. While *Lamia* is "[n]ot one hour old, yet of sciential brain," Lycius is "a scholar" under his sophist teacher Apollonius (part 1, lines 191, 279). More importantly, *Lamia* showcases what Schütz calls multiple realities of the world. Hermes's search for his nymph at the beginning of the tale follows the deferral motif in romance. *Lamia*, who makes the nymph invisible, allows Hermes to see his object of love on the condition that she can regain her woman-shape. *Lamia*'s and Hermes's wishes are both fulfilled in the godly realm but *Lamia*'s wish-fulfilment engenders another quest romance for her love with the Corinthian Lycius in the human world. Although their wish-fulfilment adheres to the convention of romance, Lycius's subsequent desire to marry *Lamia* exposes their love to the public, causing a conflict between the reality in *Lamia*'s enchanted world and the reality in his human world. Lycius's teacher Apollonius, the self-invited philosopher on their wedding night, rejects any complicity in their enchantment and declares *Lamia* to be a mere serpent and Lycius's love a foul dream. *Lamia* vanishes under the scrutiny of the philosopher's piercing eyes and Lycius dies of grief. However, the ostensible antagonism between Lycius and Apollonius conceals their deep-seated resemblance with regard to their intolerance of ambiguity: while Lycius desires an unequivocally true woman, Apollonius reduces his prey conveniently to a venomous serpent. *Lamia*, as a serpent-woman in the first place, befuddles both. The tragedy embodies the contestation of two notions of reality: although Lycius's love

with Lamia is experienced as real, it is called into doubt for its fictionality by Apollonius. Yet, in this phantasmagorical world of romance, Lamia resides in a liminal space, oscillating between personal wish-fulfilment and impersonal objectivity. Before Lycius and Apollonius's categorisation, the enigma of Lamia first and foremost embodies the indeterminacy of reality, which paradigmatically makes Keats's romance modern.

***Lamia* as a Romance of Many Worlds**

From the beginning, by disrupting the conventional timeless pastoral setting, Keats ascribes a sense of historicity to the mythological world of *Lamia*: "Upon a time, before the faery broods / Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods, / Before King Oberon's bright diadem" (1.1-3). This world of fairy tales that exists "[u]pon a time" was first inhabited by Nymph and Satyr in Greek mythology and then ruled by the English King Oberon's sovereignty. The introduction of a temporal succession together with the increasing spatial proximity prompts contemporary readers to read the story in terms of their cultural lineage. Terence Hoagwood rightly points out that this opening highlights "the relativity of belief systems" but still follows the dichotomy between illusion and reality with which he takes issue: "Rather than enter or induce illusion, Keats positively prevents entrapment in belief, emphasizing first that pantheons, which are fictions, pass away and succeed one another" (689). Keats however does not "prevent[] entrapment in belief"; instead, readers have to accept the reality of this make-believe fictional world. Hoagwood's observation of the succession of "belief systems" nevertheless highlights that the appearance of the very same world can morph according to different mythological frameworks. Yet, this relativity does not promote scepticism but acknowledges that the perception of reality is not once and for all and the world manifests itself continuously and multifariously.

Reality and illusion are two modes of the experience of the given world, and the prerequisite of an illusion is first perceived as real. Hence, successions from one reality to another should not be seen as "repeated failures in the determination of the world but as progressive approximations" (VI 44). This indeterminacy of experience distinguishes between god's and humans' dream in *Lamia*. Hermes and his nymph's union exemplifies a quest fulfilled in romance, which culminates in a stasis: "It was

no dream; or say a dream it was, / Real are the dreams of Gods, and smoothly pass / Their pleasures in a long immortal dream” (1.126-28). Gods’ dreams are no dreams, for the reality of their perennial dreams has no rupture brought by wakening, whereas woken mortals’ dreams retrospectively become non-reality. Merleau-Ponty pinpoints that dreaming makes sense only for a waking subject:

when I demand an account of the dream, I certainly direct my question toward the dreamer that I was that night, but ultimately the dreamer himself recounts nothing, the waking person is the one who recounts the dream. Without the waking up, dreams would only ever be instantaneous modulations, and would not even exist for us. (*PP* 306)

With a double vision of the mortal and the immortal, the narrator shows that gods’ romance does not belong to the human world: “Into the green-recessed woods they flew; / Nor grew they pale, as mortal lovers do” (1.144-45). Although at first “Pale grew [the nymph’s] immortality, for woe / of all [her] lovers,” she is eventually, after the union with Hermes, “like new flowers at morning songs of bees, / Bloom’d” (1.104-5, 142-43). As for the unfortunate pair of mortal lovers, paleness goes beyond a symptom of love-sickness and suggests calamity underneath the appearance of ecstasy. Lycius, charmed by Lamia’s beauty, “sick to lose / The amorous promise of her lone complain / Swoon’d, murmuring of love, and pale with pain” while Lamia, pressed by Lycius’s insistence to marry her publicly, becomes “pale and meek” (1.287-89, 2.65). Their pompous marriage is initially marred by a sense of unease: “Lamia, regal drest, / Silently paced about, and as she went, / In pale contented sort of discontent” (2.133-35). Unaware of how his teacher Apollonius’s unwelcomed visit has startled his wife and how it will ultimately turn his ceremony into a funeral, “Lycius then press’d her hand, with devout touch, / As pale it lay upon the rosy couch” (2.249-50). The oscillation between rosiness and paleness suggests that the appearing blissful moment also accompanies a tragic sense of life, metaphorically bespeaking the ambiguity of reality.

Such ambiguity manifests itself in the succession of dreams, blurring the boundary between reality and illusion. Lamia’s supernatural power allows her to turn the imaginary real: “she could muse / And dream, when in the serpent prison-house, / Of all she list, strange or magnificent: / How, ever, where she will’d, her spirit went” (1.202-5). It is also in her dream that she first encountered Lycius: “sometimes into cities she would send / Her dream, with feast and rioting to blend / And once, while

among mortals dreaming thus, / She saw the young Corinthian Lycius” (1.213-16). When Lamia’s dream turns real, Lycius’s mind retreats from objectivity of thought to subjectivity of experience: “Over the solitary hills he fared, / Thoughtless at first, but ere eve’s star appeared / His phantasy was lost, where reason fades, / In the calm’d twilight of Platonic shades” (1.234-35). Their concomitant transgression enters a liminal state where dream and reality meet:

Lamia beheld him coming, near, more near—
 Close to her passing, in indifference drear,
 His silent sandals swept the mossy green;
 So neighbour’d to him, and yet so unseen
 She stood: he pass’d, shut up in mysteries,
 His mind wrapp’d like his mantle, while her eyes
 Follow’d his steps . . . (1.237-43)

Lamia’s sensorial perception of Lycius accentuates when he is “coming, near, more near” while Lycius’s mind is “wrapp’d like his mantle.” This reversed hierarchy between mind and body heightens the sensing experience and suspends reflection: Lycius, “so entangled in [Lamia’s] mesh,” “from one trance was wakening / Into another,” and “from death awoke into amaze, . . . Then from amaze into delight he fell” (1.295-97, 322, 324). As “every word she spake entic’d him on / To unperplex’d delight and pleasure known,” Lycius’s successions of dreams acquire a sharper sense of reality through his sensual experience (1.326-27). This realness belongs to the human realm and surpasses the joy of romance represented earlier by Hermes and the nymph, as the narrator describes:

Let the mad poets say what’ever they please
 Of the sweet of Fairies, Peris, Goddesses,
 There is not such a treat among them all,
 Haunters of cavern, lake, and waterfall,
 As a real woman, lineal indeed
 From Pyrrha’s pebbles or old Adam’s seed. (1.328-33)

As the narration focalised through Lycius suggests, Lamia for Lycius is “a real woman,” while, on the other hand, when Lycius encounters his “trusty guide” and “good instructor” Apollonius, the philosopher “seems / The ghost of folly haunting [his] sweet dreams” (1.375-77). In contrasting between Lamia’s realness and Apollonius’s ghostliness, Keats portrays a reality not in the objective but in the

experiential sense, and this vision of reality quintessentially undergoes constant revision in perception.

The view of a transparent and objective world is therefore called into doubt. The visual appearance of Lamia lies beyond the omniscient narrator's verbal representation. Lamia's body can only be depicted metaphorically together with a series of similes:

She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
 Vermilion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
 Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
 Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
 And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
 Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
 Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries—
 So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,
 She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf,
 Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self. (1.47-56)

Lamia is a paradox and a chimera so resistant to categorisation that one comparison requires the revision of another. Her "gordian shape of dazzling hue" presents itself as a Gordian knot, which interweaves opposites like lustres and gloom. The more metaphorical language the narrator deploys, the more the effect of representation is undermined, for Lamia is like too many things to the extent that she ends up being like nothing. Lamia's identity slips from "some penanced lady elf" to "some demon's mistress" and to "the demon's self." Ascribed at once and dispelled in the next moment, these seeming identities can only be propositional. Lamia hides the nymph with supernatural power, but she was also once "a woman" of "[a] woman's shape" (1.101-3, 117-18); she is both a compassionate guardian and a "cruel lady" to Lycius (1.106, 290). The narrator's relentless attempts at depicting Lamia betray the verbal limits rather than Lamia's non-reality. To put it differently, the complexity of Lamia can only be ironically hinted at by unsuccessful representation.

The tragedy of Lamia is thus a consequence of Lycius's desire to expose their cloistered love to the public gaze, which invalidates their earlier framework of reality in the enchanted world. The happy ending of Hermes's and his nymph's romance is owing to Lamia's ability to keep the nymph's "loveliness invisible," as Lamia describes her (1.108):

She tastes unseen; unseen her nimble feet
 Leave traces in the grass and flowers sweet;
 From weary tendrils, and bow'd branches green,
 She plucks the fruit unseen, she bathes unseen:
 And by my power is her beauty veil'd
 To keep it unaffronted, unassail'd
 By the love-glances of unlovely eyes
 Of Satyrs, Fauns, and blear'd Silenus' sighs. (1.96-103)

Hermes alone is the exception (1.110). The fulfilment of his amorous quest, in other words, has to remain private. The continuation of Lycius and Lamia's romance similarly hinges on their seclusion:

For all this came a ruin: side by side
 They were enthroned, in the even tide,
 Upon a couch, near to a *curtaining*
 Whose airy texture, from a golden string,
 Floated into the room, and let appear
Unveil'd the summer heaven, blue and clear,
 Betwixt two marble shafts:—there they reposed,
 Where use had made it sweet, with eyelids *closed*,
 Saving a tythe which love still *open* kept,
 Then they might *see* each other while they almost slept (2.16-25; emphases added)

The habitation demands seclusion from the bustling Corinth and permits only limited openness to nature. Yet, this isolation from the social world is not as untroubled as it seems, since Lamia's magic becomes insufficient to secure the reality of their life in Corinth, which has to be materially supported by a house of "marble shafts" and "[s]aving [of] a tythe" (2.22, 24). With a "spirit pass'd beyond its golden bourn / Into the noisy world almost forsworn," Lycius reveals a "want / Of something more, more than her empery / Of Joys," while the apprehensive Lamia "know[s] well / That but a moment's thought is passion's passing bell" (2.32-39). The intrusion of such "a thought" turns the conventional romance of stasis in Part I into a new romance that dramatizes the tension between reflection and experience in Part II.

Lycius and Lamia's enlarging intersubjective world disrupts the earlier stasis of romance and allows mutability to set in their life. Lycius is "striving" "to entangle,

trammel up and snare [her] soul in [his], and labyrinth [her] there / Like the hid scent in an unbudded rose” (2.52-54). His desire to “unbud” Lamia and “unveil” his thoughts metaphorically suggests how he subjects Lamia to the public gaze. With the more human social world of Corinth in his mind, Lycius regards Lamia as his “prize”:

What mortal hath a prize, that other men
 May be confounded and abash'd withal,
 But lets it sometimes pace abroad majestic,
 And triumph, as in thee I should rejoice
 Amid the hoarse alarm of Corinth's voice.
 Let my foes choke, and my friends shout afar,
 While through the thronged streets your bridal car
 Wheels round its dazzling spokes. (2.57-64)

For Lycius, Lamia's “gordian shape of dazzling hue” is now secondary to the rowdy “dazzling spokes,” and his intention to name and fix Lamia's dazzling quality signals a departure from his earlier enchantment into abstract thoughts:

Sure some sweet name thou hast, though, by my truth,
 I have not ask'd it, ever thinking thee
 Not mortal, but of heavenly progeny,
 As still I do. Hast any mortal name,
 Fit appellation for this dazzling frame? (2.85-89)

Lamia succumbs to the human Lycius, who has “cruel grown”; the enchantress, once described as the “cruel lady,” now yields to the “tyranny” of Lycius, and she is hence, as the narrator revises his earlier portrayal: “The serpent—Ha, the serpent! certes, she / Was none” (1.290, 2.75, 81). The identity of the heroine in Keats's romance is thus much more complex and dynamic than the original tale in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, in which “lamia” is not a name but a general term for a woman-shaped monster: “Apollonius[,] who, by some probable conjectures, found her a serpent, a lamia” (CP 359). In Part II, Lycius and Lamia are no longer flat characters, and their reversible roles challenge the notion of a constant reality immune to renewing appearances.

The Blind Spot of a Philosopher's Gaze

As their romance is transposed from dreams to society, the reality of their enchanted world comes into conflict with that of the intersubjective everyday world. As the narrator foreshadows, "O senseless Lycius! Madman! wherefore flout / The silent-blessings fate, warm cloister'd hours, / And show to common eyes these secret bowers?" (2.147-49) The induction of Part II already instils a cynical view of the everlasting love of romance, which is susceptible to change in society:

Love in a hut, with water and a crust,
Is—Love, forgive us!—cinders, ashes, dust;
Love in a palace is perhaps at last
More grievous torment than a hermit's fast:—
That is a doubtful tale from a faery land,
Hard for the non-elect to understand,
Had Lycius liv'd to hand his story down,
He might have given the moral a fresh frown,
Or clench'd it quite: but too short was their bliss
To breed distrust and hate, that make the soft voice hiss. (2.1-10)

For the narrator, romance as a matter of fact is not more than "a doubtful tale from a faery land"; either "Love in a hut" or "Love in a palace," regardless of their social difference, will "breed distrust and hate." Bringing out their private love to the public, Lycius inevitably confronts the multi-perspectives of their shared social world. Lycius's world is thus subject to scrutiny of the others on their wedding night:

The herd approach'd; each guest, with busy brain,
Arriving at the portal, gaz'd amain,
And enter'd marveling: for they knew the street,
Remember'd it from childhood all complete
Without a gap, yet ne'er before had seen
That royal porch, that high-built fair demesne;
So in they hurried all, maz'd, curious and keen (2.150-56)

Drawn to the magnificent, phantasmagorical world conjured by Lamia, each guest leaves behind their thoughts of the "busy brain" to "gaz[e] amain" and "enter[] marvelling." They are "maz'd, curious and keen," for the very present spectacle overpowers their allegedly "complete" knowledge of the past. While the "royal porch"

and its “high-built fair demesne” arouse the guests’ curiosity and awe, Apollonius is not affected and remains “austere,” prizing “[h]is patient thought” over mere appearance even with his “eye severe”:

Save one, who look’d thereon with eye severe,
 And with calm-planted steps walk’d in austere;
 ’Twas Apollonius: something too he laugh’d,
 As though some knotty problem, that had daft
 His patient thought, had now begun to thaw,
 And solve and melt:—’twas just as he foresaw (2.157-62)

This “knotty problem” in his mind alludes to Lamia’s “gordian shape,” which is for Apollonius a “Gordian knot” that has to be disentangled or simply cut. Apollonius does not see but only foresees. Thus, his reflection comes before perception, and his foreknowledge has no place for knowledge garnered from immediate experience.

Apollonius therefore does not allow for any mystery in his object of gaze. Lycius’s searching eyes contrast with his mentor’s fixed gaze:

By her glad Lycius sitting, in chief place,
 Scarce saw in all the room another face,
 Till, checking his love trance, a cup he took
 Full brimm’d, and opposite sent forth a look
 ’Cross the broad table, to beseech a glance
 From his old teacher’s wrinkled countenance,
 And pledge him. The bald-head philosopher
 Had fix’d his eye, without a twinkle or stir
 Full on the alarmed beauty of the bride (2.239-47)

Apollonius’s gaze scrutinises Lamia, and his sharp eyes, like a lancet, yearn to pierce through the appearance to attain a higher reality that he holds up: “He gaz’d into her eyes, and not a jot / Own’d they the lovelorn piteous appeal: / More, more he gaz’d” (2.256-58). Discontented with this “lovelorn piteous appeal,” Apollonius sees not what he sees but what he desires to see. He dismisses Lycius’s love as merely a “foul dream”; with an utter distrust of the apparent, the stoic philosopher doubts what is immediately present to him, “gazing again / In the bride’s face” (2.271-72). Nevertheless, for Lycius, Lamia is neither a serpent nor an evil spirit; instead, Apollonius’s truth-searching eyes are the actual “demon eyes,” the “juggling eyes” that Lycius demands to “shut” (2.277, 289). Apollonius, hindered by his dualist

thinking, fails to conceive that Lamia “was a woman” and his student Lycius also a serpent-tyrant who can “entangle, trammel up and snare” his prey (1.117, 305, 2.52). For Apollonius, Lycius, despite his complicity with the entire enchantment, is no more than a “Fool” and “a serpent’s prey” (2.295, 298). Gazing Lamia like a prey, the philosopher is at the same time also metamorphosing into a serpent that he abhors: “the sophist’s eye, / Like a sharp spear, went through her utterly, / Keen, cruel, perceant, stinging” (2.299-301). Incessantly, Apollonius “look’d and look’d again” and eventually kills not only Lamia but also Lycius, leaving him “the heavy body wound” (2.304, 311). His well-intended liberation ends up as a murder.

Apollonius’s piercing gaze is what Merleau-Ponty criticises as scientific positivism, which leaves no space for dreams and myths. In *Lamia*, Keats famously points out how the elevation of science as the sole means of understanding the universe saps imagination:

Do not all charms fly
 At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
 There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
 We know her woof, her texture; she is given
 In the dull catalogue of common things.
 Philosophy will clip an Angel’s wings,
 Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
 Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—
 Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
 The tender-person’d Lamia melt into a shade. (2.229-38)

Keats here follows Hazlitt’s criticism of science in “On Poetry in General”: “the progress of knowledge and refinement has a tendency to circumscribe the limits of the imagination, and to clip the wings of poetry. The province of the imagination is principally visionary, the unknown and undefined: the understanding restores things to their natural boundaries, and strips them of their fanciful pretensions” (5: 9). Nevertheless, Keats and Hazlitt are no anti-intellectualists since what they reject is the relegation of “all mysteries” inherent in perceptual experience to disembodied abstraction of the geometrical “rule and line.” Hazlitt upholds that perceived objects are by nature obscure, for they are not isolated objects but always situated in embodied subjects’ perceptual fields:

Objects must strike differently upon the mind, independently of what they are in themselves, as long as we have a different interest in them, as we see them in a different point of view, nearer or at a greater distance (morally or physically speaking) from novelty, from old acquaintance, from our ignorance of them, from our fear of their consequences, from contrast, from unexpected likeness. We can no more take away the faculty of the imagination, than we can see all objects without light or shade. Some things must dazzle us by their preternatural light; others must hold us in suspense, and tempt our curiosity to explore their obscurity. Those who would dispel these various illusions, to give us their drab-coloured creation in their stead, are not very wise. (5: 8-9)

For Hazlitt, objects carry signification, which orients their perceivers to view them in certain perspectives or interests. Merleau-Ponty, along similar lines, emphasises that objects are “presented in a context of relations that, *a priori*, renders the different perspectival presentations equivalent” (PP 314). Both Hazlitt and Merleau-Ponty attend to the importance of the background such as distance and lighting of the visual field. Hazlitt mocks how scientists idiosyncratically isolate their objects from their contexts and environment:

Let the naturalist, if he will, catch the glow-worm, carry it home with him in a box, and find it next morning nothing but a little grey worm; let the poet or the lover of poetry visit it at evening, when beneath the scented hawthorn and the crescent moon it has built itself a palace of emerald light. This is also one part of nature, one appearance which the glow-worm presents, and that not the least interesting; so poetry is one part of the history of the human mind, though it is neither science nor philosophy. (5: 9)

Merleau-Ponty also refutes the idea of colours as abstract qualia, for colours always present themselves with texture:

If, before a mountainous landscape, we adopt the critical attitude that isolates a part of the field, the color itself changes, and this green, which was a meadow-green isolated from the context, loses its thickness and its color at the same time that it loses its representative value. A color is never simply a color, but rather the color of a certain object, and the blue of a rug would not be the same blue if it were not a wooly blue. The colors of the visual field, as we have just seen, form an ordered system around a dominant color, namely, the lighting taken as a level. (PP 326)

Superimposing reflection onto experience, Apollonius has eyes but cannot see. For him, appearance and reality are polar opposites. The world of *Lamia* however belongs to neither gods' nor humans' realm but exists in a liminal space, where magic ceases to be mere fancy and reality turns uncertain.

The world does not unfold entirely before its observer, and illusions sediment in perception, yet illusions are not delusions but integral to the sense of reality. For Keats, the truthfulness of poetry does not necessarily expel errors and mistakes of lived experience:

Though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine; the commonest Man shows a grace in his quarrel—By a superior being our reasoning[s] may take the same tone—though erroneous they may be fine—This is the very thing in which consists poetry; and if so it is not so fine a thing as philosophy—For the same reason that an eagle is not fine a thing as a truth. (*KL 2*: 80-81)

Keats's misgivings about poetry being "not so fine a thing as philosophy" hint at a general nagging anxiety over a potential contradiction between experience and truth. This problem arises from a widely accepted understanding that philosophy favours thinking over experience. Keats's celebration of experience in poetry in fact has a rapport with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, which aspires to elucidate the milieu of human experience that includes dream and myth. Merleau-Ponty agrees with Ernst Cassirer that myth offers "a mode of world formation which is independent of all modes of mere objectivization" and "does not recognize the dividing line between real and unreal, between reality and appearance, which theoretical objectivization draws and must draw" (Cassirer 68). The "cold philosophy" and "dull catalogues of common things" that Keats criticises are what Merleau-Ponty regards as the problem of objective thought:

objective thought refuses the supposed phenomena of the dream, of the myth, and in general of existence because it finds them inconceivable, and because they mean nothing of which it can thematize. It refuses the fact or the real in the name of the possible and the evident. But it does not see that what is evident is itself established upon a fact. Reflective analysis believes that it knows what the dreamer and the schizophrenic experience better than the dreamer or the schizophrenic himself; moreover, the philosopher believes that

he knows what he sees better in reflection than he knows it in perception. (*PP* 302)

Apollonius diminishes Lycius's world as a "foul dream" and him as "a serpent's prey" (2.270, 298), exemplifying such a philosopher who "believes that he knows what he sees better in reflection than he knows it in perception." Yet, the philosophers who, in Merleau-Ponty's understanding, do not seek truth at the expense of experience, belong to another type. M. C. Dillon makes a fine distinction between the search for truth and the quest for certainty: "The search for truth is an attempt to pierce the opacity of the world, an effort to make our conjectures about the world as accurate as possible. The quest for certainty, on the other hand, is an attempt to eliminate the opacity of the world altogether and make it entirely transparent; an essay to expel all conjecture or supposition from our knowledge" (10). Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and The Invisible* more unequivocally highlights the interest of a philosophy in the persistently equivocal:

The philosopher's manner of questioning is therefore not that of *cognition*. . . . Nor is philosophy an *awakening of consciousness (prise de conscience)*. . . . It is that universe that philosophy aims at, that is, as we say, *the object of philosophy*—but here never will the lacuna be filled in, the unknown transformed into known; the "object" of philosophy will never come to fill in the philosophical question, since this obturation would take from it the depth and the distance that are essential to it. The effective, present, ultimate and primary being, the thing itself, are in principle apprehended in transparency through their perspectives, offer themselves therefore only to someone who wishes not to have them but to see them, not to hold them as with forceps, or to immobilize them as under the objective of a microscope, but to let them be and to witness their continued being. (101)

Genuine philosophy for Merleau-Ponty does not penetrate its object of inquiry like Apollonius's stinging eyes or scrutinises it with forceps or under a microscope like scientists; instead, it respects its "lacuna," "depth," and "distance," which constitute its "continued being." Such a philosophical inquiry aims not at "an *answer*, but a confirmation of its astonishment" (*VI* 102). Its open-endedness corresponds to the unfolding nature of perception: "It is necessary to comprehend perception as this interrogative thought which lets the perceived world be rather than posits it, before which the things form and undo themselves in a sort of gliding, beneath the yes and

the no” (102). Keats’s new romances highlight the sense of reality in dreaming and waking, myth and science, illusion and reality, for the world has more than one modulation; philosophy ought to understand them on their own right without reducing one to the other; myth, for instance, is both “a projection of existence and an expression of the human condition” (*PP* 306). Merleau-Ponty in *The Visible and The Invisible* continues to stress the importance of keeping different modes of experience in perspective for true philosophical thinking as in the account of occultation:

If philosophy is to appropriate to itself and to understand this initial openness upon the world which does not exclude a possible occultation, it cannot be content with describing it; it must tell us how there is openness without the occultation of the world being excluded, how the occultation remains at each instant possible even though we be naturally endowed with light. The philosopher must understand how it is that these two possibilities, which the perceptual faith keeps side by side within itself, do not nullify one another. (28-29)

Thinking thus does not oppose experience but the former makes sense of the latter: “With the conversion to reflection, perceiving and imagining are now only two modes of *thinking*” (29). A philosophy sensitive to infinite possibilities of perceiving the same world is therefore not incompatible with the Romantic reflection on the relationship between imagination and reason. Merleau-Ponty’s return to lived experience in his account of reality also echoes Keats’s proto-phenomenological thinking when the poet proclaims, “Nothing ever becomes real till it is experienced. Even a Proverb is no proverb to you till your Life has illustrated it” (*KL* 2: 81). Philosophy for Keats and Merleau-Ponty in this sense is definitely not “cold.”

Neil Fraistat succinctly points out that *Lamia* “refuses to provide the terms by which it can be evaluated: nowhere can a center of meaning be located in the poem” (109). As the opening romance of the 1820 volume, this narrative decentres a single dominant framework for interpreting the world. *Lamia* hence invites its modern readers to suspend what Husserl calls the “natural attitude” in order to understand the melancholic Isabella’s collapsed world in Boccaccio’s old romance and the naïve Madeline’s startlement in her wakening. Keats’s framing technique in his romances therefore does not aim to cast doubt on the story-world but reminds readers of two co-existing worlds: the modern world that readers experience as real and the phantasmagorical ones that the characters experience also as real. Accordingly, the

romance *Lamia* itself also elicited the divided responses that Keats foresaw: “I have been reading over a part of a short poem I have composed lately call’d ‘Lamia’—and I am certain there is that sort of fire in it which must take hold of people in some way—given them either pleasant or unpleasant sensation. What they want is a sensation of some sort” (*KL* 2: 189). Keats is certain about its effects but uncertain about what effects *Lamia* might have on its readers. Poetry as an aesthetic object in this sense hence paradoxically ascertains its indeterminacy in multiple readings, and this indeterminacy meanwhile prompted Keats to reflect on the problem of alterity in aesthetic experience in “Ode to a Nightingale” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” which he wrote alongside *Lamia*.

Chapter Four: Encountering the Lyric Other

Keats being mesmerised by the Grecian grandeur of the Elgin Marbles left an indelible imprint on the memory of his artist friend Joseph Severn, who nursed the poet in his last days in Rome. Severn reminisced about Keats as an ardent admirer of art, who “went again and again to see the Elgin marbles, and would sit for an hour or more at a time beside them rapt in revery . . . with eyes shining so brightly and face so lit up by some visionary rapture” (Sharp 32). Yet, what escapes Severn’s sidelong glance is how this moment of rapture is both enchanting and embarrassing for Keats, who in his two sonnets on the Elgin Marbles expresses the aggravating effect of the sculptures’ majesty on his sense of frailty. In the epistolary sonnet to his friend Benjamin Haydon, Keats apologetically expresses how language falls short of conveying the grandeur of the Grecian arts: “Forgive me, Haydon, that I cannot speak / Definitively on these mighty things” (1-2). In the other sonnet “On Seeing the Elgin Marbles,” the transcendence of art heightens the consciousness of his frailty and transience: “My spirit is too weak—mortality / Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep” (1-2). The finitude of the mortal body grants Keats only glimpses of the transcendence of art through “dim-conceived glories of the brain” and “a shadow of magnitude” (9, 14). The “Grecian grandeur” of “these wonders” brings along “an undescribable feud” and instigates “a most dizzy pain” (10-12). A similar uneasiness continues to play out in “Ode to a Nightingale” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” published in *The Annals of the Fine Arts* in 1819 and 1820 respectively. These two odes dramatise how the mortal speaker is weighed down by the transcendence of the nightingale and the urn in his aesthetic experience. Enthralled by the wonder of art, Keats despite the discomfort cannot avert his eyes from the aesthetic objects and is torn between looking and not looking.

Lyric Embarrassment

Such awkwardness exemplifies the distinctive quality inherent in apostrophes according to Jonathan Culler: “in the first instance [apostrophes] are embarrassing:

embarrassing both to the author and his readers” (“Apostrophe” 59).¹ Culler points out that “apostrophe . . . makes its point by troping not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication itself” (59). Culler’s observation accords with Peter Hacker’s account of embarrassment as “*essentially* an audience-involving emotion” (167). Hence, not only is embarrassment a self-conscious emotion but it also designates a consciousness of one’s relation to the other. Although embarrassment does not lead to “a global decrease of self-esteem” like shame (Zahavi 316), it aligns with Silvan Tomkins’s analysis of the ambivalent attitude towards the “strange” other in shame, which “operates ordinarily only after interest or enjoyment has been activated, and inhibits one or the other or both” (134). Apostrophes in lyric poetry can be embarrassing because they set up a communication situation wherein an interested addresser speaks to an addressee who is not necessarily engaged. Keats’s two odes imagine a speaker who strives to engage in a dialogue but encounters an indifferent bird and a silent urn; his interest is inhibited, and his consciousness is directed back to himself as the rejected other. This uneasiness about the self as the other brings forth embarrassment. Yet, as Christopher Ricks remarks, “Keats as a man and a poet was especially sensitive to, and morally intelligent about, embarrassment; that the particular direction of his insight and human concern . . . is to insist upon raising the matter of embarrassability” (1). By bringing up embarrassment in his odes, Keats thereby refashions lyric poetry into a genre that does not express subjectivity so much as it enunciates the uneasy relationship between the self and the other.

Although the dynamics between the aesthetic object and the perceiver is not entirely benign, Keats’s uneasy sense of alterity nonetheless leads to his recognition of the resistance of the other. Portraying the speaker as a listener to the nightingale and a viewer of the urn, Keats receptively attends to what speaks to him. Although the nightingale and the urn are the poet’s own imaginaries, Keats remarkably construes them as the antitheses of the mortal speaker. In spite of the resulting difficulty in their communication, the other’s autonomy manifests itself in the resistance to the lyric speaker’s will; in so doing, Keats mitigates what he calls “the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime” in lyric poetry (*KL* 1: 387). For Keats, the enigma of the other is

¹ Culler reiterates the same view in *Theory of the Lyric*: “Apostrophe is a palpable embarrassment, because it is a figure of all that is most radical, pretentious, and mystificatory in the lyric” (190).

not a stumbling block but a wonder. This awareness of the other's autonomy echoes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's belief in "Eye and Mind" that "[t]he painter lives in fascination" (*The Primacy of Perception* 167). For Merleau-Ponty, painters allow themselves to open to the world and be acted upon: "Inevitably the roles between [the painter] and the visible are reversed. That is why so many painters have said that things look at them" (167). In the moment of sensing, the experiencing entity is both sensing as a sentient and being sensed as a sensible.

This reversibility of the oxymoronic sensible sentient cannot be reduced to a synthesis. On the one hand, the lyric embarrassment in the two odes exhibits Keats's insight into the self-as-other through aesthetic experience. On the other hand, foregrounding the transcendence of art for the mortal perceiver in listening and in looking, Keats anticipates what Emmanuel Alloa calls the "*resistance of the sensible*" in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (7). With his attention to the sensing self simultaneously being the sensed other, Keats accordingly demonstrates the capability of lyric poetry to address alterity.

The Expressivity of Art

Although Keats announces his failure to capture the Grecian grandeur, his emphasis on their daunting effects on the perceiver reflects the shift of focus from imitation of nature onto the expressivity of art in aesthetic experience. This expressivity of art nevertheless does not lie in the artists' will to express his feelings but in their capability of evoking correspondent passions in the perceiver's mind. In his essay "The Elgin Marbles," Hazlitt, while still maintaining that art is mimetic, distances himself from the neoclassical abstraction of nature and upholds that art is the correspondence between the vitality of nature and the artist's mind: "Art is the imitation of nature; and the Elgin Marbles are in their essence and their perfection casts from nature,—from fine nature, it is true, but from real, living, moving nature; from objects in nature, answering to an idea in the artist's mind, not from an idea in the artist's mind abstracted from all objects in nature" (18: 100). Similarly, in "On Poetry in General," the introductory lecture on the English poets that Keats attended, Hazlitt follows but also expands the mimetic function of art. Hazlitt suggests that art is a catalyst of sympathetic imagination: "The best general notion which I can give of poetry is, that it is the natural impression of any object or event, by its vividness

exciting an involuntary movement of imagination and passion, and producing, by sympathy, a certain modulation of the voice, or sound, expressing it” (5: 1). Although poetry draws on nature, it is also a result of the poet’s intuitive affective response to nature. Accordingly, Hazlitt enlarges the concept of mimesis by incorporating human subjectivity into nature as he further explains: “Poetry then is an imitation of nature, but the imagination and the passions are a part of man’s nature” (5: 3). As humans are part of nature, Hazlitt also finds sublimity in human passions exemplified in tragedies such as Shakespeare’s *King Lear* and *Othello* (5: 5-6). Quoting from *Hamlet*, Hazlitt highlights that nature in poetry is invested with human passions: “the end and use of poetry, ‘both at the first and now, was and is to hold the mirror up to nature,’ seen through the medium of passion and imagination, not divested if that medium by means of literal truth or abstract reason” (5: 8). Hazlitt in “On Reason and Imagination” makes use of the same quote and further elaborates on the ethical aspect of the expressivity of art in cultivating the sense of otherness: “The object and end of playing, ‘both at first and now, is to hold the mirror up to nature,’ to enable us to feel for others as for ourselves, or to embody a distinct interest out of ourselves by the force of imagination and passion” (12: 55). For Hazlitt, the ethics of sympathetic imagination of tragic poetry emanates from its affective power, which directs the perceivers’ attention from their ego to the concern for others. Although the sympathetic quality elevated by Hazlitt tends to be associated with Keats’s “camelion Poet,” what distinguishes Keats from Hazlitt is Keats’s emphasis on holding the polar opposites by not only feeling for others “as for ourselves” or “out of ourselves” but, more crucially, different from ourselves.

The influence of Hazlitt’s idea of the expressivity of art on Keats’s conception of art is formative but Keats also foresees the distressing effect when such expression becomes too powerful. Hazlitt’s notion of the gusto in art contributes to Keats’s conception of the “camelion Poet,” who “lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low; rich or poor, mean or elevated” (*KL* 1: 387). Hazlitt’s essay “On Gusto,” published together with Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” in *The Annals*, holds that “Gusto in art is power or passion defining any object” (4: 77). For Hazlitt, gusto comes from the reciprocal relationship between the object and the perceiver, for the expression of the former presupposes the presence of the latter: “there is hardly any object entirely devoid of expression, without some character of power belonging to it, some precise association with pleasure or pain” (4: 77). The perceiver cannot avoid

seeing an object coloured by human passions, which in return speaks to its perceiver and elicits pleasure or pain. Duncan Wu suggests that the realisation of gusto calls for disinterestedness both of the artist and of the viewer:

Gusto is an index of the imaginative intensity with which the artist endows his work. It is, in the first place, a test of disinterestedness—the ability to transcend the self so as completely to apprehend the sensations of another object; in the second place, of the ability to communicate them through technical expertise; and, finally, of the disinterested gaze of the viewer, to whom the work of art transmits them. (210)

Hazlitt particularly hails Titian's paintings as the exemplars of gusto, for the colouring "seems sensitive and alive all over; not merely to have the look and texture of flesh, but the feeling in itself" (4: 77). The aesthetic object possesses life and feelings to the extent that it sees its perceiver as, in Titian's paintings, "the limbs of his female figures have a luxurious softness and delicacy, which appears conscious of the pleasure of the beholder" (4: 77). The gesturing body is not a mass of matter but expresses its vitality and the gusto of art captures the subjectivity embodied by the figures in the paintings. As the two sonnets on the Elgin Marbles show, Keats feels the presence of the vitality preserved in the sculptures and discerns their gusto but such vitality at the same time evokes the anticipation of mortality of his failing body.

In evaluating Benjamin West's *Death on the Pale Horse*, an allegorical painting based on *The Book of Revelation*, Keats follows Hazlitt's criticism of its lack of gusto but he reflects further on how art can accommodate the disagreeable. For Hazlitt, Death in the painting is not lively and fails to exert its presence on the viewer as the figure seems to be merely a lump of pigments: "His presence does not make the still air cold. His flesh is not stony or cadaverous, but is crusted over with a yellow glutinous paste, as if it had been baked in a pye. . . . There is no gusto, no imagination in Mr. West's colourings" (18: 136). Hazlitt criticises West's painting along the lines of his stress on the expressivity of art and holds that its male and female figures are "absorbed in the feelings of their own particular misery" but "are not likely to excite any sympathy in the beholders" (18: 137). Hazlitt particularly takes issue with West's egotism since the painting exhibits the sublimity of the artist himself rather than the subject matter, and Hazlitt's criticism of West would later become Keats's of Wordsworth (18: 135-37). Keats agrees with Hazlitt's observation of the weakness of West's painting: "there is nothing to be intense upon, no women one feels mad to kiss;

no face swelling into reality” (*KL* 1: 192). Reality for Keats is imbued with intensity, which can palliate the disagreeable: “the excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth—Examine King Lear & you will find this exemplified throughout” (*KL* 1: 192). As Li Ou argues, the sublimity of the tragedy of *King Lear* exemplifies Keatsian intensity and Hazlittian gusto, and it is this altitude of human pathos through which the reader or the viewer can transcend their ego to recognise the “confrontational and oppositional” otherness (67). Hazlitt suggests that the pleasure of imitation derives from “objects in themselves disagreeable or indifferent” and explains, “by exciting curiosity, and inviting a comparison between the object and the representation, [imitation] opens a new field of inquiry, and leads the attention to a variety of details and distinctions not perceived before” (4: 72-73). In short, art fills the perceiver with wonder by foregrounding the otherness of the aesthetic object, particularly the disagreeable.

The evaporation of the disagreeable in art therefore is not annihilation but sublimation. Keats does not see art as a means of gratification and accepts its accompanying unpleasantness as he further comments on the defects of West’s painting, “in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness” (*KL* 1: 192). The artist distils the repulsiveness from unpleasantness into “momentous depth of speculation excited,” which occurs when the perceived object is recognised as the enigmatic other. The ability of accommodating the unpleasant is also what Keats in the same letter calls “negative capability,” which “form[s] a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously” (*KL* 1: 193). The expressivity of art implies that aesthetic experience as a form of communication between the artwork and the viewer, but this communication does not necessarily radiate unpleasantness or intimidation, which Keats endures in seeing the Elgin Marbles. This Romantic notion of expressivity of art and Keats’s cognizance of abating the ego in representing the other find an echo in Merleau-Ponty’s “Cézanne’s Doubt,” which gestures a resolute departure from neoclassical mimetic notion of art: “Art is not imitation, nor is it something manufactured according to the wishes of instinct or good taste. It is a process of expressing” (*Sense and Non-Sense* 17). The idea of expressive art enacts the reciprocal relationship between the fascinated viewer and the wondrous aesthetic object. While “Ode to a Nightingale” dramatises how the mortal speaker comes to a

realisation of himself as the other for the immortal bird, the interrogative mode of “Ode on a Grecian Urn” presents the ever-unfolding urn as an enigma. The endeavour and futility of synthesis in both odes result in embarrassment but also affirm the other in lyric poetry.

The Self as the Other in “Ode to a Nightingale”

Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” from the outset stages a communication doomed to failure. Shelley in “A Defence of Poetry” compares a poet to a nightingale: “A poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why” (516). The melody of Keats’s nightingale however is too sweet to the extent that its mortal listener becomes overwhelmed. Laden with this imbalance, the poem is rife with all possible oppositions between the speaker and the nightingale: melancholic and happy, here and there, mortal and immortal, temporal and timeless, terrestrial and celestial. Keats’s nightingale hence is delightful like the one in Coleridge’s conversation poem but in a totally difference sense. In Keats’s poem, the nightingale transfigures from the victimised Philomel unable to articulate her misfortune in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to a bird singing songs of ecstasy with a victimising indifference to human suffering. Not being heard and understood by the nightingale, his intended addressee, the speaker gets frustrated and embarrassed, for he wants an audience. This sense of embarrassment doubles the role of the subject-speaker: the addressee ceases to be a mere object and seems to look at him. This interplay between the perceiver and the perceived characterises Merleau-Ponty’s notion of flesh (*le chair*) in *The Visible and The Invisible*, which challenges the long-held dualism between the subject and the object. Flesh is chiasmic: “The chiasm, reversibility, is the idea that every perception is doubled with a counter-perception . . . is an act with two faces, one no longer knows who speaks and who listens. Speaking-listening, seeing-being seen, perceiving-being perceived circularity . . . *Activity = passivity*” (VI 264-65). In Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale,” the embarrassed speaker is, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, the sensible sentient. Embarrassment is an outgrowth of such recognition that the self is being seen by the other.

Keats's aesthetic ideal of a "camelion Poet" who constantly feels the presence of the other particularly incarnates Merleau-Ponty's notion of the chiasmic structure of flesh. In contrast to "the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime," Keats upholds that "A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity—he is continually in for—and filling some other Body" (*KL* 1: 387). Keats's peculiar juxtaposition of the two prepositions "in" and "for" indicates his awareness that the poet's identity is essentially coupled with his continuous directedness towards the other. There is no pure subjectivity, for consciousness is constantly *of* something, and such directedness is the fundamental phenomenological concept of intentionality. Nevertheless, Keats is more alert to the fact that the subject is more acted upon than acting. In the second half of the letter, Keats explains how he as a poet is susceptible to slipping into the identities of the other: "When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins to [*sic*] to press upon me that, I am in a very little time annihilated—not only among Men; it would be the same in a Nursery of children" (*KL* 1: 387). In contrast to this, Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey" impresses himself upon his sister Dorothy: "in thy voice I catch / The language of my *former* heart, and read / My *former* pleasures in the shooting lights / Of thy wild eyes" (117-20; emphases added). Understanding that the self is bound up with the other for a "camelion Poet," Keats is more aware that lyric poetry is a dyadic event than a re-enactment of the poet's experience. Culler in *Theory of the Lyric* argues that centring the idea of the lyric on subjectivity easily draws attention to the event but glosses over the lyric's "attempt to be itself an event" (16). Marjorie Levinson draws on enactive science and phenomenology and further elaborates that lyric poetry is "thought happening and consciousness occurring" "in or to or through an apparatus that both is and is not us, extending into the layered environments that make up our world" (261, 284). Both Wordsworth and Keats are speaking poets, but Keats speaks particularly to an audience who can turn their back on him.

Apprehensive about the nightingale's resistance, the lyric I shows an acute sense of his own alterity. The speaker's pain paralyzes not only his sense but also communication: "My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense" (1-2). While the present tense creates discursive immediacy, the shift from the indicative to the subjunctive mood signals the speaker's uneasiness about his loss of sense: "as though of hemlock I *had drunk*, / Or *emptied* some dull opiate to the drains / One

minute past, and Lethe-wards *had sunk*" (2-4; emphases added). As this change of mood indicates, his "sense" goes beyond physiological sensation and points to its semantic failure. The connective "as though" conjures up an imagined other, to whom he is so drunk that his words make no sense. Propelled by this heightened sense of awkwardness, the speaker turns to address the nightingale to establish some communion: "'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot, / But being too happy in thine happiness" (5-6). His inspiration for fellowship with the nightingale derives from his counterpart's "light-winged[ness]" and "full-throated ease," which contrast with his druggedness and weightiness further stressed by rhyming "drunk" and "sunk" (2, 4, 7, 10). The speaker's envisioning of the nightingale thereby impresses upon himself in return, exemplifying Merleau-Ponty's idea of the reversibility of flesh. In fact, when the speaker laments earlier on, "My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense," his paining and pained body is both a sensible and a sentient. Keats's sense of otherness therefore lies not only in the recognition of a nightingale singing above as the other but also in the knowledge of himself as the other for the indifferent bird.

The more the mortal speaker desires to identify with the nightingale, the more different they appear. His suffering is allegedly not caused by the "envy of [the nightingale's] happy lot" but by "being too happy in [its] happiness" (5-6), yet his yearning to bond with the nightingale results in an excess, which exacerbates their separation rather than facilitating their integration. The nightingale's "sing[ing] of summer in full-throated ease" prompts the speaker to seek help from "a draught of vintage," a catalyst for him to transcend his earthly existence to join the nightingale (10-11). With the invigoration of alcohol, "the true, the blushful Hippocrene," the speaker boldly avows, "That I might drink, and leave the world unseen, / And with thee fade away into the forest dim" (16, 19-20). This bold avowal however causes more embarrassment: while the speaker hopes to forget the haunting mortality associated with this world, the transitive verb "forget" calls for an object, which restores all human frailties to his mind: "Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget / What thou among the leaves hast never known, / The weariness, the fever, and the fret" (21-23). His wish for the communion with the nightingale paradoxically accentuates the gap between knowledge and non-knowledge of human conditions. His relentless but fruitless striving for synthesis, although embarrassing, preserves the other in its otherness. The irony of the intended but unfulfilled communion between

the speaker and the nightingale embodies the reversible but also divergent nature of flesh:

There is no coinciding of the seer with the visible. But each borrows from the other, takes from or encroaches upon the other, intersects with the other, is in chiasm with the other. In what sense are these multiple chiasms but one: not in the sense of synthesis, of the originally synthetic unity, but always in the sense of *Uebertragung*, encroachment, radiation of being. (VI 261)

Instead of dissolving their differences through an imaginative union, Keats highlights the gap between the addresser and the addressee and preserves their two simultaneous modes of existence as the self and the other. Their reversible relationship is what Merleau-Ponty describes as “hyperdialectic,” which “envisages without restriction the plurality of the relationships and what has been called ambiguity” (VI 94). Despite the ineffective communication, Keats’s lyric reveals the agency of the other.

Whereas canonical lyric poems by the first generation of Romantics such as Wordsworth’s “I wandered lonely as a cloud” and Coleridge’s “This Lime-tree Bower my Prison” celebrate the compensatory power of imagination in transcending the gap between the mind and the world, Keats concedes the limits of imagination. Laden by the intoxicating wine, the speaker resorts to the light-winged poesy: “Away! away! for I will fly to thee, / Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards, / But on the viewless wings of Poesy” (31-33). The speaker’s invocation of poetic power once again reminds him of his bodily hindrance as “the dull brain perplexes and retards” (34). An exclamation of the participation in the celestial world is furthermore undercut by incertitude: “Already with thee! tender is the night, / And *haply* the Queen-Moon is on her throne, / Cluster’d around by all her starry Fays” (35-37; emphases added). Although first drawn to the moon’s fanciful celestial imagery, his consciousness swings back to the encroaching and impenetrable earthly gloom: “But here there is no light, / Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown / Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways” (38-40). His call for “the viewless wings of Poesy” ironically brings the speaker’s impaired vision to the foreground: “I cannot see what flowers are at my feet, / Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs” (41-42). His loss of vision, however, accentuates other senses and informs Keats of an inexhaustible world:

But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows

The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
 Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;
 And mid-May's eldest child,
 The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
 The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves. (43-50)

Darkness teaches the speaker to smell, to taste, and to touch a vision, whose multifaceted aspects are forgotten in scientific inquiries into the qualia of an object. Keats's use of synaesthesia is therefore not only a literary device exalting the senses to exuberance, but it also, as Merleau-Ponty argues, significantly illustrates "the rule" of perceptual experience: "*For the subject does not tell us merely that he has a sound and a color at the same time: it is the sound itself that he sees, at the place where colors form*" (PP 238). Subjugated to the loss of vision, the speaker relishes the opaque but ever-unfolding natural world. Keats's "embalmed darkness" may allude to the "balmy night" in Coleridge's "The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem." What distinguishes Keats from Coleridge is his delight to "guess"; Coleridge's speaker by contrast diverts his attention by "think[ing] upon the vernal showers / That gladden the green earth" so as to "find / A pleasure in the dimness of the stars" (9-11). While Keats accepts the mystery of darkness, Coleridge transcends the obscure world through his poetic imagination. These two attitudes towards the unpleasantness of lost vision could intimate Keats's qualms about Coleridge's "being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge" (KL 1: 193). With his negative capability, Keats admits the constraints of corporeal eyes and reawakens synaesthetic experience to emphasise an inexhaustible world, which continuously lies beyond our vision.

As the darkness evokes the speaker's various senses, the body becomes thematised as the other. With hindered vision, the speaker also listens to his own voice:

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
 I have been half in love with easeful Death,
 Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
 To take into the air my quiet breath (51-53)

The rhymes, "time" / "rhyme" and "Death" / "breath," hint at the temporality of the sonorous body and juxtapose mortality and vitality. Attending to his breathing mortal body, the speaker recalls and envisions his impending death as corporeal liberation,

announcing, “Now more than ever seems it rich to die, / To cease upon the midnight with no pain” (55-56). The wish for “easeful Death” implies his present suffering incomprehensible to the immortal bird, which continues to sing in ecstasy:

While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
 In such an ecstasy!
 Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—
 To thy high requiem become a sod. (57-60)

The failed communication between the speaker and the nightingale culminates in their dissonance: while the speaker listens to his expiring breath, the nightingale’s never-ending song, which ironically serves as the “high requiem,” will be in vain for the speaker buried beneath as “a sod.” Nevertheless, in the process, the speaker positions his perishable body as the other for the nightingale so as to fathom out the possible meanings of mortality both for himself and for the nightingale. Given their fundamental ontological differences, the lyric speaker’s apostrophe to the nightingale proves futile and embarrassing. However, thinking through the nightingale’s immortal perspective, the speaker meanwhile sees his body as the other for his addressee.

This perishable body, although distancing the mortal speaker from the immortal bird, brings him together with his fellow human beings. The nightingale becomes an antithesis for the speaker to construe his identity as part of the mortal: “Thou was not born for death, immortal Bird! / No hungry generations tread thee down” (61-62). By contrasting his fading “quiet breath” with the nightingale’s forever “self-same song,” the speaker evokes a fellow feeling with other mortals of all kinds and all times:

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperor and clown:
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn (63-67)

The temporality of the mortal body obliterates divisions of time (“this passing night” and “ancient days”), class (“emperor and clown”), and gender (the supposedly male speaker and Ruth). Keats particularly gives more weight to the sojourning underclass Ruth through sympathetic imagination. Keats’s Ruth is reminiscent of Wordsworth’s “solitary Highland Lass” in “The Solitary Reaper,” whose “plaintive numbers” are imbued with an air of mystery. Wordsworth’s lyric speaker wonders “what she sings,”

and his speculation signalled by “perhaps” halts in a suspension of knowledge and culminates with his immediate experience: “Whate’er the theme, the Maiden sang / As if her song could have no ending; / I saw her singing at her work” (25-27). With the same conjectural adverb “perhaps,” Keats shows a similar fascination with the other but in a tentative tone, holding on to Ruth’s embodied subjectivity through a final cinematic touch to her posture and tears. The “alien corn” is an affective landscape for Ruth, and so are the “Charm’d magic casements,” “the foam / Of perilous seas,” and “faery lands forlorn” for the speaker (69-70). The nightingale’s melody acts as a catalyst for the speaker’s historical imagination, but it is also this “self-same” song that reminds him of his very temporal and spatial body shared with other mortals.

Hearing his own spondaic “forlorn,” the subject-speaker attends to his own sonorous body. The “very word” is a textually mediated sensible: “in faery lands *forlorn*. // *Forlorn!* the very word is like a bell / To toll me back from thee to my sole self!” (70-72; emphases added) The speaker’s thrice bidding adieu to the nightingale denounces his early fanciful aspiration to share the nightingale’s happy lot. Recognising the nightingale’s resistance to assimilation, the speaker comes to terms with the fact that he and the nightingale remain the other for each other and accepts their irreducible differences. Their differences are, however, paradoxically steeped in the nightingale’s interference with the speaker’s horizons: the earlier happy song is now a “plaintive anthem” and becomes relative to his localised body: “*Past the near meadows, over the still stream, / Up the hill-side; and now ’tis buried deep / In the next valley-glades*” (76-78; emphases added). The adverb “now” furthermore suggests the temporal aspect of the movement. The nightingale’s song is thus heard in tune with the speaker’s spatially and temporally conditioned body. Lyric poetry, understood as an event according to Culler, posits a dialectical relationship that retains ontological differences between the addresser and the addressee in their perceptual encounter. The acknowledgement of the resistance of the nightingale also leads to the speaker’s growing awareness of his own alterity: “Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?” (79-80) The speaker interrogates his own vision and divides himself into the past and present self, the spectator and the spectacle. A definite departure of the music stressed by a trochee (“*Fled is*”) then leaves the speaker wondering whether he is woken by the music, or whether the whole experience was merely a dream. This indeterminate ending

announces the indeterminate experiential roles of the speaker, the nightingale, and the poem itself. The self is also the other, and the other also has a self, which is as autonomous as Keats's nightingale that can show resistance and cause embarrassment.

The Enigmatic Other in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”

While the nightingale is cast as an antithesis to the suffering speaker, the silent urn presents him with a hermeneutic enigma. As Grant Scott describes “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” “The objet d’art, like the poem, is an enigma, an oracle to which the speaker comes demanding information, seeking knowledge” (119-20). Scott’s insight into the oracular character of aesthetic objects sheds light on the discursive aspect of lyric address whose communication involves the mysterious or silent other. Art can engender embarrassment since works of art as objects of interest for their perceivers can evoke a sense of estrangement. Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” chimes in with the dissatisfaction of *The Annals* with the Royal Academy’s negligence in cultivating Britain’s own talent. Imbued with a nationalist impulse, the preface expresses discontent with the British government’s complacency about the purchase of the Townley, the Elgin, and the Phigaleian marbles for artists’ imitation and its lack of aspiration for “proving [the national artists’] original strength” (v-vi). Situated within this nationalist agenda, Keats’s poem, initially entitled “On a Grecian Urn” under the section “original poetry,” draws attention to temporal and spatial dislocation of a foreign urn alien to the contemporary world. The poem is original in the sense that it invigorates an antique, plastic, classical artwork through an English tone. Keats’s poem is hence both familiar and strange. “Ode on a Grecian Urn” moreover captures the perceptual dynamics between the imagined urn and the beholder and presents this experience as an ever-unfolding process, through which the urn constantly acquires a new sense. Defying any final verdict given by the lyric speaker, the silent urn hence remains an enigma.

Unlike the nightingale’s immaterial song, the urn strikes the embodied beholder with its very materiality. The tangible urn is no less incomprehensible than the ethereal melody, for the urn as a three-dimensional artefact solicits bodily interaction and its multifacetedness keeps unfolding in each perspectival encounter with the speaker. For Merleau-Ponty, the body lends its vibrancy to the world: “One’s

own body is in the world just as the heart is in the organism: it continuously breathes life into the visible spectacle, animates it and nourishes it from within, and forms a system with it” (*PP* 209). There can be no view from nowhere since perception inevitably involves perspectives and is conceivable “only on condition of knowing that a single embodied subject could successively see from different positions” (*PP* 209). As in the case of perceiving a cube, the geometrical notion of an enclosed space between six equal faces is intelligible only with “our experience as embodied subjects” (*PP* 210). The cube is neither an absolute object in itself nor a psychological construct; rather, “the cube is already there in front of me and unveils itself through [perspectives]” (*PP* 210-11). Merleau-Ponty thereby challenges the idea of an isolated object and argues that any proper understanding of the world has to take the body into account: “The thing and the world are given with the parts of my body, not through a ‘natural geometry,’ but in a living connection comparable, or rather identical, to the living connection that exists among the parts of my body itself” (*PP* 211). The Grecian urn in Keats’s ode, comparable to the six-sided cube in Merleau-Ponty’s analysis, acquires a new sense in each reading and re-reading of the mortal speaker, who literally places its multifacetedness into perspective. The world of the urn keeps unfolding since there is an embodied subject whose vision is always perspectival.

On the other hand, the alien Grecian urn as an artefact is addressing the speaker as an addresser, and its wonder thus resides in its oracular quality, as Scott suggests, for the inquiring perceiver. The Grecian urn is geographically, culturally, and temporally removed from the artisan, its “natural” father, and so is the speaker. These various displacements imply the mortal speaker’s bodily existence with its spatial and temporal manifestations. Although the ode is often read in the ekphrastic tradition, the interaction between the speaker and the urn cannot be pinned down to an interpretation carried out solely by the speaker, but has to be understood as a dynamic activity between the perceiver and the perceived. The urn encroaches upon the speaker’s vision and reveals his sense of mortality. This perceptual encounter does not proffer theses of clarity but creates a sense of mystery. Because of this uncanny nature of the urn, the interrogation of the speaker can be embarrassing since the artefact appears alien and the communication is potentially ineffective:

Thou still unravish’d bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
 Sylvan historian, who canst thus express

A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme (1-4)

As a mortal being, the speaker reads temporality into the immortal urn. The adverb “still” captures the presentness, which carries the past and points to the future, insinuating that the status quo can be disrupted at any given moment. The metaphors “still unravish’d bride,” “foster child,” “historian” modified by “of quietness,” “of silence and slow time,” and “sylvan” juxtapose everlastingness and transience: the bride will soon consummate; the foster-child will gradually grow up; the historian belonging to the ever pastoral world will tell a story of the past. The irony here is enhanced by rhymingly contradictory ideas: “quietness” is linked to “express,” and the alliterative “silence of slow time” of the urn is contrasted with “our rhyme.” The speaker gazes at the urn, and the urn speaks to him and even outdoes him (“more sweetly than our rhyme”) in turn. The speaker cannot avoid resorting to his time-bound consciousness to express the timelessness of the urn. This difficulty in addressing atemporality through a language of temporality nevertheless asserts the urn as an enigma irreducible to human verbal representation:

What leaf-fring’d legend haunts about thy shape

Of deities or mortals, or of both,

In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?

What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?

What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?

What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy? (5-10)

In this series of questions, not only does the syntax become more fragmentary, but the speaker’s concerns also move from the visibility of the shape and figures of the urn to the invisibility of its conveyed passions. The urn as an aesthetic object is suggestive though not thoroughly transparent. The urn’s opacity discloses a world outside the subject, a hermeneutic gap that unsettles the speaker but affirms the alterity of the urn.

Moving his gaze from the shape of the urn to the engraved men or gods, the speaker attempts to sympathise with his familiar fellow human beings, whose pastoral abode however makes them not so familiar. The sensual scene on the urn is frozen but what the mortal speaker sees is a passage of time in the movement. He contrasts the experienced world and the anticipated world, portraying the former not as antithetical to, but indicative of, the superiority of the latter: “Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter” (11-12). This almost, but not quite, attained state instils mystery into the urn. The delayed fulfilment of sensual experience morphs into an

imagination of a non-sensual world: “therefore, ye soft pipes, play on; / Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear’d, / Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone” (12-14). The soft pipes must continue to play because their songs will never be experienced by the world “of no tone.” From the anticipation for ethereal melodies, the speaker turns to the fair youth, who paradoxically embodies both human passions and the timelessness of the urn. The negations of the urn’s timeless world infer the speaker’s sensual and transient world deprived of “sweeter” “unheard melodies”:

Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst *not* leave
 Thy song, *nor* ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold lover, *never, never* canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal—yet, do *not* grieve;
 She *cannot* fade, though thou hast *not* thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (15-20; emphases added)

So consolatory are the eternal love and fairness, but the lover’s need for consolation also implies a possible cause for grief for the mortal speaker. Beyond his temporal horizon, the future not only engenders his sense of mortality but also allows him to see how the lover has to defer his desire forever “[t]hough winning near the goal.” The two major imperatives of the stanza, “play on” and “do not grieve,” appear idiosyncratic, considering the complete silence of the urn. Yet, in addressing the urn, the speaker expresses his wish for continuation and his frustration about human passions. The immortal urn and the transient speaker thus form a dialectical relationship, in which one’s lack is the other’s profusion, and through which the perceiver and the perceived define each other.

Enmeshed with the immortal urn, the mortals on the urn also become alien. While the speaker notices the everlasting happiness, the urn conversely functions as a foil for his transience: “Ah happy, happy boughs! that *cannot* shed / Your leaves, *nor* ever bid the spring adieu; / And, happy melodist, *unwearied*” (21-23; emphases added). The repetitions of “happy” create an irony, dramatising the evanescence of this-worldly happiness. The urn’s ideal state parallels the postlapsarian narrator’s incantation of Adam and Eve’s soon-to-be lost happiness in *Paradise Lost*: “Sleep on / Blest pair; and O yet happiest if ye seek / No happier state, and know to know no more” (book 4, lines 773-75). Apart from these negations, the jubilant description of the urn also culminates in excess and pain. Despite the stasis of the urn, the figures of the urn for the mortal speaker convey temporality. Five present participles (“piping,”

“panting,” “breathing,” “burning,” and “parching”) and five “for ever”s not only depict the scene on the urn but also suggest the speaker’s temporal experience: he foresees how prolonged intense passions lead to the suffering of the “burning forehead” and “parching tongue.” The eternity of the urn constantly reminds the speaker of his frail mortal body, and is thus both allurements and haunts for the perceiving embodied subject, who is susceptible to the pain of excess.

It is also the three-dimensional nature of the urn, which, unlike a painting on a canvas, motivates more bodily involvement of the beholder, who has to move it around to gain perspectives. In “Ode on Indolence,” Keats vividly portrays how the three spectral figures, later revealed as Love, Ambition, and Poesy, become “strange” “as when the urn once more / Is shifted round” (5-10). This changing point of view has a literal sense in terms of vision and a metaphorical sense regarding the call for the viewer’s open attitude in perceiving art. When conflated, these two senses tell of an inexhaustible world, where one has to relinquish the desire for omniscience and to openly accept perspectival boundaries. As the speaker turns the urn and casts his eyes from one scene onto another scene, the urn captures both the conviviality of the pastoral and the desolateness of the town. Although the figures of the sacrificial scene remain static on the urn, the speaker discerns the motion embodied in their gestures and thus wonders about their identities and the direction to which the crowd march. By using deictic demonstratives and present participles, Keats intensifies the immediacy of the scene:

Who are *these* coming to the sacrifice?

To what green altar, O mysterious priest,

Lead’st thou *that* heifer *lowing* at the skies,

And all her silken flanks with garland drest? (31-34; emphases added)

Hence, not only the poetic discourse but also this perceptual encounter becomes an event as a re-enactment of the bygone time. Making use of his favourite image of the “heifer lowing at the skies” of the Elgin Marbles, Keats invokes the urn’s Hellenic ancestry: “What little town by river or sea shore, / Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel, / Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?” (35-37) The enigmatic urn fills the speaker with wonder and triggers his historical imagination. “Peaceful citadel” ironically conjoins presence and absence, for the still secure citadel presently visible on the urn presumably now lies in ruins. The “little town” “[i]s emptied of this folk” both during the march and at the moment when the speaker looks at the urn. The

speaker's historical imagination also brings a future perspective into the scene: "And, little town, thy streets for evermore / Will silent be; and not a soul to tell / Why thou art desolate, can e'er return" (38-40). The "for evermore" silent streets echo the "for ever" piping songs of the pastoral. These two contrasting episodes dramatise the two sides of the same urn. While the co-existence of joy and sorrow continues, the speaker's questions will forever be unanswered and the silent urn remains an enigma.

From the scenes of the urn, the speaker returns to the artefact itself and inquires into its relation to him. In this concluding stanza, the speaker attempts to make sense of the urn by resorting to classical aesthetics. Its "Attic shape" is characterised by its "Fair attitude" through sexual and spatial equilibrium between male and female, between high and low: "with brede / Of marble men and maidens overwrought, / With forest branches and the trodden weed" (41-43). Hailing the urn as an embodiment of the ideal, the speaker overturns the initial passive image of the urn as the "foster-child of silence and slow time" and ascribes agency to the urn: "Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity" (44-45). The "silent form" of the urn draws its beholders to the experience prior to any "thought," bringing this momentary encounter into "eternity." Keats's lyric enactment of this perceptual encounter with the urn is also, in Merleau-Ponty's words, "a radical reflection, that is, a reflection that attempts to understand itself, [which] consists paradoxically in recovering the unreflective experience of the world" (*PP* 251). Keats, in an epistolary poem to Reynolds written a year earlier, already exhibited a similar awareness of such "unreflective experience": "Things cannot to the will / Be settled, but they tease us out of thought" (76-77). To tease is also to mock, so the very concreteness of the urn also scorns any human venture for total comprehension. As the object of mockery, the embarrassed subject, as Hacker suggests, can feel humiliated and may even vent his "anger at the observer or at the person who is exposing one" (168). The serenity of the classical world is accordingly disrupted and the regular pentameter interrupted by a caesura and a spondee: "As doth eternity: *Cold Pastoral!*" (45; emphases added) The urn, like Keats's nightingale, witnesses human suffering from generation to generation with indifference: "When old age shall this generation waste, / Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe / Than ours" (46-48). Considering the insoluble gap between himself and the irresponsive urn, the speaker's calling the urn "a friend to man" cannot be taken too literally since such a friend can be a callous one. Keats's famous epigram "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" aligns with

the urn's constant "Attic shape" and "silent form," but in stark contrast to the speaker's world of flux. Its validity remains uncertain, and it is also unclear whether these words are inscribed on the urn or a lesson extracted by the speaker from the urn.

Much textual criticism of the ode centres upon the last two lines and aims to distinguish between the voice of the urn and of the speaker. Yet the ambiguity of the text mirrors the enigma of the urn. The quotations marks, whether they do not exist at all as in the first publication in *The Annals*, or bracket only the aphorism as in Keats's last volume, reveal how the material or textual aspect, even the punctuations, can be vital for making sense of the poem. The indeterminacy of the urn and of the poem foregrounds the resistance of the unfolding perceived other. Connecting beauty, truth, and knowledge, these two lines celebrate the authenticity of pre-reflective experience and tie in with the perceptual truth in Keats's romances discussed in Chapter Three. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" is an outright tautology, which aims to provoke affect rather than refer to any extrinsic truth. This intuitive perception of beauty is presented as a mode of human existence, not in the Platonic ideal world, but in this world of experience: "that is all / Ye know on earth." The disinterested statement about beauty and truth is revealed as an imperative "all ye need to know," warning against the intention to attain truth through deliberation. Merleau-Ponty holds, "The error of reflective philosophies is believing that the meditating subject could absorb the object into his meditation or grasp the object upon which he is meditating without remainder, or that our being reduces down to our knowledge" (*PP* 64). Keats's silent urn epitomises the resistance of the sensible that Merleau-Ponty describes: "The thing is . . . hostile and foreign, it is no longer our interlocutor, but rather a resolutely silent Other [*Autre*], a Self that escapes us" (*PP* 336). This tension between perception and reflection arises not only in the final stanza but has already been set up from the beginning, for the gap will "for ever" exist between the speaker and the urn and between the text and the reader. It is, however, through this gap that the artefact shows its alterity and autonomy.

From his two early sonnets on the Elgin Marbles to "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode on Grecian Urn," Keats shows an acute awareness of the conundrum of lyric poetry in representing the other. The work of art is not the perceiving subject's conjecture but manifests itself in the perceptual field as a thing with a material body. Thus, Merleau-Ponty argues, "The body cannot be compared to the physical object, but rather to the work of art" (*PP* 152). The materiality of art is integral to its

existence and “painting” therefore “does not imitate the world but is a world of its own” (*WP* 96). As in poetry, Merleau-Ponty points out, “the poem is not independent of all material support, and it would be irremediably lost if its text was not perfectly preserved. Its signification is not free and does not reside in the heaven of ideas; it is locked up between the words on some fragile piece of paper” (*PP* 152). As perception is intertwined with the body, the invisible sense of art depends on its visible modulations:

A novel, a poem, a painting, and a piece of music are individuals, that is, beings in which the expression cannot be distinguished from the expressed, whose sense is only accessible through direct contact, and who send forth their signification without ever leaving their temporal and spatial place. It is in this sense that our body is comparable to the work of art. (*PP* 153)

The melody of the nightingale and the shape of the Grecian urn appear in the perceptual field in a way that is comparable to how embodied selves are perceived the others. With regard to aesthetic experience, Keats, in attending to the autonomous other and not shying away from embarrassment and mystery, enjoys the wonder of art and demonstrates the self-reflexivity of his odes by allowing the nightingale to sing its dissonance and the urn to keep its silence.

Chapter Five: Speaking Beyond Words in the *Hyperions*

Contrary to the nightingale's "full-throated ease" and the Grecian urn's expressive silence, Keats oftentimes associates his undertakings of poetry with tongue-tied experiences. His sonnet on rereading *King Lear* gestures towards his turn to tragedies that are not as palatable as romance: he leaves behind the "golden-tongued romance, with serene lute" to "assay / The bitter-sweet of this Shakespearean fruit" (1, 7-8). While the Elgin Marbles pose the challenge to him of a definite account of an overwhelming aesthetic experience of mighty things ("To Haydon with a Sonnet," 1-2), the sonnet writing itself also makes Keats feel the strictures of a foreign poetic form as if "by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd" ("If by dull rhymes," 1). Moments of inarticulation also abound in his poetry. When narrating the encounter with the moon-goddess to his sister Peona, Endymion describes it as "a dream / That never tongue, although it overteem / With mellow utterance" (1.574-76). In *Isabella*, not only does Lorenzo "pray / For power to speak" to confess his love "but still the ruddy tide / Stifled his voice, and puls'd resolve away," but the narrator also admits that he has "no mad assail / To make old prose in modern rhyme more sweet" and that such "a verse in English tongue" can only be "[a]n echo of [Boccaccio] in the north-wind sung" (43-45, 155-56, 159-60). The struggle with poetic language also induces his uneasiness about his "tuneless numbers, wrung / By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear" in "Ode to Psyche" (1-2). The nightingale's ethereal melody is so unlike his "word . . . like a bell" ("Ode to a Nightingale," 71). The lover's "parching tongue" on the Grecian urn (30) as well as mortal transience frustrates aspiration for an immortal narrative ("not a soul to tell / Why thou art desolate," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," 39-40). Keats's poetic language thus teeters precariously on a willingness to speak with a "strenuous tongue" that "[c]an burst Joy's grape against his palate fine" ("Ode on Melancholy," 27-28). Over the span of Keats's *annus mirabilis*, the *Hyperion* project, instead of narrating the fall of the Titans, probes into their existential crisis after the fall during the transitional period to the Olympian gods. The Titans' constant failure to speak about their own trauma, which also exerts anxiety on the narrator in representing the traumatised subjects, brings failed linguistic signification to the foreground. Yet, through this

linguistic failure, Keats pursues how expression is still possible when established language reaches its limit.

At the core of Keats's final epic venture is an irony of speaking the unspeakable. "Meanwhile in other realms big tears were shed, / More sorrow like to this, and such like woe, / Too huge for mortal tongue, or pen of scribe" (book 1, lines 158-60), Keats's narrator in *Hyperion: A Fragment* (hereafter *Hyperion*) avows how the Titans' melancholy defies linguistic signs both in speaking and in writing. Language is in jeopardy and so is narration. As Gérard Genette points out, the very act of narrating is narrative's very being: "As narrative, it lives by its relationship to the story that it recounts; as discourse, it lives by its relationship to the narrating that utters it" (*Narrative Discourse* 29). In attempting to recount the Titans' traumatic fall, the authorial narrator relinquishes his omniscience and concedes that his ability to narrate is incapacitated by the exhausted "mortal tongue." Such narrative anxiety resembles Milton's struggle to represent the prelapsarian Eden through postlapsarian language in *Paradise Lost*, Keats's model for the first *Hyperion*. However, the impression of recounting or representing the Titans' agony is illusionary, for the narrated world is the narrator's own making. The kernel of the difficulty of the epic hence stems not so much from the representation of the other as from the representational illusion of narration itself. Keats's acute sense of such a problem manifests itself in his second recast of the poem as *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream* (hereafter *The Fall*), in which Keats fundamentally changes the narrative situation from heterodiegetic to homodiegetic. His adoption of a first-person perspective turns narrative representation into lyric expression and heralds his shifted concern about the signifying process over the signified in narrative. Through the Titans' faltering voices as well as the narrator's failed signification, Keats with his negative capability contests linguistic complacency in narrative representation and suggests a world beyond language.

Speech as an Accomplishment of Thought

The illusion that narrative represents a world stems from the belief that language translates thoughts into words, which subjugates the actual to the ideal. The narrated world comes to the fore against its linguistic background just like how speech seems "a simple means of solidifying thought, or . . . the envelope or the clothing of

thought” (*PP* 187). The struggle to speak and to narrate in the *Hyperions* however reveals a world that awaits linguistic expression to realise its sense. As Merleau-Ponty holds, “For the speaker . . . speech does not translate a ready-made thought; rather, speech accomplishes thought” (*PP* 183). An accomplished thought, in other words, is speech’s efficacious self-effacement of “its emblem or its body” (*PP* 187), resulting in an illusion that there is “a sort of ideal text that our sentences attempt to *translate*” (*S* 42-43). Speechless thoughts are no thoughts. Language does not merely operate internally within a set of diacritical relationships between different signs as in Saussure’s model. Instead, in contrast to what M. C. Dillon terms as this Saussurean “semeiological reductionism” (178), Merleau-Ponty holds that speech, like gestures, originates from humans’ instinctive drive to communicate the world: “Speech is a gesture, and its signification is a world” (*PP* 190). Even in the silence, a speaking subject still directs their consciousness at the world before speech comes into being. Born into a given language, humans inherit it as their culturally and historical sediment, but language speaks through them so much that they live the language and speak the world. Language is hence both intra-referential and extra-referential (Dillon 206). The Titans’ inability to sublimate their agony into words and the narrator’s epistemological constraints illustrate “an excess of the signified over the signifying” (*PP* 410) and the very fact that “expression is never total” (*S* 89). The *Hyperions* as fragments furthermore bespeak a becoming speech that anticipates its final accomplishment.

In depriving the heterodiegetic narrator of his conventional omniscience in *Hyperion* and staging the homodiegetic narrator outright as a mortal in *The Fall*, Keats dramatises not only the limits of linguistic mediation of experience but also the speaking subjects’ existential crisis. The linguistic deficiency reveals not so much cognitive constraints as the mode of being in the world: “For the speaker no less than for the listener, language is definitely something other than a technique of ciphering or deciphering ready-made significations. . . . Language is much more like a sort of being than a means” (*S* 42-43). Critics are well aware that the ontological difference between the narrator and the Titans renders the verbal translation of the gods’ excessive agony difficult (Taylor 673-87, Bennett 148-50, Bode 34). It is, however, also crucial to note that the humanised narrator is Keats’s own fabrication; it is Keats who makes him such and, in so doing, foregrounds the discursive aspect of narrative, namely the very act of narrating or storytelling. Keats’s narrative anxiety has been

attributed contextually and intertextually to his uneasiness about the reception of his poetry after the scathing reviews of *Endymion* (Bennett 144-46), or narratologically to the narrator's episteme (Bode, "Hyperion" 31-37). Recent criticism of the *Hyperions* sees the epic failure as Keats's authentic portrayal of human condition. Their narrative incompleteness, according to Jonathan Mulrooney, is paradoxically a more faithful, affective, and complete historiography of traumatic experience. Like the wounded bodies for physicians, the fragments of the poems for Lily Gurton-Wachter demand attention and endorse a disrupted narrative overpowered by passions (143, 170). In Yohei Igarashi's figurative reading, the difficulties of communication in the *Hyperions* are like winding dark passages that bespeak the opacity of mediated communication. Narration in the *Hyperions* is in peril but the failed attempts to narrate meanwhile direct readers' attention from the story to the narrative's linguistic medium.

The linguistic failure in the *Hyperions* accentuates the opaque nature of language that Merleau-Ponty observes. As the body is situated in the milieu of the world, the meaning of a linguistic act has to be perceived in relation to the gestalt of signs:

Since the sign has meaning only in so far as it is profiled against other signs [*se profile sur les autres signes*], its meaning is entirely involved in language. Speech [*parole*] always comes into play against a background of speech [*parole*]; it is always only a fold in the immense fabric of language [*du parler*]. To understand it, we do not have to consult some inner lexicon which gives us the pure thoughts covered up by the words or forms we are perceiving; we only have to lend ourselves to its use, to its movement of differentiation and articulation, and to its eloquent gestures. There is thus an opaqueness of language [*du langage*]. Nowhere does it stop and leave a place for pure meaning; it is always limited only by more language [*langage*], and meaning appears within it only set in a context of words. Like a charade, language is understood only through the interaction of signs, each of which, taken separately, is equivocal or banal, and makes sense only by being combined with others. (*S* 42 [68-69])

Words carry established lexical denotations, but their meanings can only emerge from the interaction with other signs in the moment of speaking. Such "opaqueness of language" further is brought to the fore as what Peter Lamarque calls the opacity of

literary narrative that thematises the “dependen[ce] on the manner of its presentation”: “there is no such transparent glass—only an opaque glass, painted, as it were, with figures seen not *through* it but *in* it” (3, 11).¹ The *Hyperion* fragments, as ever-becoming narratives, characterise Romantic irony, as Anne Mellor puts it, which “can be linguistically expressed only as hints, cyphers, and hieroglyphs, and never as lucid, logical discourse” (10-11). All language, emerging against a background of silence, is ironic for Merleau-Ponty: “the idea of complete expression is nonsensical, and that all language is indirect or allusive—that is, if you wish, silence” (*S* 43). In a letter to George and Georgiana, Keats expresses how words fall short of re-enacting non-verbal cues in speaking: “Writing has this disadvan[ta]ge of speaking. one cannot write a wink, or a nod, or a grin, or a purse of the Lips, or a *smile—O law!*” (*KL* 2: 205). Speaking for Keats is a thoroughly embodied act as Merleau-Ponty similarly observes:

Just as speech does not merely signify through words, but also through accent, tone, gestures, and facial expressions, and just as this supplemental sense reveals not so much the thoughts of the speaker, but rather the source of his thoughts and his fundamental manner of being, so too poetry—while it may be accidentally narrating and signifying—is essentially a modulation of existence. (*PP*152)

The parallel drawn between speech and poetry suggests that they are more than assemblages of a string of words; instead, meanings manifest themselves in the whole expressive act. The thoughts expressed, in brief, cannot be divorced from their signification. Poetry with its high degree of self-reflexivity nevertheless speaks differently from everyday speech in pragmatic use. As Paul Ricoeur holds, “poetic texts speak about the world. But not in a descriptive way. . . . The effacement of the ostensive and descriptive reference liberates a power of reference to aspects of our being in the world that cannot be said in a direct descriptive way, but only alluded to” (37). Letter writing cannot replace embodied experience but Keats believes that words, when understood not in a referential way, can unleash imaginative power: “but in all the most lively and titterly parts of my Letter you must not fail to imagine me as the

¹ Opacity, as Lamarque explains, is however not an intrinsic quality of narrative but relative to the reader’s interest. A reader who is more interested in the plot than in the literary presentation may find the narrative transparent.

epic poets say—now here, now there, now with one foot pointed at the ceiling, now with another—now with my pen on my ear, now with my elbow in my mouth” (*KL* 2: 205). Poetry for Keats aspires not to represent *the* reality but to configure *another* finer reality: “we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated” (*KL* 1: 185). Although language fails in the *Hyperions*, it points beyond itself and speaks more than the linguistic signs.

If the *Hyperions* are in search of a language (Bode 34), and if Keats favours “the figurative denseness of literary language” over “the dominant stylistic ideal of clarity” (Igarashi 154), Keats is pursuing how language can still perform when linguistic signs run out of their force.² The speaking subjects of a language in their various uses of signs utter what Merleau-Ponty terms as “speaking speech” (*une parole parlante*) and “spoken speech” (*une parole parlé*): “spoken speech . . . enjoys the use of available significations like that of an acquired fortune. From these acquisitions, other authentic acts of expression—those of the writer, the artist, and the philosopher—become possible” (*PP* 202-3). Merleau-Ponty also calls “speaking speech” variously “authentic speech” and “original speech,” while “spoken speech” is “a secondary expression, a speech about speech that makes up the usual basis of empirical language” (*PP* 530n6). In *The Prose of the World*, Merleau-Ponty further contrasts these two kinds of speech: while “human spoken speech” (*le langage parlé*) is a “language after the fact, or language as an institution,” “human speaking speech” (*le langage parlant*) is a “language which creates itself in its expressive acts, which sweeps me on from the signs toward meaning” (10).³ Considering the level of

² Keats’s inquiry into the limits of language can be read comparatively with Angela Esterhammer’s discussion in *The Romantic Performative: Language and Action in British and German Romanticism* (2000) about the failure of linguistic performativity in Friedrich Hölderlin’s epistolary novel *Hyperion*, pp. 191-202.

³ The English translator renders *le langage parlé* as “sedimented language” and *le langage parlant* as “speech” probably in order to distinguish between language as a social and cultural system and speech as contingent individual expression based on the given system. According to Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics*, *le langage* refers to the human faculty of speech that is both social and individual while *le langue* is the established linguistic system of a community (9). While *langue* can be

creativity involved, Merleau-Ponty gives much more primacy to speaking speech than to spoken speech that relies on established linguistic convention. Speaking speech signifies a transformation from aphasia to verbal sublimation, such as “that of the child who utters his first word, of the lover who discovers his emotion, of the ‘first man who spoke,’ or of the writer and the philosopher who awaken a primordial experience beneath traditions” (*PP* 530n7). Nevertheless, since the child’s and the lover’s expressions, albeit creative for themselves, still rely on spoken speech, instead of founding it like the first speaker, writers, and philosophers, Hayden Kee finds Merleau-Ponty’s distinction between these kinds of two speech “thoroughly untenable” (421-22). As Kee further explains, “All speech is speaking speech” since even spoken speech, despite its reliance on existing idioms, still involves some creativity; hence, spoken speech and speaking speech should be best understood in terms of degree rather than kinds (425). The dethroned Titans belong to the past and, in Merleau-Ponty’s words, even their spoken speech, like “hieroglyphics old” (*Hyperion*, 1.277), has lost its relevance in the world and fails to respond to their unprecedented fall. The transition to the Olympian Age hence concerns not only power but also language. The *Hyperions*, in a sense, envision how a speaking speech can be born when a spoken speech becomes sterile.

Unnarration and the Illusion of Narrative Objectivity

A narrative that purports to represent objectivity becomes impossible when there is no available language for the experience. Andrew Bennett observes that Keats in *Hyperion* exhibits his “generative anxiety . . . over tellability” and applies Gerald Prince’s term “disnarrated” to suggest that Keats in the poem negates his earlier narrative tropes to assert an alternative narrative by “referring to what is not or cannot be narrated” (147-48). According to Prince’s categories, the “disnarrated” are the

translated as “language,” there is no English equivalent to *langage*. I here follow Saussure’s translator Wade Baskin to translate *langage* as “human speech” in order to show the continuation of “spoken speech” (*la parole parlée*) and “speaking speech” (*la parole parlant*) in *The Phenomenology of Perception*. I contend that either *la parole* or *le langage*, in contrast to *le langue*, designates Merleau-Ponty’s concern about the contingency of speech.

authorial references to “the events that *do not* happen,” and what Bennett discusses regarding the tellability of the events in the narrated world belongs more to the “unnarratable, or nonnarratable,” “which, *according to a given narrative*, cannot be narrated or is not worth narrating” (1-2). Bennett’s succinct observation of Keats’s dialectics between narrative anxiety and alterity is not marred by this terminological slip, and Prince’s conflation of the epistemological (what cannot be told) and the pragmatic (what is not worth narrating) aspects of the unnarratable also deserves further distinction. Robyn R. Warhol thereby reworks Prince’s classification and designates what “can’t be told” as the “supranarratable” and refers the strategy of representing the unnarratable as “unnarration,” which “assert[s] that what did happen cannot be retold in words, or explicitly indicating that what happened will not be narrated because narrating it would be impossible” (222).⁴ More important than the meticulous subcategories for the discussion here is Warhol’s clear differentiation between the objects of narrative (the unnarratable) and narrative discourse (unnarration), the latter of which is figured as the narrator’s “mortal tongue” in the *Hyperions*.

Keats is by no means unaware of his narrating voice. When “cogitating on the Characters of saturn and Ops” in *Hyperion*, Keats is anxious that too much attention to the identity of the poet can lead to the “wordsworthian or egotistical sublime” (*KL* 1: 387). As a counterbalance of egotism, the “camelion Poet” is by nature oxymoronic: “A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity” (*KL* 1: 387). In the total absorption in the characters, the genuine “camelion Poet” will even forget the role of a poet in the process of writing:

If then he has no self, and if I am a Poet, where is the Wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not at that very instant [have] been cogitating on the Characters of saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess; but is a very fact that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature—how can it, when I have no nature? (*KL* 1: 387)

⁴ Warhol’s other subcategories of the unnarratable include: that “needn’t be told” (the *subnarratable*), “shouldn’t be told” (the *antinarratable*), and “wouldn’t be told” (the *paranarratable*) (222).

The close identification of the “word” of the poetry with the “opinion” of the poet, as in Wordsworthian lyricism for Keats, is at odds with the poet’s susceptibility to other identities acting upon him.

Nonetheless, Keats’s emphasis on such self-effacing quality also ironically accentuates his self-consciousness: “When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins to to [*sic.*] press upon me that, I am in a very little time annihilated” (*KL* 1:387). This tension between his own self and the narrating self is acutely felt by Keats in that he clearly severs the meditation on the “camelion Poet” from the ensuing overt expression of his poetic ambition: “In the second place *I* will speak of *my* views, and of the life *I* purpose to *myself*—*I* am ambitious of doing the world some good. . . . *I* will assay to reach to as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon *me* will suffer” (*KL* 1: 387; emphases added). Keats’s emphatic use of first-person pronouns, instead of betraying his ego, connotes his attention to the possible intrusion of the poet’s voice in mediating the experience of the other. In a rather whimsical tone, Keats concludes his letter by playing with the idea of the “camelion Poet”: “But even now I am perhaps not speaking from myself; but from some character in whose soul I now live. I am sure however this next sentence is from myself” (*KL* 1: 388). Although the letter was written at an early stage of the composition of *Hyperion*, Keats’s watchfulness of his ego explains the narrator’s constant anxiety in the poems over speaking for the Titans’ great agony.

From *Hyperion* to *The Fall of Hyperion*, Keats shifts the focus from the representation of the event onto the discourse as an event. Whereas the first *Hyperion* dramatises the Titans’ and the narrator’s relentless attempts to arrive at a narrative, the recast and lyricised epic with a homodiegetic narrator centres primarily on narration itself. While Émile Benveniste pits impersonal historical narrative against personal discourse and regards them as the “two different planes of utterance,” (206-9), Genette points out that there is no pure narrative without discourse, since the narrator is still discoursing even in a narrative written purely in third-person pronouns and in past tense without any direct speech of characters (“Boundaries” 8-11). Keats’s self-conscious narrator in the *Hyperions* brings the discursive act to the foreground, destabilising assumed narrative objectivity.

This problem of objectivity also manifests itself in the Titans' failure to sublimate their loss into words, a typical symptom of melancholy. The essential difference between mourning and melancholia, according to Freud, lies in the melancholic subject's inability to "know[] . . . not *what* he has lost in him" due to "an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness" (14: 245). Impaired speech in melancholia, a hindrance to bringing the lost objects to consciousness via words, has long been recognised in medicine. In the Middle Ages, the Persian physician Rhasis already noticed that patients of melancholy suffer from "*stutting, or tripping in speech*" and tend to talk to themselves (Burton 1: 382). Montaigne in his *Essays* gives various anecdotes showing how sadness can grow excessive "beyond any means of expression" (8). John Haslam, a physician contemporary with Keats, in *Observations on Madness and Melancholy* notes that patients' utterances are marked by "strong, and perhaps involuntary, propensity to repeat the emphatical words in a sentence" (35-36). More than one and a half centuries after Haslam, Julia Kristeva's description of language retardation in a melancholic state differs not much from her predecessors': "speech delivery is slow, silences are long and frequent, rhythms slacken, intonations become monotonous, and the very syntactic structures . . . are often characterized by nonrecoverable elisions" (34). For Kristeva, linguistic regression is however more than a pathological symptom; it has a significant impact on one's being: "Melancholia then ends up in asymbolia, in loss of meaning: if I am no longer capable of translating or metaphorizing, I become silent and I die" (42). Kristeva's reading of asymbolia as death strikes a chord with Merleau-Ponty's figuration of a hollow sign as an "inanimate body" for a patient with amnesic aphasia of colour names (*PP* 199). The patients not only fail to categorise similar colours but they have also lost a certain attitude of perceiving their world through language. Humans as symbolic creatures, as Merleau-Ponty argues in *The Structure of Behaviour*, can transcend the immediate givens: "the act of speaking expresses the fact that man ceases to adhere immediately to the milieu" (174). Hence, "thought is not an effect of language"; instead, "it presents, or rather it is, the subject's taking up of a position in the world of his signification" (*PP* 198-99). Similarly, the aphonia of a woman who is barred by her mother to see her lover, despite her inability to speak, "represents a refusal of coexistence" (*PP* 163-64). Melancholic aphasia problematises the representational approach to narrative that intends to objectively verbalize a world. Language is more than verbal translation of thoughts, and linguistic failure

hence can adversely impact on humans as symbolic creatures and their relation to the world.

Narration of traumatic experience defies any claim to transparency and clarity at the expense of “uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts” (*KL* 1: 193). Geoffrey Hartman proposes that the promise in literature in the face of trauma stems nevertheless precisely from its dialectics between signification and its failure:

Literature both recognizes and offsets that inadequacy. If there is a failure of language, resulting in silence or mutism, then no working through, no catharsis, is possible. Literary verbalization, however, still remains a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible. . . . We are taught to read for what is without words, or as yet beyond their reach: for the wound as well as the power of signification that contains or composes it (“Trauma” 259).

Literary expression with its opacity effectively preserves the traumatised subjects’ heightened sense of the lacunae of their perceived world that frustrates intelligible articulation. In Merleau-Ponty’s words, literature epitomises the struggle of an emerging speaking speech to overcome the constraints of an exhausted spoken speech. The unnarration of Keats’s *Hyperions* accordingly is ironic: in dramatising that which cannot be told in words and in discoursing that which resists discourse, Keats’s *Hyperions* exhibit critical self-reflexivity of narration.

Failed Signification in *Hyperion*

From the outset, *Hyperion* stages the tragedy of the fallen Titans itself as a story yet to be told. The poem begins *in media res*, an epic convention that establishes a narrative need for a recount of their fallen state but also ironically traps the Titans in their bygone selves. The falling stress of the opening lines mirrors Saturn’s drastic fall that is quick in the story time but slow in the discourse time:

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon, and eve’s one star (1.1-3)

The weight of two trochees (“*Deep* in” and “*Far* from”) and a spondee (“*Far sunken*”) captures how time coalesces into movement, as the adverbs and verbs denoting instantaneous spatial dislocation (“*deep*,” “*far*,” and “*sunken*”) entail a

fleeting temporal shift. Saturn, the planet-god astrologically known for his slowness and heaviness (Klibansky et al. 167), parallels the melancholic speaker in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* who complains, "Whether I tarry still or goe / Me thinks the time moves very sloe" (1: lxix). The decelerating discourse time reflects the striking dissonance between Saturn's subjective delayed temporal perception and the sudden historical change. Negations, along the line of Bennett's argument, inscribe the disnarrated non-happenings:

Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,
Still as the silence round about his lair;
Forest on forest hung above his head
Like cloud on cloud. *No* stir of air was there,
Not so much life as on a summer's day
Robs *not* one light seed from the feather'd grass,
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest. (1.4-10; emphases added)

Saturn's quietness, like the woman's aphonia discussed by Merleau-Ponty, expresses a subconscious withdrawal from the world. The absence of vibrant movement serves as the background to the presence of stationary death. Meanwhile, the scenic description of stasis after the fall prolongs the discourse of a story that shows no progression. The narrated silence is not serene but deadening as if it has choked off language:

A stream went voiceless by, still deadened more
By reason of his fallen divinity
Spreading a shade: the Naiad 'mid her reeds
Press'd her cold finger closer to her lips. (1.11-14)

The Naiad's touch of her lips signals a hush, instead of a speech. Similarly, when Hyperion's wife Thea comes to the drooping Saturn, some "words" "[i]n solemn tenour and deep organ tone" come forth from her "parted lips," and yet the sonority of these "mourning words" shrinks to "accents" in the course of the "frail" narration of "our feeble tongue," *vis-à-vis* "that large utterance of the early Gods" (1.47-51). Language fails not only for the narrator but also for Thea when she recognises the inadequacy of her comforting words as well as the pain she may inflict when eliciting a narrative from the melancholic "poor old King": "I have no comfort for thee, no not one: / I cannot say, 'O wherefore sleepest thou?'" (1.52-54) Thea resigns herself from her solemn speech to gesture, weeping at Saturn's feet (1.70). Narration on both the

authorial and diegetic levels comes under pressure to find a speaking speech for the contingency of such a traumatic fall.

This difficulty in narrating the unnarratable further exacerbates Saturn's existential angst. Left only with a shattered and dated sign system to recount his past, the fallen Saturn is defined by what he is presently not: "His old right hand lay nerveless, listless, dead, / Unsceptred; and his realmless eyes were closed" (1.18-19; emphases added). Saturn himself also cannot verbalise his fragmented self and has to seek help from Thea to "tell" him about his identity:

Look up, and *tell me* if this feeble shape
 Is Saturn's; *tell me*, if thou hear'st the voice
 Of Saturn; *tell me*, if this wrinkling brow,
 Naked and bare of its great diadem,
 Peers like the front of Saturn. (1.98–102; emphases added)

Dissociating his deteriorating physicality from his self, Saturn rejects the fact that he is a dethroned king. Saturn, in other words, refuses to mourn, resulting in his inability to name the objects of his loss. Saturn's narrated self is not aligned with his actual self as if he could still be the king: "I am gone / Away from my own bosom: I have left / My strong identity, my real self" (1.112-14). He hence affirms that "Saturn must be King" and envisions "a golden victory" to "repossess / A heaven he lost erewhile" (1.123-26). Saturn is still in need of a narrative for his fall and thus longs for other "palpable Gods" to "[t]ell" him and to "speak [their] counsel . . . for Saturn's ear" (2.153, 160, 162). As the epic moves on, the Titans' various failed attempts to speak announce the impossibility to continue their narrative.

The Titans' metonymic use of their voices as the signifiers of their selves reveals the existential crisis in unnarration. Their voices constantly fail them as how they are alienated from their former identities. Thea, despite her "solemn tenour and deep organ tone," fails to wake up the sleeping Saturn, who "at length . . . lifted up / His faded eyes" "but spake, / As with a palsied tongue" when overwhelmed by "his kingdom gone, / And all the gloom and sorrow of the place, / And that fair kneeling Goddess" (1.48, 89-93). Saturn's supposedly solemn speech sets off with articulatory difficulties so much as that "his voice . . . cease[s]" and, only after "a little time" of silence can he "snatch[] / Utterance" as if his voice were no longer integral to his being (1.138-41). Saturn's speech, which consists merely in a series of questions, is fragmentary and charged with uncertainty rather than affirmation: his repetitive

syntax gradually “crumble[s]” away to the monosyllabic word “Where” (1.141-45). Although the final word, loaded with power, “made quake / The rebel three,” it appears impotent in comparison to his drastic fall (1.146-47). Other fallen gods share a similar anxiety about their voices: while Cœlus laments, “I am but a voice” (1.340), Clymene diminishes herself as “the simplest voice” (2.252). The Titans’ alienated voices restrain their effective communication. Hyperion’s “voice left out, despite of godlike curb” and his pressing call for Saturn to regain the throne is suppressed as “a heavier threat / Held struggle with his throat but came not forth” (1.226, 251-52). Even those Titans who strive to maintain composure or optimism cannot be immune to the shock of the fall and exhibit linguistic regression: the Sophist Oceanus’s “first-endeavouring tongue” is “Caught infant-like from the far-foamed sands” (2.171-72), and Enceladus’s “wrath” makes his voice “overwhelming” (2.303-4). On the authorial level, the narrator avows the excess of the Titans’ sorrow, which is “Too huge for mortal tongue or pen of scribe” (1.160), and his direct address to the inadequacy of the Muse negates the epic tradition: “O leave them, Muse! O leave them to their woes; / For thou art weak to sing such tumults dire” (3.3-4). This piling up of urgency for expression intimates that the Titans lack a discourse that can properly sublimate their melancholy into words to form a meaningful narrative. Meanwhile, the more pressing challenge for Keats as a poet is how to narrate the others’ suffering, suffering which the sufferers themselves find impossible to express.

For the Titans, the communicative function of language is disrupted, and such failed signification further exacerbates their alienation from the world. Preoccupied with the reclamation of his throne, Saturn withdrew into himself and “heard not Thea’s sobbing deep” (1.139). Hyperion’s struggle to speak is compared to a scene of commotion: “For as in theatres of crowded men / Hubbub increases more they call out ‘Hush!’” (1.253-54) The representational function of language fails the Titans, for they can no longer grasp their world with linguistic signs. Although the Titans desire to mourn, “their own groans / They felt but heard not” since the noise of nature engulfs and outdoes their faltering voices by “the solid roar / Of thunderous waterfalls and torrents hoarse” (2.6-8). If “[s]peech is a gesture, and its signification is a world,” as Merleau-Ponty holds (*PP* 190), the agitation of inexpressible anguish accordingly drives the Titans to retreat to nonverbal communication as well as linguistic barbarism: “some groan’d; / Some started on their feet; some also shouted; / Some wept, some wail’d” (2.110-12). Saturn has to make strenuous efforts to “load / His

tongue with the full weight of utterless thought, / With thunder, and with music, and with pomp” (2.119-21). Overwhelmed by this “utterless thought,” Saturn fervently yearns for a cause to elucidate their fall, asking twice, “Can I find reason why ye should be thus” (2.131, 149). Saturn’s demand for a reason is a step for him to construe a full-fledged narrative discourse that can create causal relationships from chaos. Saturn turns to the available scripts and “[s]tudied from that old spirit-leaved book,” the “book [he] ever kept,” the “Nature’s universal scroll” (2.133, 137, 151). His reading and search nonetheless prove futile, and Saturn can then only seek help from other “palpable Gods,” who can “[t]ell” him the cause of the downfall (2.153, 160). Given a group of Titans who are so “[o]’erwhelm’d, and spurn’d, and batter’d” and can only “groan,” Saturn’s expectation of their counsel with his “ear . . . all a-hunger’d” is also ironic (2.162-63). Saturn’s last hope resides in Oceanus, who “[p]onderest high and deep” (2.164). Saturn’s loss of words calls for a narrative, a challenge not only posed to the Titans but also to the narrator, who likewise grapples with the limits of signification.

Although answering Saturn’s cry for causality, Oceanus’s narrative of necessity does not provide the comfort that he purports to offer. Oceanus, as a “Sophist and sage,” sees reason as the balm, hence urging other Titans to “shut up [their] senses, stifle up their ears” (2.167, 175). The language that Oceanus exploits is rational rather than expressive; in contrast to the other Titans, Oceanus himself stresses how he distances his voice from his interiority to attain absolute objectivity: “My voice is not a bellows unto ire” (2.176). His depersonalised voice is like what Merleau-Ponty describes as an “algorithm, a universal language,” “a revolt against language of its existing states and a refusal to depend upon the confusions of everyday language” (*PW* 5). As an upholder of the emancipating power of truth, Oceanus narrates their fall as an inevitable ending destined by natural law:

Yet listen, ye who will, whilst I bring *proof*
 How ye, perforce, must be content to stoop:
 And in the *proof* much comfort will I give,
 If ye will take that comfort in its *truth*.
 We fall by *course of Nature’s law*, not force
 Of thunder, or of Jove. Great Saturn, thou
 Hast sifted well the atom-universe;
 But for this *reason*, that thou art the King,

And only blind from sheer supremacy,
One avenue was shaded from thine eyes,

Through which I wandered to *eternal truth*. (2.177-87; emphases added)

With frequent references to idioms connoting rationality such as “proof,” “Nature’s law,” “reason,” and “truth,” Oceanus regards their fall not as a contingent historical event of rebellion but as a natural consequence of cyclical evolution. Oceanus’s narrative of the Titans’ fate is heavily marked by connectives of causality: “And first, *as thou wast not the first of powers, / So art thou not the last; it cannot be: / Thou art not the beginning nor the end*” (2.188-90; emphases added). His disengaged view of the tragedy shifts the focus from the individual to the universal, subjecting the affective perspective to a disinterested outlook. From a collective perspective, Oceanus narrates, “*We fall by course of Nature’s law*” (2.181; emphasis added). His narrative, characterized by the first-person plural, belongs to “we the giant-race” (2.200). Towards the end of his speech, he eventually narrates his encounter with his dispossessor but immediately generalises his personal experience into a universal moral: “Receive the truth, and let it be your balm” (2.243). His imperative exhortation however produces no palliative effect on the Titans: “Whether through poz’d conviction, or disdain, / They guarded silence, when Oceanus / Left murmuring, what deepest thought can tell?” (2.244-46). Oceanus’s speech, in spite of its coherence, turns out to be ironic: although Oceanus’s logical language answers Saturn’s urgent call for a narrative of their fall, the persuasion itself, which intends not only to be a speech but, more essentially, to assuage the Titans’ great agony, fails.

On the contrary, Oceanus’s speech incites dissent from Clymene, who “answer’d not, only complain’d” even though she is “the simplest voice” (2.249, 252). In contrast to Oceanus’s objective language, Clymene makes an impassioned plea with her “hectic lips” (2.250). While Oceanus holds that a narrative of “the pain of truth” can prepare other Titans to “bear all naked truths” (2.202-3), Clymene centres her narrative on the process of narration as an outlet for her deep sorrow: “Yet *let me tell my sorrow, let me tell / Of what I heard, and how it made me weep, / And know that we had parted from all hope*” (2.259-61; emphases added). Telling, instead of what is told, is the quintessence of narrative for Clymene. Her narrative about the “I of grief” is figurative and metaphorical, rather than analytical and persuasive, for order is impossible and music out of tune: “O melody no more! for while I sang, / And with poor skill let pass into the breeze / The dull shell’s echo” (2.265, 272-74).

Instead of linking fragments with causal connectors, Clymene attends to the disjointed melody:

A living death was in each gush of sounds,
 Each family of rapturous hurried notes,
 That fell, one after one, yet all at once,
 Like pearl beads dropping sudden from their string (2.281-84)

Different from Oceanus's call for detachment from the agony, her desire to tell asks for engagement and sympathy:

O Father, and O Brethren, had ye felt
 Those pains of mine; O Saturn, hadst thou felt,
 Ye would not call this too indulged tongue
 Presumptuous, in thus venturing to be heard. (2.296-99)

Narrative with a beginning and an ending for Oceanus helps grasp the causal relationship behind chaos but the teleology of narrative for Clymene resides in its expression, in the very act of telling. Narrative, as a means of sublimation of sorrow so as "to be heard," once again evokes the narrative challenge of understanding and mediating the Titans' agony laid out from the beginning of the poem.

Clymene's impassioned narrative is however repressed by a pragmatic pressure on narrative. Her lethargic ineffectual voice is "swallow'd" by Enceladus's "overwhelming voice":

So far her voice flow'd on, like timorous brook
 That, lingering along a pebbled coast,
 Doth fear to meet the sea: but sea it met,
 And shudder'd; for the overwhelming voice
 Of huge Enceladus swallow'd it in wrath (2.300-303)

Unlike Clymene's yearning to narrate her interiority, Enceladus's "ponderous syllables" aspire to arouse action (2.305). For Enceladus, the purpose of language derives from its use and actual influence; the merely analytical or expressive use of language hence for him is premature as "baby-words / In midst of this dethronement horrible" (2.314-15). Enceladus asks the "sleepy Titans" to "Speak! roar! shout! yell!" in revenge for their lost realms (2.316). Like Clymene, Enceladus desires to "tell" other Titans, yet what he tells is not his interiority, but *how* to reclaim their thrones:

Now ye are flames, I'll *tell* you *how* to burn,
 And purge the ether of our enemies;

*How to feed fierce the crooked stings of fire,
And singe away the swollen clouds of Jove,
Stifling that puny essence in its tent. (2.327-31; emphases added)*

Although Enceladus's language is instructional and directs the Titans to external action as if a narrative of the future matters more than a recounting of the past, his future is in fact in the past "[w]hen all the fair Existences of heaven / Came open-eyed to guess what we *would speak*" (2.337-38; emphases added). Enceladus and other Titans, whose "lips knew else but solemn sounds," have now lost their voices and long to be heard (2.340). Enceladus, when projecting their future triumph, unconsciously narrates a discontinued past.

Enceladus's wrathful speech, which ends with a hope for the "still . . . undisgraced" "brightest brother," fails to arouse any action that it calls for (2.344). Hyperion, who struggles to speak in Book I, is overwhelmed by despondency and his utterances further retreat into sighs: "Sighs, too, as mournful as that Memnon's harp / He utter'd, while his hands contemplative / He press'd together, and in silence stood" (2.376-78). It is important to note that Hyperion, unlike other Titans, in Book II has no direct speech of his utterance except his final cry "Saturn" (2.388). The narrator has to verbalise his non-verbal sighs and silence, intensifying the tension between the narrating and the narrated. Hyperion's final "loud" shout and the gods' desperate call from "their hollow throats" fail to elicit any response from Saturn, their intended listener (2.381-91). The Titans' narration, impaired by failed and ineffectual signification, falls short of either effecting affective expression or arousing action, resulting in a disarray of noise and dead silence: "Thus in alternate uproar and sad peace / Amazed were those Titans utterly" (3.1-2). Silence and inaction pervade the narrative discourse of the first two books, which mainly comprise a sequence of monologues rather than dialogues. The unsuccessful verbal exchange fails to facilitate the progression of the story as well as the Titans' psychological development. This rupture between the narration and the story stands in sharp contrast to the dynamics between Mnemosyne and Apollo in Book III.

While the Titans are desperate to tell their agony, Apollo, the Olympian god of poetry, nevertheless contests the notion of narrative as a verbalised form of immediate experience. Apollo appears as a listener attentive to the others' sorrow rather than a speaker of his internal suffering: "He listen'd, and he wept, and his bright tears / Went tricking down the golden bow he held" (3.42-43). In contrast to Saturn's searching

“Nature’s universal scroll” (2.151) for a cause of his downfall, Apollo instead “with eager guess began to read / Perplex’d” the “purport in [Mnemosyne’s] looks for him” (3.47-49). Intrigued by Mnemosyne’s face, Apollo wonders at individuality instead of universality. With his “eager guess” and perplexity, Apollo exemplifies negative capability, acknowledging that there are uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts exceeding his intelligence (*KL* 1: 193). The sympathetic Mnemosyne desires to comprehend his “heart’s secret” through a narrative:

Tell me, youth,

What sorrow thou canst feel; for I am sad
 When thou dost shed a tear: *explain* thy griefs
 To one who in this lonely isle hath been
 The watcher of thy sleep and hours of life,

 Show thy heart’s secret to an ancient Power
 Who hath forsaken old and sacred thrones
 For prophecies of thee, and for the sake
 Of loveliness new born. (3.68-79; emphases added)

Yet, Apollo questions the adequacy of a narrative that translates immediate and direct experience into verbal representation, even “while his white melodious throat / Throbb’d with the syllables”:

Mnemosyne!

Thy name is on my tongue, I know not how;
 Why should I tell thee what thou so well seest?
 Why should I strive to show what from thy lips
 Would come no mystery? For me, dark, dark,
 And painful vile oblivion seals my eyes:
 I strive to search wherefore I am so sad,
 Until a melancholy numbs my limbs (3.82-89)

For Keats, Apollo’s awareness of his “dark, dark, / And painful vile oblivion” suggests his understanding of a “World . . . full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression” (*KL* 1: 281). For Apollo, the insight into the limits of narrative is the recognition of the mystery of the world. Apollo beseeches Mnemosyne to “point forth some *unknown* thing,” to show him “*other* regions than this isle,” and “[p]oint [him] out the way / To any one *particular* beauteous star”

(3.95-96, 99-100; emphases added). The “unknown,” the “other,” and the “particular” suggest a world beyond the present linguistic designations, pointing towards his “aching ignorance” (3.107). Such allusiveness is for Merleau-Ponty “*the virtue of language*: it is language which propels us toward the thing it signifies” (*PW* 10). Therefore, with skepticism about linguistic transparency, Apollo, reads not texts but Mnemosyne’s “silent face,” which narrates suffering in history more forcefully and, accordingly, deifies Apollo:

Mute thou remainest—mute! yet I can read
 A wondrous lesson in thy silent face:
 Knowledge enormous makes a God of me.
 Names, deeds, gray legends, dire events, rebellions,
 Majesties, sovran voices, agonies,
 Creations and destroyings, all at once
 Pour into the wide hollows of my brain,
 And deify me, as if some blithe wine
 Or bright elixir peerless I had drunk,
 And so become immortal. (3.111-20)

In Apollo’s reading of this “silent face,” the “wondrous lesson” is the overabundance of the unnarrated that, while “mute,” points beyond narration itself. The resistance to verbal translation of the facial expression suggests that affect is not a concept but an embodied phenomenon, as Merleau-Ponty explains: “I do not perceive the anger or the threat as a psychological fact hidden behind the gesture, I read anger in the gesture. The gesture does not *make me think* of anger, it is the anger itself” (*PP* 190). Apollo’s uptake of the “wondrous lesson” of the “silence face” in his brain metaphorically illustrates Merleau-Ponty’s view that that “[c]ommunication or the understanding of gestures is achieved through the reciprocity between my intentions and the other person’s gestures, and between my gestures and the intentions which can be read in the other person’s behavior” (*PP* 190-91). Apollo’s deification is thus rooted in a reversible relationship between “thy silent face” and “a God of me,” which brings forth a consciousness of coexistence: “I confirm the other person, and the other person confirms me” (*PP* 191). Apollo, a god of poetry, is deified by his encounter with Mnemosyne, and his speech in turn ascribes meanings to her face. By doing so, Keats highlights the interrelationship between language and the intersubjective world that it speaks.

The reappearance of the narrator's voice, which aims to give a visual representation of Apollo's agony, however brings back the earlier problem of representation. Consequently, *Hyperion* ends abruptly with the word "celestial," an immortal quality that cannot be verbally mediated through the mortal tongue. Keats ultimately abandons the whole *Hyperion* project because "there were too many Miltonic inversions in it—Miltonic verse cannot be written but in an artful or rather artist's humour. I wish to give myself up to other sensations" (*KL* 2: 167). Keats's dissatisfaction with his narrative discourse that displays too much poetic "spoken speech" hints at his awareness of its incongruity with Titans' unnarratable traumatic experience, but his claim to turn to other sensations indicates an important shift of focus from verbal representation to visual evocation in *The Fall of Hyperion*.

The Lyric Turn in *The Fall of Hyperion*

Hyperion's abrupt ending signals Keats's heightened awareness of the limits of narration, which preoccupies the poet's mind so much that the problem is brought to the foreground in *The Fall of Hyperion*. The unattainable objectivity for the mortal narrator in the first *Hyperion* is resolved by the subjective homodiegetic narration of the second, in which his perception is by nature finite. Speech hence is no longer representational but expressive. Taking issues with Plato's criticism of mimetic direct speech opposing diegetic indirect speech, Genette points out that there is only an "illusion of mimesis" in narrative since "narration, oral or written, is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating" (*Narrative Discourse* 164). The antithetical relationship between mimesis and diegesis, as Genette continues to explain, is problematic when narration involves "silent events and actions. . . . The truth is that mimesis in words can only be mimesis of words. Other than that, all we have and can have is degrees of diegesis" (164). The problem of unnarration in the first *Hyperion* is hence an outgrowth of mimetic illusion of a linguistic failure in representing an event in the narrating process. If Keats's *Hyperion* project is what Hartman calls "lyric epics" ("Spectral Symbolism" 60), his decisive lyric turn is a breakaway from the mimetic notion of his narrative to an interrogation of the narrator's voice. The narrator's enunciation, in other words, is not a representation of an event but "an attempt to be itself an event" (Culler 16). Keats's second *Hyperion* follows the steps of Dante to take on a first-person perspective and presents not an

objective scene but a subjective vision as a dream as the title indicates. The meaning of the vision is not in itself but comes into being in the narrator's speaking.

Instead of depicting the Titans' traumatic fall, the opening of *The Fall of Hyperion* first and foremost stages the narrative struggle of telling. On the one hand, poetic language possesses the power of an amulet, which "[w]ith the fine spell of words alone can save / Imagination from the sable charm / And dumb enchantment" (1.9-11). On the other hand, although every mortal can in principle have a vision, speaking of it is conditional, demanding the versification of a mature poetic voice: "every man whose soul is not a clod / Hath visions, and would speak, if he had lov'd / And been well nurtured in his mother tongue" (2.13-15). Consequently, the ambiguity of the narrator's own role, whether as a poet or a fanatic, exerts pressure on his linguistic craftsmanship, which can posthumously serve as the presence of his absence: "Whether the dream now purposed to rehearse / Be poet's or fanatic's will be known / When this warm scribe my hand is in the grave" (1.16-18). The narration of *The Fall of Hyperion* is thus framed as a test or a trial for the narrator to demonstrate his voice to prove himself as a poet.

However, this dramatisation of the narrator's lyric voice destabilises rather than reinforces the narrator's identity. The ideal of the poet is not defined by the narrator but spoken through Moneta, who is cast as Mnemosyne in *Hyperion*. In *Hyperion*, Apollo's deification, although still in progress, is ultimately directed towards to status of a god of poetry; in *The Fall*, Keats effaces or even questions the identity of the narrator as a poet. The narrator's reliance on verbal rehearsal to prove himself as a poet is ironically counterproductive. Contrary to the expectation set up in the induction, the identity of the narrator is not revealed through his verbal eloquence. To prove that he is no dreamer, the narrator has to undergo the trial put forward by Moneta to follow the footsteps of Apollo in *Hyperion*, to "mount up these immortal steps" so that he can "die and live again" (1.117, 142). His transformation also involves a similar pain that makes Apollo "shriek" "[a]t length" (*Hyperion* 3.134-35): "I shriek'd; and the sharp anguish of my shriek / Stung my own ears" (*The Fall* 1.126-27). Prior to eloquence, the narrator experiences annihilating aphasia: "What am I that should so be sav'd from death? / What am I that another death come not / To choke my utterance, sacrilegious, here?" (1.138-40) For Moneta, poets, unlike dreamers, sympathise with the suffering world: "None can usurp this height . . . / But those to whom the miseries of the world / Are misery, and will not let them rest" (1.147-49).

True poets direct attention not to their own voices but to those of the others: “They are no dreamers weak; / They seek no wonder but the human face; / No music but a happy-noted voice” (1.162-64). Hence, his aspiration to prove his identity betrays a sense of egotism similar to Saturn’s “strong identity” in *Hyperion*; the narrator is thus “less than they” because of his “fever of [himself]” (1.166, 169). The autonomy of narrative entails a decoupling of the narrative voice from the poet’s identity.

This decoupling brings narration to the foreground and, with the self-reference to its limits, becomes ironic. The narrator highlights the poet’s ethical responsibilities: “a poet is a sage; / A humanist, physician to all men” (1.188-90). Moneta’s distinction between the poet and the dreamer who are “[d]iverse, sheer opposite, antipodes” suggests that poetry, despite its linguistic mediation, goes beyond words to the world (1.200). Self-congratulatory use of language for the inspired narrator is now a fault of “mock *lyrists*, large *self* worshipers, / And careless hectorers in *proud* bad verse” (1.200, 207-8; emphases added). While this comment, as critics have remarked, can refer to Keats’s contemporaries like Byron and Wordsworth, Keats expresses a more general concern about the egotistical tendency in lyric poetry. The sole attention to the self of the dreamer is antithetical to the sense of alterity of the poet, who “pours out a balm upon the world” (1.201). With regard to narrative, there is a narrated world that is born in words, but an ethical narrator also acknowledges that narrative does not exhaust the world in its linguistic representation.

With this attention to self-reflexivity, the concern of his *Hyperion* project fundamentally shifts from the representation of the Titans’ traumatic experience onto unnarration itself. The self-conscious heterodiegetic narrator in the first *Hyperion* contradicts himself, for he has to continue to narrate despite his acute sense of the impossibility of narration. On the contrary, unnarration, rather than the unnarratable, becomes the object of narrative in *The Fall* for the homodiegetic narrator:

I had no words to answer; for my tongue,
Useless, could find about its roofed home
No syllable of a fit majesty
To make rejoinder to Moneta’s mourn. (1.228-31)

His awareness of the linguistic constraints here however concerns his verbal exchange with Moneta on the same narrative level, instead of the authorial unnarration. The narrator, who now cares less about his linguistic competency, attends to the affect borne by the visual sign: “by her voice I knew she shed / Long treasured tears”

(1.220-21). The Titans' voices, which predominantly function as metonyms in *Hyperion*, are succeeded by Moneta's face in *The Fall*. Like Lamia's "gordian shape" (1.47), the equivocation and complexity of the face indicative of a feeling subject cannot be pinned down to direct verbal representation. Moneta's sorrowful countenance embraces ambiguity and rejects scientific anatomy, as the narrator not only hears but also feels Moneta's voice:

So at the view of sad Moneta's brow,
I ached to see what things the hollow brain
Behind enwombed: what high tragedy
In the dark secret chambers of her skull
Was acting, that could give so dread a stress
To her cold lips, and fill with such a light
Her planetary eyes; and touch her voice
With such a sorrow. (1.275-82)

Moneta's "high tragedy" as a narrative is not linguistically but visually mediated and transmitted. To resolve the tension between the narrator's omniscience and his restrictive mortal tongue, Keats skilfully embeds the opening of *Hyperion* in the narrator's vision, which is supplemented by Moneta's verbal narrative, as the narrator beseeches Moneta, "Let me behold, according as thou said'st" (1.289). The narrative accordingly centres on the image that the narrator sees, and Moneta's bodily presence and narration remain on the same narrative level within the narrator's perceptual experience:

. . . side by side we stood,
(Like a stunt bramble by a solemn pine)
Deep in the shady sadness of a vale,
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far the fiery noon, and eve's one star.
Onward I look'd beneath the gloomy boughs,
And saw, what first I thought an image huge,
Like to the image pedestal'd so high
In Saturn's temple. The Moneta's voice
Came brief upon my ear,—“So Saturn sat
When he had lost his realms.” (1.292-302)

From the Titans' voices in *Hyperion* to Moneta's face in *The Fall*, Keats presents a trajectory of his mind moving away from the verbal to the visual and hence from a poetic angst about linguistic mediation to an embracement of the unspeakable. Like Apollo who acquires his deifying knowledge by reading Mnemosyne's face, the narrator gains an insight into Saturn's agony through his sight:

Whereon there grew
 A power within me of enormous ken,
 To see as a God sees, and take the depth
 Of things nimbly as the outward eye
 Can size and shape pervade (1.302-6)

The panoramic view of "the lofty theme" cannot be captured by "those few words hung vast above my head"; the vision instead substantialises and invigorates the verbal abstraction, instilling the image of sorrow in his mind (1.306-7). The visual is more long-lasting and not confined by linguistic signification. Through his "eagle's watch," the narrator "might see, / and seeing ne'er forget" (1.309-10). The visual experience of the narrator exceeds his verbal representation. Moneta's vision silently passes to the narrator, turning her "immortal sickness which kills not" into the narrator's "load of this eternal quietude, / The unchanging gloom" (1.258, 390-91). Such recognition of "this eternal quietude" before speech is a rediscovery of "the primordial silence beneath the noise of words" (*PP* 190).

In *The Fall*, the anxiety about unnarration is thus alleviated, and Saturn also no longer demands the Titans to tell the cause of their downfall as in *Hyperion*; instead, he recognises the affective aspect of language and uses "moan" thirteen times to ask them to unleash their agony (1.412-30). The "sorrow" and "woe" are still "[t]oo huge for mortal tongue, or pen of scribe" to articulate their full sense, but this recognition of the limitation of human language manifests itself not as a narrative anxiety but as an exemplar of sympathetic imagination, for these utterances are not from a narrator who belongs to a different realm as in *Hyperion* but by Moneta, the "left supreme / Sole priestess of [Saturn's] desolation" (1.226-27). With a Smithian insight into the difficulty of sympathy between the feeling subjects and the spectator when passions grow too excessive (34), Moneta "humaniz[es] [her] sayings" so that her words can be in tune with the narrator's ear (2.2). Embedding Moneta's words into the narrator's vision, Keats offers two homodiegetic narratives: while the extradiegetic poet-narrator recounts his vision, Moneta, as a character in his vision,

narrates the Titans' fall that she witnesses as an intradiegetic narrator.⁵ Hyperion's action also turns into the narrator's vision of his wandering eyes:

On he flared,
 From stately nave to nave, from vault to vault,
 Through bowers of fragrant and enwreathed light,
 And diamond paved lustrous long arcades (*Hyperion* 1.217-20)

My quick eyes ran on
 From stately nave to nave, from vault to vault,
 Through bowers of fragrant and enwreathed light,
 And diamond paved lustrous long arcades. (*The Fall* 2.53-56)

However, Keats cannot consistently maintain these two narrative levels. If Keats continued the line "on he flared" and proceeded with what he wrote for the first *Hyperion*, *The Fall* would take up the earlier omniscient narration and fall once again in the representational illusion he sets out to avoid. Keats left the epic unfinished.

The problem of narrating the unnarratable in Keats's *Hyperions* helps revisit negative capability with respect to narrative opacity. Whereas "fact and reason" (*KL* 1: 193) aim at precision, unnarration is a reminder of the unattainable absolute linguistic mediation of experience. With this insight into the process of signification, Keats attends to what enactivists have recently called "linguistic bodies," which "are unfinished, always becoming" (Cuffari et al. 7). Keats's struggle in the *Hyperions* to signify what is beyond signification in his narration portrays that human existence perceptually expresses itself as an event also in silence. Poetry for Merleau-Ponty exemplifies the "gestural sense" of language that points to the world. While "words, vowel, phonemes are so many ways of singing the world," the mortal tongue in the *Hyperions* reveals that "the *full* sense of a language is never translatable into another" since to speak a language is to "take up the world it expresses, and we never belong to two worlds at the same time" (*PP* 192-93). Allegorically, this unfinished project is likewise a catalyst for imagining what lies beyond the finished—it is ever speaking, ever narrating, and is never complete.

⁵ For the discussion of narrative levels, see Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 227–37.

Chapter Six: Temporalising the Lyric Present

Keats's abandonment of his *Hyperion* project brought along the fruition of his last great ode "To Autumn," whose lyric serenity comes like a relief from his earlier strenuous deliberation of epic writing. In a letter to Reynolds dated 21 September 1819, Keats, right before announcing "I have given up *Hyperion*," reminisces about his epiphany in a picturesque autumnal Winchester during a walk:

How beautiful the season is *now*—How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather—Dian skies—I never lik'd stubble fields so much as *now*—Aye better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm—in the same way that some pictures look warm—this struck me so much in my sunday's walk that I composed upon it. (*KL* 2: 167; emphases added)

Keats's innocuous absorption in the autumnal tranquillity accentuated by his use of the simple present can seem however suspicious with regard to his quietness about this historical moment. McGann in his provocative essay "Keats and the Historical Method in Literary Criticism" (1979) finds the poem's silence about the Peterloo Massacre on 16 August in the same year unsettling, regarding its presentation as "a charmed world far removed from . . . the dangerous political tensions of his society" (1021). To repudiate McGann's claim, other new historicist critics identify the poem's implicit allusions to Keats's contemporary historical moments so as to rescue this allegedly escapist Romantic poet by construing a political one. Andrew Bennett situates the unnamed goddess Ceres in the second stanza in the enclosure movement in the nineteenth century. Considering that Ceres in mythology represents not only "agrarian plenitude" but also "the origins of lawful and economic exchange and of topographical boundaries," her effaced proper name for Bennett symbolises "a transgression of the law of property," and the unbounded imagery throughout the poem is also "a denial of enclosure, a political gesture of defiance against the appropriation of public property" (*Keats, Narrative and Audience* 163-65). Nicholas Roe draws a parallel between the word "conspiring" in the poem and the conspiracy theories after the Peterloo Massacre and interprets Ceres differently as a symbol of justice, reading the poem as "a negatively capable intervention" (*John Keats and the Culture of Dissent* 252-65). These contextual and intertextual discoveries remedy the

tendency to read Romantic poetry as a transcendence of the actual world in the earlier scholarship. Yet, given that humans born into a pre-existing world are by nature historical, the understanding of historicity also has to go beyond particular historical events.

Keats's repeated use of "now" in the letter does not dissolve time but suggests an acute sense of time-consciousness in the present. Taking issue with McGann's charge of Keats's reticence about the social upheaval in Manchester, Paul Fry argues that what lies at the core of the poem is "the ontology of lyric moment" and its "existential register" rather than "the historical one" (211, 217). Fry's word "moment" however reveals the impossibility of disentangling human existence as historical beings from their sense of temporality. As Emily Rohrbach rightly points out, existence and historicity are not mutually exclusive (90). The lateral temporal movements in Keats's poems for Rohrbach offer an alternative to "the largely linear notions of progress informing Enlightenment historiography" and portray "a world not subject to being stabilized by reference either to patterns of the past or to a clear trajectory into the future" (77, 88). Nevertheless, in order to experience the continuity of time, the consciousness of the present cannot be isolated from that of the past and of the future. Therefore, what is in need is a new set of vocabulary to reconfigure the relationship between the past, the present, and the future in a non-linear fashion.

Merleau-Ponty draws on Husserl's study on the internal time-consciousness to account for the temporal experience of perception as a network of intentionalities of the past, the present, and the future. This phenomenological approach to temporal experience captures the remarkable quality of the lyric present that brings together the consciousness of the past and the future in the moment. In dramatising the autumnal scene instead of the seasonal cycle, Keats highlights this lyric moment that is intertwined with the subject's temporal field of perception. Drawn to the very present, Keats reveals temporal experience not as a series of time segments but as a living moment before reflection. The personified autumn as a temporal object furthermore suggests how consciousness constitutes time through the perceived world that transcends and feeds into an embodied subject's sense of historicity.

Keats's Poetics of Temporal Experience

The present for Keats, instead of being a slice of time, unfolds itself in a temporal field. His negative capability is a capability to live the extended unfathomable present “when man *is . . . being* in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts,” as well as an opposition to a view of time as successive segments, according to which the future seems to leapfrog the present in “irritable reaching after fact & reason” and blunts the past as “half knowledge” (*KL* 1: 193-94; emphases added). On the contrary, Keats’s comparison of “human life” to “a large Mansion of Many Apartments” illustrates temporal consciousness as a process, in which one stage grows into another:

The first we step into we call the infant or thoughtless Chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think—We remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening of the thinking principle—within us—we no sooner get into the second Chamber, which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-Thought, than we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there for ever in delight: However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one’s vision into the ~~head~~ heart and nature of Man—of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression—whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken’d and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open—but all dark—all leading to dark passages—We see not the ballance of good and evil. We are in a Mist—*We* are now in that state—We feel the “burden of the Mystery,” To this point was Wordsworth come, as far as I can conceive when he wrote ‘Tintern Abbey’ and it seems to me that his Genius is explorative of those dark Passages. (*KL* 1: 280-1)

Although the pathway from “the infant or thoughtless Chamber” to “the Chamber of Maiden-Thought” and then to the “dark passages” may seem to exalt thinking, Keats in fact shows the earlier two stages as the precondition or even the “father” of the later heightened consciousness in darkness: reflection on time presupposes time first lived as experience by an embodied subject, who passes from one chamber to another without necessarily noticing the passage of time that accompanies the bodily

movement. Keats's mansion of life is hence better understood not as three discrete stages of life as their names seem to convey but as a developing consciousness of one's temporal existence. At first, "the infant or thoughtless Chamber" represents a timeless view that resembles eternity; the entrance into "the Chamber of Maiden-Thought" propelled by "the thinking principle" however yields a growing consciousness of the conflict between one's "think[ing] of delaying there for ever in delight" and the reality of irretrievable time; this intensifying consciousness endows humans with a sharpening vision to see the temporal existence not merely as individual instants but as "the heart and nature of Man," bringing forth an awakening sense of intersubjectivity and historicity: the self as an "I" is part of humanity as a "we" that together now inhabits a "World . . . full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression." As Keats describes it in "Ode to a Nightingale," all human beings, regardless of their social status, have a share in mortality: "The voice I hear this passing night was heard / In ancient days by emperor and clown" (63-64). Keats later more elaborately explains that this mutable world manifests itself as a vale of soul-making, where personal identities form, and such a process is inseparable from a temporal consciousness that engenders a sense of mortality. Keats thereby refuses to belittle this fundamental aspect of human existence in an attempt at "delaying there for ever in delight" as in "the Chamber of Maiden-Thought." Keats furthermore associates the dark passages with Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," in which the poet's revisit to the same spot from the beginning is situated within his temporal horizon of the past "five summers, with the length / Of five long winters" (1-2). Human existence for Keats comes along with temporal consciousness that permeates every living moment.

As Keats emphasises, "We are in a Mist—*We* are now in that state—We feel the 'burden of the Mystery,'" so the consciousness of human finitude concerns not only the distant future but the very present. While birth and death mark the beginning and the end of consciousness, humans henceforth live within this temporal field. Keats's lyric about the mortal body particularly inscribes the past and the future in the here and now. The sonnet "When I have fears that I may cease to be") reflects on the annihilation of existence, and the mortal speaker's present consciousness ("When I have fears," line 1; "When I behold," line 5, and "when I feel," line 9) unfolds against the background of an anxiety about the forthcoming loss of the present to an unredeemable past ("Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain, / Before high

piled books, in charactry,” lines 2-3) with portentous feelings that the present may not be realised as the future (“I may cease to be,” line 1; “I may never live,” line 7; “I shall never look,” line 10; “Never have relish,” line 11). This vast temporal field concludes with a rhyming couplet written in the present: “then on the shore / Of the wide world I stand alone, and think / Till love and fame to nothingness do sink” (lines 12-14). Syntactically, this one-sentence sonnet, with the main verb in the present tense both in main and subordinate clauses, accomplishes a fleeting moment that envelopes a consciousness of the past and the future. The present, although an instant snapshot, has its temporal field.

In another sonnet written upon his visit to Robert Burns’s cottage, Keats situates his corporeal existence in the bygone past, endowing the present with a sense of historicity: “This mortal body of a thousand days / Now fills, O Burns, a space in thine own room” (1-2). The history is lived by the breathing and touching speaker with a throbbing heart: “My pulse is warm with thine old Barley-bree, / My head is light with pledging a great soul” (5-6). Burns’s literary presence, despite his corporeal absence, continues to daunt Keats: “My eyes are wandering, and I cannot see, / Fancy is dead and drunken at its goal” (7-8). Keats’s revered Scottish bard becomes a *genius loci* residing in the material objects in the cottage as a co-presence of the younger poet:

Yet can I stamp my foot upon thy floor,
 Yet can I ope thy window-sash to find
 The meadow thou hast tramped o’er and o’er,—
 Yet can I think of thee till thought is blind,—
 Yet can I gulp a bumper to thy name,—
 O smile among the shades, for this is fame! (9-14)

Burns’s fame fills Keats with apprehensions about his own fame that may sink to nothingness, as he indicates in the sonnet “When I have fears that I may cease to be” and in his letter:

[Burns’s] Misery is a dead weight upon the nimbleness of one’s quill—I tried to forget it—to drink Toddy without any Care—to write a merry Sonnet—it wont do—he talked with Bitches—he drank with Blackguards, he was miserable—We can see horribly clear in the works of such as a man his whole life, as if we were God’s spies (*KL* 1: 325)

A life of writing, in other words, becomes present as a life in writing, similar to how Keats envisions that “This living hand now warm and capable” can live on and he can

still “hold it towards” his addressee, who can bring the past and the absent to the present.

The Phenomenology of the Lyric Present

This ability of the lyric present to resuscitate the past as the present is one of the defining features of lyric performativity. Susanne Langer in *Feeling and Form* describes that the use of the simple present in the lyric conveys the subjective experience of eternity: “The whole creation in a lyric is an awareness of a subjective experience, and *the tense of subjectivity is the ‘time-less’ present*. . . . Lyric writing is a specialized technique that constructs an impression or an idea as something experienced, in a sort of eternal present” (268). George Wright in his more extensive study shows that the lyric present tends to evade temporal clues and contexts that are necessary in everyday speech in order to create a sense of timelessness: “Lyric action . . . insofar as it is defined by these unspeechlike present tense verbs, is timeless yet permanent, pastlike yet edging toward the future, repeatable yet provisional, urgent yet distant, ceremonious and archaic” (569). Comparing the tense of lyric poetry with that of speech in daily life, Wright’s study is careful and comprehensive, but his linguistic method overlooks the fact that temporal experience comes before verbal representation. Hence, Wright also suggests that the lyric present imparts a “disembodied air” (570). With more regard to the lyric itself as an event, Jonathan Culler in *Theory of the Lyric* points out that the simple present, as “the dominant tense of lyric,” even in ballads that tend to narrate, turns “a narrated past . . . into a present of enunciation” (283-84). The lyric present, as Culler further argues, suggests not so much timelessness as “the time of enunciation,” “a moment of time that is repeated every time the poem is read” (294-95). Culler’s emphasis on the lyric as a discursive act draws attention to enunciation, an embodied aspect of speech, but the temporality of such an event is assumed rather than explained.

Regarding this oxymoronic eternal present in lyric poetry, Keats’s “To Autumn” further problematizes the subjectivity of temporal experience. Keats’s self-forgetting absorption into the seasonal vista is often interpreted as his extraordinary poetic achievement. Walter Jackson Bate, for instance, holds that the poem embodies a thing totally in itself: “The poet himself is completely absent; there is no ‘I,’ no suggestion of the discursive language that we find in the other odes; the poem is

entirely concrete, and self-sufficient in and through its concreteness” (581). Aileen Ward similarly observes, “It is Keats’s most characteristic because most impersonal poem. The poet himself is completely lost in his images, and the images are presented as meaning simply themselves: Keats’s richest utterance is the barest of metaphor” (322). Yet, soon after the publications of Bate’s and Ward’s acclaimed biographies in 1963, Morris Dickstein argues that Keats’s “thinking principle” in his metaphor of human life as a large mansion designates his “self-awareness and awareness of the world that surrounds, nurtures, and conditions the self” (ix-x). For Dickstein, the poem thus “should not be used to prove that his poetic career culminates in impersonal serenity and naturalistic harmony” (262). Situating Keats’s “To Autumn” in a larger context of literary history, Lilian Furst regards the poem as a paradigmatic case of the Romantic inward turn from an objective view of nature: in contrast to James Thomson’s *The Seasons*, autumn in Keats’s poem “becomes a product of experience, mood, and feeling, in short, not a sight” (18). And recently, William Ulmer has also pointed out that the absent references to the speaker do not erase “the speaker’s mediation”; instead, “the human mind remains quietly at work, an unnamed avatar of the season itself in its busy arrangements” (202-3). Indeed, not only does the apostrophe posit an addressing speaker, but temporal experience itself, phenomenologically speaking, is also inseparable from an experiencing subject. The self-effacing quality of the poem is not synonymous with an absence of selfhood but portrays how a subject steers consciousness towards the world. The lyric present in “To Autumn” as a living moment exemplifies the subjectivity inherent in temporal experience.

Keats’s attention to autumn as a moment of experience rather than as a phase within the seasonal cycle is characteristic of his emblematic condensation of a vast temporal horizon into the present. As the previous chapters have shown, the affective intensity of his encounter with the immortal nightingale and the Grecian urn peaks at his immediate perceptual experience in listening and in looking. Even when narrating a traumatic historical event in the *Hyperions*, Keats centres not on the fall but on the falling, not on the spoken but on the speaking. In a similar vein, autumn for Keats is not a juncture between summer and spring but an occasion in which the sense of the past and the sense of future merge in the present. The Romantic “internalization of autumn,” according to Furst, witnesses a shift of the focus “from the object of the gaze, the landscape perceived . . . onto the subject of gaze, the impressions of the

perceiver” (15). This turn to subjectivity in fact even more significantly parallels phenomenology’s breakaway from an objective view of time to an inquiry into a constituting temporal consciousness. A tranquil autumnal scene bespeaks not so much the quality of the landscape as the relationship between the landscape and the perceiver. For Merleau-Ponty, the calmness of autumn that Keats experienced in Winchester could possibly be disrupted when disturbances creep into the perceiver’s mind:

I arrive in a village for the holidays, happy to leave behind my work and my ordinary surroundings. I settle into the village. It becomes the center of my life. The low level of water in the river, or the corn or walnut harvest, are events for me. But if a friend comes to see me and brings news from Paris, or if the radio and newspapers inform me that there are threats of war, then I feel exiled in this village, excluded from real life, and imprisoned far away from everything. Our body and our perception always solicit us to take the landscape they offer as the center of the world. But this landscape is not necessarily the landscape of our life. I can “be elsewhere” while remaining here, and if I am kept far from what I love, I feel far from the center of real life. Bovarism and certain forms of homesickness are examples of a decentered life. (*PP* 299)

No matter whether Keats’s “To Autumn” is reticent about or suggestive of the bloodshed of the Peterloo Massacre, the landscape still reveals itself as a lived world perceived temporally and spatially. For Merleau-Ponty, events presuppose an embodied subject: “there are no events without someone to whom they happen and whose finite perspective grounds their individuality” (*PP* 433). He thereupon questions the common metaphorical expression that “time passes or flows by” (*PP* 433). Time is not an object in itself, and it seems to flow like a stream from the past to the future only because one imagines a witness at the upper and lower course of the river: “Time presupposes a view upon time” (*PP* 433). The seasonal change that Keats’s “To Autumn” depicts hence makes sense only when situated in the subject’s temporal horizon.

The transitoriness of autumn that Keats captures is in tune with how the perception of the present takes place against the background of temporal change, or within what Merleau-Ponty calls “a field of presence” (*PP* 438). Merleau-Ponty’s notion of temporality is indebted to Husserl’s account of time-consciousness,

according to which the consciousness of the present necessarily involves “retention” and “protention”:

Husserl calls the intentionalities that anchor me to my surroundings “protentions” and “retentions.” These do not emanate from a central I, but somehow from my perceptual field itself, which drags along behind itself its horizon of retentions and eats into the future through its protentions. I do not pass through a series of nows whose images I would preserve and that, placed end to end, would form a line. For every moment that arrives, the previous moment suffers a modification: I still hold it in hand, it is still there, and yet it already sinks back, it descends beneath the line of presents. In order to keep hold of it, I must reach across a thin layer of time. (*PP* 439)

What has just been experienced is still present as retention in temporal consciousness although the event is past, and the indeterminate future of what comes next is on the edge of the present perceptual field. The present will sink into the past and the future becomes the present. Retention and protention do not call for active consciousness as in recollection and expectation but are always present in every living moment. Thinking of time in terms of its thickness reveals the fact that, as Merleau-Ponty puts it, “Time is not a line, but rather a network of intentionalities” (*PP* 440). The past, the present, and the future are hence not outside the subject but are lived by the subject: “The past, then, *is not* past, nor is the future future. It only exists when a subjectivity comes to shatter the plenitude of being in itself, to sketch out a perspective there, and to introduce non-being into it” (*PP* 444). Temporality reveals an integral dimension of subjectivity, and subjectivity is in turn the pathway to the true understanding of temporality: “Time must be understood as a subject, and the subject must be understood as time.” (*PP* 445) This chiasmus between temporality and subjectivity elucidates the subject’s temporal field in “To Autumn,” in which the lyric present is not incongruous with but inextricable from the past and the future. Autumn is accordingly transformed from an external objective season to a lived experience.

The Lived Present in “To Autumn”

From the beginning, the autumnal scene is saturated with the speaker’s temporal consciousness, through which the picturesque landscape is set in motion. Keats’s use

of present participles such as “maturing,” “conspiring,” and “budding” highlights the passage of time in the present (2, 3, 8). The emphasis is not on maturity as in “the mature sun” or on a fact as in the simple present “conspire,” but on the event itself that has a temporal dimension. The to-infinitives such as “to load,” “To bend . . . / and fill,” “To swell . . . and plump,” “to set” furthermore depict the protentional aspect of time-consciousness (3, 5-8). This current spectacle is also imbued with the retention of “summer [that] has o’er-brimmed [the bees’] clammy cells” (11). The bees’ illusion that “warm days will never cease” is reminiscent of the philosophising fish “at continual play in the tepid delight of summer” described in Keats’s vale of soul-making passage (*KL* 2: 101). Their worlds forever stay at the moment, for they lack temporal consciousness. Time, as Merleau-Ponty holds, is more like a fountain than a river since the present’s seeming constancy in fact derives from unceasing renewals of water in its every burst. Analogously, the notion of eternity is a product of time-consciousness: “The feeling of eternity is hypocritical; eternity feeds on time. The fountain of water only remains the same through the continuous thrust of the water. Eternity is the time of dreams, and the dream refers back to the day before, from which it borrows all of its structure” (*PP* 447). Autumn morphs from the static abstract description of a “[s]eason of mists and mellow fruitfulness” (1) into the perceiver’s temporal experience. The present frolicsome imagery of an ongoing nature feeds on a subject’s temporality that carries the past and intends the future.

This subjective aspect of the autumnal scene comes to the foreground in the following stanza that portrays a personified season. Autumn is seen and sought (12-13). In contrast to the contingency of the visual encounter in the first stanza, the second stanza stresses a habitual scene signalled by “oft” and “sometimes” that extends the temporal field of the immediate present (12-13, 19). Yet, Keats’s personification ascribes agency to autumn to the extent that it is not only perceived but also perceiving, not only constituted but also constituting. The expectation of the autumnal presence “on a granary floor,” “on a half-reap’d furrow,” “across a brook,” or “by a cyder-press” intimates the temporal dimension of space (14, 16, 20, 21). Given autumn’s wandering appearance in various frequented places, the perceiver’s sense of familiarity rooted in the past does not preclude its openness in the future. Actions such as winnowing, reaping, and oozing are in the “half” of the course; the anticipation of “[t]he next swath” is currently “spare[d]”; the “patient look” awaits the dripping cider “hours by hours”: movements in the present are imbued with a yet-to-

come prospect. Keats's personified autumn thereby ceases to be a mere temporal object and becomes a real sensing subject. Keats presents his view of autumn but, in Merleau-Ponty's words, does not "lay it out" and "immobilize it" (*PP* 445). Keats's personification may even hint at some quintessential nature of time, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, "Time is even occasionally personified. Everyone imagines that time is a single concrete being, fully present in each of its manifestations just as a man is fully present in each of his spoken words" (*PP* 445). Personification of time is more than a fanciful way of understanding time; instead, "there is more truth in the mythical personifications of time than in the concept of time considered in the scientific way" (*PP* 445). Personified time reveals time's subjectivity as Merleau-Ponty goes further and say: "time is someone" (*PP* 445). Michael Kelly suggests that this shift from Husserl's absolute consciousness to Heidegger's ontology, from "time as the subject" to "the subject as time," from "an intrinsical to an immanentist theory of the self's relation to temporality" pre-emptly Merleau-Ponty's later own criticism of the dichotomy between consciousness and object that pervades in *Phenomenology of Perception* (201, 208). The fine line between "time as the subject" and "the subject as time" is probably too intricate for Keats's deliberation of time but the chiasmus of subject and time manifests itself in the dyadic lyric structure. The personified autumn perceives what the lyric speaker sees. It is through autumn that the perceiver's temporality can unfold in the most concrete terms.

The wider the autumnal scene becomes, the broader the temporal field is. The minute depiction of apples, hazels, flowers, and beehives turns into the thicker strokes of the harvesting, reaping, gleaning, and wine-pressing scenes, culminating in a panoramic view of nature in the final stanza. In situating autumn in the seasonal cycle, Keats highlights the historicity of this experienced moment: "Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?" (22) The consciousness of a forthcoming spring is, on the one hand, the sedimentation of the subjective experience of the previous bygone springs in nature; on the other hand, this human patterning of a four-season cycle is also an intersubjective cultural and historical inheritance. Such a cyclical view of nature informs the speaker of the pastness of the present and enables him to recognise the autumnal music in terms of natural history: "Think not of them, thou hast thy music too" (23). The twilight heightens a sense of the past and accentuates the historicity of the present:

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 shallows, 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. (25-33; emphases added)

Simultaneity, connoted by the connectives “while,” “and,” “then” (a conjoining rather than a sequencing marker), and “as,” is coupled with a consciousness of the passage of time. The peak of life (“bloom,” “full-grown”) implies a history of bygone days and announces the decay of life (“soft-dying day”) at the same time as how “the light wind lives or dies.” Life is a process, and so is music like the symphony of mourning, bleating, singing, whistling, and twittering an enduring temporal object that comprises retention, primal impression, and protention in Husserl’s elucidation of time-consciousness (*On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* 24-25). Nature exists before the human subject, and the present for Keats also has its own historicity. The scene of gathering swallows is not uncommon in poetry of autumn but Keats’s emphasis on the subject’s temporal consciousness at the present that carries the past and points to the future departs from James Thomson’s treatment of autumn as a component of the seasonal cycle:

When Autumn scatters his departing gleams,
 Warned of approaching Winter, gathered, play
 The swallow-people . . .

 With other kindred birds of season, there
 They twitter cheerful, till the vernal months
 Invite them welcome back—for thronging now
 Innumerable wings are in commotion all. (836-38, 845-48)

Keats’s sense of historicity, in other words, need not be localised at a particular historical event but is always present at the present moment. Merleau-Ponty points out how the entanglement of the past and the present embodies his notion of flesh: “past and present are *Ineinander*, each enveloping-enveloped—and that itself is the flesh (VI 268). As Wilhelm Dilthey argues, “The historical world is always there, and the

individual does not merely contemplate it from without but is intertwined with it. . . . We are historical beings before being observers of history, and only become we are the former do we become the latter” (297). More than objective historical facts, history is integral to human consciousness of their existence in the world. History for Merleau-Ponty is immanent in all lived experience and is meaningful for a subject who lives it: “I am thrown into a nature, and nature appears not only outside of me in objects devoid of history, but is also visible at the center of subjectivity” (*PP* 361). Thinking of the spring is to think with a history that recedes into the present lived autumnal moment.

Keats’s lyricised autumn is a step forward from his earlier sonnet “The Human Seasons” included in a letter to Benjamin Bailey dated 13 March 1818 following his contemplation of “Things real—things semireal—and no things” (*KL* 1: 242-43). The thread that runs through his reflection on reality and time is the relationship between subjectivity and the sensible world. Seasons, as this sonnet shows, correspond to the subject’s consciousness of his own temporality: “Four Seasons fill the Measure of the year; Four Seasons are there in the mind of Man” (1-2).¹ In comparison with spring, summer, and winter, Keats devotes more lines to autumn:

He hath his Autumn ports
 And Havens of repose, when his tired wings
 Are folded up, and he content to look
 On Mists in idleness: to let fair things
 Pass by unheeded as a threshold brook. (8-12)

This autumnal unobtrusiveness and passivity in the human mind are characteristic of what Husserl describes as the “passive synthesis” of pre-reflective time consciousness. With regard to this oxymoronic expression that includes both passivity and activity, Merleau-Ponty suggests that time lives us as much as we live time:

¹ This sonnet was later published in Leigh Hunt’s *Literary Pocket-Book for 1819* (1818). In the published version, Keats removes his archaism and makes several changes to the lines on summer and autumn. The version in the letter is used here, for the seasons in this version are treated less as objects of thoughts but exhibit more dynamics with the human subject and hence ties in better with the context of reality and mind in the letter.

it is clear that I am not the author of time, any more than am I the author of my own heartbeats, nor am I the one who takes the initiative of temporalization; I did not choose to be born, but no matter what I do, once I am born, time flows through me. And yet, this springing forth of time is not a mere fact that I undergo; I can find in time a recourse against time itself, as happens in a decision that I commit to, or in an act of conceptual focusing. Time tears me away from what I was about to be, but simultaneously gives me the means of grasping myself from a distance and of actualizing myself as myself. (*PP* 451)

Keats understands both this transcendence of time and how one can act with time. Earlier in the year 1819, Keats wrote to his brother and sister-in-law in America:

Now the reason why I do not feel at the present moment so far from you is that I rememb{er} your Ways and Manners and actions; I known you manner of thinking, you manner of feeling: I know what shape your joy or your sorrow w{ou}ld take, I know the manner of you walking, standing, sauntering, sitting down, laugh{ing,} punning, and every action so truly that you seem near to me. You will rem{em}ber me in the same manner—and the more when I tell you that I shall read a passage of Shakespeare every Sunday at ten o Clock—you read one {a}t the same time and we shall be as near each other as blind bodies can be in the same room. (*KL* 2: 5)

To remember is to retrieve the past that is seen at a distance from the present. Yet, remembrance for Keats is also a strategy to feel the presence of the absent, to transform distance into proximity. Living time simultaneously is hence not the same as living according to the clock time. Reading Shakespeare together “at the same time” so as to feel to be “in the same room” for Keats is a negotiation between the transcendence of time and his taking up of time. When Keats travelled to Rome with a premonition of his “dying days,” he wrote in his copy of *Poetical Works of Shakespeare* the allegedly last sonnet “Bright Star.”² The sonnet contemplates a bright star that long predates the mortal speaker, who however comes to the realisation that eternity is the intense feeling of the living present. Understanding the

² There are two versions of this sonnet. One dated 1819 was first published in the *Plymouth and Devonport Weekly Journal* in 1838 and based on Charles Brown’s manuscript. The other was written in later September or early October 1820 according to Joseph Severn and based on Keats’s holograph in his copy of Shakespeare.

past, the present, and the future vertically rather horizontally, Keats foresees that his own corporeal past will be lived by the onlookers of his graveyard as their past when they presently stand there and read the words he told Severn to engrave on his gravestone in his final days: "Here lies one whose name was writ in water."

Conclusion: Reading the Sensuous Keats Once Again

“Thy name was writ in water on the sand,” Oscar Wilde inscribes the engraved words of Keats’s tomb in his own sonnet, elegising the young poet’s premature death and envisioning his final resting place as a refuge “[r]id of the world’s injustice and its pain” (1, 12). Wilde’s Keats is “[t]he youngest of the Martyrs” who “here is lain / Fair as Sebastian and as foully slain” (4-5). This Wildean Keats is a wounded hero “on his Death Bed, in the Bitterness of his Heart, at the Malicious Power of his Enemies,” as the epitaph describes. Yet, this image of a vulnerable young poet who could not withstand the harsh criticism reflects more his friend Charles Brown’s view, rather than Keats’s of his own. Keats in his final days in Rome instead instructed Joseph Severn that he desired no name but only the nine unassuming words (“Here lies One Whose Name was writ in water”) on his gravestone, words that concede his rootedness in this world, a vale of soul-making. For some of his contemporaries and the Victorians, however, Keats seemed too sensitive and feeble, and his sensuous poetry too effeminate, as if femininity could not be a strength. Keats was simply “killed off by one critique,” as Byron tersely puts it in *Don Juan* (XI, stanza 10). Hazlitt, on the one hand, praises Keats’s “extreme tenderness, beauty, originality, and delicacy of fancy”; on the other hand, Keats for him lacks some “manly strength and fortitude to reject the temptations of singularity in sentiment and expression” (9: 244-45). Matthew Arnold commends Keats for his “abundantly and enchantingly sensuous” quality that illustrates Milton’s dictum that poetry should be “simple, sensuous, impassioned,”¹ but he also adds that Keats’s greatness lies in “something more than sensuousness” (205-7). Coventry Patmore counters Arnold’s comparison of Keats to Milton and comments that Keats’s poetry is characterised not so much by “sensuousness” as by “sensuality,” although “in the broader, and not in the vulgar and degrading sense” (330-31). By “sensual,” Patmore means “strong imagery of the senses” minus “a strong passion of the mind” (337). Regardless of whether Keats is sensuous or sensual, his admirers and detractors

¹ Milton’s epigram is from *Of Education*, and he first coined the word “sensuous” in *Of Reformation*, according to *Oxford English Dictionary*, to “avoid the sexual connotations of *sensual*.”

concur that the appeal of sensing experience in Keats's poetry makes not enough, if not no, sense.

This dissociation of sense and sensuousness is a residuum of the mind-body dualism that phenomenologists challenge and this study of a phenomenological Keats questions. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, Keats's attention to the sensing body taps into ontological questions about human situatedness, reality, alterity, expression, and temporality in his exploration of interdependence between poetic forms and content. In phenomenology, Husserl in *Logical Investigations* already pointed out that the binary view of sense (*Sinn*) and sensuousness (*Sinnlichkeit*, also translated as "sensibility") "make[s] the relation between conceptual thinking and perception incomprehensible and contingent" (Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology* 29). Speaking of a thing's "very organization of its sensible appearances," Merleau-Ponty gives an anecdote of the young Cézanne who mistook expression as something behind rather than on the face and only later learned that expression is in fact "the language of thing itself, and is born of its configurations" (*PP* 337). In his preface to the essay collection *The Sense and Non-Sense*, Merleau-Ponty extends his analysis of things' plenitude to aesthetics: "The meaning of a work of art or of a theory is as inseparable from its embodiment as the meaning of a tangible thing—which is why the meaning can never be fully expressed. The highest form of reason borders on unreason" (4). The invisible idea in music, literature, or love is always integral to their sensible appearances (*VI* 149). This relationship between sense and non-sense is marked by a chiasmic structure, which also characterises the dialectic between reality and illusion, expression and silence, self and other. Keats's avowal of "Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts" can similarly be understood in a reversible, instead of an antithetical, way: although the sensuous is intuitively given in pre-reflective experience, thinking yields an insight into the structure of experience. In this sense, a "Life of Sensations" does not oppose "Thoughts" but is a foundation for a "philosophic Mind" (*KL* 1: 185-86) that in turn reveals the mystery of life.

This sensing life for Keats however also manifests itself in frailty, frustration, anxiety, suffering, self-doubt, and death consciousness. Yet a rupture of order does not immediately entail nihilism. As Keats's "Ode on Melancholy" asserts:

Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,

Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
 Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine;
 His soul shalt taste the sadness of her might,
 And be among her cloudy trophies hung. (25-30)

Keats's defamiliarisation of the everyday and familiar in his poetry impels one to question, in Husserl's words, the naiveté of "natural attitude" and, in the realm of literature, it anticipates Modernists' "strenuous tongue" to speak what Ariane Mildenberg describes as the "rupture of conventional literary values, form and language" (17). As Mildenberg continues to explain, "'rupture' should not be seen as a rejection but as a new *awareness* of the taken for granted ground of our values, language, acts and expressions" (17). With his skepticism towards religious dogma, his challenges to the increasingly dominant scientific view of reality, his self-consciousness about his own mortal body, his cognizance of the limits of language in terms of representation, and his sensitivity to humans' fleeting existence in history, Keats can be arguably described as a Modernist. Indeed, Keats "became the most attractive romantic" to the Modernists in spite of their anti-Romantic sentiments (Bornstein 27) and can even exemplify Modernist ideals such as Eliot's impersonal poet. Considering the significant influence of writers like Rilke, Valéry, Proust, and Mallarmé on phenomenologists, the connection between Modernism and phenomenology is a well-ploughed field. To bring Keats into dialogue with Modernist poetics, this concluding chapter places a phenomenological Keats alongside T. S. Eliot and Wallace Stevens, who have garnered numerous phenomenological readings in literary criticism. The goal of this comparison is not to trace a Keatsian influence on the two later poets but to show how Keats's proto-phenomenological view is akin to a paradigm shift of emphasis from the poet's consciousness of the world in Romanticism onto the world of experience for subjects in Modernism, a "belated reaction against the Cartesian 'two worlds'" (Johnson 61). Both Romantics and Modernists, like phenomenologists, attend to the interaction between an embodied subject and the lived world. Nevertheless, it is phenomenology's turn to the intentional object of pre-reflective consciousness that decidedly moves further away from Cartesianism and becomes receptive to Modernist thoughts. Eliot and Stevens' poetics of objects in the world, in particular, brings Keats's proto-phenomenology of sense and sensuousness to further fruition.

The Situatedness of T. S. Eliot's Impersonal Poet

Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" puts forward his hugely influential idea of impersonality in order to distance himself from Wordsworthian lyricism. Published in two instalments in 1919, the essay ironically appeared in the periodical *The Egoist*, a title that would immediately ring the bell of Keats's criticism of Wordsworth's egotistical sublime. In his impersonality theory, Eliot rejects the Wordsworthian idea of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity" but singles out Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" as an exemplar of "the intensity of the artistic process" (2: 109-11). For Eliot, there is a distinction, although not always consistent, between emotions and feelings: whereas the former are personal, the latter are not and more primordial in great poetry, forming part of "a new compound" that emerges in the poet's platinum-like mind where "the fusion [of numberless feelings, phrases, images] takes place" (2: 109-10). As in Keats's ode, the nightingale, rather than a specific bird, "bring[s] together" "a number of feelings" (2: 109). Eliot's anxiety of influence, however, may induce him to construe a Wordsworthian lyricism that is much more personal than the one Wordsworth envisions. To demarcate his theory of impersonality from his Romantic predecessor, Eliot glosses over that poetry for Wordsworth is "the most philosophic of all writing" and "its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative" (Wordsworth, "Preface" 751). In fact, although Eliot holds that "[p]oetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality," he also adds, "But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things" (2: 111). Considering this dialectical relationship between personality and its surrender, Romantic authorship, as Andrew Bennett suggests, is not entirely "incompatible with impersonality" (*The Author* 71). Eliot's reading of Wordsworth might be uncharitable, but it is specifically Keats's chameleon-poet that unmistakably illustrates for him an artist's "continual self-sacrifice" and "continual extinction of personality" (2: 108). The adjective "continual" is important here, since it implies an ongoing formation and effacement of self and other, thus establishing a hyperdialectical relationship, as Merleau-Ponty would call it, "where signification never is except in tendency, where the inertia of the content never permits the defining of one term as positive, another term as negative, and still less a third term as absolute suppression of the negative by itself" (*VI* 94). As the poet is "continually in

for—and filling some other Body” (*KL* 1: 387), one self is lost but another is gained in living other identities. This sympathetic imagination achieved by continuous alternation between self and other affirms an intersubjective world that appears multifariously to different but co-experiencing subjects.

Keats’s attention to the immediate givenness of the world to embodied subjects aligns with Eliot’s poetics of the objective correlative in his essay “Hamlet and His Problems” published in *The Athenaeum* in 1919. Judging *Hamlet* as a work of art, Eliot contentiously argues that this renowned Shakespearean play does not deserve its reputation and is merely “the ‘Mona Lisa’ of literature” (2: 124). *Hamlet* is “an artistic failure” since the prince’s melancholy is unconvincingly “in *excess*” and his mother, “so negative and insignificant,” is not “an adequate equivalent” for his feelings (2: 125-26). *Hamlet*, in other words, lacks an “objective correlative,” that is “a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked” (2: 125). Eliot’s inquiry into the affective effect of an artwork’s presentation of objects on the audience strikes a chord with phenomenology’s interest in the sense-giving (*Sinnggebung*) process in experience. This connection is more than associative since Eliot, on his study trip to Marburg as Sheldon Travelling Fellow in 1914, did read Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* in German, which contains the terms *objektives Korrelat* and *gegenständliches Korrelat*, and made annotations in his copy (Griffiths 649-50, see also Schwartz 166-67). Yet this Husserlian influence, if there is any, seems to be, according to Dominic Griffiths, only “superficial,” since Eliot’s use of the term concerns mainly the effectiveness of the objects in art in eliciting certain affective response, whereas Husserl’s “objective correlate” is the referent which an expression means (652). Griffiths further proposes that Eliot’s objective correlative instead shows more affinity with Bergson’s aesthetic ideas in *Time and Free Will* in that the function of art for both is to arouse sympathy between the audience and artist through its suggestiveness (654-57). However, Bergson’s recurrent references to the artist’s emotions can be equally incongruous with Eliot’s deliberate use of passive voice (“are given,” “is . . . evoked”) to efface the artist’s presence when he introduces the term.

It is hard to pin down Eliot’s thoughts to one particular thinker among his eclectic readings, but resonance is based not so much on direct contact as on similar

concerns. Central to the notion of objective correlative is Eliot's stress on *Hamlet* as "a work of art," a phrase that appears six times in the essay (2: 122, 124). The hero Hamlet, by contrast, is part of "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events." An artwork for Eliot must manifest itself as an organic whole as "a set," "a situation," and "a chain." This insistence on the unity of the artwork becomes even more central in Eliot's elevation of the metaphysical poets, whose minds, when "perfectly equipped for its work," are "constantly amalgamating disparate experience" and "forming new wholes" (2: 380). Thus, the holism of the objective correlative runs along similar lines as his theory of impersonality, according to which the poet "must be aware that the mind of Europe—the mind of his own country—a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind" (2: 107). This unity of the artwork parallels the unity that Merleau-Ponty observes both in artwork and in body. While narratives may construct an illusion of representation, narration is inseparable from its discourse:

The novelist's role is not to set forth ideas, or even to analyze characters, but rather to present, without ideological commentary, an inter-human event and to allow it to ripen and burst forth to such an extent that every change in the order of the narration or in the choice of perspectives would modify the *novelistic* sense of the event. (*PP* 152)

Eliot's and Merleau-Ponty's shared understanding of the autonomy of the artwork as a unified body that transcends personality, ideas, and ideology resonates with Keats's idea of non-egotistical poetry: "We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us. . . . Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enter one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject" (*KL* 1: 224). The flaw in *Hamlet* for Eliot lies not in its excess of emotions but "in *excess* of the facts as they appear," betraying an "[in]complete adequacy of the external to the emotion" to showing "artistic 'inevitability'" (2: 125). The justification for any excess in an artwork hence is its ability to arouse sympathy in the audience naturally as if the emotions were their own. This is also an axiom that Keats similarly holds: "Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity—it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance" (*KL* 1: 238). Eliot's stress on the completeness of "the external to the emotion" is equally important for Keats: "[Poetry's] touches of Beauty should never be half way thereby making the reader breathless instead of content . . . if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a

tree it had better not come at all” (*KL* 1: 238-39). Equally important to these resonating ideas of the two poets is their tendency to deemphasise the artist in favour of the artwork and the audience in their judgement of success in artistic creation.

Eliot later attenuates his polemics of impersonality but the idea of the unity and naturalness of an artwork, which Keats also aspires to attain, continues to play a crucial role in his poetics. In his lecture “The Music of Poetry,” delivered at Glasgow University in 1942, he comments that English poetry is “a kind of amalgam of system of diverse sources,” comparable to “human beings in a composite race” (6: 312). In spite of the varying “dominant” “element in the poetic compound” at different times, poetry for Eliot speaks “the ordinary everyday language which we use and hear,” and at least on this issue he concedes that Wordsworth “was right” (6: 313, 315). In collapsing the division between conversation and poetry, Eliot discerns the interdependence between the prosaic sense and the musical sensuousness in poetry: “the music of poetry is not something which exists apart from the meaning” (6: 313). If the music of poetry is “latent in the common speech of its time,” poetry is also “latent in the common speech of the poet’s *place*” and displays its situatedness in the world (6: 315). Keats would agree. In his rhetorical question in a fragmentary poem, “Where’s the poet,” Keats shares Eliot’s view that the poet is the man residing among his fellow human beings and creatures native to the world, and, as he proclaims in *The Fall of Hyperion*, “sure a poet is a sage; / A humanist, physician to all men” (1.189-90). As to be situated in the world also means to live the world as an embodied subject, Merleau-Ponty with a sense of togetherness would agree, “We are in the world” (*PP* 431). Poetry for Keats, Eliot, and Merleau-Ponty has its origin in the sensible world.

In his lecture “The Three Voices of Poetry” given at the Central Hall in Westminster in 1953, Eliot goes further in suggesting that the artwork itself is a world: “the work of a great poetic dramatist, like Shakespeare, constitutes a world” (7: 829). This worldly aspect of poetry pushes him to revise his theory of impersonality after almost thirty years and to reconsider the interrelationship between the artwork and the artist. For an attentive listener, the three voices, namely “the voice of the poet talking to himself—or to nobody,” “the voice of the poet addressing an audience,” or “the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse,” are “most often found together” and “all . . . audible” (7: 817, 826-27). This renewed understanding is however not a regressive step that equates the artwork to the artist’s

thought, as if it were a visible translation of an invisible idea. Instead of turning the sensuous into a derivative of the sense, Eliot proposes that artists incarnate themselves in the sensible work of art: “The world of a great poetic dramatist is a world in which the creator is everywhere present, and everywhere hidden” (7: 829). A successful artist, like the anonymous body in perception, remains in the background of aesthetic experience and leaves the artwork in the foreground. In characterising this embodied nature of art, Eliot overcomes his earlier dualist language and offers a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between thought and expression. It is the struggle to achieve sensibility by unifying feeling and thought that Keats, as he observes, also strives for in the second *Hyperion* (2: 381).

In spite of his ambivalent attitude towards Romantic ideas of authorship, Eliot consistently stresses the situatedness of artwork, since the impersonal poet carries along the tradition, brings out feelings from the organic whole of objective correlatives, and speaks the language of the time. This continuous phenomenological undertone in Eliot’s poetics is present not only in his later overtly philosophical poems such as *The Four Quartets*, as many critics have already observed, but also earlier in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock,” the opening poem of Eliot’s first collection *Prufrock and Other Observations*, published exactly in the year of the centenary of Keats’s writing of *Endymion*. Eliot’s Prufrock is a solitary flâneur, a plausible counterpart of Keats’s wandering Endymion pining for his idealist moon-goddess. “Let us go then, you and I” (1), the speaker extends an invitation to an unknown addressee to embark on a quest-romance like Endymion’s, without a definite goal.² Unlike Endymion’s actual movements, the structuring device in Eliot’s

² The famous opening line creates many speculations of the identity of the addressee “you.” Eliot, in his reply to the literary critic Kristian Smidt in 1959, forgets the poet’s impersonality and exercises his authority. On the one hand, he admits that his answer “must be somewhat conjectural” and “[his] memory may deceive him”; on the other hand, he “assert[s] that the ‘you’ in *The Love Song* is merely some friend or companion, presumably of the male sex” (*The Poems of T. S. Eliot* 376n1). Some readings are for him “quite astonishing over-interpretation” (376n1). His conjecture, remote memory, and evasive adjective “astonishing” all undercut his final verdict. Keats, in this respect, may live up more to Eliot’s ideal of impersonality in letting readers discover new meanings in their re-readings of the poem.

poem is, as George Bornstein points out, “[t]he speaker’s mind,” a legacy of the Greater Romantic Lyric (130). If the “you and I” “both belong to the same psyche” and the poem features a “division of the self” (Bornstein 130), this divided self is orchestrated to its maximum in Keats’s *Endymion* and Eliot’s *Prufrock*.

While *Endymion* cannot reconcile his ideal and the thingness of things, *Prufrock* in his invitation already anticipates rejection. In this so-called love song, the speaker confesses not so much his romantic feelings as his anxiety and paranoia as an embarrassed other. Similar to the embarrassed speakers in Keats’s “Ode to Nightingale” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” he is so self-conscious that he feels the need to “prepare a face to meet the faces that [he] meets” (27). With a heightened sense of an ageing body, he is observing himself being observed: “(They will say: ‘How his hair is growing thin!’) ... (They will say: ‘But how his arms and legs are thin!’)” (41, 44) Eliot’s indecisive speaker is paralysed by relentless “visions and revisions” (33), “decisions and revisions” (48), always expecting that “there will be time” (23, 26, 28, 37). His reflection on action (“Shall I . . .” 54, 70, 122, “Should I” 59, 61, 68, 69, 79, and “Do I...” 45) turns into inaction, and his oblivion to the present echoes the question in Keats’s “To Autumn”: “Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?” *Prufrock*’s inner journey does not culminate in a happy ending as in *Endymion*, but its last three lines turn from an unaccomplished “go” to an apodictic experience in an intersubjective world: “We *have lingered* in the chambers of the sea / By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown / Till human voices wake us, and we drown” (129-31; emphases added). The mythology of the singing mermaids, much more remote than romance in Keats’s times, is presented as real and lived, as the present perfect indicates. This change from solipsist introspection to experience insinuated with a despondent concluding note mirrors *Endymion*’s homecoming to the earth with “Peona [who] went / Home through the gloomy wood in wonderment” (4.1002-3). Following a different trajectory from Wordsworth’s “I wandered lonely as a cloud,” *Prufrock*’s and *Endymion*’s minds turn outwards towards shared sensuous experience. Their homecoming illustrates what Jeffrey M. Perl identifies as the *nostos* motif in Modernism, and such a return, as Bruce Johnson further elaborates, is moreover “a return to a lost home where there were never two worlds, but one” (61). The final dwelling place of Keats’s and Eliot’s heroes is an intersubjective world, “a World of Pains and troubles” (*KL* 2: 102), comparable to Dante who ultimately returns from the Inferno to the earth to tell the story, as the epigraph of “The Love

Song” reminds us, and like the poet-narrator of *The Fall of Hyperion* who will tell his vision to the perceived world.

The Reality of Wallace Stevens’ New Romanticism

In contrast to Eliot’s anti-romantic sentiments, Wallace Stevens envisions a new romanticism and Keatsian echoes abound in his poetry. To refute the Victorians’ effeminate Keats rather than endorsing their gender bias, Stevens regards Keats as a manly poet like Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Browning, and much of Tennyson (*Letters* 26). In his journal, he recalls his reading of Keats’s *Endymion* with a sudden awakened sensitivity to the sensuous world, a moment reminiscent of Severn’s portrait of Keats with a book on his crossed legs on the day he wrote “Ode to a Nightingale:

In the afternoon I sat in the piano room reading Keats’ “Endymion”, and listening to the occasional showers on the foliage outside. The fronds of a fern were dangling over my knees and I felt lazy and content. Once as I looked up I saw a big, pure drop of rain slip from leaf to leaf of a clematis vine. The thought occurred to me that it was just such quick, unexpected, commonplace, specific things that poets and other observers jot down in their note-books. It was certainly a monstrous pleasure to be able to be specific about such a thing. (*Letters* 28-29)

Keats’s *Endymion*, as one may reasonably conjecture, with its bowery scenes and celebration of “a thing of beauty,” forms the Gestalt of Stevens’ sensual experience, sharpening his senses to see “the foliage outside,” “[t]he fronds of a fern,” “a big, pure drop of rain slip[ping] from leaf to leaf of a clematis vine.” His epiphany of “quick, unexpected, commonplace, specific things” as poetic materials and his “monstrous pleasure to be able to be specific about such a thing” correspond to the thingness of things that both Keats and Merleau-Ponty discern. In his courtship of Elsie Moll, Stevens quoted lines from *Endymion* in his letters. He told Elsie that the manuscript of *Endymion* was the only interesting thing on the exhibition of J. P. Morgan’s collection in the library of Columbia University and cited the monumental line “A thing of beauty is a joy forever” (*Letters* 110). Red bananas and *Endymion* were “a partial solution” to Stevens’ summer evenings in New York, where one would “never see a wheat-field, or a corn-field or a barn” (*Letters* 148), a scenery that

easily recalls Keats's "To Autumn." These awakenings of the perceptual reality of quotidian things, invoked through Keats's poetic imagination, not only resonate with the young Romantic's credo, "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not" (*KL* 1: 184), but also touches on Stevens' long ruminations about the triangular relationship between romanticism, imagination, and reality.

Romanticism for Stevens is not one single literary movement but stands for an aesthetic achievement. Stevens' account, unlike Eliot's sweeping generalisation, exhibits acumen regarding the positive and negative connotations of romanticism. Stevens rejects the "*pejorative* sense" of the word and goes so far as to claim that "poetry is essentially romantic" (*Letters* 277).³ Romantic poetry does not designate certain attributes of poetry found in the Romantic era but refers to a normative value. Stevens explains, "only the romantic of poetry must be something constantly new, and therefore, just the opposite of what is spoken of as the romantic" (277). In other words, romantic poetry, along the lines of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of language as discussed in Chapter Five, is also a "speaking speech" that continuously enriches its "spoken" sense. This persistent self-renewal characterises romanticism as a movement of becoming for Stevens: "What one is always doing is keeping the romantic pure: eliminating from it what people speak of as the romantic" (277). With such perennial newness in romanticism, "the most casual things take on transcendence, and the poet rushes brightly, and so on" (277). As Stevens further elaborates in his aphorism collection "Adagia," in spite of its "stale" and "impotent" occasions, romanticism in its true sense is generally "potent" (*OP* 180). The essential romantic quality of poetry is perceived intuitively "as if one were recognizing the truth about poetry for the first time" (180). In associating romanticism with intuitive truth, Stevens proposes an aesthetics comparable to what Keats describes as the truth of Adam's dream, and to a phenomenology of truth as approximation in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. The truth of romanticism has to continuously refashion itself since Stevens, like Keats and Merleau-Ponty, is aware of a sensible world that is inexhaustible in perception and defies any claim of an objectivity reality that can be attained once and for all.

³ See also Steven's "Adagia" in *Opus Posthumous*, pp. 172, 180.

If Stevens' romanticism is a perpetual movement of renewal, his later more anti-romantic comments are only superficially so and still accord with his vision of a new romanticism as continual self-critique. In "Imagination as Value," Stevens champions imagination as "one of the great human powers" and "the liberty of the mind," but the romantic "belittles" the former and "is a failure to make use of" the latter (*NA* 139). Considering imagination as almost synonymous with Romanticism, Stevens' criticism is no doubt provocative. Yet, as Stevens' use of romanticism has its own specific meaning, his definition of imagination also differs from the general understanding. The defining feature of Stevens' notion of imagination is its ability of abstraction, a word that the Romantics would be hesitant to use:

The imagination is the only genius. It is intrepid and eager and the extreme of its achievement lies in abstraction. The achievement of the romantic, on the contrary, lies in minor wish-fulfillments and it is incapable of abstraction. In any case and without continuing to contrast the two things, one wants to elicit a sense of the imagination as something vital. In that sense one must deal with it as metaphysics. (*NA* 139)

It is noteworthy that Stevens' urge to "cleanse the imagination of the romantic" is under pressure from the survival of imagination in the face of logical positivism and Freud's science of illusions (*NA* 138-39). In order to rescue the status of imagination in the modern times, Stevens elevates imagination to metaphysics as "the only clue to reality" (*NA* 137). Hence, the abstraction and reality that Stevens emphasises are not the same as the objective thought in science, which Keats and Merleau-Ponty both challenge. On the contrary, imagination for Stevens, instead of claiming universal objectivity, is "the power of the mind over the possibilities of things" and "the source not of a certain single value but of as many values as reside in the possibilities of things" (*NA* 136). While Keats suggests that there are "Things real—things semireal—and no things" (*KL* 1: 242-43), Stevens in the essay "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words" (1942) proposes that, as "there are degrees of the imagination," "there are [by implication] degrees of reality" (*NA* 7). Reality for Stevens is not disengaged objectivity; especially in art, it is linked to the perception of the world, as Keats also puts it: "every mental pursuit takes its reality" (*KL* 2: 242): Stevens similarly highlights how poetry embodied the poet's perception of reality:

The poet has his own meaning of reality, and the painter has, and the musician has; and besides what it means to the intelligence and to the senses, it means

something to everyone, so to speak. Notwithstanding this, the word in its general sense, which is the sense in which I have used it, adapts itself instantly. The subject-matter of poetry is not that “collection of solid, static objects extended in space” but the life that is lived in the scene that it composes; and so reality is not that external scene but the life that is lived in it. Reality is things as they are. (NA 25)

This lived reality, spoken against the background of the Second World War when the essay was published, can be outrageously “violent” but violence for Stevens is far more than physical ferocity; it is pervasive in life in general for “everyone alive” (NA 26-27). As reality is not simply an objective fact, Stevens holds that reality in poetry should go beyond such violent reality: “A possible poet must be a poet capable of resisting or evading the pressure of reality of this last degree, with the knowledge that the degree of today may become a deadlier tomorrow” (NA 27). With regard to “the social, that is to say sociological or poetical, obligation” of a poet, Stevens states that the poet “has none” and “is bound to resist and evade” it (NA 27-28). Poetry creates its own reality through imagination.

Stevens is well aware that his view of poetry as a valve for the pressure of reality can be easily accused of escapism. However, as Stevens is careful about the multiple connotations of romanticism and reality, he also redefines escapism. Although he argues that poetry has no social obligation, he does not mean that poetry is asocial. Instead, as imagination partakes in reality, so does reality in social life, so that “the imagination and society are inseparable” (NA 28). What Stevens rejects is, in Keats’s words, “a palpable design” (KL 1: 224) in poetry whose “all-commanding subject-matter . . . is life, the never-ceasing source” (NA 28). Whereas the pejorative sense of escapism implies detachment from reality that Stevens “regard[s] as fundamental,” escapism in poetry in his understanding “help[s] people to live their lives” through a process of aestheticising reality that is rooted in the artist’s lived world:

the artist transforms us into epicures; that he has to discover the possible work of art in the real world, then to extract it, when he does not himself compose it entirely, that he is *un amoureux perpétuel* of the world that he contemplates and thereby enriches, that art sets out to express the human soul; and finally that everything like a firm grasp of reality is eliminated from the aesthetic field. (NA 30-31)

This elimination of reality is not a factual absence but a withdrawal into the perceptual background, constituting the “aesthetic field” without being a theme itself. Hence, not only is such “a world of poetry indistinguishable from the world in which we live,” but it also creates “the world in which we shall come to live,” and “the world to which we turn incessantly and without knowing it and that he gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it” (NA 31). Interpreting reality not as an objective fact but as a perceptual world, Stevens dissolves the opposition between imagination and reality and thereby shows that poetry as “the supreme fiction” reveals rather than neglects reality.

Stevens’ endeavour to dispose of the romantic sense of imagination is not a rejection of the movement but an attempt to bring it forward: “There is more than the romantic in the statement that the true work of art, whatever it may be, is not the work of the individual artist. It is time and it is place, as these perfect themselves” (NA 139-40). A mind capable of abstraction for Stevens is not a Cartesian *cogito* but a mind that can “think of [imagination] as part of life, and to think of it as part of life is to realize the extent of artifice” (NA 140). “We live in the mind,” Stevens says (NA 140), but it is also crucial to stress that it is the embodied mind in which we perceptually live. In this abstract rather than rational mind, imagination, as “an activity like seeing things or hearing things or any other sensory activity” (NA 145), brings together sense and sensuousness. For Stevens, “[i]t is the *mundo* of the imagination in which the imaginative man delights and not the gaunt world of reason” (NA 58). Considering imagination as the truth of the perceived world, Stevens’ vision of “the great poem of the earth [that] remains to be written” comes close to Keats’s “favorite Speculation,” “that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated” (KL 1: 185). In salvaging the imagination from the pejorative sense of romanticism, Stevens offers a phenomenological view of imagination that is akin to Keats’s poetics of sensuousness.

It is this sensuous world where both Keats and Stevens discover how poetry can capture unfolding experience in perception and offer an alternative to religion. Stevens’ “Sunday Morning” turns a symbolic day of salvation in Christianity into a celebration of the everyday world of joy and sorrow. Stevens’ line “Divinity must live within herself” is a belated reverberation of Keats’s soul-making in “a World of Pains and troubles” (KL 1: 102):

Divinity must live within herself:

Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
 Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
 Elations where the forest blooms; gusty
 Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights;
 All pleasures and all pains, remembering
 The bough of summer and the winter branch.

These are the measures destined for her soul. (23-30)

These sensuous experiences are not passive sense data but signify human existence in the world. While a rose with sensation, as Keats supposes, in blooming and dying enjoys “a beautiful morning” and endures the “annoyances” of “a cold wind” and “a hot sun” (*KL* 1: 102), Stevens also notices “[a]ll pleasures and all pains” in the natural cycle in the woman’s remembrance. Both poets recognise that these earthy elements as “measures destined” for the soul-making are given to the embodied subjects without pronouncing their destinies. As “The Hymn to Pan” in *Endymion* celebrates more the communal earth than the actual deity; the chanting of “a ring of men” “on a summer morn” in Stevens’ poem hails becoming rather than being, deification rather than a deity: “Their boisterous devotion to the sun, / Not as a god, but as a god might be” (91-94). Stevens’ chanting the sun into being evokes Keats’s deifying Apollo in *Hyperion*. Despite their scepticism of religious dogma, religion serves as a means for Keats and Stevens to inquire into the shared concern of the human race. The vale of soul-making, as Keats himself describes it, is “a faint sketch of a system of Salvation which does not affront our reason and humanity” in an attempt to identify the commonality among religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism (*KL* 103). Stevens in a journal entry recalls how religious experience is germane to the understanding of the reciprocal relationship between humans and the world: “Last night I spent an hour in the dark transept of St. Patrick’s Cathedral where I go now and then in my more lonely moods. An old argument with me is that the true religious force in the world is not the church but the world itself: the mysterious callings of Nature and our responses” (*Letters* 58). In their return to the origin of human experience, both poets philosophise religion and perform a true phenomenological reduction that demands a perpetual beginning according to Merleau-Ponty (*PP* lxxviii). The beginning for Keats and Stevens is this sensible world of here and now.

Sensuous experience underpins a finite mind that cannot preconceive what comes to be perceived. Gerald L. Burns comments that Stevens’ poetry is “a poetry of

the spectator, in which the main thing is to see something or to construct something, and thereby to count it as knowable or valuable (or, in short, something to call one's own)" (26). Yet, for an embodied subject unlike God, to see something also means to have something amiss in the present perceptual field. As Stevens writes in "Study of Two Pears," "The pears are not seen / As the observer wills" (stanza 6, lines 23-24), resonating with Keats's line "Things cannot to the will / Be settled, but they tease us out of thought" in his epistolary letter to Reynolds (76-77). Knowledge thus implies lacunae, as Keats's notion of negative capability reminds us. Speaking of a poet as a spectator, Keats can also be regarded as such with his "Ode on a Grecian Urn" but Stevens in comparison is more struck by quotidian spectacles. Unlike Keats's spatiotemporally dislocated urn, a mundane object like a jar for Stevens can equally instigate a series of transformations. His "Anecdote of the Jar" is nothing more than a single act of "plac[ing] a jar in Tennessee" (1). Once situated in specific surroundings, an indefinite jar becomes the jar that brings the wilderness to the foreground of the hill, mak[ing] it "no longer wild" (1-6). The jar "took dominion everywhere" (8), for it establishes a ubiquitous relation to its environment as the focus of the spectacle. The jar is "like nothing else in Tennessee" (12) since to see the presence of this very jar is to relegate other things to the background as something else.

For an embodied subject, perspectival perception thus entails what else can be seen. While fifty-nine readings, as Jack Stillinger proposes, can be drawn from Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" ("Fifty-nine Ways"), Stevens discerns also at least thirteen ways of looking at a blackbird. Although Stevens' blackbird is not Keats's highly poeticised nightingale, both poems demonstrate an awareness of the absolute other that evades the perceiver's projection. In stanza 7, the speaker addresses "thin men of Haddam" who "imagine golden birds" but dismiss the blackbird in their immediate experience: "Do you not see how the blackbird / Walks around the feet / Of the women about you?" (25-29), echoing Keats's question, "Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?" (*KL* 2: 102) Centring knowledge on perception, the poem highlights the pre-linguistic sensorial experience that the narrator's mortal tongue in Keats's *Hyperion* poems also registers:

I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,

That blackbird is involved

In what I know (stanza 8, lines 30-34)

The sense of utterance is imbued with a sonorous body. Still, “noble accents” and “lucid, inescapably rhythms” revolve around an aspiration for the ideal, of which the speaker is so cognisant to assert the reducible concreteness of “[t]hat blackbird” as part of the consciousness. In contrast to the Cartesian *cogito*, the knowledge in Stevens’ poem is transitive, involving the other beyond the self. “But I know” signals a phenomenological turn to “what I know” in intuitive sensuous experience, exquisitely demonstrating Eliot’s unified sensibility of thought and feeling. Thought can be felt, as Keats, the emblematic sensuous poet, in his last letter to Charles Brown concludes, “I always made an awkward bow” (*KL* 2: 360). In perceiving how his sensing body will be sensed, Keats already sees the sense of the sensuous as his Modernist successors.

Coda: Keats, Merleau-Ponty, and Modern Thought

Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception* considers the “painstaking task” of phenomenology as a part of the movement of “modern thought” that some forerunners of Modernism such as Balzac, Proust, Valéry, and Cézanne also partake:

If phenomenology was a movement prior to having been a doctrine or a system, this is neither accidental nor a deception. Phenomenology is as painstaking as the works of Balzac, Proust, Valéry, or Cézanne—through the same kind of attention and wonder, the same demand for awareness, the same will to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state. As such, phenomenology merges with the effort of modern thought. (*PP* lxxxv)

For Merleau-Ponty, the emergence of phenomenology is “neither accidental nor a deception” but cultural and historical since it grapples with the problem of subjectivity in modernity that the Romantics and the Modernists also face. The advent of a heightened sense of self-consciousness after Descartes renders the reflection on the world without some consideration about subjectivity difficult. Phenomenology’s endeavour to “to grasp the sense of the world or of history in its nascent state” is thus a return to the primordial intuitive experience before the mind-world dualism. Merleau-Ponty, in a 1948 radio talk, further relates the difficulty of modern thought to the growing attention to the opacity of truth: “If modern thought is difficult and runs

counter to common sense, this is because it is concerned with truth; experience no longer allows it to settle for the clear and straightforward notions which common sense cherishes because they bring peace of mind” (*WP* 49). Modernist works such as Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* are notoriously difficult since these artists strive to overcome the “straightforward” representation of a transparent reality to capture the myriad of experience beyond the Cartesian *cogito*. Along the same lines of modern subjectivity, Keats’s notion of negative capability acknowledges uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts not as the obstacles but the paths to truth, an awareness that comes to the foreground in the twentieth century. Keats’s poetry with its singular sensuousness portrays a world experienced by a lived body that cannot be objectified and remains opaque. The sense of this sensing life is indeterminate and ever in a state of becoming. Accordingly, Keats’s poetics of sensuousness along with phenomenology “merges with the effort of modern thought.”

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