Keats and Hellenism: Revisiting Grecian Forms, Influence, and Questions of Belatedness in Keats's Sonnets and the Spring Odes

PARIS, ANNE-VIVIEN

Keats and Hellenism: Revisiting Grecian Forms, Influence, and Questions of Belatedness in Keats's Sonnets and the Spring Odes

Anne–Vivien Paris

In compliance with the requirements of Masters in English

Department of English
Durham University

June 2023

Statement of Copyright

COVID-19 Declaration

Furthermore,COVID–19 has had a profound impact on individuals worldwide, especially students and researchers. The pandemic has resulted in unforeseeable disruptions and challenges, including illness and limited access to resources, which have significantly affected academic work. This thesis statement emphasises the adverse effect of the pandemic on the author's research, limiting their resources and time to complete the project during a prolonged residency in Hong Kong. However, with the flexibility and understanding of the unnatural circumstances brought about byCsOVID–19, the author managed to complete the research work to the best of the author's ability in the circumstances. The author recognises the importance of prioritizing the health and well–being of individuals in the academe amidst these challenging times while still producing a thorough research work.

Statement on Margins and Citation Style.

The implementation of mirrored margins in this thesis adheres to the guidelines set forth by the Durham University research protocol, which emphasises mirrored margins not less than 40mm at the binding edge and other margins not less than 15mm to ensure uniformity and consistency for optimal legibility and aesthetic appeal. Additionally, it is essential to note that the present work follows the guidelines set forth in the ninth edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, which is widely recognised as a standard reference for academic writing in the humanities. By adhering to these conventions, this work seeks to uphold the highest standards of academic rigour and professionalism.

Abstract

Delving into the captivating world of John Keats – one of the most prominent figures of the Romantic era – this research examines his intricate relationship with Hellenism. We unravel the evolving nature of Keats's engagement with Hellenism, examining its manifestations through different temporal stages and varying poetic genres. Keats's connection with Hellenism undergoes a nuanced examination and shifts away from a static portrayal to one that emphasises its evolving nature. This approach uncovers distinct features characterizing Keats's Hellenism throughout his poetic journey, spanning from sonnets to odes and across his early works to later compositions.

The concept of negative capability, famously coined by Keats himself, plays a crucial role in understanding his development of a unique approach to engaging with Hellenism. Primarily analysing Keats's poetical works reveals how negative capability serves as a key factor in shaping Keats's own form of Hellenism. It explores how his ability to embrace uncertainty and ambiguity enables him to enter a dialogue with the overpowering power of the dead poets, which Hellenism embodies. Furthermore, the interplay between temporality, negative capability, and beauty in Keats's Hellenism is studied. There is an intricate relationship that exists between these three elements, shedding light on how the exploration of beauty in Keats's poetry intertwines with his evolving understanding of Hellenism, ultimately shaping his poetic vision and aesthetic sensibilities. Despite being considered a belated poet of Ancient Greece, Keats has internalised his own inner Greek poet and used it to transform his works and imbue them with his own brand of Hellenism – a prophet of an age long past.

The thesis illuminates the dynamic evolution of Keats's Hellenistic pursuits by discussing the multifaceted nature of Keats's Hellenistic connection and the interplay of temporality, negative capability, and beauty. Ultimately, it offers fresh insights into the Romantic poet's genius, expanding our understanding of his profound engagement with the classical world and its enduring influence on his poetic legacy.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

This study is dedicated to the individuals who have played an integral role in my academic journey, providing unwavering support, guidance, and encouragement.

To Dr. Jessica Valdez and Dr. Julia Kuehn, your early encouragement during my undergraduate years sparked my passion for literary exploration. Your invaluable advice and belief in my abilities have guided me through this research, and I am forever grateful for your mentorship.

To my dear friend Ran, whose unwavering support and attentive listening provided a much-needed source of motivation. Your benevolence and willingness to engage with my thoughts, despite not being a Keats expert, have been a constant source of inspiration.

Above all, I extend my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Mark Sandy. Your relentless dedication, insightful supervision, and profound expertise have been indispensable in shaping this study. Your strength and influence are clearly evident in the present paper, and I am immensely grateful for your guidance and belief in my potential.

To these individuals and more, whose support has been vital throughout this endeavour, I offer my heartfelt appreciation. Your contributions have fuelled my intellectual growth, and this dedication stands as a testament to the profound impact you have had on my academic journey.

Introduction

"Half–Knowledge": Keats's Negatively Capable Poetics and Reimagining the Grecian World

In The Burden of Past and the English Poet, Walter Jackson Bate points out a problem faced by modern artists, stating that "the remorseless deepening of self–consciousness, before the rich and intimidating legacy of the past, has become the greatest single problem that modern art (art, that is to say, since the late seventeenth century) has had to face and that it will be increasingly so in the future".[1] This is a challenge faced by poets a hundred years ago and now. Keats was acutely aware of this artistic self–consciousness, as he lamented, "there was nothing original to be written in poetry; that its riches were already exhausted – and all its beauties forestalled."[2]

Keats feared being able to create "original" literary works as his own creations would, inadvertently, be overshadowed by some other ancient piece of art. As early as the seventeenth century, Alexander Pope pointed out the importance of "invention" in the preface of his translation of The Iliad: "It is the invention that, in different degrees, distinguishes all great geniuses: the utmost stretch of human study, learning, and industry, which masters everything besides, can never attain to this."[3] By its very definition, invention for poets and artists would solve this dilemma of "replicating" poetry. By inventing something, a poet regardless of when

[1] Walter Jackson Bate. *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*. Harvard University Press, 2013. p.4
[2] John Keats. "To Richard Woodhouse – 27 Oct 1818." The Keats Letters Project, 27 Oct. 2018, keatslettersproject.com/category/correspondence/to-richard-woodhouse-27-oct-1818/.
[3] Homer. *The Iliad by Homer*. Project Gutenberg, 1 July 2004, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6130. Accessed on 7 October 2022

they lived could create original works that are free from the influences of the past. They could proudly recognise their works as something unique and pristine.

However, what is there more to invent if, as Keats feared, all the ideas have been employed in previous great artworks? "What is there left for modern poets to write after Shakespeare?" Dryden puts succinctly the advantage of timing to Shakespeare, "All the images of Nature were *still* present to him [Shakespeare] and he drew them, not laboriously but *luckily,* when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too." (italics added). Among all the generations of poets, the Romantics were particularly preoccupied with the issue of originality, as Harold Bloom concludes, "Romantic tradition is consciously late, and Romantic literary psychology is therefore necessarily a psychology of belatedness."[4] Romantic poets hold that poetry is a unique expression of an individual's creativity and that originality is a key component of good poetry. An emphasis on originality and individuality signifies the worth of both poetry and poets. Clearly, Keats struggled to think of himself as an original poet and instead imagined himself cowering under the wing of great poets and looked at his works as nothing more than an afterthought compared to what the great masters had previously done. This "anxiety of influence" is apparent in Keats and his struggle with Greek poets. Poetry is not just an expression of the self, but an aggressive struggle of self–assertion for a place in the literary world. Here, we see that Keats typifies a Romantic struggle to be just as unique as the olden masters were.

Throughout Keats's short but glamorous literary career, an "anxiety of influence" has always been present in his works, as Harold Bloom points out.[5] Keats has

[4] Harold Bloom. *A Map of Misreading*. Oxford University Press, 2003. p.35
[5] Bloom, p. 84

always struggled with the notion that he as a "young" poet can hardly hold up to the exacting poetical standards of the old masters. He worried that he might not be a powerful poet in his own right, that his works are only derivative and flattering of those that came before him and never achieve literary and personal immortality. A strong poet (at least according to Bloom), especially if they were born after the so-called poetical golden age, can overcome this anxiety of influence by having a clear, imaginative space for themselves.[6] Instead of just merely mirroring the old masters in their craft, "belated" Keats can now be somehow in equal standing with them and create works that are worthy of praise or, at the very least, hold up to the excellence of the past.

This influence is not just limited to Grecian literature but also to Shakespeare and Milton's works. However, Keats particularly struggled with Hellenism due to several reasons. Keats's struggle with the classic language was well–known and he had to rely on second–hand narrations of authentic Greek tales. His Hellenistic influence was not direct but indirect, and this troubled Keats greatly. Keats claimed his reliance on second–hand translations of the language himself and his continued frustrations about it. In one of his many letters, Keats lamented, "I Iong to feast upon old Homer as we have upon Shakespeare, and as I have lately upon Milton."[7] Another factor was that of cultural differences. Obviously, Keats was British, which is an entirely different culture than that of the Ancient Greeks. However, this reason did not seem to impact Keats as closely as it did with the others since, in the words of Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Keats was Greek",[8] especially with the way that Keats

[6] Bloom, p. 5
[7] Letters of Keats. To J.H. Reynolds, Apr 27, 1818
[8] "A mechanical imitation of style, or by choice of similar subjects, would not bear any resemblance to Keats; no one would recognise the intended imitation. When somebody expressed his surprise to Shelley, that Keats, who was not very conversant with the Greek language, could write so finely and classically of their gods and goddesses, Shelley replied 'He *was* a Greek.' The writings of Keats are saturated and instinct with the purest inspiration of poetry ; his mythology is full of ideal passion ; his divinities are drawn as from " the life," nay, from their inner and essential life ; his enchantments

portrayed and narrated the ancient Greek myths. So impressed by Keats was Shelley that he claimed that not even William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, or he could equal Keats in thinking like a Greek poet.

Unlike Shelley and Byron, who were proficient in Greek and had "participated" in the Greek War of Independence, directly and indirectly, Keats had less exposure to Greece in his entire life. All in all, Keats had several disadvantages relating to everything Greek. His struggle with the language would lead him to agonise about not capturing the essence of classical work itself, which added to his haunted thought that he lived temporally displaced to Ancient Greece. Apart from glimpsing the Elgin Marbles, Keats's relied on translations by George Chapman, Alexander Pope and John Lemprière. However, what Keats did not achieve in a literary examination of Greek texts and myths, he more than made up for in both spirit and mind.

Such spirit and mind compensated for Keats's linguistic shortcomings. However, this innate linguistic disadvantage has been amplified by critics. Jennifer Wallace comments succinctly in her book *Shelley and Greece*, "Keats could not read Greek, he encountered Greek culture by viewing physical objects, such as statues and vases, and by reading books of mythology. These, potentially, reduced him to the position of passive spectator. He also relied heavily upon his imagination."[9] Keats was indeed a passive spectator of Ancient Greece and Hellenistic themes. He was not nearly knowledgeable enough to warrant a thorough understanding and examination of Grecian elements and he knew it. He could only put into words what

and his “faery land” are exactly like the most lovely and truthful records of one who has been a dweller among them and a participator in their mysteries; and his descriptions of pastoral scenery are often as natural and simple as they are romantic, and tinged all over with ideal beauty.” See Richard Horne, editor. *A New Spirit of the Age*. Vol. 2. Harper & Brothers, 1844. p. 196.

[9] Jennifer Wallace. *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism*. New York, 1997, p. 3.

he imaginatively feels at the moment when he is faced with a relic or literary remnant of Ancient Greece and its glory.

The idea of Keats being, "a passive spectator" has been advanced by several other major critics. Martin Aske, author of *Keats and Hellenism,* the only book-length study of this issue, summarises as follows:

> Keats appeals to antiquity as a supreme fiction, that is, an ideal space of possibility whose imaginative rehabilitation might guarantee the authority of modern poetry. Yet an acute awareness of his own irreversible modernity necessarily engenders in the poet a contrary sense of the alterity of Greece, its difference from, and possible indifference to, his own moment in the history of poetry. Keats's fear that he had touched the beautiful mythology of Greece in too late a day', his lament to Richard Woodhouse that there was no longer anything original to be written in poetry, his sense of indolence and oppression at the overpowering idea' of the dead poets – these anxieties reveal the extent to which Keats was aware of the belatedness of his own situation vis–à–vis antiquity.[10]

That Keats was, at an early stage of his literary career, extremely preoccupied with his Grecian Muse was undeniable. However, Keats's relationship with his classical muse was not static; like any form of literary relationship, it evolves as time goes by, as indicated in his letters. On 27 April 1818, Keats declared to J.H. Reynolds that he "shall learn Greek", but in the consecutive year, he gave up that thought, he wrote, "I do not think of venturing upon Greek."[11] This change of mind has been overlooked by previous critics. It shows that Keats's state of mind and his literary and cultural experience are not just set in stone (for example, he saw the Elgin Marbles in 1818 – this *vis– à–vis is* a *first–hand* experience that helped to redefine his relationship with Ancient Greece), but in fact are multi-directional and temporally varied. One of the primary aims of this thesis is to re-examine Keats's literary engagement with Ancient Greece as a moveable and fluid experience, as well as show the important role that negative capability had in shaping Keats's

[10] Martin Aske. *Keats and Hellenism: An Essay*. Cambridge University Press, 2005. p.1–2.
[11] John Keats. Letter to George and Georgiana. 17–27 September, 1819. The Keats Letters Project.

engagement with Ancient Greece. Keats's relationship with Ancient Greece and Hellenistic literature was never static – in fact, it was always dynamic and eventually revolutionised how he created and viewed his own world. From a mere temporally distanced spectator or onlooker of Grecian culture, he gradually transitioned into a poet who, actively, interacted with Grecian antiquities, such as the Elgin Marbles or Grecian urns. This shows Keats increasing confidence in the Hellenistic world. Keats may not have been born during the golden age of poetry, but he gradually invested enough of himself in Hellenism to actively confront and interact with Greco–Roman culture without sacrificing his own poetic uniqueness and without suffering from an anxiety of influence.

Key to this gradual change was Keats's idea of the Negatively Capable poet. The idea of negative capability was coined by Keats in his 1817 letter to George and Thomas Keats:

> I had not a dispute but a disquisition with Dilke, upon various subjects; several things dove–tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetralium of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half–knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.[12]

There have been an astronomical number of studies on Keats's notion of negative capability, but negative capability is seldom (if at all) linked with Keats's response to Hellenism. For example, negative capability is completely unmentioned in Aske's entire book on *Keats and Hellenism*. This is surprising, as negative capability demands from a person a suspension of belief and rationalism to

[12] "John Keats, the "Negative Capability" Letter." *Mason.GMU.edu*, mason.gmu.edu/~rnanian/Keats-NegativeCapability.html. Accessed 1 Aug. 2022.

appreciate beauty. Keats's longing for a time he was born too late for and wanting to be a poet of that age is surely beyond rational possibilities – after all, there is no invented time travel in modern times, much less his time. The only way to achieve this is not on the tangible reality, therefore Keats needed to suspend his desire to be in Ancient Greece to reconcile his own unique position as a belated "Greek" poet. Negative capability, as he coined it, applies to his situation. What inspires me to connect the dots between negative capability and Hellenism is a passage from Keats's 1818 letter:

> I long to feast upon old Homer as we have upon Shakespeare and as I have lately upon Milton. If you understood Greek, and would read me passages now and then explaining their meaning, 'twould be, from its mistiness, perhaps a greater luxury than reading the thing one's self.[13]

There are similarities here between this letter and the early one to his brothers. Noticeably, the two letters mention Shakespeare and other poetical influences on Keats (Coleridge, Milton, Homer) and both focus on discussing the "right" way of engaging with previous literary works. Through "mistiness" and "half–knowledge", the engagement with art is "a greater luxury" that allows the artist to achieve more. These two passages praise the beauty of mystery and suggest an alternative angle of engaging with artwork by acknowledging the merit of indirectness and incompleteness. The work of art (literary or not) intrinsically contains beauty, and acknowledging the mysterious nature of a work of art is one of its merits, helping only to further heighten its importance and beauty.

During the Romantic Period, the reception of classical literature and themes underwent significant evolution, encompassing a spectrum of voices beyond those traditionally acknowledged in scholarly discourse. Keats' concept of "negative

[13] Hyder E. Rollins, editor. *The Letters of John Keats*, 1841-1821. Harvard UP, 1958.

capability and exploration of classical themes are particularly evident in his work "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and reflects his ability to embrace ambiguity and mystery rather than seeking fixed interpretations or resolutions. Aside from Keats, recent scholarship has highlighted the contributions of women writers to the discourse surrounding Ancient Greece during this period. Akin to Keats, despite often lacking formal education in Greek, these poets have actively participated in discussions surrounding Hellenism.[14]

Their works, though marginalised in traditional literary histories, offer unique perspectives on classical themes. Felicia Hemans, for instance, critically engaged with the idealised portrayal of Greece, presenting a nuanced view of its cultural complexities, including its treatment of women.[15] Similarly, Letitia Landon interrogated traditional notions of Hellenism, challenging simplistic narratives of cultural perfection with her keen insights.[16]

The reception of the classics during this period was not a unidirectional process dominated solely by male voices. Rather, it was characterised by a dynamic and multidirectional exchange of ideas, with women writers playing a significant role in shaping the Romantic understanding of ancient Greece. Much like Keats's notion of negative capability, these women emphasised a willingness to embrace uncertainty and ambiguity, enriching the discourse with diverse perspectives and interpretations.

[14] Noah Comet. *Romantic Hellenism and Women Writers*. Springer, 2015.
[15] Comet, pp. 16-17
[16] Comet, pp. 16-17

Keats' works undoubtedly remain central to the Romantic engagement with literary classics. However, the contributions of these women who also grappled with Greek culture and literature during the same period deserve acknowledgement.

In my thesis, I show how negative capability plays a crucial role in Keats's engagement with Hellenism and argue that it is this imaginative foundation that allows Keats to shift from the external to the internal. Through the power of negative capability, Keats internalises Hellenism by merging it with his own lived experience, perception, and feelings, despite his own temporal distance from, and lack of historical knowledge of, the ancient world. In his view, Hellenism is no longer a distant thing in the past, an intangible faraway theme, which contemporary poets cannot reach because they simply are not alive when it was thriving. Hellenism to Keats was something he could now reach – he was no longer bound by temporal limitations (or "the burden of the past"[17], to borrow Walter Jackson Bate's terminology). Instead, Keats has been transformed into a "lamp" that shines from within the poet's mind to touch the lives of others with an innate sense of Hellenism. In this way, Keats's Hellenism is not merely a mirror that simply reflects Grecian grandeur, but a "radiant projector which makes a contribution to the objects it perceives".[18]

In M.H. Abrams's influential book *The Mirror and the Lamp*, he proposes four theories of art: mimetic, pragmatic, expressive and objective theories. The mimetic theory, derived from Socrates and Plato, views art as imitations – a mirror which reflects the external world, but "not the actual, but selected matters, qualities, tendencies, or forms, which are within or behind the actual–veridical elements in

[17] See Bates, p. 70
[18] M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Vol. 360. Oxford University Press, 1971. p. 22

the constitution of the universe which are of higher worth than gross and unselected reality itself" (p. 35). Expressive theory, in relation to mimetic theory, was no longer serving as a mirror to reflect peripheral objects but rather to externalise what is internal and make what is inside the poet (inner life) the primary subject of his art. Instead of merely reflecting what was, expressive theory takes what is within and shines it outward (p.22). The "artist himself becomes the major element generating both the artistic product and the criteria by which it is to be judged" (p.22). Abrams succinctly explains expressive theory by elucidating:

> A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's own mind; or if aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to poetry by the feelings and operations of the poet's mind.

This theory is symbolised by the artist as the "lamp" (where light and beauty come from within and are radiated outward), which displaced the conventional idea of the artist as a "mirror" (where the idea is merely reflected from outside sources, see mimetic theory above) of the early nineteenth century. The lamp here "is instinct with the poet's feelings for the depiction of the universal and typical as the property which distinguishes poetry from descriptive discourse" (p.65). Keats has achieved this with his unique Keatsian Hellenism.

Keatsian Hellenism is characterised by its profound incorporation of negative capability, a concept Keats himself coined to describe the ability to embrace uncertainty and mystery without seeking fixed interpretations or resolutions. This concept allowed Keats to transcend the limitations of his temporal distance from Ancient Greece and engage with its cultural and literary heritage in a deeply personal and imaginative manner. Through negative capability, Keats internalised

Hellenism, merging it with his own lived experience, perception, and feelings. This dynamic interaction between the poet's inner world and the external realm of Ancient Greece resulted in a poetic landscape where the boundaries between past and present, reality and imagination, become fluid and intertwined. Keats's Hellenism thus becomes a radiant projection of his inner self, illuminating the beauty and complexity of the Grecian world for generations to come.

By using his mental prowess, Keats has transformed a previously barren landscape into a thriving scenario full of Greek elements – from gods and goddesses to ancient festivals, or long–gone traditions. His imagination is still an artistic product with which Keats used to peek into what Ancient Greece might have been like. So, in truth, Keats was not merely reflecting those Grecian elements he saw but instead has been intentionally internalizing them and picking them apart to put them in the transformative landscape of his mind. Within this psychic landscape, Keats brings these elements to life almost as if, imaginatively, he has gifted a form of immortality to an extinct people. In his mind, Ancient Greece is not *ancien*t but is just Greece. Through Keats's power of imagination, he has trumped and traversed being unable to speak or understand Greek and not seeing Greece's peak glory.

I borrow these two theories (mimetic and expressive) from Abrams as an effective tool to differentiate the various stages of Keats's Hellenism. Keats's early engagement with Hellenism was mixed with awe, frustration, and anxiety, realizing that "there was nothing original to be written in poetry".[19] He was in the mimetic stage in which he constantly and eagerly looked at the "external", and came to the conclusion that everything "external" had already been created by previous masters,

[19] "To Richard Woodhouse – 27 Oct 1818 – The Keats Letters Project." The Keats Letters Project, keatslettersproject.com/category/correspondence/to-richard-woodhouse-27-oct-1818. Accessed 9 Aug. 2023.

and this "external" world was not even entirely clear and precise to him due to his illiteracy in Greek. The gradual development of the concept of negative capability allows Keats to overcome these issues while shifting the focus of his relationship with Hellenism from searching for the external to turning towards the internal. Keats's Hellenism, to borrow Abrams's words, "was no longer serving as a mirror reflect peripheral objects, but rather to externalise what is internal and make what is inside the poet (inner life) the primary subject of his art".[20] Negative capability plays a crucial role in Keats's shift from the external to the internal and his imaginative engagement with Hellenism.

Accordingly, my thesis is divided into three parts: the sonnets, the Grecian goddesses, and the Urn. In the sonnet part, I examine the mimetic stage of Keats's Hellenism by looking at the role of external influences (for example, Chapman and the Elgin Marbles) on his imagination. In the Grecian goddesses' part, I demonstrate the gradual changes and development of Keats's Hellenism from mimetic to expressive poetic modes by looking into the relationship with his Grecian muses (Psyche, Melancholy, Autumn). Finally, in relation to the Ode on a Grecian Urn, I explore how Keats's poetic object embodies the very essence of expressive art and the indispensable role played by negative capability in the poem. The scope and focus of my thesis foregrounds the sonnets and the odes to demonstrate the changing and dynamic imaginative relationship that Keats has with Hellenism from his early to late career.

[20] See Abrams, p. 62

Chapter 1

Reading Homer and Classical Forms in Keats's Sonnets

Keats's sonnets on Hellenism, namely the well-known On First Looking into Chapman's Homer and On Seeing the Elgin Marbles, are both about the influences of Grecian philosophy and ethos. The two sonnets, written in the years 1816 and 1817, respectively, represent different inspirations. One is about a literary "influence" of Greece, especially how Chapman's book on Homer influenced Keats. This observation is based on a specific anecdote that Keats and his friend Charles Cowden Clarke read Chapman's Homer together one night. Perhaps inspired and moved so much by the work, he decided to write On First Looking into Chapman's Homer, which is succinctly and aptly named.

On the other hand, On Seeing the Elgin Marbles is about visual "influence", inspired by what Keats had seen when he went and visited the Elgin Marbles in London. The poet was astounded and enraptured by the sculptures so much so that, according to sources, Keats went to see them several more times. Martin Aske contends that the Elgin Marbles symbolised Keats's reverence for Ancient Greece in a way that no text could, seeing that the "nonverbal fragment is more eloquent than the verbal."

Aske thinks that these two poems show Keats's anxiety of influence. In his book, he says:

> The ambiguous feelings registered in the two early sonnets, On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' and On Seeing the Elgin Marbles', suggest that the poet is rather more sensitive than Haydon to the problems arising from the collision of antique and modern. He is also less glib in his response to Grecian grandeur' : Forgive me, Haydon, that I cannot speak/Definitively on these mighty things' (To Haydon with a Sonnet Written On Seeing the Elgin Marbles'). (p.16)

Although the two poems were written relatively close together, the tonal development of the two is entirely different. Keats first encountered the Grecian mythos through Chapman's Homer as he could not appreciate the original, seeing as he could not speak Greek.[21] He already had a crude but working idea of the beauty of Ancient Greece, and yet he was wholly unprepared for witnessing the Elgin Marbles. Looking at the Elgin Marbles from his moment in time, Keats reshaped the original Greek mythos into his own personal interpretation. Both sonnets show his awe and reverence for the grandeur of Greece, but they do so in different ways. The reader can sense the atmosphere of both "new and old" modes with these sonnets and of the feeling of nostalgic enchantment in Chapman's Homer, and the poignant acceptance and present experience of the Elgin Marbles.

On the one hand, one might feel inspired and enchanted at finally meeting someone they looked up to. On the (unfortunate) other hand, Aske said that one could feel pressured and stressed with the burden of never living up to (or even being nowhere near) the standard of his idol. Applying Keats's anxiety of influence, Aske thinks that Keats is painfully aware of his disconnection with Ancient Greece. Keats has despaired of the waning quality of his works, as he is both daunted and inspired by his muse. Such mixed moods are reflected in these two sonnets.

It is important to note that these sonnets do not actively and consciously internalise existing peripheral or external aspects, but rather, it is a gentle and subtle, subliminal process. The artist (poet), as a 'lamp', does not actively take what they

[21]Aske has commented the following on On First Looking into Chapman's Homer, and yet he is quite quiet with regards to the Elgin Marbles as there is no detailed analysis in the whole book: "And yet, of course, it is in the very movement towards epiphany that the poem begins to deconstruct itself. The name 'Homer' represents the most privileged site of the beautiful mythology of Greece – the 'pure serene' of an origin – but no sooner is the name spoken than it is displaced by another name, 'Chapman'. And it is, I think, precisely this displacement which signifies, for the modern poet, the impossibility of a pure, unmediated return to origins." See Martin Aske. *Keats and Hellenism*: *An Essay*. Cambridge University Press, 2005. p. 42

see and convert it into art (sonnet) but rather, external influences have already subconsciously nestled their way into the artist's psyche. Keats's sonnet stands as proof of this subconscious melding of external properties with the artist. The titles of the two sonnets give a sense of self without explicitly saying so engaged in either the act of reading or gazing. This unannounced self-containment within the titles themselves is a testament to the subtle inner world (the lamp) where one is not overtly aware of its existence, but it is present. Proof extends to the opening of these two sonnets, both starting with either "I" or "my", echoing the self again. However, this internalization is not always a benign and quiet process. It could be a jarring experience in and of itself within these two poems.

Both sonnets, at first sight, seem to be talking about "external objects" (Chapman's Homer and Elgin Marbles), and yet as with the symbolic "lamp",[22] what the poem reveals is how Keats externalised his understanding of Chapman's Homer and the Elgin Marbles and they shed light on the development of Keats's thinking about psyche *vis a vis* Ancient Greece.

Chapman's Homer, Cortez, and Belatedness

Reading through On First Looking into Chapman's Homer, you might spot a blunder, especially for eagle-eyed readers. Keats incorrectly identified (at least in the sonnet) Hernan Cortez as the person who discovered the Pacific, and not Vasco Núñez de Balboa, who was the conquistador in question. Was this an honest mistake, or was it more than a slip? Ever since Tennyson's comment on the

[22] M.H. Abrams. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 22

Balboa/Cortez mistake in 1861, "*history requires here Balboa,"* critics have been debating the legitimacy of Cortez for more than a century.[23] Around one hundred years ago, Lane Cooper followed Tennyson and referred to the Balboa/Cortez crux as "Keats's mistake of Cortez for Balboa". [24] Many critics follow this line of thinking, including Joseph Warren Beach, Carl Woodring, and John Flautz. These critics regard Keats's choice of Cortez as a historical error, as it was Balboa and not Cortez, who discovered the Pacific.

The error these critics claim stems from the reading habits of Keats. Beach argued that the final simile in Chapman's Homer was very likely inspired by Robert's *History of America*, a book which Keats had probably read when he was studying at Enfield as the school library held a copy of the book. [25] By relying heavily on the assumption that Keats had read the book and the idea that Robertson was in his mind when Keats composed the sonnet, Beach argues that the "realms of gold" in fact refer to the images of countries where the sixteenth–century Western explorers have found precious metals (something that Keats had obtained from Robertson).[26] Furthermore, the term "serene" in Keats's sonnet[27] refers to the Pacific.[28] Robertson writes, "His western islands were no mythical Atlantis, but actual concretions of earth, washed by a real ocean, geographical barriers to be got round in the quest of gold."[29]

[23]Francis Turner Palgrave. *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language: Selected and Arranged, with Notes.* Lippincott, 1884. p.298.
[24] Lane Cooper. "A Glance at Wordsworth's Reading. II." *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1907, p.115.
[25] Joseph Warren Beach. "Keats's Realms of Gold." *PMLA*, vol. 49, no. 1, 1934, pp. 246.
[26] Beach, 254.
[27] Keats, John, and Jeffrey N. Cox. "Keats's Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition." 2009. All subsequent quotations, unless otherwise stated, are from this edition and source.
[28] Beach, 252. Beach argues that what Keats meant by "serene" is "marked by peaceful repose; unruffled; placid", which refers to the "Pacific".
[29] Beach, 256–257.

Woodring, by and large, follows this logic and argues that the poem is, in fact, the description of a seaman's journey to the New World[30] and that the "gold" in the poem is a piece of evidence because "the golden age of English literature is filled with a hunger for gold". The relationship between the two is symbolic, as the hunger for gold in the golden age of English literature is akin to the excitement for the exploration of the "unknown world" at the time of Europeans. He further points out that Keats possibly "slipped from Balboa to Cortez" through Pizarro and provides an alternative angle in reading the poem by demonstrating how Pizzaro's image overlaps with Chapman's. Based on Keats's letter, Woodring argued that Keats named Pizarro instead of Balboa in 1819, and according to Robertson, Pizarro accompanied Balboa in Darién when Cortez was absent due to illness.[31] Flautz, writing around a decade after Woodring, also views Cortez as a displaced figure by arguing that Cortez's notorious reputation as a ruthless annihilator renders him an unsuitable presence in the poem.[32] Woodring comments that "Keats did not feel like Cortez. He just forgot, early one October morning in 1816, who discovered the Pacific Ocean."[33]

Indeed, critics such as Charles Walcutt, Cecil Vivian Wicker, Charles Rzepka, Thomas Forsch, and Derek Lowe, who advocate for the interpretation that Keats meant Cortez (thus rejecting the notion of Keats making a mistake), stand in disagreement with Flautz. Albeit short, Walcutt's comment in 1946 began a new way of looking into the Balboa/Cortez issue. His argument that "Granted that Balboa discovered the Pacific, — but the situations in the poem that are presented

[30] Carl Woodring. "On Looking into Keats's Voyagers." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 14, 1965, pp. 15–22.
[31] Based on this fact, he further elaborates how Pizarro's re–creation of the Inca's "mountain–chain of gold" resembles the vicarious Hellenistic experience furnished by Chapman in the poem, p.21.
[32] John Flautz. "On Most Recently Looking Into 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'." *CEA Critic* 40.3 (1978): pp. 27.
[33] Flautz, p. 27.

as parallel to the closing one are not of completely new and unexpected discoveries," serves as the very foundation for Wicker and Rzepka's later arguments.[34]

Instead of assuming the theme of Keats's sonnet is one of discovery, Walcutt argues that the poem is more concerned with the idea of first seeing something as written in the sonnet rather than discovering it. He explains,

> Keats says he often heard about Homer's work before he read it. Likewise, the watcher of the skies, we may assume that the poem means exactly what it says, would have known both the existence and the location of an undiscovered planet before he first saw it; for the newer planets have been predicted before they were seen. And so it could be with Cortez, seeing the Pacific for the first time.[35]

Wicker's argument emphasises that Keats's poem does not explicitly refer to Cortez as the first person who discovered the Pacific, in the same way that Keats alluded to how Chapman was not the first one to encounter Homer's works.[36] As Wicker concludes, "These were not new nor newly found by him or anyone else."[37] Wicker's thoughts have been largely neglected until Charles J. Rzepka revived them in 2002 after Aske wrote *Keats and Hellenism* in 1985.[38] Rzepka expands Walcutt and Wicker's notion by reading Cortez as the symbol of a belated figure, one which reflects Keats's own belatedness. He writes, "[Cortez] represents the poet's mediated relationship to Homer/the Pacific *via* an original discover,' Chapman/Balboa, is the perfect choice for this second–hand' poet's alienated self–representation".[39] Rzepka also insists that Keats meant Cortez by contending that his renowned reviewers and friends, such as Leigh Hunt, Charles Cowden, and

[34] Charles C Walcutt. "Keats's 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'." *Explicator*, vol. 5, no. 8, 1947, p. 56.
[35] See Walcutt, p, 55
[36] C. V. Wicker. "Cortez–Not Balboa." *College English*, vol. 17, no. 7, 1956, pp. 383.
[37] Wicker, p. 383.
[38] Charles J. Rzepka "Cortez: Or Balboa, or Somebody like That": Form, Fact, and Forgetting in Keats's "Chapman's Homer" Sonnet." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 51, 2002, pp. 35–75
[39] Rzepka, p.47.

William Godwin would have noticed the mistake if Keats indeed meant Balboa.[40] However, it should be noted that Aske has initially proposed the association of Cortez and the idea of belatedness. Aske describes the "realms of gold" as a place being occupied by the "old poets" in which the belated poet is "obliged to travel in his desired recuperation of the past".[41] He writes, "The name 'Homer' represents the most privileged site of the beautiful mythology of Greece – the 'pure serene' of an origin – but no sooner is the name spoken than another name displaces it – Chapman'."[42]

In fact, Aske's argument is a miniature of previous critics' arguments such as Woodring, Beach, and Flautz because they center upon the idea of "displacement". Within the scholarly discourse, proponents positing Keats's intention towards Balboa assert a historical perspective wherein Cortez assumes precedence over Balboa. Some critics read the relationship between Cortez/Balboa and Chapman from an alternative angle. From Lynn H. Harris,[43] Bernice Slote,[44] Thomas

[40] Rzepka, p.56.
[41] Aske, p.40.
[42] Aske, p.42.
[43] Lynn H. Harris points out that while the terms “realms”, “fealty” and “demesne” are of Old French Origin and are “distinctly medieval”, Chapman and Cortez are both Renaissance references. She argues that the poem demonstrates a juxtaposition of medieval and Renaissance which is “mediated by Homer”. See Lynn H. Harris “Keats’s ‘On First Looking into Chapman's Homer’,” *The Explicator* (1946), p. 72–73.
[44] Slote emphasises how the act of reading aloud has inspired the “loud and bold” phrase in the poem. She argues that Cortez in fact did see the Pacific from Darién based on Robertson’s narration. However, as pointed out by Rzepka, this is erroneous because Cortez had never been to Darién and Slote’s conclusion is merely an misinterpretation of Robertson’s text. For Slote, see Bernice Slote. “*Of Chapman’s Homer and Other Books*.” Homer, Routledge, 2018, pp. 132–140. For Rzepka’s argument, see Rzepka p.67.

Forsch,[45] Helen Vendler, [46]and, more recently, Meegan Hasted,[47] none of the critics seem to have reached a completely satisfactory answer of whether Keats intended Cortez or Balboa.

It is undeniably an impossible mission to reach a satisfactory answer because we cannot go back in time and inspect what was in Keats's mind when he composed the poem in 1816. This leaves us in a kind of limbo — "uncertainties, mysteries and doubts" in which we perhaps should embrace it "without any irritable reaching after fact and reason",[48] as Keats's famous notion of negative capability. Keats left the reader in a state of "half–knowledge", and we vacillate between Cortez and Balboa forever. Previous criticism has overlooked exploring this realm of "half–knowledge"; we do not necessarily have to figure out whether the figure Keats meant was Balboa or Cortez.

The fundamental problem of the historical proponents is the existence of a notion that because Keats had read Robertson's *History of America* when he was younger (and the appearance of Cortez the explorer in the poem) that there must be a

[45] Thomas Forsch also agrees that the sonnet concerns belatedness and offers a psychoanalytical reading of the issue. Like Wicker and later Rzepka, Forsch argues that it is unnatural for Keats's friends and reviewers to bypass the blunder and points out that it is equally bewildering that it took almost another century for Walcutt to challenge Tennyson's comment. From a psychoanalytical angle, he argues that the mistaken choice of Cortez can be viewed as a Freudian parapraxis, which reflects Keats's unconscious literary ambition. He writes, "as a reader, Keats wants to explore and discover, but as a writer he wants to make name for himself; he wants to be a conqueror in the world of literature." He further explains that because such an ambition is not proper to be revealed in a piece which pay tributes to Chapman and Homer, this desire conceals itself in the unconscious world and hence results in the Freudian slip of Balboa to Cortez. See Thomas Frosch. "Keats's 'on First Looking into Chapman's Homer'." *The Explicator* 62.3 (2004): p. 146–150.

[46] Helen Vendler argues through attentive that Keats's discovery of Homer is a "collective" experience within the sonnet. Rather than looking at the watcher simile and the Cortez simile as something in parallel (as it is often done by previous critics) she emphasises the importance of Keats's choice of "or" instead of "and", and argues that the "replacement of the single watcher by the plural company of Cortez 'and all his men'" tells something more – the importance of the other's aid in discovering something. Just as Keats has to rely on Chapman to understand Homer (as he can't read Greek), Cortez's discovery of the Pacific is also done in the company of "all his men". See Helen Vendler. "John Keats: Perfecting the Sonnet" Bloom's Modern Critical Views "*John Keats*" Updated Edition, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 2007, pp. 244–260

[47] Instead of focusing on debating the possible influence of Robertson's *History of America* on Keats's sonnet, Hasted offers a unique reading into the importance of Bonnycastle's *An Introduction to Astronomy*. She argues that Keats's term "some watcher" suggest an idea of rediscovery rather than discovery. In Bonnycastle's book, the discovery of Uranus is not depicted as a work done entirely by William Herschel, the German–British astronomer solitarily (p.261). Rather, many rediscoveries by others were carried out in order to verify Herschel's claim, because "the planet needed to be seen, and seen again, to be validated." (p.264). See Meegan Hasted. "CHAPMAN'S HOMER and John Keats's Astronomical Textbook." *The Explicator* 75.4 (2017): 260–267.

[48] Scott, p.60.

connection between the two. Although I do not deny the possibility of Robertson's possible influence on Keats, I do have some concerns about whether Robertson's influence is such a significant factor in understanding the poem and the Balboa/Cortez conundrum. Both Beach and Woodring contend that the "gold" in the poem refers to what the Renaissance Spanish and Portuguese explorers have discovered, and the idea of Cortez naturally makes us think so. However, they overlook how the term "gold" is used in other poems of Keats. In fact, the idea of "gold" has always been linked to literature, especially Apollo's image, the sun god in Keats's poems. Additionally, Woodring also points out that there exists a connection between the gold the conquistadors sought in the New World and the literary golden age of English Literature. In his *Ode to Apollo*, a poem Keats wrote a year before "Chapman's Sonnet", he describes Apollo's residence as "western halls of gold" where "bards, that erst sublimely told/Heroic deeds, and sang of fate". Following immediately, Homer appears with "his nervous arms/Strikes the twanging harp of war, /And even the western splendour warms," which bears a striking similarity to the images and sequence of the lines from Chapman's sonnet, "Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold, /And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;/Round many western islands have I been/Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold."

After Homer, Keats also mentions other great "bards" like Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Tasso. Following this logic, it is hard to imagine that a year later, Keats's "realms of gold" and "western islands" become the materialistic gold and America that the sixteenth-century explorers were so zealous for. The realm of gold and western islands in the poems are not earthy locales, but ethereal and mythological abodes of the gold where great bards such as Milton, Shakespeare,

and Tasso (whom Keats had read their works), reside. Carl L. Johnson, in his essay dedicated to the study of "The Realms of Gold",[49] also comments that it is implausible that the first reading of Chapman's Homer reminded Keats of Robertson's book and the gold in the New World. Woodring's argument, "Except for the two words withheld, bards and Apollo, the language denotes travel westward after 1492" is hence problematic because he overlooks Keats's tendency of associating the term "Western" with "Apollo" –the "Western islands" in Chapman's sonnet is essentially Greek.

Another problem of reading the "realms of gold" as the New World is that it completely neglects the importance of the lines about the "watcher". Beach himself noted the inconsistency, "The Simile of the watcher of the Skies is thus the one image in the whole poem which is not obviously derived from voyages of discovery on the sea".[50] If the poem intends to compare the "discovery of Homer" to the "travel to the new world", and if we view that as the key to interpreting the poem, then the insertion of the "watcher" line in between the first four lines about the western island and Cortez's discovery to the last four lines is discordant and incongruous. As Lynn H Harris has noted, both Chapman and Cortez were from the Renaissance period[51]. Herschel, the "watcher" who discovered the planet Uranus, however, was from the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the way that the eighteenth–century Herschel appears before the fifteenth–century Cortez shows

[49] Johnson draws on Leigh Hunt's comment on the poem that there is "a little vagueness in calling the regions of poetry 'the realms of gold." He goes on to elaborate that the connection between gold and poetry may be likely inspired by the fact that gold was widely used to embellish books and argues that the "goodly states" refers to "single great works", "kingdoms" refers to "greater works or collected works" and "islands" refers to "immortal works" which "bards in fealty to Apollo hold". While this may be a reason, I believe Keats's choice of "realms of gold" is more likely be inspired the image of Apollo. Apollo, being the sun god (hence gold) and god of poetry render it natural for Keats, who was so familiar with Greek mythology to associate the two together, and hence Apollo's residence is "western halls of gold". Even if we put away the Apollo factor, "gold" has also been associated with literary works when looking into Keats's other poems. There are "golden–tongued Romance" in the King Lear sonnet, and "tales and golden histories" in "Bards of Passion and of Mirth". For Johnson's essay, see Carl L. Johnson. "The Realms of Gold." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1960. pp. 6–10.

[50] Beach, p.253.

[51] Harris, p.73.

that the poem does not follow a necessary sequence or "chronological" temporality. Keats's imagined temporal moment also does not situate itself entirely as Beach and Woodring have concluded about Robertson's interpretation.

This draws out the issue overlooked by previous critics: the poem is a narration of a personal experience in which temporality has been deconstructed. When Keats inaccurately utilises Cortez and replaces him with Balboa, the so-called "historical sequence" that many critics seek to establish has already been deconstructed. The speaker in the poem, then, does not exist in any one exact historical moment as we do – he is in a personal, imaginative world of literature, an independent place that does not necessarily reflect what is happening or has happened in the "real world". The "Cortez" in the poem is not the Cortez in the real world, and neither is Balboa. Simply, if we look at it from a historical perspective, Cortez is not Cortez, but he is not Balboa either. He is an imagined figure which exists in the speaker's realm of imagination, a convenient medley of Cortez and Balboa.

Those overly historical–determined readings of Keats's sonnet have elided the "personal aspect" so much that they seem to have forgotten the poem is not about history, but about the reader's own experience of encountering Chapman's Homer for the first time. The poem, after all, travels between different areas of his private "imagined land" gained from literary exposure – from "the realms of gold", "goodly states and kingdoms", "western islands", "wide expanse", "demesne", "skies" to eventually "The Pacific". The Pacific is not necessarily the Pacific in the world, but a "literary" and "imagined Pacific" – Keats himself had never seen the Pacific and had never been to Darién (although Keats expressed a desire to visit the Americas), but it does not forbid him from travelling there in his imagination. The movement

of the poet is clearly from "the vague and general" to the "concrete and specific",[52] but it does not necessarily imply such a journey is from the "imagined" to the "real" world. Darién and the Pacific are not different from the Greek Islands in Keats's opinion, as his knowledge of them is, after all, from literary sources.

To clarify, Keats would have been aware of the differences between them; however, because his knowledge of both Darién and the Pacific are derived mainly from literary sources, they may have fused readily in Keats's imagination. I am not suggesting that the "realms of gold" and "The Pacific" are metaphors of the same nature, but they could very well be viewed as extensions of the imagined literary locales the poem has presented us, and therefore we do not necessarily see them as whole binaries.

Just because the watcher and Cortez have a "real–world" counterpart does not make them any more historically real than any other imagined figure in the poem – after all, in ancient history, a lot of the time, real history and mythology merge. For people in Homer's time, Greek myths were already present, like the fall of Troy (with all the intervention of Greek gods), for example. They are "tales and golden history of heaven" as Keats calls it. Once we remove that idea of dividing the poem into the "imagined/real" part, we can find that the sestet is a continuation of the octave. Its purpose is to show how the speaker feels in his travel to the imagined world of Chapman's Homer, but not to narrate the history of Herschel or Cortez's discovery. In this sense, the watcher and Cortez does not stop Keats from using Cortez in the poem together in light of their historical importance because they fall equally into the personal spectrum. It is noteworthy that they come after the

[52] Paul McNally. "Keats and the Rhetoric of Association: On Looking into the Chapman's Homer Sonnet." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 79, no. 4, 1980, p. 534.

appearance of "I" because it supports the subjective interpretation, *"then felt I like some watcher of skies…or like stout Cortez".* Even if the watcher and Cortez are viewed as historical figures here, the poem has already borrowed them from their historical points and put them in a subjective realm of imagination – a place where anyone can be anything, from the greatest explorer to a humble observer out of time. In support of the nonhistorical use approach, it was Balboa who first saw the Pacific but this historical fact does not stop the poem from using Cortez in the poem. This means that Keats was not referring to whoever saw the Pacific first (a factual historical point) but rather to a personal moment of discovery – something that Cortez did when he "discovered" America. M.H Abrams concludes the same: "That it was Balboa, not Cortez, who caught his first sight of the Pacific from the height of Darién, in Panama…matters to history but not to poetry". After all, the poem is not about Herschel, Balboa or Cortez's discovery, but about the discovery of Keats as speaker of Chapman's translation of Homer.

For proponents of historical criticism, the oversight of the poem's "personal aspect" posed a significant challenge, while those subscribing to the belatedness critical perspective contend with the issue of excessive interpretation. In his influential essay, Wicker argues that the poem is about the "shadow of a magnitude" instead of "discovery". He writes,

> It is not about the discovery of poetry in the way a new continent or ocean or heavenly body is discovered, not about the discovery of Homer, or the discovery of Chapman … because Keats didn't specifically say Cortez was the first white man to see the Pacific, nor does he quate the experience of Cortez with his own discovery of Poetry, or of Homer. These were not new nor newly found by him or anyone else. His reading of Chapman was not his first acquaintance with Homer.[53]

[53] Wicker, p. 385.

There are a few problems with Wicker's reading. First, the poem is indeed about discovery. He is right in the sense that the poem is not about the discovery of Homer or Chapman, because the poem is about the discovery of "Chapman's Homer".[54] Second, although Keats does not explicitly state that Cortez is the first white man who discovers the Pacific, the poem obviously uses Cortez and the watcher as similes to characterise the experience of "first" discovery. If Keats did not mean discovery and there is nothing "new nor newly found by him or anyone else", it will be perplexing why he included the "first" overtly in the title and described the experience as something "new" – as if a "new planet swims into his ken". Wicker proposes that "ken" here means "range of sight, insight, understanding, but hardly discovery as first finding". Unfortunately, Wicker tends to focus on the minutiae of the details rather than the overall picture, for example, the "ken" may not mean discovery, but in that very same line, Wicker overlooks something crucial – a "new planet" that "swims into his ken". Keats compared this astronomical discovery to his "first" looking into Chapman's Homer.

Indeed, critics have various views on the theme of discovery, and they provide a new lens to examine Keats's works.[55] In a brilliant essay, Daniel Pollack–Pelzner demonstrates the importance of the change from "wond'ring eyes" to "eagle eyes" and argues that Dante likely inspired the "eagle eyes" reference.[56] He compares

[54] This logic also applies to the Aske's interpretation of the Chapman/Homer problem. He writes, "no sooner is the name [Homer] spoken that it is displaced by another name, "Chapman". (Aske p.42). However, this observation is appropriate because the poem does not really displace Homer with Chapman. What the speaker means is that he is hearing Homer's "expanse", "pure and serene" via the voice of Chapman. The two are of equal weight – saying that it is a replacement is not sound because if we remove "Homer" and retain only "Chapman", this does not fit the poem at all. If we remove "Chapman" and have only "Homer", then the narrative has lost its essence.

[55] Bernhard Frank argues that the choice of Cortez at Darién is "a portmanteau image containing both the ravaging of Mexico by Spaniards and the discovery of the Pacific Ocean; thus it folds into itself the allusion to both the sack of Troy and the seafaring Odysseus" – in other words, both Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. See Frank, Bernhard. "Keats's 'on First Looking into Chapman's Homer'." *The Explicator* 42.1 (1983): pp. 20–21; Jamey Hecht believes that the poetry's "explicit subject is the discovery of poetry's capacities not his [Keats's] own specific capacities as a poet". See Jamey Hecht. "Scarcity and poetic election in two sonnets of John Keats." *ELH* 61.1, 1994: pp. 103–120. Forsch shares the same view with Wicker and agrees that "discovery was not ultimately what he [Keats] was writing about". Forsch, p.148. And most recently, Hasted argues that the poem is about re–discovery instead of discovery.

[56] The source of Pollack–Pelzner's argument is the Reverent Henry F. Cary's 1805 translation of Dante's *The Inferno* in which Homer is described as "an eagle" which soars above his poetic peers. The term "pure serene" also appears in Cary's

Keats and Dante because they could not read Greek – Keats relied on Chapman while Dante relied on Virgil. Pollack–Pelzner writes,

> Keats looking into Chapman's Homer became Dante looking at Virgil's Homer, poeta sovrana (the supreme poet), and thereby gained the greatness of vision (eagle eyes) that the soaring Homer imparted to both. Rather than showing alienation or belatedness, Keats's second sight revealed his deep identification with the poetic tradition and his ability to revise an earlier poet's scene to place himself within it.[57]

While I have reservations regarding how much Dante plays into our understanding of the sonnet, I agree that the poem's theme is more definitely about discovery than alienation or belatedness, though not mutually exclusive. The significance of the discovery in "Chapman's Homer" is that Chapman has shown Keats a new way of engaging with Greek literature – a way that blends "Greek literature" with "English literature". It is as if there is no difference between the two; as if it is "pure serene", and as if Coleridge has commented that Chapman's Homer has *"no look, no air, of a translation",* and the translation is itself, "as truly an original poem as the Fairy Queen [sic]".[58]

Chapman himself has clearly explored this idea of blending Greek and English in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*. In the introduction of *The Odyssey*, Chapman observes, "I have adventured, right noble Earl, out of my utmost and ever–vowed service to your virtues, to entitle their merits to the patronage Homer's English life". This is a distinctive feature of Chapman's translation – rather than seeing Chapman as a distinct Greek poet of thousand years ago, Chapman reinvents him with an "English life", as if he was "born in England", and hence in the Odyssey we encounter terms such as "our English general", "English born", and "English Muse". This is the same

translation. See Daniel Pollack–Pelzner,. "Revisionary company: Keats, Homer, and Dante in the Chapman sonnet." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 56, 2007, p.41–42

[57] See Pollack–Pelzner, especially p.42.

[58] Quoted from Simeon Underwood. "English Translators of Homer from George Chapman to Christopher Loge*." English Romantic Hellenism* 1700–1824, edited by E. T. Webb, Manchester UP, 1982, 210.

in *The Iliad* as well: "In our thrice–sacred Homer's English way", but curiously, is distinctly absent in Pope's translation.[59] There does not seem to be a distance between Homer and Chapman, or between English and Greek. Chapman himself blends the two, as he writes, "In whose Song I have made our shores rejoice,/ And Greek itself vail to our English voice". Chapman's choice of "vail" interestingly does not convey the idea of Greek superiority over the English. He does not seem to feel the "overpowering idea of the dead poets", nor the pressure of being belated, nor the "shadow of a magnitude", instead Chapman advocates the superiority of his own English version of Homer:

But as great clerks can write no English verse,
Because, alas, great clerks! English affords,
Say they, no height nor copy; a rude tongue,
Since 'tis their native; but in Greek or Latin
Their writs are rare, for thence true Poesy sprung;
Though them (truth knows) they have but skill to chat in,
Compar'd with that they might say in their own;
Since thither th' other's full soul cannot make
The ample transmigration to be shown
In nature–loving Poesy; so the brake
That those translators stick in, that affect
Their word–for–word traductions (where they lose
The free grace of their natural dialect,
And shame their authors with a forcéd gloss)
I laugh to see; and yet as much abhor
More license from the words than may express
Their full compression, and make clear the author;
From whose truth, if you think my feet digress,
Because I use needful periphrases,
Read Valla, Hessus, that in Latin prose,
And verse, convert him; read the Messines
That into Tuscan turns him; and the gloss
Grave Salel makes in French, as he translates;
Which, for th' aforesaid reasons, all must do;
And see that my conversion much abates
The license they take, and more shows him too,
Whose right not all those great learn'd men have done,
In some main parts, that were his commentors.
But, as the illustration of the sun

[59] Keats had read Pope's translation before Chapman's one, and it is evident that he prefers Chapman's version over Pope's, as noted by Wicker, "Line 5 clearly notes previous knowledge of Homer through Pope, but since Keats had not previously fully appreciated Homer, the line is a damaging criticism of Pope's version" (Wicker, p.383). Slote also offers a vivid comparison between Chapman's translation and Pope's one (Slote, p. 258). I would like to add that different from Chapman's version, Pepe's translation does not contain the word "English", and neither is the idea of merging English and Greek present.

Should be attempted by the erring stars,
They fail'd to search his deep and treasurous heart;
The cause was, since they wanted the fit key
Of Nature, in their downright strength of Art.
With Poesy to open Poesy:
Which, in my poem of the mysteries
Reveal'd in Homer, I will clearly prove;
Till whose near birth, suspend your calumnies,
And far–wide imputations of self–love.
Tis further from me than the worst that reads,
Professing me the worst of all that write;
Yet what, in following one that bravely leads,
The worst may show, let this proof hold the light.

Chapman's claim, as Simeon Underwood remarks, "goes far beyond the act of translating *the Iliad* and the Odyssey from Greek to English".[60] While I agree with Underwood's argument that this act is to appropriate "the Greek poet Homer into the English literary canon",[61] I think Chapman's claim has also shown Keats a new way of engaging with Greek literature and the "overpowering dead poets". This perspective, in which English is not regarded as an inferior medium for conveying Greek art (and by providing Homer with an "English way"), offers the potential to eliminate the temporal gap between antiquity and modernity – creating a sense of spatial immediacy. Keats's own comment reveals that Chapman has successfully presented him with an "English" Homer, which is still "pure serene" and that none of the other translations he read can compete. The phrase "I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold" also suggests a spatial immediacy between Keats and Chapman's Homer. This also explains the shift of tone, from passiveness to activeness, in Keats's sonnet. Before encountering Chapman's work, the speaker is passive, indicated by the phrase, "Had I been told". After encountering Chapman's Homer,

[60] Simeon Underwood. "English Translators of Homer from George Chapman to Christopher Loge*." English Romantic Hellenism* 1700–1824, edited by E. T. Webb, Manchester UP, 1982, p.1. Apart from the Iliad and The Odyssey, Underwood mentions that this idea also appears in another Chapman's Homer apart from The Iliad and The Odyssey. In "*Euthymiae Raptus, or The Tears of Peace",* Chapman describes the encounter with Homer's ghost, in which Homer's ghost claims, "When, meditating of me, a sweet gale/ Brought me upon thee; and thou didst inherit/My true sense, for the time then, in my spirit;/And I invisibly went prompting thee/To those fair greens where thou didst English me.'
[61] Underwood, p.2.

the speaker is so enlightened that he compares his own discovery of Chapman to the great discoveries of the Pacific and Uranus, which also justify the change from the original phrase "wond'ring eyes" to "eagle eyes". Chapman has enlightened Keats not to be as passive and merely "wond'ring", but it gives him a direction and a vision to pursue – hence we have Cortez staring at the Pacific using his eagle eyes that are filled with active thinking or "wild surmise".

In this sense, throughout the poem, Keats is not trying to show us an opposite binary, i.e., the imagined land versus historical land, Chapman versus Homer, or Balboa versus Cortez. Instead, all the images are blended and complementary with each other – a seemingly historical but imaginative land, Chapman's Homer, and Cortez's Balboa. There does not seem to be a distance between the real and the imagined, or antiquity and modernity. Everything is in harmony in this imaginary world inside Keats's mental landscape. This world has an actual, real-world reference but does not automatically reflect the real world; borrowing M.H. Abrams' term – it is not the mirror but the lamp that illuminates the speaker's inner world. Written around a year before he famously proposed the idea of "negative capability" in a letter to his younger brothers George and Thomas Keats, we can already see the seedlings of it. The poem contains an imaginative truth that requires the reader to suspend reality for a moment and cope with "half–knowledge" where one should do away with an immediate explanation. Keats would later nurture this concept and name it "negative capability".

Keats and the Elgin Marbles

If Keats was inspired by Chapman's Homer to write of the light and bright, then the opposite holds true for the Elgin Marbles. Chapman had given Keats both access to and a means to engage with Ancient Greece despite Keats's ignorance of Ancient Greek. In so doing, Keats journeyed to a whole new world wherein wonder and marvel moved him to create his greatest masterpieces. This unearthing (literally with the Elgin Marbles) of Grecian mythos in Keats's mind is not entirely altruistic, as will be proved in this paper. Coming from the sunny and light atmosphere of On First Looking into Chapman's Homer, the transition to the darker and defeatist atmosphere of On Seeing the Elgin Marbles is very evident, and one must wonder what changed in Keats's mind. Several imagery and symbolisms between the two sonnets highlight their similar natures, and an obvious parallel between the two sonnets is the recurring image of the eagle. The reader sees two diverging eagles in the sonnets: one is determined and inspired (Chapman's Homer) having eagle "eyes" and is a commentary on discovery, while the other is very different – the eagle is "weak" and "sick" (Elgin Marbles) all too ready to soar above but physically unable to anymore. Reading between these lines, Keats was anxious about seeing the Elgin Marbles, and this concern translated into his writing of the sonnet. Despite feeling helpless and overpowered by the grandeur of the statues, Keats was able to subliminally internalise the essence of Ancient Greece through the Elgin Marbles. Like how he understood Greece through Chapman's Homer, he did the same with the Marbles although it is more pessimistic compared to the first sonnet. It is perhaps understandable that Keats would be disturbed and have negative notions when he is faced with weathered proof of art and culture in Ancient Greece, especially when he previously saw it as ideal.

Critics have agreed, historically, that the sonnet On Seeing the Elgin Marbles is passive, pessimistic, and dark. Keats makes that particularly clear with the opening line: “My spirit is too weak – mortality”, thus hinting at a tired and darker overtone compared to the first sonnet. Other critics, such as Stephen Larrabee, point out in 1943 that Keats was too overwhelmed, then, by the first sight of the Elgin Marbles to be able to write good poetry about his experience.[62] One could be forgiven for being overwhelmed (perhaps with the gravitas of it) when met with a weathered piece of critical history, but Keats's unsettlement was more profound than that. What was it about the Elgin Marbles that was so unsettling, and why were they so concerning? The arrival of the Elgin Marbles in Britain created a complex or mixed view among the people. People were divided into those who saw them as "wonders" and those who were cowered by the "shadow of a magnitude" the Marbles exuded.[63] Keats, thoroughly besieged by emotion, "is paralyzed by the marbles and oppressed by their spirits. The only solace he has is the statue's 'fragmented condition'".[64] If these weathered and dilapidated statues inspired such dampened dispositions within Keats, he would have despaired even more when they were at their most perfect state, rather than the ruins that they currently are. The sonnet translates a fraction of what Keats might have felt in the presence of the Marbles, as Crisman describes, “The early lines, after all, stress weakness, sickness, hardship, weeping and strain”[65]. The opening lines were fraught with such strong images of negative emotions and a blanket of exhaustion that one, who has previously read Keats's glowing commendation of Ancient Greece with On First

[62] Stephen A. Larrabee, *“IX. Keats*.” English Bards and Grecian Marbles. Columbia University Press, New York, 1943, pp. 204–232.
[63] See Grant F. Scott, editor. *Selected Letters of John Keats*. Harvard University Press, 2002 p. 131
[64] Scott, p. 135
[65] See William Crisman. “A Dramatic Voice in Keats's Elgin Marbles Sonnet.” *Studies in Romanticism* Vol. 26, No. 1 (1987): pp. 49-58.

Looking into Chapman's Homer, would raise an eyebrow with the complete turn that Keats had taken. George Yost claims:

> As he saw it, his own slender achievement, "a shadow," must suffer in contrast with the "magnitude" of the Elgin Marbles, which have survived all tests – of height, distance, and time. The sick eagle must reach the sky and the cloudy winds or remain forever a shadow of greater achievements.[66]

Keats's sonnets on the Elgin Marbles and Chapman's Homer reveal two completely diverging attitudes towards Hellenism. A juxtaposition of these two poems provides a better insight into Keats's turbulent relationship in his sonnet period. Both On First Looking into Chapman's Homer and On Seeing the Elgin Marbles suggest the involvement of the English aspect as the inevitable medium for Keats's Hellenism. English has become the de facto standard for Keats in expressing his specific brand of Hellenism since Keats cannot understand or read Greek, and he has never been to Greece. George Chapman, an English dramatist, translator, and poet, served as a master and gave common ground for Keats in voyaging to the past – through him, Keats had a "filtered" and yet "pure and serene" view of what is Greek. Chapman served as the first contact with a strange and foreign past, leaving an indelible impression on Keats. Perhaps nothing could have disillusioned Keats had he only ever seen Hellenism through Chapman's eyes, but alas, it was not to be. Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin of the Royal House of Bruce, shattered Keats's naïve and simplistic view of Greece when he brought home across the sea from the Parthenon in Athens the marble sculptures that would be later known as the Elgin Marbles. At first, there was great clamour about the moving of the Marbles from their original home in Greece; in fact, Lord Byron fervently opposed the

[66] George Yost. "Keats's Tonal Development." *Studies in English Literature*, 1500–1900, vol. 23, no. 4, 1983 pp. 570–571.

acquisition, likening it to looting and pillaging a culture that was not English.[67] The Marbles were first exhibited privately in 1807, and prominent members of society gave only but a lukewarm commendation of the exhibit. Painter Ozias Humphry said that "the whole was a Mass of ruins'" which was apt considering it was a collection of limbs and stumps to the crudest eye. When they were finally unveiled in the British Museum sixteen years later, it marked the start of a new era in Britain – from merely decorative to educational, this shift helped facilitate the acceptance of the Marbles into society.[68] Scott remarks that they had "arrived before their time" where they could be appreciated fully. The Elgin Marbles became a success and a well–known attraction. Elgin's name would be immortalised in history because of the sculptures he brought home, and he would also be an integral part of Keats's sonnet about the Marbles.[69] This would mark another English factor that tied Keats with Hellenism. Esterhammer notes that "The sonnet's title immediately identifies about the sculptures with the name of Elgin, as if the aesthetic objects were inseparable from the agent who brought them to England."[70]

While Chapman's Homer is praised as "pure and serene", it is clear that Keats viewed and thought of the "Elgin Marbles" as something fragmented and broken. This is because when the poem first introduced the Elgin Marbles, it did not mention a complete image, but rather fragments of "imagined pinnacle and steep".[71] The term "imagined" is complex and ironic applied to the sonnet, because despite the suggestion that it was utterly rhetorical, Keats had not imagined anything. This

[67] Scott, p.125
[68] Scott, p. 127
[69] Grant F. Scott. "Beautiful Ruins: The Elgin Marbles Sonnet in its Historical and Generic Contexts." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 39, 1990, pp. 123–150.
[70] Angela Esterhammer. "Translating the Elgin Marbles: Byron, Hemans, Keats." *The Wordsworth Circle* 40.1 (2009). p.30.
[71] Grant F. Scott has commented on this, that he said, "Keats is paralyzed by the marbles and oppressed by their spirits. The only solace he has is the statues' "fragmented condition". He notes that 'The final lines of the poem, as we have seen, present a series of mysterious still–lifes, frozen images as fragmentary in nature as the battered marbles'. See Scott, Grant. *Selected Letters of John Keats*. Harvard University Press p. 135 and p. 149.

already suggests that Keats's observation of the Elgin Marbles was not merely skin deep per se, but rather something is changing within him. A person does not describe something they have experienced first–had as merely "imaginary", and this echoes the intention of the sonnet – the dual nature of Keats.

In fact, Keats had visited *vis–à–vis* several times the Elgin Marbles as suggested in his title. The question is then raised: why would Keats need to "imagine" them? Was he imagining the missing pieces that were lost from the rocky sea journey from Greece to London? Was he imagining how the Marbles initially looked like when the artist laid his tools for the final time and presented his masterpieces to the Greek public? The word "imagined", different from what it meant in the "imaginary realms of gold" in the first sonnet, reinforces the idea of escapism and passiveness. It recalls lounging around with a book or with a canvas and paintbrush in hand and just escaping reality at that moment, although the reasons for wanting to escape said reality could be various, and Keats's disposition puts him squarely in the pessimistic corner. Instead of using concrete and firm statements to describe what he has personally seen with his actual eyes, he goes deeper into his imagination when it comes to describing the marbles. It is as if he is either depressed or discouraged by the oppressive, overwhelming power of the Marbles or as Scott said, lamenting the fragmentary status (both literal and figurative) of the Marbles. Another quirk with the sonnet is that the Marbles themselves are conspicuously absent from the poem, though one would assume that they would be present since they are the subject. Crisman notes that the sonnet itself does not even begin with the title's announced topic of "seeing".[72] Ironically, "seeing" here was not

[72] The poem is not “On the Elgin Marbles” but On Seeing the Elgin Marbles; the nature of the “seeing” here is Keats's first interest, a fact not surprising, since only two words in the poem (“these wonders,” line 11) definitely refer to the Marbles themselves. If, as Werner Beyer says and Keats’s letters bear out, the Elgin Marbles were important to the biographical Keats

tantamount to the literal description of something one saw, but rather is about "seeing" beyond the material and into one's own self. This is a feature of Keats's spring odes, including Ode on a Grecian Urn, Ode on Melancholy, *Ode to a Nightingale, and* Ode to Psyche.

In this regard, it seems like Chapman's Homer and the Elgin Marbles sonnets are very different in terms of Keats's relationship with Hellenism. I would not deny that assumption, as one can clearly see hope and enlightenment with the former and depression and hopelessness with the latter. However, the two sonnets do have something in common with how each poem incorporates Hellenistic elements. Structurally, both sonnets use the emphatic self "I" or "My" ("Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold" versus "My spirit is too weak") to denote something very personal and strong feelings. In Chapman's Homer, although there are a lot of other figures in the sonnet such as the bards, Apollo, the adventurer Cortez, and the unnamed astronomer, the use of "I" in the sonnet represents the poem in its entirety and an imaginative ability to find common ground with disparate (unrelated) historical and mythical figures.

Interestingly, although the Elgin Marbles do not sound or come off as resolute and adamant as the sonnet on Chapman's Homer, it has a mirroring structure with the first sonnet. Almost every line contains the emphatic self "Me/I" in the octave, and only in the sestet do they disappear. Another point to consider is that "I" stands as a homonym for the seeing eye' in the sonnet, therefore adding another level of interpretation to it. Compare both below:

---

because they “developed [his] eye for color and line,” the reader might be puzzled that these colors and lines are entirely missing from the poem – puzzled, that is, if one takes the speaker to be the biographical Keats. See Crisman, p. 54.

On Seeing the Elgin Marbles

My spirit is too weak—mortality
Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
And each imagined pinnacle and steep
Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.
Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep
That I have not the cloudy winds to keep
Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.
Such dim–conceived glories of the brain
Bring round the heart an undescribable feud;
So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude
Wasting of old time—with a billowy main—
A sun—a shadow of a magnitude.

And,

To Haydon with a Sonnet Written On Seeing the Elgin Marbles

Haydon! Forgive me, that I cannot speak
Definitively on these mighty things;
Forgive me that I have not Eagle's wings—
That what I want I know not where to seek:
And think that I would not be over meek
In rolling out upfollow'd thunderings,
Even to the steep of Helciconian springs,
Were I of ample strength for such a freak—
Think too that all those numbers should be thine;
Whose else? In this who touch thy vesture's hem?
For when men star'd at what was most divine
With browless idiotism—o'erwise phlegm—
Thou hadst beheld the Hesperean shine
Of their star in the East, and gone to worship them.

This is not mere coincidence but rather ingenious design – it does not only hold true for On Seeing the Elgin Marbles but is also the case for other sonnets by Keats on the Elgin Marbles, such as *To Haydon with a Sonnet Written* On Seeing the Elgin Marbles. There is no more "Me/I" in the sestet of the sonnet above but note the presence of the pronouns in the first eight lines of the poem. Perhaps an interesting aside is that Haydon was not disillusioned by the Elgin Marbles as was

Keats, but rather he saw "glory" in them.[73] The painter was one of the strongest supporters of the appropriation of the Elgin Marbles, and perhaps this could be why he was so infatuated with it. This must be why Keats expressed to Haydon,

> Haydon! Forgive me, that I cannot speak
> Definitively on these mighty things;
> Forgive me that I have not Eagle's wings—
> That what I want I know not where to seek:
>
> (To Haydon with a Sonnet Written On
> Seeing the Elgin Marbles, lines 1–4)

as Keats could not easily share in his friend's basking in the glory of the Elgin Marbles. Keats's sonnet also succinctly encapsulates the contrariness he must have felt when it comes to the Marbles – he describes them both as "wonders" and a "shadow of a magnitude", both beautiful and oppressive at the same time.

A reader may be puzzled as to why the poem does not give us any precise depiction and imagery of the Marbles despite being the sonnet's subject aside from the ambiguous "imagined pinnacle and steep". There is nothing concerning the Marbles when the title, ironically, stresses the action of "seeing" them, but instead, it gives us a deteriorating description of the internal mind of the poet and of how he felt seeing the marbles. The title's "seeing" and what it represents in the poem refers to contrasting things – seeing versus feeling. Whereas seeing equates to what is external, feelings stem from the internal. This is a central dichotomy in Keats's sonnet, as it also must be why, even though titled "On Seeing", the sonnet is centred on the feeling of the poet, as opposed to what he merely saw. Even though the Elgin marbles do not actually appear in the poem until the eleventh line, the marbles are

[73] See Grant F. Scott, "Beautiful Ruins: The Elgin Marbles Sonnet in its Historical and Generic Contexts." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 39, 1990, pp. 123–150.

used as a tool to depict something that stems from within. It is a clever way of peering into the poet's mind because the poem does not give us much of a description of the external.[74]

It was not just the title that created a disjointed idea between the literal and the figurative. In Line 1, the speaker says, "*My spirit is too weak—mortality"*. Right then and there, the reader would be hard–pressed to ignore the personal and internal musings of the poet, and instead realise that the poet is not engrossed with dealing with the external Marbles first–hand, but rather is conversing with his inner self.[75] The second line continues the internal musing by describing his "mortality" as something obfuscating and oppressive, perhaps referring to his disillusionment with his own self. I concur with Crisman's assumption above that by opening a poem that is explicitly titled with one of the most famous exhibits of his time, the reader will expect to be taken into a journey of the then–new Elgin Marbles, and not a window to the mind of a somewhat disillusioned poet. Keats does briefly touch on the Elgin Marbles in line 11; however, he quickly drops the real–world allusion and circles back to his contemplation of himself.[76] This is in keeping with the ironic theme of his sonnet, where one would assume one thing (such as expecting beautiful poetry on the Elgin Marbles perhaps), only to read something entirely unrelated to the exhibit, but at the same time, an irrevocably changed experience because of it. Scott says "The Marbles depress the poet and drive him towards feelings of his own inadequacy [...] Keats neither idealises the experience nor makes it conform to the dominant reaction of uplifting power and feel

[74] Scott has an interesting argument about the marbles as a medium. He writes that 'Keats's sonnet questions this theme of endurance in the marbles and points rather to the fragility of their medium, their tenuous form'. He adds that 'The poem "remains in its own way as much a fragment as the statues'[...] 'yet remain faithful to the prescriptions of the ekphrastic genre'. Grant F. Scott, editor. *Selected Letters of John Keats*. Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 141, 148, 149.
[75] See Crisman, p. 54

[76] Crisman, p.54

divinity."[77] Curiously, Scott compares Keats's complacency of the Marbles with the English public's near worship of the bygone statues. In comparison, Keats was morose and felt inadequate of himself – that instead of the veneration most of the people around him gave the statues, Keats was pushed into an examination of his self and found himself lacking. [78]

Keats's sonnet, then, is trying to show the reader a glimpse from the internal. However, the poet himself is highly concerned with what is deemed as external influences (the Marbles). This contradiction and struggle between these things ("Bring round the heart an indescribable feud" and "dizzy pain") is the direct result of the poet not finding a way to strike a balance or rationalise the two opposite forces in the poem. It is only fitting, therefore, that the sonnet on the Elgin Marbles is awash with delicate incongruities. The Elgin Marbles symbolises both mortality and immortality, as Scott comments "The sonnet emerges as a meditation on the mortality of aesthetic form and stands in direct opposition to the Renaissance and Shakespearian themes of the sonnet as outlasting time, as the supreme immortal monument".[79]

The relationship between the immortal and mortal aspects of the Elgin Marbles is fascinating since statues outlive their sculptors and thus carry with them centuries and millennia later the essence of their artist with their own beauty, but at the same time, they are at the mercy of time and weathering, thus representing that not everything can last forever. On Seeing the Elgin Marbles takes to task the enduring aspect of the statues and instead highlights that the very thing that makes them

[77] See Scott, p. 135
[78] Scott, p. 135
[79] Scott, p.149

endure the aeons are the ones that make them the most fragile – a perfect summation of the struggle between the immortal and mortal, of the dead and the enduring. [80]

Scott has praised Keats for successfully creating a sonnet that has completely transformed the tangible Elgin Marbles into the written word. He considered the sonnet a worthy translation of the Elgin Marbles and I agree with that. [81] Keats had taken the essence of the Marbles and weaved it into his sonnet along with his changing narrative and mindset about Ancient Greece. The sonnet perfectly encapsulates the feeling of being "fragmented" which is how Keats saw the Marbles, and not when they were in their glory. Perhaps this subconscious re-evaluation drove Keats to dig deep inside him and, instead of writing about the outward and visible beauty of the Elgin Marbles, to write about their profound effects on his inner self.

Both Keats's sonnets enshrined his attitude towards Ancient Greece when they were written. One was light and ideal, while the other was wrought with anxiety and the struggle for mortality. The sonnet on Chapman's Homer argues for the transportive power of literature and allows the reader to, for a moment, relive and imagine the world in which Homer once walked. This metaphor of transportive capability is not only limited to the literal lines of the sonnet but rather to the whole poem as both the reader and the speaker use the literary imagination to travel to inaccessible scenarios and time.[82] In the Elgin Marbles, Keats was similarly transported within his own mind, where he was troubled by and grappled with the idea of his own mortality and the feeling of not being good enough. The opening octet shows the

[80] Scott, p. 149
[81] Scott, p.150
[82] Paul McNally. "Keats and the Rhetoric of Association: On Looking into the Chapman's Homer Sonnet." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 79, no. 4, 1980. pp 530–540.

reader how Keats viewed mortality – "My spirit is too weak —mortality/Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep". He describes mortality as a weakness, or as a tiredness that lulls him to sleep. This feeling is involuntary, the same involuntary sentiment that one experiences when one is transported into Ancient Greece through literature. The oppressive atmosphere in On Seeing the Elgin Marbles directly contrasts the hope and excitement On First Looking into Chapman's Homer gives.

E. B. Murray notes that it was not Keats's insufficiency that choked him up upon seeing the Marbles, but that it was the realization that art has mortal and artistic limitations.[83] Everything Keats made would eventually fall into the sands of time and become degraded as the Marbles were, no matter how once distinguished or commended they were. In this way, the transportive capability of literature brings the past into the present to give the same rush or experience to its reader as it could have once upon a time.

The opening lines of the sonnets also give us another way to examine their similarities and differences. Both the sonnets deal with experience, albeit differently. In the first four lines of Chapman's Homer, the speaker has experienced literary treasures ("gold"), implying that they have already previously done this journey. For the Elgin Marbles, the speaker is lamenting his experiences ("And each imagined pinnacle and steep") and realizing that he is tired and cannot go on. The sonnets give us two differing outlooks toward experience: one is in accordance with the happiness of surprise and discovery, where through the power of literature they could understand and see what they could not have done. The other is

[83] E. B. Murray, "Ambivalent Mortality in the Elgin Marbles Sonnet." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 20, 1971, pp. 22–36.

manifesting weariness and an awareness of the end, having experienced what he had. Now that the speaker recalls these memories, he feels an intense hurt that he cannot recover from. This pain that Keats feels is not caused by his observation of the inspiring and transcendent Elgin Marbles but rather by the fact that he cannot match them.

The Elgin Marbles talks of a "sick" eagle that must die out of his element. He likens himself to the eagle – his mortal limits tether him to the ground and unable to achieve the artistic heights of accomplishment and transcend. Since Keats could not ascend (because of extrinsic obstacles "pinnacle and steep"), he is comforted to settle for idleness (sleep). Although he wants to reach for the pinnacle, because of his own mortality he cannot achieve this, and the poem shows the struggle between perfection and the real. In contrast, Chapman's Homer sonnet also talks of an eagle, albeit as a metaphor. The image implies that this must be a healthy eagle as opposed to an infirm one, as it embodies Cortez's ability to take in the beauty of the Pacific. Such an "eagle[s] eyes" here symbolises greatness and the ability to discover wonders, whereas the Marbles' sick eagle is at the end of its metaphorical tether – no longer capable of glory or greatness.

Chapter 2
Ode to Psyche: Figures of Antiquity and Questions of Belatedness

The imagery of Greek goddesses and nymphs are abundant in Keats's poems, such as references to Vesper, Cynthia, Eurydice, Vertumnus, and Arethusa. However, perhaps the most noticeable among all the mentioned will be the ode dedicated to Psyche, written in the spring of 1819. Different from the rest of the great odes of 1819, Psyche is the only poem dedicated to a concrete female figure with a certain and specific "name", instead of more general and intangible themes, such as Melancholy, autumn and Indolence, or tangible but unspecific things, such as Grecian Urn and Nightingale. This may be the reason that has led critics to call it a "problem child",[84] or the "Cinderella of Keats's great Odes" by Kenneth Allott[85], pointing towards its "irregularities" compared to the rest of the odes. Recently, Susan Wolfson considered Ode to Psyche the least examined of Keats's odes.[86]

One of the mainstream readings of Ode to Psyche centres on the theme of belatedness. Homer Brown notes that Keats picked the perfect figure for his own belatedness (as Keats feared that the glorious peak of poetry was well past him), as Psyche is a belated figure herself – too late for the great adventures of the Greek mythos, and too late a goddess.[87] Jonathan Bate also supports this claim by juxtaposing Thomas Moore and Keats's depiction of Psyche. While Moore depicts Psyche as a "first–born spirit of the air", Keats views her as "the latest born and

[84] Leon Waldoff. "The Theme of Mutability in the '*Ode to Psyche*'." *PMLA*, vol. 92, no. 3, 1977 p. 410.
[85] Kenneth Allott. "The '*Ode to Psyche*'." *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1956. pp. 278–301.
[86] Susan J. Wolfson, "Slow Time,' 'a Brooklet, Scarce Espied': Close Reading, Cleanth Brooks, John Keats." *The Work of Reading*, edited by Paula Rabinowitz, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. p.. 195.
[87] Homer Brown. "Creations and Destroyings: Keats's Protestant Hymn, the '*Ode to Psyche*'." *Diacritics*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1976. p. 50.

loveliest vision far".[88] Martin Aske follows Brown by arguing that Psyche (similar to the Grecian Urn) "is a figuration of antiquity, an emblem of Keats's supreme fiction."[89] Additionally, Geoffrey Hartman calls the poem "a belated version of a belated myth".[90] That Psyche is a belated goddess from a belated myth, accounted in a belated poem, is undeniable. However, as Martin Aske argues, the relationship between Psyche and the speaker is more like her being merely a tool to be described.[91] There is a certain animating power, in the form of negative capability, which induces Keats to convert a static, belated, and one–way relationship into something dynamic and interactive – the poem not only embodies the Greek myth, but it interacts with and represents it.

In the following, I examine closely this dynamic relationship between Psyche and the speaker and how the poem interacts and represents the myth, as well as the dual embodiment of negative capability in both Keats's poem and the original myth. Keats begins:

O Goddess! hear these tuneless numbers, wrung
By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear,
And pardon that thy secrets should be sung
Even into thine own soft–conched ear:
Surely I dreamt to–day, or did I see
The winged Psyche with awaken'd eyes? (Lines 1-6)

The first six lines of the ode establish an interesting venerating but intimate aspect between the speaker and Psyche. Although the speaker clearly worships her – by calling her a "goddess" and asking for a "Pardon" – he also figuratively attempts to establish an ambiguously intimate relationship between Psyche and himself by

[88] Jonathan Bate. "Tom Moore and the Making of the '*Ode to Psyche*'." *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 41, no. 163, 1990 p.331.
[89] Martin Aske. *Keats and Hellenism.* Cambridge University Press, 2005. p.102.
[90] Geoffrey Hartman. "Listen Up! Keats's 'Ode To Psyche'." *The Yale Review* 99.2 (2011) p.89.
[91] Martin Aske argues that what matters to Keats is not the inclusion of Greek myths in the poem, but the "possibility of telling" them. See Martin Aske. *Keats and Hellenism.* Cambridge University Press, 2005. p.52.

claiming that he is aware of Psyche's "secrets". There is a certain hierarchical distance between the two, but they are, at the same time, so close to each other that his "tuneless numbers" will be "sung" directly into Psyche's ears. He can *see* Psyche, as she appears in front of the speaker in a half–dream, half–reality status. Between the speaker and the character of Psyche, it is as if they are in direct conversation or supplication, with the speaker calling out to Psyche as "O Goddess". Lawrence Kramer said that the 'Ode to Psyche' was a wooing poem, and despite the "radical ambiguity" of the gods that are present in these poems, the ode seeks the goddess's invoked presence to "sanctify the poet's imagination."[92]

This means that the speaker is talking to Psyche directly, addressing her with care and reverence. The emphasis given to the aural and visual senses ("hear, sung into thine own soft–conched ear, did I see the winged Psyche") further provides proof that the speaker is not only emotionally close but also wants to pay homage to Psyche. This image of Psyche ("awaken'd eyes") suggest that she is seeing the speaker, or at the very least is aware of whoever they are, like a goddess looking out for her supplicants. In this instance, the speaker witnesses the embrace between Cupid and Psyche, the goddess that he venerates. Even though it seems like the speaker is talking directly to Psyche, he is actually "talking at″ Psyche, and not *to* her. The line "awaken'd eyes" implies that Psyche has just awoken and has yet to hear whatever praises the speaker was saying beforehand about her. Psyche herself is not aware of the praises the speaker is heaping before she is awake and cognizant but symbolically, the speaker is talking about what Psyche represents instead – a

[92] Lawrence Kramer. "The Return of the Gods: Keats to Rilke." *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 17, No. 4. 1978, pp. 483-500

goddess to be worshipped and venerated. Wagner considers the poet in this ode to have taken both roles: that of the engaged protagonist (via inserting himself) in the narrative and that of the redeemed narrator, as we shall see in my discussion.[93]

Aside from adoration for a respected figure, the passage also suggests a feeling of voyeurism and an uncertain relationship between knowing and dreaming – the half-reality and half-dream state that the ode echoes throughout its entirety. The setting of the first stanza is also something to note. They are in a suspended space between reality and dreams. The speaker is in the world of reality when he speaks consciously and ardently about how his work of art will praise Psyche the goddess, but then he travels to the world of imagination where he claims to see Psyche and Cupid "couched side by side". The transition between these two worlds is evident by a shift of tense, from present tense ("hear", "pardon") to past tense ("dreamt", "did I see", "wander'd", "saw", etc). The speaker uses the present tense when he talks from the "world of reality", i.e., how he acts as Psyche's priest and lets her story be heard in his poem. The use of the past tense in the poem has a dual purpose. On the one hand, Keats's use of past tense represents a completed action (such as the speakers' encounter with Psyche and Cupid) and, on the other, is also used to indicate the imaginary and unreal nature of such actions. The structure of the first stanza is echoed by that of the poem; throughout the entire ode, the speaker travels between the two worlds, indicated by these two different associations with Keats's use of past tenses.

Keats's imaginative traversing in the ode echoes the Greek myth of Cupid and Psyche. By looking into this closely, I demonstrate that belatedness is not the only

[93] Robert D. Wagner. "Keats: '*Ode to Psyche*' and the Second 'Hyperion'." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 13, 1964, p. 35

issue of Psyche that concerns Keats as is often pointed out by critics, but also how negative capability is embodied in the original myth and is, in fact, an indispensable factor that makes Keats's concept itself a subject matter in the ode. Critics have been focused on the connection of Ode to Psyche and belatedness, and several have made comments on it. Brown had already claimed that Psyche is the perfect belated figure that mirrors Keats's own situation. This is similar to Aske's remark that Psyche is "a particularly appropriate emblem through which the poet might define his relation to antiquity",[94] and the way that Jonathan Bates contrasted Moore and Keats in their emphasis on the former's beginnings and the latter's focus on belatedness.[95]

In the original Greek myth, Cupid demands Psyche to be *negatively capable,* by staying content with the uncertainty of his identity. Their relationship, one between a human and a Greek god, is built on the foundation that she does not have any "irritable reaching after fact & reason" to figure out his identity. The relationship was maintained – as long as she did not actively look for a definite answer to her doubts. Her ultimate inability to stay content with the half–knowledge status nearly put an end to their relationship. The appearance of Psyche and Cupid in stanza 2 reflects this struggle. Instead of portraying Psyche and Cupid as passionate lovers, there is an evasive and subtle distance between them:

> They lay calm–breathing, on the bedded grass;
> Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;
> Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu,
> As if disjoined by soft–handed slumber,
> And ready still past kisses to outnumber
> At tender eye–dawn of aurorean love:

[94] Martin Aske. *Keats and Hellenism: An Essay*. Cambridge University Press, 2005. p.102.
[95] Jonathan Bate. "Tom Moore and the Making of the '*Ode to Psyche*'." *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 41, no. 163, 1990. p.331.

They are presented as lovers yet not passionate lovers, but one with a subtle distance as hinted by their posture – their lips do not touch each other despite embraced arms and pinions. This image again mirrors the myth. Psyche is close to Cupid as they have an intimate relationship, but she is also distant from him as she does not know his identity nor his face. Keats's poem adumbrates the presence of distance with the repetitive use of "not" in the same line ("touch'd not"; "had not bade adieu"), casting a contrast with the previous lines' affirmative tone of their relationship. This is further reinforced by the term "disjoined" in the next line. Psyche and Cupid "embraced" each other, but the poem states the opposite in the following two lines. Therefore, while the poem seemingly presents Psyche and Cupid as "a pair" of intimate lovers, the poem also repeatedly and simultaneously denies that by emphasizing and hinting at both the distance and disconnection. Despite the presence of ambivalence, the "negative" elements in this stanza, the end of stanza 2 affirms the relationship – by confirming that they will obtain "Aurorean love". The term "Aurorean" again refers to the myth – that Cupid must leave Psyche before sunrise. In this way, this stanza mixes Grecian mythology, imagery and the idea of negative capability all in one passage. Ultimately, the poem represents this ambivalent relationship between Psyche and Cupid to that of the speaker and the Grecian world that Psyche embodies. As we see in the following stanzas, Cupid is subtly distant while also having an intimate engagement with Psyche.

Keats put succinctly the reason for choosing Psyche as the subject matter of his poem:

> You must recollect that Psyche was not embodied as a goddess before the time of Apuleius the Platonist, who lived after the Augustan Age, and consequently the goddess was never worshipped or sacrificed to with any of the ancient fervour,

> and perhaps never thought of in the old religion. I am more orthodox than to let a heathen goddess be so neglected.[96]

Keats would have used Psyche as a symbolic image of his inability to live in Ancient Greece. He places a premium on the original retelling of Greek tales by someone who can understand Greek as opposed to the English–translated equivalent of the stories. Relating to Psyche, she exercises negative capability and only in the state of negative capability – willingly deferring the urge to explain away that which she does not understand – does she keep and meet Cupid. Psyche here did not truly appreciate the loss she eventually incurred when she broke faith with her husband in the tale– she only realised it when it was gone. Her whole experience was cemented and became real when she saw her husband's face, but by then it was too late – her luxuries, her status, and her husband were gone. The persuasion of truth does not bring the necessary happiness it seems to guarantee. Paul Sherwin pointed out that negative capability is not an explanation, but rather an excuse – "a defensive maneuver".[97] He states, "the will not to will can belie a mere inability or a failure of nerve". I agree with Sherwin when he says that Psyche used negative capability not as an explanation for her actions but as a defensive manoeuvre to retain what she has. Indeed, Psyche, aside from her husband's warning, might have been unwilling to part from the luxuries and attention she was enjoying, such as the mansion, her husband's affections, and having a considerate lover – something that her sisters lacked and only she enjoyed. By simply living her reality and not asking questions about her unique situation, she ensures the continuance of her current privileges. Psyche is enjoying her present and is not

[96] John Keats. Letter to George and Georgiana Keats. *The Keats Letter Project*. April 30, 1819
[97] Paul Sherwin. "Dying into Life: Keats's Struggle with Milton in *Hyperion*." *PMLA*, vol. 93, no. 3, 1978: p. 392.

possibly destroying what she has now with probing questions. It may be that Psyche is just incapable of asking questions that run the risk of losing everything, and it could also naturally be, as Sherwin notes, a "failure of nerve". Despite her urge to know things, her wanting to protect her status quo is even stronger, hence her silence and capitulation.

In Keats's ode, the speaker departs from the intimate monologue of the previous six lines. Here we have a shift from the direct conversation between the speaker and Psyche to a more psychical movement.

> I wander'd in a forest thoughtlessly,
> And, on the sudden, fainting with surprise,
> Saw two fair creatures, couched side by side
> In deepest grass, beneath the whisp'ring roof
> Of leaves and trembled blossoms, where there ran
> A brooklet, scarce espied: (Lines 7-12)

The speaker "wander'd in a forest thoughtlessly", and previously said, "surely I dreamt today, or did I see…" which gives us, the reader, a sense that the speaker stumbled on something that they did not expect to have seen. Indicated by a shift of tense, the speaker wanders into an imaginary status – or more precisely, a half–dream, half–reality status in which he is conscious of his "dreaming", as pointed out by Helen Vendler:

> The restoration of the forgotten Psyche is the real subject of the poet's endeavor, and two forms of re–creation are attempted in the ode. In the first, which opens the ode, the beloved divinity is represented as existing eternally in a world accessible by dream or vision when the conscious mind is suppressed, a world exterior to the poetic self. Had she been only within, the poet's vision of her could with propriety only be called a dream; but if she were without, he could genuinely affirm that he had seen her with awakened eyes. (Once again, I interrupt to say that I do not mean that Keats, in life, is uncertain whether or not he had had a dream or seen a vision. The diction of dream and waking is for Keats a way of making truth–claims; when he wishes to insist that poetry has something to offer us which is more than fanciful entertainment, he turns, as in his description of– Adam's dream, to the metaphor of awakening and finding it truth.)[98]

[98] Helen Vendler. *The Odes of John Keats*. Harvard University Press, 1983. p. 53.
Aileen Ward also supports the half–dream, half–reality consciousness of the speaker, saying "Vendler analyzes the curious structure of this [*Ode to Psyche*] ode in terms of its trope of reduplication, with the initial mythological vision of the lovers in the forest and the absent historical cult of Psyche reflected mirror–like in the imagined mental cult of the goddess and

I agree with Vendler's assessment of the half–dream, half–reality status of the speaker. One could clearly see the indication of a sense of not seeing an event or a thing clearly as it is something the speaker only saw momentarily, his thoughts elsewhere and barely registering the brooklet. This typically happens when one dreams, as the details are often foggy and covered with a mysterious air that they barely remember once they wake–up. The poem itself is a representation of that half–real/half–dream status where words are not yet matched with the ideas, as Bunn calls "stationing" – "engagement and disengagement", and "association and dissociation", which speaks to the idea of Keats's negative capability.[99] Indeed, instead of settling on a concrete scene, the poem itself is situated in a "mythological" scene. Vendler argues that the contrast between the dream state and the "real" state is more than mere entertainment, it is a way of making "truth–claims" – showing us that poetry is a way of awakening and knowing the truth.[100] This raises an interesting question – what is the "truth" then, of the poem? Is the speaker from the world of our reality, looking back into our history and the Greek past, or is he in the world of dreams or myth wherein he sees Psyche and Cupid ensconced side by side? By not having a conclusive answer to this, the reader can truly appreciate the beauty of poetry in this foggy state between realities. The pure, intentional obscurity of the ode is what makes it beautiful or has meaning. However, it is interesting that the speaker shifts in tone and gives us what looks

---

the final meeting of the lovers in the imagined fane. The implied aesthetic, of art mirroring existence not in an artistic medium so much as in the prior stage or "pre–art" of purposeful, constructive and scenic or architectural imaginings," suggests the connection between Keats's actual vision of the enigmatic three figures "on a greek vase" in March 1819, and their two successive embodiments in the odes "On Indolence" (where the challenge to construe the imaginings is refused) and "On a Grecian Urn" (where it is met): so it is significant that, as Vendler remarks, the *Ode to Psyche* gives Keats's first portrait of himself as artificer". Vendler and Ward echo the idea of a certain half dream, half reality status with respect to the "real" world the speaker must have been in for the first six lines, which is supported by the line "scarce espied". See Aileen Ward. "The Odes of John Keats by Helen Vendler: A Review." *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1984 pp. 92.

[99] Bunn, p. 593

[100] Helen Vendler. *The Odes of John Keats*. Harvard University Press, 1983, p. 53

like a "truth–like" statement at the very end by using an affirmative (but future tense) outlook for Psyche – that they (the speaker) will be Psyche's priest. If we are to see the entire ode as an ode that is hovering between the two states, between reality and dreaming, then this is the exact "awakening" moment. The poem looks out into the future timeline and is now putting away the past and beautiful but unrealistic "present".

Mid hush'd, cool–rooted flowers, fragrant–eyed,
Blue, silver–white, and budded Tyrian,
They lay calm–breathing, on the bedded grass;
Their arms embraced, and their pinions too;
Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu,
As if disjoined by soft–handed slumber,
And ready still past kisses to outnumber
At tender eye–dawn of aurorean love:
The winged boy I knew;
But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?
His Psyche true! (Lines 13-23)

Note the shift of "you" to "they" in the second stanza. Here the "forest" scene corresponds with the Greek story of Cupid and Psyche. "Their arms embraced, and their pinions too:/Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu" is in reference to the point that although Psyche lived and slept beside Cupid, never had she seen her lover's face.[101] Although not explicitly referring to the myth, the elements of the poem are embodied in the poem. The dreamlike status of the poem permeates here, as the poem shows that both Cupid and Psyche are physically close but still apart. Both figures are also deep in "slumber", an element that reminds the audience of the myth.

In the first stanza, the speaker has already established a close relationship with Psyche, but he takes a complete reversal in the second stanza. The speaker seems to recognise Cupid *("the winged boy I knew*", emphasis added), but not Psyche

[101] Ruth Bottigheimer. *Magic Tales and Fairy Tale Magic: From Ancient Egypt to the Italian Renaissance*. Springer, 2014. p. 4

("But who wast thou", emphasis added*).* This is bewildering as he claims to have seen "winged Psyche" in the first stanza. His inability to immediately know Psyche is in accord with the difference between the popularity/reputation of Cupid and Psyche in the history of mythology. Cupid, unlike Psyche, is not a "latest–born" figure, as his name has been popular and well–known since ancient times. However, Psyche was not popular –she did not have her own "shrine", "grove" or "oracle" as pointed out by the poem. Cupid was a well–established member of the Greek pantheon by then, with Psyche yet not fully recognised. Psyche was still considered a "newborn" among the gods here. Thus, the speaker would immediately acknowledge a known god rather than a new member in the "hierarchy" of gods, as seen in the next stanza.

Keats identified his poetic aspirations with the belated figure of Psyche. She was a belated goddess of Grecian times, and him a poet who laments his belatedness. Robert D. Wagner makes an interesting argument that "Psyche herself is no more than a myth, an illusion generated by the soul to mediate between itself and reality".[102] If we are to follow Wagner's thinking, then indeed Keats has written the Psyche of the ode in such a way as to reconcile his reality as a temporally displaced poet with his soul (feeling destined to have been born in the time of Ancient Greece). In doing so, even only by using his mind, he was able to stitch together his reality and what he yearns for. Keats calls this the "Vale of Soul–making" which posits that man can neither be a soul nor have an identity except through the "World of Pains and Troubles".[103] The soul creation is Keats's response to suffering. For Keats, suffering is always present, in the here and now, and is necessary to create

[102] Wagner, p. 31
[103] James Shokoff. "Soul-Making in '*Ode on a Grecian Urn*'." *Keats-Shelley Journal.* Vol. 24 (1975): pp.102-107.

identities. It is thus conceivable that Keats did not believe in life after death, as it would disparage and discredit his suffering when he was alive. Soul creation is not a sudden occurrence, but rather it is a long process that happens over a lifetime and needs the interaction of the mind and the heart. Psyche here is an illusion, but because she is a symbol of that which creates all myths, she is the one believable illusion. However, Wagner counters that Keats could not give this belief a solid basis in "the world of change and decay". It is also important to note that there is another layer for Psyche here. Not only is she an illusion for the Vale of Soul–making, but she also has a natural connection with the soul. The basic meaning of her name is life in the sense of breath, and in another interpretation, Psyche is a personification of the human soul. Psyche, as a person, has earned her godhood and identity through a "World of Pains and Troubles". Her suffering has meaning, and her soul is well-earned. Additionally, she is the essence of the interaction between the mind (Psyche) and the heart (her tale with Cupid). With this, she has transformed from a believable illusion into the very essence of soul creation.

If Psyche is a "belated" goddess who misses her own shrines in the golden age of Ancient Greece, then the speaker is a belated artist, as his poem is written long after that golden period. His words, which are not Greek, are just "tuneless numbers" to the Grecian world. Like Keats, the speaker is intimately familiar and identifies with Greek literature, and yet he is unable to directly access it (his belatedness to the golden age of poetry).

O latest born and loveliest vision far
Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!
Fairer than Phoebe's sapphire–region'd star,
Or Vesper, amorous glow–worm of the sky;
Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none,
Nor altar heap'd with flowers;

Nor virgin–choir to make delicious moan
Upon the midnight hours;
No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet
From chain–swung censer teeming;
No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat
Of pale–mouth'd prophet dreaming. (Lines 24-35)

In this stanza, the speaker poignantly realises that Psyche is the "latest born" of the gods, at least, figuratively speaking. It is another testament to her belatedness both temporally (one that Keats identifies with) and as a goddess through her marriage with Cupid. Jonathan Bates points out that Tom Moore and Keats differed in their characterization of Psyche – where Moore accentuated beginnings, it was the idea of belatedness that Keats painted Psyche with. He writes that the difference between Moore's characterization of Psyche and Keats's was that Moore focused more on beginnings, while Keats emphasised belatedness.[104]

Psyche was a belated figure: she was a "faded" goddess, and she was late when it came to the tales of grandeur and great acts of the ancient Greek gods. The term "faded hierarchy" clearly suggests two things: first, despite the awareness of her new status as a goddess, she still can never hope to be as strong or as important as the major figures in the Greek pantheon as she was always to be in the lower rank, and secondly, even the strongest of the pantheon have begun to fade. Despite their legendary prowess and the myths written about the Olympians, they have started to die out. What hope is there then for Psyche, a goddess not yet fully ingratiated into her mythos, to persist? This relates to Keats's own self–aware problem of belatedness. In his letters to John Hamilton Reynolds in 1817, he has (several times) acknowledged his status of being belated[105]; hence, in this ode, the crux of the problem is that not only was Keats the only belated character here, but also Psyche,

[104] Jonathan Bate. "Tom Moore and the Making of the '*Ode to Psyche*'." *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 41, no. 163, 1990, pp. 325–333
[105] Kaier, Anne, and John Hamilton Reynolds. "John Hamilton Reynolds: Four New Letters." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 30, 1981, pp. 182–190.

thereby creating a dual belatedness (in terms of Keats as an aspiring poet who seeks to establish his poetic reputation). Brown also commiserates with Psyche in her status as a belated figure. As a mortal–turned–goddess, Psyche was already too late to be included or play an important part in the stories of Greek mythology. She is, therefore, a completely apt comparison for Keats's own belatedness.[106]

Leon Waldoff notes that this is ironic since it was her situation that threatened the Greeks as they underestimated her, a human, turning into a goddess. Unfortunately, Psyche was also too late for the antique vows. Belonging to the "faded hierarchy" means she belongs to the "faint Olympians", and, therefore, not really worshipped compared to the original Olympians.[107] Psyche's "coming to perfection", although still inferior compared to the old gods, represents the human soul and the end of traditional beliefs. This is powerful, as when the mind is in the mastery of all its faculties, it eschews other beliefs and by extension belief in the old gods.[108] She was not as strong nor perfect as the other Olympians seeing that she was born human and only later made a goddess, and in fact, she is categorically recognised as weak, but in becoming a goddess (her coming to perfection) she threatens the status quo of the Olympians. Psyche, is still vulnerable compared to the other members of her pantheon despite her godhood, which represents the end of traditional beliefs and along with it, the old Gods. Schulz notes that "The passion of the heart – human love with its stages of self–destroying humiliation – transfigures Psyche from a beautiful girl into a lovely divinity."[109] Keats would have known that Psyche was not a venerated member of the Greek pantheon, but

Brown, Homer. "Creations and Destroyings: Keats's Protestant Hymn, the '*Ode to Psyche*'." *Diacritics*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1976. p. 50.
[107] Waldoff p. 411.
[108] Wagner, p. 31
[109] Schulz, p. 57

with the way that he wrote the ode, this diminutive goddess was exalted and praised. Keats even goes so far as to act like a priest for her and build a figurative temple for his goddess. Psyche persevered with impossible tasks set by Venus until Jupiter pities her and makes her immortal to reunite with her Cupid. Although she was newer than the other gods, she would have an existing virtual temple (even if only the mind of her priest) and would outlive even the strongest of the gods.

Waldoff stresses the importance of influence for the ode. He states:

> But, once we have granted the argument of influence, we realise that, important as it is, it alone will not account for the recurrence of the scenes or interpret their significance for us. Significance, after all, is not really something that can be inherited but is instead, to paraphrase Wordsworth, a synthesis of what the poet perceives and half creates.[110]

Indeed, Keats seems to be suffering from what Harold Bloom calls the "anxiety of influence", where Harold Bloom theorises that there is no "original" work, but rather it is a derivative or a mistranslation of an older work. Ode to Psyche itself is a referential work of the original Psyche myth, but the fact that it is related to the original Psyche tale is not why it is important to Keats's readers. In fact, (in accord with Waldoff) Keats presents his Psyche in a way, apart from her belatedness, that is "original". Instead of hailing his Psyche in the same mould as the original Grecian Psyche, he has transported the original Psyche into his mental landscape with his own imaginative image of both Psyche and Cupid. Keats's transportation of the characters is still in keeping with the features of the original myth but with Keats's own reimagining of the "fane" of his own mind and time. Keats has reworked the scenes and themes of the original tale to what he "perceives and half creates". He relates Psyche to his own status as an aspiring poet, and by doing so transforms the

[110] See Waldoff, p. 415

mythological Psyche into his version of the figure. Waldoff also argues that Keats was simply having wish–fulfilling encounters with his mortal heroes and goddesses, although this is often idealised or exaggerated.[111] Indeed, behind every mortal hero and goddess Keats incorporated into his works is a fulfilment of his wish to touch and be a poet of the golden age of poetry (as much as he can be). We could also interpret it as a more elaborate and permanent restoration by Keats of the heroes and goddesses in his mind, immortalised in his works. Without a doubt, Keats was suffering from separation anxiety that he addressed and fulfilled using his own creations. Keats had drawn and focused on Psyche so much when he could have had his pick of other Greek characters since she echoes what Keats must have felt in his own belatedness with poetry. He would have strived to find a connection between his perceived temporal displacement from a character that could also share his plight. Psyche herself was full of contradictions, dying yet immortal, weak yet outliving the strongest gods. And so was Keats. He was enamoured of a status that would be forever out of reach for him while alive and could only be accessed by either a posthumous existence or with the mind.

Psyche, the goddess created by literature, replaces the outdated Greco–Roman pantheon, which itself is a replacement for the Titans in the unfinished Hyperion.[112] This echoes the paradox that Psyche presents – weak and yet overpowers the previous rulers, late and yet not late enough to be forgotten, mortal and yet immortal. Psyche, acting as the embodiment of literature, replaces the myth of Ancient Greece – illustrating the transvaluation of mythology by the written text.[113]

[111] Waldoff, p. 415
[112] Brown, p. 49
[113] Brown, p.50

Ode to Psyche and Hyperion can be seen as the "final, cultural transformation" of poetry. Thus, if we follow Brown's thinking, Ode to Psyche is both a reflection of the real Greek landscape as well as that of the poet's created world inside of his mind. On the one hand, Psyche is a myth within the real Grecian world, but by the poet illustrating her as a subject of his work (and therefore a product of his mind), Psyche as an embodiment of literature has now replaced the original mythological figure inside of the poet's mind. Essentially, the transvaluation mingles and reconciles all in the landscape of the poet's mind – the divide between the myth and the literary figure has now been unified, allowing the poet to create a new world, albeit mentally. This move allows Keats to create and experience the Greek myth firsthand as if he has naturally lived it and gives him an answer to his belated status *vis–à–vis* the golden age of poetry.

This summation and transformation of the mythology to literature are summed up by John Savarase: "Keats's access to mythology, artefacts of antiquity, and cultural capital, in general, has long been seen as textually mediated."[114] Keats has become an agent of transformation himself. The access may be mediated or filtered by the translated work, but it is Keats's own ability that allows him to be an agent of transformation. He has reimagined a canonically established and traditionally accepted Grecian myth and transformed them into vivid figures with their own senses in a mental landscape.

On the idea of transformation, the stanza also tackles the comparison between Psyche and other Greek figures. The choice of comparison is also interesting: Phoebe, the goddess of the moon, and Vesper, the goddess of the evening star (also

[114] John Savarese. "Psyche's "Whisp'ring Fan" and Keats's Genealogy of the Secular." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2011. p. 393

referring to Venus, the planet in the evening). First, both figures appear and are associated with the nighttime (Phoebe) and twilight (Vesper). Vesper is noteworthy as she represents dusk, another in-between state (that of fading day and the eve of the night) that mirrors the confusion of dreaming and waking. It is also powerful, as twilight is a time of transformation, shifting from the certainty of the day into the uncertainty of the night. Together with the setting of the poem, this contrast of twilight and daylight is Keats's creatively enacting original elements of the Greek myth of Psyche whereby the goddess could only meet her lover under cover of darkness. She, eventually, lights a lamp to catch sight of him and is subsequently abandoned and punished by Cupid. The darkness that allowed for the communion of Cupid and Psyche (as Cupid forbade her to see his face) and Psyche's transgression with the lamp are ingeniously reimagined in the final lines of Keats's ode replete with a bright torch, and a casement open at night / To let the warm love in' (66–67).

The darkness covers Cupid until Psyche disobeys him and lays eyes on him, finally breaking under the weight of her curiosity. The mythological Psyche inspires Keats’s notion of negative capability by actively looking for a concrete answer to her husband's identity at the expense of sacrificing her worldly luxuries. Keats understood that there are some things in life that simply do not have an answer, and it is important to accept uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts without reaching after fact and reason. Keats knew that, in the ode, Psyche's inability to be close to her lover Cupid would never have a conclusion, but it does not mean that she cannot be comforted by what her status quo is. In doing so, Keats realises the second condition to his negative capability which is accepting certain mysteries and being comforted by them.

The last stanza of the poem also echoes the nighttime setting and the term "midnight hours" supports the imagery. Secondly, both Vesper and Phoebe are not major goddesses in the Greek pantheon so if Keats went for a more famous or well–known goddess (Phoebe could have been Artemis or Diana, as both are connected to the moon, and Vesper could be portrayed as Aphrodite/Venus), Psyche would be easily overshadowed. Keats's choice of goddesses allowed Psyche to stand in her own right without the fear of being eclipsed. Keats's choice of goddesses here is deliberate. Since they are "second–rate" goddesses to the main deities of the Greek pantheon, it also echoes how Keats considers himself *vis–à–vis* the golden age of poetry. His choice to include minor goddesses like Vesper and Phoebe shows his diminished capacity as a poet compared to how it must have been in the glory days of Ancient Greece.

Psyche presents a paradox through which Keats shows his concern about humanity's mutability. Keats utilised mutability as his central concern in his major poems, and as Jack Stillinger notes, "the odes as a group may be read as an investigation of the imagination's ability to cope with time and change".[115] Psyche was a dying immortal (this allowed Keats to be sensitive to loss) but, as Psyche was still a goddess, her immortality (weak or not) allowed her to defer the finality of death. An awareness of Psyche as a personification had to be set aside as Keats convinced himself it was real, and, therefore, also had to know that a reunion would be impossible.[116] This is the crux of the problem of the poem before the last stanza as it is, in a way, trying to advocate for Psyche (to "give" her temple, lute, to claim she is the "loveliest" and "fairest") but inevitably confirming Psyche's inferiority in

[115] Waldoff, p. 410
[116] Waldoff, p. 412–413

the Ancient Greek world. There's a sense of isolation and incapability in the poet because of the burden of time: the speaker realises that he is too late to worship Psyche in Ancient Greece, and he can only do so now. He realises that he cannot go back in time, saying that it is "though too late for antique vows/too, too late for the fond believing lyre". Ironically, Keats's poem offers a hymn to Psyche as both soul and the poetic imagination.

O brightest! though too late for antique vows,
Too, too late for the fond believing lyre,
When holy were the haunted forest boughs,
Holy the air, the water, and the fire;
Yet even in these days so far retir'd
From happy pieties, thy lucent fans,
Fluttering among the faint Olympians,
I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspir'd.
So let me be thy choir, and make a moan
Upon the midnight hours;
Thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet
From swinged censer teeming;
Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat
Of pale–mouth'd prophet dreaming. (Lines 36-49)

The lines: I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspir'd./So let me be thy choir, and make a moan/Upon the midnight hours*;* are of utmost importance, because they indicate another clear shift of tone and attitude from the first part of the ode. There is also a shift of tenses here, where from the first three stanzas the speaker speaks of the past, in the fourth stanza they are now speaking in the present (I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspir'd).

Keats inserts himself as a lately come 'pale–mouth'd' prophet for Psyche. In so doing, Keats also shows his own belatedness of coming too late for the golden age of poetry. He mirrors his own belatedness of being a belated prophet for poetry with being a belated priest for Psyche. From incapability to capability (the speaker seems to be unable to do a lot, especially in the third stanza because of his and Psyche's

dual sense of belatedness), from absence to presence (the speaker was conspicuously absent in the third stanza with the disappearance of "I" but is actively present in the fourth stanza, and appears bringing along the absent voice, lute, to something present "thy voice" and "thy lute"), and from denials in the third stanza to affirmations. In this sense, the fourth stanza echoes the first with the following: the presence of a reverent and adoring relationship between the speaker and Psyche ("be thy choir", "and make a moan/upon the midnight hours" echo "thy voice, thy lute, thy pipe, thy incense sweet" and "Thy shrine, thy grove, thy oracle, thy heat"), the seeming removal of the distance between Psyche and the speaker by the use of sensory terms ("by my own eyes inspir'd", "moan", "incense sweet"," heat"), and lastly the dreamy ambience ("surely I dreamt today" and "Of pale–mouth'd prophet dreaming"), which was integral for the speaker and Cupid to meet and encounter Psyche. Wagner notes that the ode does not realise its potential and becomes convincing until the last stanza of the poem,[117] as the final stanza is arguably the triumph of Keats's poetic ingenuity as the ode shifts from the external to the internal world. Indeed, the last stanza gives another layer of meaning to the previous stanza, further solidifying the ode.

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
Far, far around shall those dark–cluster'd trees
Fledge the wild–ridged mountains steep by steep;
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
The moss–lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep;
And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress
With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same:
And there shall be for thee all soft delight
That shadowy thought can win,
A bright torch, and a casement open at night,

[117] Wagner, p. 32–33

The imagination is enough for the speaker to promise Psyche nothing more than beyond "shadowy thought can win".[118] This last stanza is the ultimate affirmation of the poet's new status as Psyche's belated priest in conclusion to the previous stanzas, although the "night" beyond the casement promises not only 'warm Love', but also a possible unseen existential threat. Keats does not look to death anymore to support what he considers ideal, but back to life, to the "warm Love", and he can do this because his ideal is at peace with how things are. Wagner writes that "his mind is free to describe itself because it does not expect to describe more than itself; it is free to imagine reality without limit because it is able to recognise and respect its own limit."[119] Indeed, Keats's mental capability is free to imagine the scene however he wanted. And yet, this freedom is also confined within the realities of the situation. He cannot just imagine anything, but this mental freedom means that he is free to do as he wishes within the confines of the story or situation. Therefore, he cannot think of the myth of Psyche and then add elements from another pantheon into his work (say, elements from Norse mythology). This is a measure of Keats's willingness to "confine the infinite" in his works and find desire in his imagination. In this ode, the olden Greek gods were no longer around to consecrate "… the air, the water, and the fire", but using Keats confined yet infinite imagination, he sanctifies it. The "zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees" all add to the role of the "gardener Fancy", and they add another layer of imagination not in the real myth, but in the private recesses of the poet's mind now illustrated in his ode.

[118] Wagner p. 34
[119] Wagner pp. 33–34

For Bunn, the power of transformation (of his previously bleak mind) lies with Cupid and Psyche acting as agents of transformation. Instead of merely being mythological figures with pre-existing characteristics that the poet can utilise and appropriate in his poem, Cupid and Psyche instead are actively transforming the poet's mind. Cupid and Psyche have a mutual engagement with the poet. Keats has built an internal, intangible world inside his mind to worship Psyche, and after internalizing this mythological Psyche and transforming his mental landscape, "his ideas become ‘tuneless numbers’ not simply because of modesty but also because he is in an extraordinary communication with his own soul."[120] I agree with Bunn on the transformative power of Cupid and Psyche. This is a manifestation of how the poet becomes the figurative lamp when it comes to making poetry. Instead of merely mirroring the exact copy of an external subject, the poet allows the idea or concept of the subject in his mind and creates a whole new world to explore. Cupid and Psyche have become agents of transformation here instead of only being strictly characters with parts to play. These figures have actively changed the mind of the poet to recreate a fictional scenario where the poet supposedly happens on the couple and becomes Psyche's belated priest.

Bates considers the change in the last stanza to a more subjective voice (the poet's mind) as Keats's most decisive innovation.[121] The last stanza overturns the third stanza's negative statements *(Nor altar heap'd with flowers/Nor virgin–choir to make delicious moan/No voice, no lute, no pipe, no incense sweet/No shrine, no grove, no oracle, no heat)* with an affirmation (*Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane*). It also paints a more positive future with the use of the future tense (*will be*

[120] Bunn, p. 590
[121] Bates p. 331

thy priest), possessing a hope held out conditionally for the future. Bates also notes that Keats ends his poem on a note of non–consummation between Psyche and Cupid. Psyche is waiting in her prepared bridal chambers and yet her lover, Cupid, is nowhere to be seen as he was at the beginning of the poem. This stanza also clearly states the solution for the dual belatedness of Keats and Psyche – although there will not be a physical temple, he can build an intangible tribute or "virtual" fane that will be independent of the influence and decay of time. Psyche, the speaker, and Keats are creatures of belatedness – Psyche as the belated goddess, the belated worshipper, and Keats the belated poet of his own time. Keats reconciled this problem by creating a scenario where Psyche is transformed into an actual worshipped goddess, at least in the speaker's mind. By doing so, Keats has restored himself to the height of Greek artistry and myth (something he feared he was already too late for) using his mind. Psyche's goddess status, once an idealised notion in the third stanza *(O latest born and loveliest vision far/ Of all Olympus' faded hierarchy!)* has become an active status with the speaker becoming her "priest", building her a virtual temple to preserve her and where the speaker actively worships her. Note also the contrast of the first stanza where Keats painted Psyche laying amongst the grass *("*They lay calm–breathing, on the bedded grass"*),* and now she will have her own temple in the mind of the speaker, as is befitting a goddess with a priest since a goddess should have a temple where she can be properly worshipped.

By internalising Psyche as a figure, Keats was in "communication with his soul". Keats had all the imaginative freedom that allowed him to create worlds inspired by real myths and stories. His mind is a self–limiting yet transformative tool that enabled him to translate what is inside of him and impart it to his works.

Furthermore, his internalization of a figure (in this case Psyche) allowed him to have a dialogue with his soul and his unconscious psyche. He may not have been alive during the golden age of poetry and thus his soul yearns for it, but then again, through the internalization and kindred status of Psyche as a belated figure, he has communicated with his soul and consoled it. This move permitted Keats to be at peace with what could not be and accept what is. The reader will notice that the narrative of the ode (separateness with seclusion to identification echoes the movement from the mere potential of the poet to create and transform his mind through self–realisation. Schulz encapsulates this movement in the ode as Keats's rediscovery of the "immutable correspondence" between the external and internal worlds (material and immaterial).[122] Keats bridges the dual aspects of the physical and spiritual world by going beyond his senses and instead accepting the imaginative truth. In doing so, Keats achieves a synthesised experience. In his celebration of Psyche the goddess, we have his established vision of love and beauty, which he translates into a timeless, immutable truth within his ode. This internalisation serves as a launch and introduction for Keats's other odes, especially since it portrays Keats's commitment to Hellenism as evidenced by the growing presence of it in his works and the examination of art, self and inner life.[123] The ode shows Keats's preoccupation with the mind and how it can bridge Romantic poetry with the self. Despite living thousands of years after his own beloved age, Keats can still "reach for" Hellenism through the mind and it shows throughout his works. He is a belated poet and clearly identifies himself with belated figures, but

[122] Schulz, p. 57
[123] Waldoff, p. 416

it is in this sense of belatedness that he sees beauty and truth through in his present mind's eye.

Chapter 3

Ode on Melancholy and To Autumn: Classical Figures and Grecian Moments

Classical Figures and Melancholy

The Ode on Melancholy is John Keats's shortest ode and was probably written in May 1819 in the late spring of the same year that other great odes (Grecian Urn, Nightingale, Psyche, and Indolence) were composed. At first glance, the ode talks about the human emotion of melancholy, but as with Keats and his works, there are several levels to it. Ode on Melancholy originally had four stanzas, but Keats decided to leave out the first one. Here is the draft of that stanza in its original form:

Though you should build a bark of dead men's bones,

And rear a phantom gibbet for a mast,
Stitch creeds together for a sail, with groans
To fill it out, bloodstained and aghast;
Although your rudder be a Dragon's tail,
Long sever'd, yet still hard with agony,
Your cordage large uprootings from the skull
Of bald Medusa; certes you would fail
To find the Melancholy, whether she
Dreameth in any isle of Lethe dull.

As Harold Bloom posits, it is not congruent with the rest of the stanzas[124]. The first stanza did not mesh well with the melancholic nature of the ode and publishing the ode with the original first stanza might be disruptive to the intricate symbolism of the poem. The "harmonious" nature of the published poem was threatened by the imagery of quests in the unpublished stanza (And rear a phantom gibbet for a mast/ Stitch creeds together for a sail, with groans/ Although your rudder be a Dragon's tail/ To find the Melancholy, whether she').

[124] Harold Bloom. *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*. Cornell University Press, 1971. p. 413

Ann Lozano points out that the discarded first stanza does not weaken the published poem and the remaining three stanzas. The expressed ideas are still the central element in this poem.[125] Lozano concludes that the rest of the poem is as good even without the original first stanza, but Keats's ode should still be examined as a whole unit with the inclusion of the planned opening stanza. As with Keats's other odes, Ode on Melancholy is rife with Grecian imagery, and classical characters from mythology. The poem contains three Greek–related references and two of them are female members of the Grecian pantheon: they are Lethe, a river in the Greek Underworld, Psyche, Cupid's love, and Proserpine (another name for Persephone), the Queen of the Underworld. The River Lethe in Greek mythos is the underworld river of forgetfulness or oblivion. Souls who pass into Hades's domain drink the water from the river Lethe to move on from their previous lives. Keats warns the reader that it is essential to feel and relish the moments of melancholy and not to "go to Lethe" or have a drink of its waters. It is essential not to seek oblivion immediately but to dwell in that which is melancholia.

A sense of death is evident within the ode, given the symbolism of death, and Keats used descriptive, symbolic language in talking about it. The poem contains several imagery of death and its instruments, such as poisons and harmful substances (Wolf's–bane, tight–rooted, for its poisonous wine;/ By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine/Make not your rosary of yew–berries (Keats, lines 2-5)), highlighting the concept of Death or of contemplating it. Beetles, yew–berries, the death moth, and owl are also considered to be aspects of Death in different cultures and add to

[125] Ann Lozano. “Phonemic Patterning in Keats's” *Ode on Melancholy*”.” *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 17, 1968, pp. 15–29.

the tone of the poem. In conjunction with death, solitude, and melancholy in the poem, Keats created a goddess of melancholy from his Greek model – that is, she is transformed into a Keatsian symbol for a state of mind. He created this melancholy goddess through the power of his imagination and Greek insight. Barbara Herrnstein Smith points this out in her study:

> What makes this pretense so complex, however, is that although the statement is direct–we, or the implied audience, are being told about the nature and sources of melancholy–it is presented in terms of a figure, a mythological conceit. What I wish to suggest in what follows is that, although this figure is not to be taken merely as the decoration of a mood, neither is it to be mistaken as the substance of the pretended utterance.[126]

Keats personified "melancholy" and made her a goddess in the third stanza of the poem (Ay, in the very temple of Delight/Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine'). Indeed, Smith is correct that Keats illustrates to us not only the sources and nature of the melancholy but also a personified figure of the emotion. Keats presents us with a worshipping scene, as in in his Ode to Psyche (His soul shalt taste the sadness of her might,/And be among her cloudy trophies hung (lines 29-30)), with a follower actively absorbed into the goddess's temple he has created Keats has personified his discrete idea of melancholia with his own imaginative twist in the ode.

In Greek mythos, there are other characters that represent the idea of Melancholy, or at the very least, related to the idea of it.[127] According to Connolly,[128] the Algea

[126] Barbara Herrnstein Smith. "Sorrow's Mysteries": Keats's '*Ode on Melancholy*'." *Studies in English Literature,* 1500–1900, vol. 6, no. 4, 1966, p. 680

[127] These characters are Oizys, the goddess of misery, anxiety, grief, and depression, Achlys, a personification of Sorrow during Heracles's tale, or the Algea, a trio of women that have influence over distress, sorrow, and grief. See Hesiod, Theogony 211–255, Homer, Iliad 5.695–698, Odyssey 22.79–88., Nonnus, Dionysiaca, 14.143–185. For Oizys, see Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 3.17

[128] Joy Connolly. "Ten Reasons to Read Homer: Addressing Public Perceptions of Classical Literature." *Classical World,* vol. 103, no. 2, 2010. p.237

are said to be the daughters of Eris, the goddess of chaos or strife, and primarily dealt with the spectrum of emotions under "pain" and "suffering". Eris's daughters are Lupe (pain, grief, distress), Ania (sorrow and trouble), and Achus (ache and anguish). Their dominion over these specific emotions often overlaps, but it is generally agreed upon that they are often full of negative emotions that align with suffering. Suffering and silence are not connected to the idea of Keats's figure of Melancholy in the ode, but also with Angerona, the goddess of Suffering and Silence.[129]

Aside from that, Salamasius, in his Exercitationes Plinianae[130], points out that Angerona's name originally meant and symbolised restraint – a key feature of Keats's ode and its opening pleas against negative excess. This is a key feature in Keats's account of Melancholy, whose figure echoes the imagery associated with Angerona, as the goddess is depicted as either gagged or veiled (a commentary on her silence), as well as a muzzle for her own pain to ensure that Delight can shine brighter. As discussed by Burton's source in Macrobius[131] and expounded by Robert Cummings,[132] Keats may well have distilled the idea of Macrobius's Angerona into his composition of the central figure in Ode on Melancholy. Placing a goddess of silence at the centre of Keats's ode might explain why there is no

[129] "Keats on the other hand makes the point that contrary states of feeling may converge in a single sensation. I want to argue that this theme, and the metaphors for it that Keats turns to, are available in the tradition of commentary on the goddess Angerona deriving from Burton's source in Macrobius. And I want further to suggest, in the face of what looks like a serious improbability, that Keats was familiar specifically with pictorial versions of that tradition. It may be helpful to bear in mind throughout that Angerona is primarily and properly a goddess, not of Melancholy, but of Suffering and Silence." See Robert Cummings. "Keats's Melancholy in the Temple of Delight." *Keats–Shelley Journal* 36 (1987): p.51

[130] Claudius Salamasius. *Exercitationes Plinianae.* 1629. pp. 7–8

[131] Burton calls Angerona dea as "our goddess of melancholy". "Lucian makes Podagra the gout a goddess, and assigns her priests and ministers: and melancholy comes not behind; for as Austin mentioneth, *lib. 4. de Civit. Dei, cap. 9.* there was of old *Angerona dea*, and she had her chapel and feasts, to whom (saith [2827]Macrobius) they did offer sacrifice yearly, that she might be pacified as well as the rest. 'Tis no new thing, you see this of papists; and in my judgment, that old doting Lipsius might have fitter dedicated his [2828]pen after all his labours, to this our goddess of melancholy, than to his *Virgo Halensis*, and been her chaplain, it would have become him better: but he, poor man, thought no harm in that which he did, and will not be persuaded but that he doth well, he hath so many patrons, and honourable precedents in the like kind, that justify as much, as eagerly, and more than he there saith of his lady and mistress": Robert Burton. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Edited by Holborn Jackson, vol. 1, New York Review of Books, 2001. p. 144.

[132] Robert Cummings. "Keats's Melancholy in the Temple of Delight." *Keats–Shelley Journal* 36 (1987): 50–62. p. 54

"dominant" symbol or sustained allegories in the poem.[133] There is a distinct absence of any prominent structure aside from "sovran shine" and "temple", and the allegories are veiled and written abstractly. Several critics have discussed the image of Melancholy and likened them to Grecian characters that resemble melancholy and its related negative emotions, but rather than looking outwards into them, I move to examine the ode's inwardness and focus on the goddesses that are explicitly mentioned in the Ode on Melancholy. Keats could have used any of the Grecian goddesses (or characters) that are traditionally linked with melancholy, sadness, pain, grief, distress, sorrow, or anguish as his muse, and yet he does not explicitly mention any of them in his ode. Instead, he created Ode on Melancholy as an ironic take on Ode to Psyche and the mentioned goddesses in the ode. He directly mentioned both the goddesses Psyche and Persephone – who, at first glance, are not related to the idea of melancholy.[134] In fact, it is quite ironic for Keats to use his Psyche in Ode on Melancholy because his Ode to Psyche is a happier goddess compared to a "mournful Psyche". Why then did Keats use Psyche instead of the other Greek characters with a decidedly more melancholic

[133] John Jones. *John Keats's Dream of Truth*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1969, p. 263

[134] *Ode to Psyche*'s last stanza is longer than the other stanzas but it carries weight and is as optimistic as the worshipper is to their goddess, Psyche. The use of Psyche in *Ode on Melancholy* is then questionable as Keats's *Ode to Psyche* ends in a high, positive note, and not melancholic.

"Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind:
Far, far around shall those dark–cluster'd trees
Fledge the wild–ridged mountains steep by steep;
And there by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
The moss–lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep;
And in the midst of this wide quietness
A rosy sanctuary will I dress
With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain,
With buds, and bells, and stars without a name,
With all the gardener Fancy e'er could feign,
Who breeding flowers, will never breed the same:
And there shall be for thee all soft delight
That shadowy thought can win,
A bright torch, and a casement ope at night,
To let the warm Love in!"

background?[135] Perhaps it is because the solution to melancholia is not happiness but instead irony. Haverkamp writes:

> Irony, in this case, does more, in that it establishes a permanent movement that postpones indefinitely while wittingly keeping alive the dangerous impact of the postponed. Irony, in overcoming melancholy, makes melancholy the anthropomorphism of trope that it used to be under the reign of a different "rhetoric of temporality." In Keats's On First Looking into Chapman's Homer and his Ode on Melancholy, the address to an immortal soul, Psyche, is reduced to a meditation on its mortality, its limited availability, and final unreadability.[136]

Ironically, Keats's Ode on Melancholy and its use of Psyche (as the soul) becomes a meditation on death itself. Keats's opening (No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist/Wolf's–bane, tight–rooted, for its poisonous wine;/Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd/By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;/Make not your rosary of yew–berries,/Nor let the beetle, nor the death–moth be/Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl) a parody of On First Looking into Chapman's Homer to Ode to Psyche's romance bower. The irony here is the ambivalent nature and incapable of definite answers that recall the uncertainties of Keats's concept of negative capability. The deadly and suicidal overtures of Keats's writing are directly at odds with his portrayal of Psyche's serene and peaceful setting in his ode to her. In so doing, Keats imaginatively eschewed traditional classical figures of melancholy and related emotions.

This special handling of Greek characters is similar to those Greek myths that tend to associate feelings and emotions with a particular god or goddess. Emotions such as joy are personified through the goddess Euphrosyne; rage is personified through

[135] Keats may also have been positively influenced by Democritus Junior's *Anatomy of Melancholy* when creating his *Ode on Melancholy* and why he included Psyche as an overt character in the ode. Interestingly, the book references Psyche and her tale an astonishing 14 times, which must also be why Keats find it apt to include Psyche's image in his melancholic ode. See Democritus. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. 1638.
[136] Anselm Haverkamp. "Mourning Becomes Melancholia. A Muse Deconstructed: Keats's '*Ode on Melancholy*'." *New Literary History* 21.3 (1990): pp.693–706.

the goddess Lyssa, or peace (among others) through the goddess Eirene (the Horae, second-generation children of Zeus and Themis). So, Keats's imaginative practice is itself inspired by Grecian myth and he transforms the concept of melancholy into a revered goddess within the space of his ode. The Greek mythonyms in the poem (Lethe, Proserpine, Psyche) all symbolise the balance between beauty and grief[137], and this is, perhaps, why Keats chose to create his own goddess of melancholia – someone who could tiptoe between the narrow line of happiness and sadness to find that in misery there is beauty or vice versa. For Keats, there is sadness in pleasure ("and aching Pleasure nigh,/Turning to poison while the bee–mouth sip", lines 23-24) for the mortal experience. The bittersweet emotion of each human experience is, inextricably, entwined.

Building on the idea of Keats's imagining of a goddess of Melancholy, it is not surprising then that Psyche and Persephone's names appear explicitly in the ode. Keats used Psyche and Persephone as his "mold" in creating his own goddess Melancholy in the ode, as he deliberately bypasses those traditional mythical figures associated with melancholy. This is not an oversight from Keats, but instead a deliberate stroke of poetic genius on his part. First, as with the ode, Keats created the idea of Melancholy as a figure closely related to death and its symbolism. Imagery of death or harbingers of death are abundant in the poem ("wolf's bane, poisonous wine, nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine, yew–berries, beetle, death–moth, mournful Psyche, downy owl", lines 2-7), and even if one is to include the first unpublished stanza, the imagery already paints us a picture of death (Though you should build a bark of dead men's bones').

[137] Anna Shotova–Nikolenko "The Onomastic Space of John Keats's Odes." *Professional Competencies and Educational Innovations in the Knowledge Economy: Collective Monograph*, ACCESS Journals, 2020. p.13.

Keats's image of the deathly bark' also hints at the first Greek mythonym of Lethe, which appears in the published version of the ode. In Greek mythology, Lethe[138] is also known as the "Lemosyne", one of the five rivers under Hades's domain of the Underworld. It is also known as the river of unmindfulness – literally because one's mind will be blank of thought once its waters are drunk. The river wound through the cave of Hypnos, the god of sleep, and because of this, the river is sometimes a quiet lullaby to those who could not, figuratively, give their minds over to rest (or oblivion). This kind of rest is not a violent one, nor is it something to be afraid of. It is the natural order of things – the next step for the shades of the dead in Hades's dominion to be reincarnated into their next lives. Aside from the river, the name is also shared with a female personification of forgetfulness, who is a "dull" guard in the cave of Hypnos[139]. In addition to Lethe, an explicit connection to Hades at the very least, there are also several other talks of instruments of death or those that can deliver it, such as poisons ("wolf's bane", "nightshade", "yew–berries") that are closely associated with suicides, as well as "gentle" silent death. For centuries, humans have used them to effect death on themselves (or others) gently and quickly. However, as with Keats and the dual meanings of several aspects in this ode, these are not just harbingers of death but also (if used correctly and safely) of health. Yew–berries[140] specifically were used to treat several ailments common among the people of that time, thus saving them from death instead of typically causing it. This yew berry symbolism highlights the bittersweet experience of

[138] "To begin with, there is every reason to believe that Lethe is to be understood not as a euphemism for personal death or suicide, but as a reference to a specific place: the abode of the impersonal force (or mythological figure), Death." See Smith, p. 680.
[139] Statius, *Thebaid* 10.86–92
[140] Harold R Hartzell. "Yew and Us: A Brief History of the Yew Tree." *The American Gardener*, vol. 96, no. 3, 1995, pp. 20–25.

mortals at the core of the poem, which gives as much importance to the negative emotions in life as those happier ones.

The bittersweet nature of experience is further dramatised by the portrayal of Psyche in Ode on Melancholy. Keats described Psyche as "mournful Psyche" in the seventh line of the ode, giving her an air of mourning and melancholy as opposed to the idea of Psyche one could have once finished reading Keats's Ode to Psyche. Instead of portraying her as a belated goddess or a goddess in the first throes of love, Psyche here is instead mournful of something. Keats has appropriated Psyche's attributes to her own concocted goddess of melancholy and even describes the goddess as someone who "dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die". Though referring to Keats's own goddess of Melancholy, this line also reminds us of Psyche because Psyche is a "beauty" who nearly died when she opened the box of Persephone's beauty that contained the essence of death. Eventually saved by Cupid, she was finally taken to Olympus. Apart from Psyche, this new goddess of melancholy is also inspired by Persephone (Proserpine's Greek version), the consort of Hades, and the Queen of the Underworld. Persephone's tale is one of beauty and melancholy – beauty from where she captivated Hades' attention and melancholy from her mother's despair of her absence. Persephone herself initially suffered from Hades' attentions, thus the melancholy part. One could read the first line in Persephone's own shoes as she struggled to accept living in the Underworld. On the mortal plane, her mother is also dealing with her melancholia, plunging the world into six months of famine and then into another six months of plenty when Persephone returns aboveground.

Keats's artistic choices in Ode on Melancholy are in keeping with his own sense of the duality of feeling and experience. It is not a coincidence that these two goddesses were mentioned, as they both have aspects of beauty and death. The very scene where Psyche appears in the Ode on Melancholy, automatically reminds the reader of a "mournful" Psyche after nearly dying from being exposed to Persephone's box. She is mournful at that moment since she and Cupid might not have their happy conclusion after all and instead is now journeying into the depths of the Greek Underworld. The first stanza is full of regret, sadness, and death – emotions that we also see in the two goddesses in the poem.[141] It is, therefore, apt that the stanza begins with a solemn warning (No, no, go not to Lethe, neither twist') as the reader will, at least in this ode, descend into a stanza full of negative emotions. Keats is warning people not to go into the embrace of death immediately or to forget the pain immediately, but also to realise that the feeling of melancholy escorts even the highest of happiness. To reiterate, Keats chooses Persephone and Psyche not just because they are associated with death but also because they possess beauty and death. The first line of the ode, where the reader is vehemently cautioned against going into the Lethe, is applicable to both goddesses. Persephone's because of her abduction and subsequent initial depression in the Underworld, and Psyche's when she died after Aphrodite commanded her to ask a part of Persephone's beauty. These goddesses embody the myth in which we find melancholy, beauty, regret, and death entangled with one another.

[141] The idea that melancholy is associated with mortality is indeed not a new concept. Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy describes such a perception has always existed in the English Literature world. What is special about Keats's treatment of Melancholy is that he merges it together with death and beauty into a feminine personification of a Greek goddess. See Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Edited by Holborn Jackson, vol. 1, *New York Review of Books*, 2001, p. 144

Keats's deliberate choice of the goddesses that appear in the poem is also the justification as to why he eschewed the unpublished stanza. Medusa is another Greek mythonym and character that could fit into Keats's criteria, but Keats would eventually discard the first stanza as fate would have it. Medusa's tale is rife with pain, suffering, melancholy, and death – a truly misunderstood Greek character that people can commiserate with. Her negative experiences during her mortal life also echo the tragedies that the goddesses Persephone and Psyche go through, which eventually qualifies them to be in this melancholic ode. However, as much as there are similarities between the three of them, Medusa's final embodiment is an object of pain, suffering, death, and "ugliness" which makes her an unsuitable metaphor in the poem. Cursed by Athena, the goddess of wisdom, after being raped by Poseidon[142], Medusa was transformed into an "ugly" beast, one with snakes for hair and a deadly gaze that literally petrifies anyone who seeks her eyes. Nevertheless, she is still seen by others as a protector of sorts, as her image is used as a sigil for Athena's own shield and real–life shields, vessels, and statuary. However, no matter how tragic and sad Medusa's fate is, Keats could not, in the end, justify Medusa's use in the final version of the ode as it clearly imbalances its delicate nature. Her tale and her "ugliness" show a great disparity between her and Persephone or Psyche. The association between beauty and melancholy is, in fact, a characteristic of the Romantic period, yet we do not see it as much compared to other characteristics. Smith points out:

> It is sometimes said, for example, that whereas Keats is not usually a victim of the worst excesses of the Romantic sensibility, this ode demonstrates his tendencies in that direction, if not his total capitulation."

[142] Susan R. Bowers "Medusa and the Female Gaze." *NWSA Journa*l, vol. 2, no. 2, 1990. p. 222.

Naturally, people perceive Melancholy as a negative emotion entirely, one that is connected to pain, sickness, ugliness, or suffering[143], but they often lose sight of how it can contrast with other more positive emotions. Keats's singular technique of associating beauty and melancholy together to create such memorable odes is new and revolutionary in his time. This technique also necessitated the removal of the original first stanza and Medusa's image in the ode, as it would have diverted away from the collective and dual symbolism of Psyche and Persephone are offering in relation to death and beauty. It would, therefore, be entirely jarring for a reader if they switch from Medusa's "ugly" imagery to the conventionally beauteous images of Psyche and Persephone despite holding the concept of melancholy and death close to heart.

Perhaps, Keats is entirely justified in not publishing the original stanza with Medusa in it since the ode, at its core, is an acceptance of the state of melancholy. One would know (or at the very least, what Keats endeavours to know) that the ode urges the reader to embrace melancholy and misery in its entirety. Using melancholy, Keats stresses the importance of the more negative aspects of human lives as a distinct component of our mortal experience instead of an experience we actively need to shy away from.

Grecian Moments and To Autumn

To Autumn was the last ode that Keats wrote before succumbing to tuberculosis at the young age of 25. The ode is a tribute to the bountiful beauty of the autumn season, and Keats characterised it with an abundant imagery of life. Some may

[143] Josiah Blackmore. "Melancholy, Passionate Love, and the Coita d'Amor." *PMLA*, vol. 124, no. 2, 2009, pp. 640, 642.

wonder why I included To Autumn in this thesis about Keats and Hellenism. Indeed, the ode does not seem to contain any explicit Hellenistic themes or figures. Martin Aske does not even mention this ode at all in his influential book on Keats and Hellenism; however, is there really no trace of Hellenistic elements in the poem? Apart from Nathan Comfort Starr's brief mention in 1966,[144] the poem's correlation with Hellenism was also mentioned in *The Genesis of Keats's Ode to Autumn* by Ernest J. Lovell, Jr in 1950. Although not explicit, Hellenistic themes are present in the ode. In the following, I would like to demonstrate and explore the Hellenistic elements in the ode and identify the "Grecian" moments in Keats's To Autumn.

In his essay, Lovell mentions Edith Hamilton's comment on the "Greekness" of Keats's poem.[145] Hamilton's comment inspired Lovell's idea that the poem itself is like a Greek work – there is only "actuality" instead of a vision and dream, which are often common topics in Keats's poetry. For Lovell, this actuality is what distinguishes the poem from the other odes.[146] However, I cannot entirely agree with Lovell on this as Keats's To Autumn is not only "actuality" but one in which the imagination is also embodied. The theme of To Autumn is distinct from the other odes because of the absence of the mythological figure and elements that usually accompany Keats's works, the absence of a tangible object, and its abstractness. Unlike the Ode on a Grecian Urn and Ode to Psyche which dealt with a heavy and symbolic mythological figure, To Autumn*'s* figure is conspicuously

[144] "I cannot see what flowers are at my feet, / Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs." Throughout the poem one realises the antinomies of conflict. Finally, in a burst of imaginative vision Keats frees himself, and achieves an Olympian purview". Nathan Comfort Starr. "Negative Capability in Keats's Diction." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 15, 1966, p. 67.
[145] "saw the beauty of common things and were content with it. . . . The Greeks liked facts. . . . Curiously, Keats . . . has in the Ode To Autumn written a poem more like the Greek than any other in Eng lish. . . . The things men live with, noted as men of reason note them, not slurred over or evaded, not idealised away from actuality, and then perceived as beautiful?that is the way Greek poets saw the world. Edith Hamilton. "*The Greek Way To Western Civilization*." (1963): p.134.
[146] Ernest J. Lovell "The Genesis of Keats's Ode To Autumn." *The University of Texas Studies in English*, vol. 29, 1950 pp.204–221.

absent. In fact, it does not explicitly mention any mythological figures at all but instead works as an allusion to the characteristics of the mother and goddess of agriculture – Demeter. This is a direct exclusion from Keats's other odes that have a central, underlying character on which his works are based. Nor does the ode have a tangible manifestation or object such as is present in Keats's On First Looking into Chapman's Homer or *Ode to Nightingale*. Autumn's figure hovers between the tangible (there are obvious and physical traces of autumn that one can touch, such as falling leaves and ripe harvests) and the intangible (falling leaves and harvests are only aspects of Autumn, and not the entirety of it). Hence, as a singular and concrete object, autumn is hard to define compared to figures such as "nightingale", "urn", or "Psyche" which are previous subjects of Keats's odes. Autumn's idea itself is relative – usually defined as a season between summer and winter – a transitionary period that bridges two opposite states (life and death, heat and cold, vitality and indolence). Whereas Ode on Melancholy has strong mythological themes, To Autumn's is more subtle and understated. The Hellenistic theme of To Autumn is instead woven into the imagery and words of Keats where it still can be felt, experienced, and personified. To Autumn is in fact "an expression of the sensation, or sensuous impression" of Keats's walk around the "warm, golden stubble fields" around the country.[147]

The notion itself of autumn, hence, lies in an interesting position which remains both "tangible" (you can see autumn in the changing of the leaves and the bountiful acorns) and "intangible" (autumn as a season is generally felt or experienced, and how it quietly shapes the environment). This nature of Autumn is perhaps the reason why it looks so different from the remaining odes, since Keats cannot treat

[147] Claude Lee Finney, *The Evolution of Keats's Poetry, Volume II*. Harvard University Press, 2013. p.707

it as something utterly imaginative (e.g., Psyche)) or approach it in a rather relatively realistic manner (e.g., Nightingale). Hence, to represent it with pure imagination and actuality does not do the theme justice. The poem reflects this mix of imagination and actuality – the very figure of Autumn is itself an imagined and personified figure that does not exist. Nevertheless, it is an authentic figure all the same as it is made of real aspects of the season and harvest activities. Keats characterises the seasonal autumn in such a way that it appears as if the season itself is a personified *figure*, even going so far as to describe how the wind is disturbing the figure's hair or how the figure managed to fall asleep while working on their tasks. However, by doing so, this exact representation of Autumn is still a figment of Keats's imagination. His version of Autumn is a personal, imaginative figure built only in his mind, despite autumn existing as a season in real life. Other people do not necessarily think of autumn the way Keats personified his version of autumn in the ode. Keats paints this imaginative figure as a personification of autumn and links it to the activities and actions done during the worship of the goddess of harvest.

This choice of personifying Autumn is worth pondering upon, as in Greek and Roman mythologies, the four seasons and nature are linked to their respective patron gods or goddesses. This practice of using the names of the Greek gods and goddesses to represent nature is not uncommon in Keats's poems. He used the goddesses Phoebe to simulate the night sky and Vesper to represent twilight in his Ode to Psyche ("Fairer than Phoebe's sapphire–region'd star,// Or Vesper, amorous glow–worm of the sky"). Instead of using the literal sun, he alluded to Apollo, the sun god in Greek mythology. Apollo, Daphne, Pan, Cupid, Psyche – these are just some of the Greek figures that Keats has used in his works. By extension, the way

that Keats characterised his autumnal figure echoes strongly with the Greek personification of harvest, the goddess Demeter. To be clear, this autumnal figure is not the goddess Demeter[148], but Demeter's characterization herself is linked to "Autumn", such as the ideas of harvest, fruitfulness, "ripeness", or the figure of a "gleaner'.

In the Greek mythos, Demeter is the goddess of harvest and the mother of Persephone. The Greeks celebrated a festival in honour of the goddess called Demetria where it was customary for the votaries of the goddess to lash themselves with whips made from the bark of trees.[149] John Lemprière, the author of the *Bibliotheca Classica*, narrated the story of Ceres, Demeter's Roman counterpart, and how the goddess of harvest in her grief after her daughter Proserpine (Persephone) was taken from her, made the land barren and unlike autumn (where the crops are all gone and winter is just around the corner). Keats, who was so familiar with Lemprière, naturally makes the connection between Demeter (Harvest) and autumn. In doing so, Keats imbues the personification of autumn with characteristics from the Greek goddess. In his book, *Keats, Narrative, and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing*, Andrew Bennett argues that the mythical substitution of Demeter for the figure of autumn is political[150]. He further contends that Demeter in the ode represents the transition from a communistic economy to a more capitalistic approach. In seeing the ode as striking a political

[148] "'To Autumn' seems essentially to be a monologue comprising the second half of an implied dialogue between Keats's fictional speaker/narrator and a personified Demeter–like divinity seen as the figure of Autumn" Gaillard points out clearly that it is not the goddess Demeter per se that Keats is channeling in the ode, but rather Keats's personification of autumn contains "Demeter–like" divinity. This proves that Keats intended his personification of autumn to be like Demeter, the harvest goddess, but not about Demeter herself. See Theodore L. Gaillard Jr. "Keats's To Autumn." *The Explicator*, vol. 56, no. 4, 1998, p. 185.
[149] John Lemprière. *Bibliotheca Classica: Or, A Classical Dictionary*. G. and C. Carvill, 1831.
[150] Andrew Bennett. *Keats, Narrative and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing*. Cambridge University Press, 1994. p.163

register, it seems like Bennett is assuming that there is an "absent presence" of Ceres based on an allusion to another Keats poem, Lamia, and brings his "economic" reading To Autumn. No matter how Bennett tries to insert his politico-economic reading into To Autumn, he merely shows its "absence" and not their direct "presence" in the ode. It is not supported by any direct textual evidence in the ode why Ceres is present and absent at the same time. The ode should not be read purely from a political point of view, but from a standpoint that also appreciates the existential concerns of Keats's ode. Autumn's personification (and by extension, those elements of Demeter) suggests a dialectical positioning between presence and absence, living and dying, which encapsulates the contradictory aspects of the goddess Demeter.

Demeter was celebrated as a goddess of bounty and harvest, but she could also be a harbinger of death and famine. Much like how autumn is a season of plenty, it could also be a season of death and decay. Although traditionally a goddess of plenty and vitality, Demeter is equally connected to dearth and death. Her daughter, Persephone, arguably the ultimate "fruit" of a harvest goddess, was taken by a figure of Death (Hades). Aside from death, Demeter is also connected and can cause famine and starvation – of lean times and hardships, which is essentially in conflict with her life–giving persona. When pleased, Demeter ensures life and a bountiful harvest, but when angered (and in despair over her daughter's abduction), she can bring about death and destruction. Keats reflects this duality in the ode – he brings up the benevolent side of Demeter (Ceres) as the goddess of harvest in the first and second stanza Keats personified autumn as both regeneration and degeneration, both life and death. This duality is present throughout the poem and is only fitting as the season itself is a prelude to death (winter) and comes after birth

(spring/summer). It stands on a cusp that is neither here nor there, representing the moment that one is both verdant and yet with an encroaching sense of deterioration fast on its heels. The ode itself is a transitional piece as it is placed between worlds, so to speak. In fact, the ode itself does not have a definite conclusion but ends in a moment of suspended action, which does not quite achieve its goal. This shift is especially apparent with the evolution of time in each stanza.

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom–friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch–eves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage–trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'er–brimm'd their clammy cells. (Lines 1-11)

The first stanza paints a picture of abundance, life, and beauty – all monikers that we associate with the first two seasons (summer and spring). Autumn here is personified as a "Close bosom–friend of the maturing sun", with the sun identified as "maturing" and not "matured," which gives us an idea that there is time yet to spare. Autumn is much like its predecessors in that fruit trees yield their fruits in large quantities ("To bend with apples the moss'd cottage–trees*")* or that plants or flowers are budding ("With a sweet kernel; to set budding more") or with bees busy for some late pollination ("And still more, later flowers for the bees,/Until they think warm days will never cease"). The personification speaks to a central core of Demeter as a "mother" – providing for her children (humans) by yielding or bearing forth produce from the soil. This maternal image heavily parallels the autumn season, where one can imagine a heavily expecting mother, soon to give birth, with the bountiful fields just ripe for harvest. Not only that, other images in the form of

"ripeness to the core", "swell the gourd", "budding more" and the bees all add to the maternal effect. The bees are a symbol of fertility and life, another personification of the goddess Demeter, as they are integral in fertilizing crops and keeping the life cycle in motion. In fact, this whole sequence here is a reversed process of how the harvest or the crops are made. Keats changed the natural order of things here – where it should be first bees pollinating the flowers, then plants yielding their fruits, and finally being ready for harvest, it is now overturned. This is a commentary on Keats's disregard for the temporal sequence of the details. Even the depiction of bees here thinks of this time as "warm days (that) will never cease", not knowing that winter and wilting are around the corner. This picture of indolence and lazy leisure is apparent in lines 8–10. The entire stanza works as a homage to the positive gifts of a harvest goddess to her supplicants: after a pleasant and warm Summer, all their efforts are now rewarded with a full return.

In this stanza, the full powers of Demeter as a goddess and the personification of autumn are on display: the tree boughs are bending downwards full of their fruits, the produce is robust and plump, and the corn is sweet. Bennett references the idea of Ceres's horn or the cornucopia, the horn of plenty. [151] In Greek mythology, the cornucopia originally came from when the baby Zeus, on the run after his father's cannibalistic tendencies, broke off Amalthea's goat horn. Amalthea then proceeded to fill the broken horn with food for the young god, and with Zeus's blessing, the horn would provide an infinite bounty of sustenance to whoever had the horn. Later, the horn would be appropriately associated with Demeter herself as the goddess of the harvest. The horn of plenty would be related to other gods as well and is still used today as a festive symbol during Thanksgiving, an autumnal celebration of

[151] See Bennett, p. 163

plentitude. Demeter's cornucopia is a symbol of her powers of abundance and a classic emblem of Greek antiquity. The horn of plenty would always yield produce and sustenance for her followers so long as Demeter is sated and happy. If the goddess is happy, the humans are assured of a good harvest; when she's mad or distracted, crops will fail, and starvation will be nigh. Humans are then incentivised to keep her happy and appease her since she is the goddess most concerned about bringing food to the table, hence the festivals in her honour. Matched by Keats's habitual activities of the harvest.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft–lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half–reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder–press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours. (Lines 12-22)

In the second stanza, we have a very precise depiction of a personified figure of autumn. We have descriptions of the figure's "hair" gently disturbed by the wind or that the figure is sitting (implying that they must be resting for a moment after doing something) on a granary floor. The figure is also asleep on the furrow with their harvest tasks half–done. The ode leads us to see the figure as a person working the toils of autumnal activities, and in doing so, gives us a clear view of a human figure of autumn. The first stanza talks about the bounties of the season, but the second talks about the toil it takes to complete the harvest which a human must do. These activities show that the personified figure of autumn is doing typical activities associated with the season and further cement Keats's personification of the season. In the first stanza, the figure here is laden with bounty and fruitfulness ("To bend

with apples the moss'd cottage–trees,//And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core") and just ready to be plucked and harvested. This is a manifestation of Demeter's role as the goddess of harvest, and for every bountiful harvest, people would sing their praises to the goddess. According to C.L. Finney, this personification is likely inspired by Chatterton's poem *Aella, a Tragicall Interlude,* but in this version, the figure of autumn is male (as is the role of the reaper).[152] Keats may have positioned the figure as a male due to the role of the reaper, but this figure also possesses the qualities of the mythological goddess Demeter. However, according to Mark Bracher,[153] although the image of the reaper is traditionally associated with death, it does not mean a final and ultimate "death" but rather symbolises the "death of death". Notice that the "hook" which is linked to the Grim Reaper is immediately followed by the word "spares". With this, Keats subverts the conventional role of Death but instead allows for a momentary stay of execution or hints at possible new beginning. This is important to the idea of Demeter as a harvest goddess as with every harvest season, the grains are cut from their stalks and the fruits plucked from their boughs, and yet, this does not spell the end for the plants (or supply of food for the humans) but marks another beginning for a new harvest season. Death here, then, is not a complete and final harbinger of nothingness but instead a harbinger of life, as much as Demeter is a goddess of vitality. Both are central roles to growth and rebirth – one clearing the way for new harvests and the other taking care of the harvest.

Demeter's duality is further expressed in the poem's first stanza. From her vibrant role in the first stanza (being a "friend of the sun"), the figure changes into the four

[152] Claude Lee Finney. *The Evolution of Keats's Poetry, Volume II*. Harvard University Press, 2013. p. 708
[153] Mark Bracher. "Ideology and Audience Response to Death in Keats's 'To Autumn'." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1990. pp. 650–651.

human roles (winnower, reaper, gleaner, and someone watching over the cider press) of a typical harvest season.[154] Notice the passivity of the roles: the winnower is seated "carelessly" on the granary floor, and the reaper is asleep among the poppies. An air of indolence has arrived in the second stanza ("Or by a cyder–press, with patient look,//Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours"), which is a direct contrast to the vitality shown in the first stanza. There is no explicit "I" in the poem, although the figure of Autumn is present throughout.[155] Keats used this sense of indolence as a poetic device "a perceiver who is highly receptive throughout the poem to concrete images of autumn, but who is limited for two–thirds of the poem in his ability to reflect upon those images and assess their significance in indicating temporality." The speaker is preoccupied with the autumnal activities and does not immediately notice the time of day nor the change in their landscape. Just like how the personified figure has started to drift into the land of Morpheus, so does their awareness of time slip away from their consciousness, too.

This is a manifestation of Demeter's duality and a manifestation of the contrasting temporality and themes in the ode. From busy and vibrant imagery in the first stanza, the second stanza paints a slowing and "tapering" pace of autumnal activities. A sense of indolence has entered the poem as the harvest is not done yet and is still in the process; however, the workers have started to slack off – whether they are sitting on the granary floor or asleep among the poppies. It seems as if things are slowly coming to a standstill, which is an apt description of the hibernation of animals that start during the later parts of the autumn, or even the eventual slowing down of life in preparation for the winter.

[154] James Lott. "Keats's To Autumn: The Poetic Consciousness and the Awareness of Process." *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 9, No. 2. 1970. p. 73
[155]Walter Jackson Bate. *John Keats*. Harvard University Press, 2009. p. 581

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, Where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—
While barred clouds bloom the soft–dying day,
And touch the stubble–plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows, borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full–grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
Hedge–crickets sing; and now with treble soft
The red–breast whistles from a garden–croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies. (Lines 23-33)

The last stanza gives us an image of the end of a day for a typical harvest season. From the first stanza, we have the morning characterised by the vitality of the harvest and of the "maturing" sun. From there, we have the afternoon in the second stanza, where harvest activities have nearly been completed and the workers presumably resting for a while before finishing their tasks. In the third stanza, we have the culmination of the day, the twilight, and the onset of the evening. This is the consummation of the movement of time in the ode and the comparative symbolic themes that Keats weaved into the ode. It also connects with the idea of Demeter' as both goddess of life and the harvest and harbinger of death and decay, although her brand of "death" is not of the terminal kind but rather a start of new beginnings. The third stanza is the final step of the cycle of life and rebirth, and Keats gives us a vision of things coming to an end, but he does not give a definite end to it, much like how Demeter's brand of "death" works. Keats gives us an image of rosy twilight skies ("barred clouds bloom the soft–dying day,//and touch the stubble–plains with rosy hue", lines 25-26) and the start of the gentle evening breeze ("or sinking as the light wind lives or dies", line 29). Even the animals are starting to wind down their activities for the night ("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", lines 30-33) The last stanza also completes the progression of the ode in terms of

the season by finally recognizing that winter is on the cusp of arriving, and even animals are preparing for their seasonal hibernation. Keats gives us a description of animals in their preparation or state during the fall: sheep are fat enough for their eventual slaughter (line 30) and the swallows are ready for their annual migration to warmer climes lest they die in the cold (line 33). These images hint at an eventual death. This stanza also finally reveals the speaker ("Ay, Where are they?") to the reader, which abruptly yanks it back from the steady progression towards unconsciousness that the second stanza built up. Just when the unidentified speaker slips into complete unawareness in the second stanza, they are figuratively awakened with a question of where "the songs of spring" (line 23) are, thus suggesting that the speaker is now aware of the passage of time. It should be noted as well that Keats also made the consciousness of the figure come full circle: from an alert consciousness of the bees in the first stanza (think warm days will never cease (line 10), to the sleepy and slow progression towards unconsciousness in the second stanza ("Drows'd with the fume of poppies", line 17), and finally to the sudden return to wakefulness in the third stanza. This also gives the reader a concrete distinction that the speaker is fully aware of the differences between autumn and spring – although the speaker might have related the two in the first stanza, they have become intimately aware of the differences in the last stanza.

According to Lott, the ode reveals two results of sensitivity to the temporal process.[156] First, the mind can "recapture past time" (and for Keats's belatedness, create a world independent of decay *vis–à–vis* the present time). With Keats's imagination (just like how the personified Autumn has snapped back into consciousness in the last stanza, see: how the sense of indolence in the second

[156] See Lott, p. 80

stanza shifts to an alert and questioning figure in the first lines of the last stanza), he could build a place where he and his works would be immune to the passage of time, thus resolving his anxiety over belatedness. This also echoes the priest in Ode to Psyche', where he builds a "virtual fane" to worship his belated goddess Psyche, away from the perils of time. Secondly, the mind can (at the same time) see the presence of death in nature. This is already evident with the references to "soft–dying day", "in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn", or that "the light wind lives or dies." The speaker here is aware of an end to temporal relationships and uses metaphors and imagery that give the reader an almost complete sense of conclusion. It is important to note that Keats leaves us with no satisfactory conclusion but abruptly leaves us in the final stages of the processes that began in a lingering summer, only to end with the anticipation of winter, such as the ode's depiction of winter not fully arriving or the swallows who are exiting the frame, but not completely out of it yet. This sense of finality is absent in the first two stanzas, and only gives the reader just a hint (not even a solid conclusion) of finality in the last stanza.

In To Autumn, there is a repeated sense of presence/absence and comparison, much like what we also see in Ode to Psyche. Bennett points out that Ceres (Demeter) is a "pervasive absent presence" in the ode' For example, Keats draws a contrast and parallel between the "songs of spring" and the funereal music of autumn (Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn (Keats, line 27). Bennet points out that To Autumn ends autumn's funereal noise in response to the ode's earlier question ("Where are the songs of Spring? Ay where are they?", line 23).

By so doing so, Keats evokes a sense of a transitionary phase from the other seasons as autumn is a bridge between summer and winter. Autumn is the season when life

is at its fullest (fields bursting with crops and fruits), but at the same time, decay is slowly setting in. A season between the hottest days (summer) and the coldest nights (winter). It exists in a place where life and its hustle and bustle are still celebrated yet prepares for its long slumber for the onset of winter. Keats even managed to appropriate the harvest goddess's life-giving and abundant characteristics into the ode, but also at the same time hints at slow (and essential) deterioration and decomposition to restart the cycle over again. Keats's tendency for comparison is evident in the ode. Bennet theorises that Keats's theme of "absence and presence" in the ode is about Ceres and the anonymous gleaner; however, it is about Autumn and the objects in comparison (the seasons, the songs, the time of day). Autumn itself is a transitionary period, hovering between "absence and presence", recalling the concerns and "half–knowledge" of Keats's portrayal of

Ultimately, Keats's To Autumn is a celebration of a transitionary period from the fullness of life to the silent embrace of death and slumber. Keats managed to capture the essence of Demeter as the goddess of harvest and plenty and appropriate it to his personification of autumn. In his ode, he successfully paints a picture of autumn, not just as a season, but as an allegory between two opposing forces such as life and death (rebirth). Keats manages to inject Greek elements into a poem that has no evident and explicit ties into Hellenism with his borrowing of Demeter–like features for autumn. In doing so, Keats also reflects his own status of belatedness as a poet, where he hovers between a despondent yet aspiring modern poet and longs for the golden age of poetry in Ancient Greece. His predisposition for Hellenism coloured his personification of autumn. He perfectly personified autumn with Demeter's role as a harvest goddess and her personality. She is present and,

yet at the same time, absent in the ode. She is both a nurturing mother and a deathly demise, but nevertheless always holds a promise for renewal and new opportunities.

Chapter 4

Ode on a Grecian Urn: Three Ways of Looking at Keats's Ancient Artefact

Among all of Keats's poems, the Ode on a Grecian Urn is undeniably the complex embodiment of quintessential Keatsian themes – Hellenism, belatedness, beauty, truth, art, death, eternality and impermanence. It is perhaps the most "Greek" of all the other poems written by Keats, as Matthew Arnold comments that the first three lines of the poem are "Greek, as Greek as a thing from Homer or Theocritus".[157] Debates over the two last lines continue over the two last centuries to now – and as Walter H. Evert rightfully points out, most of the readings differ on whether we read them as one single summary or as two separate lines – statement and counterstatement – made by the urn and the speaker.[158] There are several interpretations as to the meaning of the last two lines, with James O'Rourke summarizing the debate as "either an idealistic or a realistic view of reality".[159] At the same time, Jacob D. Wigod argues that the "implicit subject of the Ode on a Grecian Urn is the ideal itself".[160] Implicitness is also what David K. Cornelius sees, and he urges the reader to read the poem by focusing on "what it does *not* say".[161] Elliot M. Schrero concludes that "some commentators read the concluding sentence as an address by the poet to his readers, others read it as part of the urn's lesson to humanity".[162] In a more recent analysis, Paul Bentley brings into a "third party" by interpreting the Grecian urn poem as "a disguised Socratic dialogue with

[157] Arnold quoted in Claude Lee. *The Evolution of Keats's Poetry, Volume II* Harvard University Press, 2013. p. 640
[158] Walter H. Evert. *Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of Keats*. Princeton University Press, p. 314.
[159] James O'Rourke. "Persona and Voice in the '*Ode on a Grecian Urn*'." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1987, pp. 27
[160] J. D. Wigod "Keats's Ideal in the *Ode on a Grecian Urn*." *PMLA*, vol. 72, no. 1, 1957, p.113.
[161] David K. Cornelius "Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*." *The Explicator*, vol. 20, no. 5, 1962, p. 108.
[162] Elliot M. Schrero "Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*." *Chicago Review*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1954,, p.77.

the critics".[163] It is the ultimate question coined by Stillinger's chapter on "Who Says What to Whom at the End of 'Ode on a Grecian Urn?". [164] Indeed, critics have very different readings on the two lines. Evert himself reads them as two separate lines, as "the logic of the poem's argumentative development and the textual evidence" compel the reader "to read the lines as statement and counterstatement".[165] This chapter offers an alternative perspective on these two lines in relation to Keats and the question of Hellenism and belatedness.

First Way of Looking

In reading the ode, the reader will notice an emphasis on "distance" within the poem. Distance in the temporal and physical sense. The ode is full of imagery of physical distance (Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/Are sweeter; and Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss' (line 17) that reflects the temporal distance between the speaker and the urn itself. It is as if there is a dual discourse going on between the speaker – one in the literal and the other in the figurative sense. The physical distance manifests the temporal distance in the ode. We can see the poet's despair of the temporal displacement with his rhetorical, despondent questions in stanzas 1 and 4.

> 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? // Who are these coming to the sacrifice? //And all her silken flanks with garlands drest? // Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn? (Keats, lines 7-10, 31, & 34)

This is related to Keats and his struggle with temporal displacement from Grecian art and poetry. The distance evoked in the ode is also apparent in its temporal

[163] Paul Bentley. "Keats's Odes, Socratic Irony, and Regency Reviewers." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 62, 2013, p.115.
[164] Jack Stillinger. *Twentieth–Century Interpretations of Keats's Odes* Prentice–Hall, 1968 p.113.
[165] Evert, p.314

dimensions. The urn is preserved from the day it was created and until thousands of years later in contrast to the temporally remote and youthful speaker. The speaker is appreciative of the urn's apparent escape from temporality and is drawn to the forever–frozen actions in the ode, such as the piper's "unheard" (lines 11-12) song or the preserved love and beauty of the young lovers. At first glance, one would think that this experience trumps all other human experiences – after all, is it not better to live forever in anticipation of the moment? Inevitably, despite the tempting idea of immortality that the urn offers, the speaker realises that they can never equate to the urn on such a level since the speaker is inescapably human and subject to the passage of time. With this disconnect and distance to the temporal sense of the speaker, they abandon their attempt to identify with the images on the urn. From the warm musings of the speaker, they realise that the ode suddenly turns cold and indifferent, reminding the reader of their mortality ("As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!/When old age shall this generation waste", lines 45-46). However, the urn can still be a "balm" to man as the ages pass by as it offers a glimpse of the past, yet whatever connection the urn can offer the speaker will be forever distant and removed since it is not mortal and ultimately belated to the humans observing the urn.

This "belatedness" to Greece, as pointed out by Martin Aske, has permeated his works – a sense of being inscribed in the "just–after" is present in them. Grant Scott thinks of Keats as a poet "immediately confronted with a sense of his own belatedness" in On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer and the Elgin Marbles'". Keats himself is aware of his own belatedness and has self–consciously created his own set of renditions of classical myths to fit his understanding of Greece.

Second Way of Looking

Another important facet of Keats's Grecian Urn is an emphasis on "incompleteness" or the absence of a fully–achieved state – as Evert sees it the poem occupies an "incommensurate" state.[166] The ode is not just a repository of conflicting and incomplete statements, but the ode itself is an "incomplete" work. The sense of incompleteness is central to the overall feeling that the ode projects as a whole, especially with its unanswered questions in stanzas 1 and 4, plus the riddle of beauty at the end ("Beauty is truth, truth beauty, —that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know'", lines 49-50). The last line itself is enigmatic, as it does not definitively tell the reader whether it is the speaker addressing the urn, or if it is the urn addressing mankind in general. If it is the former, then our speaker is talking about his awareness of mortality's limitation – the urn will forever be covered with beautiful and truthful renditions of the past, but our speaker will not be there to witness them. Human life is infinitely more complex than can be encapsulated or equated in one line as "Beauty is truth, truth beauty, —that is all", but for the urn, this is its truth. If it is the latter, then the urn is giving humanity a largely important lesson, and that of all human complexities, the only thing that matters is that we know beauty and truth are one.

As the ode ends with a sense of frustrated incompleteness, it opens with another set of tensions expressed in oxymoronic imagery. Keats talks of an "unravish'd bride of quietness", letting the speaker know that (taken literally) despite the status as a bride, it is still untouched. The process of being a bride is incomplete, and the qualifier "of quietness" leads us to think that there is something missing. Weddings

[166] Evert, p. 315.

are generally occasions of merriment and jubilation, with exultant music playing constantly. That Keats is saying "of quietness" in relation to an "unravished bride" is already portraying incompleteness itself.

In addition, lines 2 and 3 also show incompleteness and silence ("Thou foster–child of silence and slow time,/Sylvan historian, who canst thus express", lines 2-3). These lines tell of the vast expanse of time that the urn has witnessed. Keats compares the urn as a foster child to the concept of silence and slow time here, forever waiting and waiting. Also, by putting the urn as a "Sylvan historian", it connects the speaker's moment in time with all that the urn has experienced. Even certain actions of the figures in the urn have no conclusion.

There is no distinct or satisfying natural end to these actions – the music will never be heard, the lovers can never truly kiss, the town streets forever are silent, the "folks" can never return to their citadel, the leaves will never shed, and the urn will remain as is even when old age comes to the speaker. The figures are forever in action (or inaction) and their goals are incomplete.

Despite the bright portrayal of Ancient Grecian life in the urn, the speaker eventually sees that they can only reminisce about it and never experience it fully. While the effort to try and experience what once was is commendable, the urn can never give the full narrative when it was made. It can only tell a very select story; hence, the speaker cannot thoroughly see the past through the urn. However incomplete, the speaker, at the very least, has achieved a glimpse of Ancient Greece, which could be a balm to their soul. Using the speaker's imagination, they have transported themselves briefly to a particular moment in history, reliving it in honour and wonder. Regarding incompleteness, the ode does acknowledge that

although the urn is immortal, it can never have the full story of the world, but it does help tell its stories – it serves as a recorded account of what it was like in Grecian time. In this way, what the urn is doing for the speaker is what the ode does for the reader. It allows the reader to experience what Keats the speaker is experiencing and feeling as he contemplates the object when he authored the poem in the nineteenth century. The speaker is sharing his musings on two completely different points in time, giving the reader a third point of view when they compare them in their own time.

This incompleteness is another manifestation of Keats's relationship with Hellenism. Aside from the temporal distance that Keats has from Ancient Greece, the ode serves as a metaphor for his relationship with Greece because it also remains incomplete due to temporal distance and his innate lack of proper Greek knowledge.

Finney has identified there are two kinds of beauty from Greek life portrayed in the poem: "the beauty of the Bacchic throng, a beauty of youth and energy and joy; and the beauty of the pastoral sacrifice, a beauty of clear serenity and quiet piety." When explaining the sources of the two forms of beauty, Finney writes, "He [Keats] learned the beauty which he associated with Greek life from Greek sculpture, which he saw in fragmentary but original form, rather than from Greek poetry, which he read in warped and coloured translations".[167] Finney's observation is illuminating and relevant in the sense that attempts to identify where the sense of "distance" and "incompleteness" comes from – as Keats's engagement with Hellenism is not just through literature, but also through the fragments of sculpture. This idea of Keats's

[167] Finney, p. 640.

fractured experience of ancient sculpture– by electing the presentation of a sculpture–like *objet d'art* through the linguistic medium of a poem.

Third Way of Looking

Many critics have neglected the negatively capable aspect of Keats's Ode on a Grecian Urn.[168] Nathan Comfort Starr, however, praises the poem as "the most serene and moving expression of Keats's Negative Capability,"[169] but his very brief reading can be expanded with an eye on the topic of Keats and Hellenism.

Stanzas 2 and 3 are fraught with "negativities": "unheard", "not", "no tone", "canst not leave", "nor ever", "never, never", "do not grieve", "cannot fade", "hast not", "that cannot shed", "nor ever bid". These "negative" elements in the poem – distance and incompleteness (as they are naturally "undesirable" factors) have been put under scrutiny by critics, but on second thought, it might also be the opposite. There are a few examples in the poem that show that distance and incompleteness, in fact, foster positive results, and they are indispensable for the creation of "beauty". Indeed, the representation of beauty in the poem is closely associated with "distance" and "incompleteness".[170] For example, there is distance with the melody so that it cannot be explicitly heard, but instead, the speaker is content with them not hearing it but still encourages the "unheard" melody to play on. Cornelius points out that the "unheard melodies" are, in fact, the silent response of the observer that "answers" the questions in stanza 1.[171] It is the distance and incompleteness which

[169] Nathan Comfort Starr. "Negative Capability in Keats's Diction." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 15, 1966, pp. 59–68. p.66.
[169] Nathan Comfort Starr. "Negative Capability in Keats's Diction." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 15, 1966, pp. 59–68. p.66.
[170] Finney has identified there are two kinds of beauty from Greek life portrayed in the poem: "the beauty of the Bacchic throng, a beauty of youth and energy and joy; and the beauty of the pastoral sacrifice, a beauty of clear serenity and quiet piety." When explaining the sources of the two forms of beauty, he writes, "He [Keats] learned the beauty which he associated with Greek life from Greek sculpture, which he saw in fragmentary but original form, rather than from Greek poetry, which he read in warped and colored translations".
[171] Cornelius, p.108.

makes the melodies "sweeter" than the melody that our ears can experience. If we follow Cornelius and take the "unheard melodies" as a guide to the questions that the urn provokes questions, then the poem is directing us to hear on a "metaphysical/spiritual level, which demands of us a negatively capable empathy with the spirit beyond physical sensation. Finney summarises it brilliantly, "The melody of their pipes timbrels touches our imagination but not our ears."[172] The distance and incompleteness, in this sense, elevate our engagement with art to a higher level. Equally, the reading of the poem, to borrow Starr's term, requires "our mind's eye";[173] through imagination, the distance and incompleteness are replaced by a vivid representation of Grecian scenes. Such "half–knowledge" allows imagination to flourish, as we are in a negatively capable mode of being "without any irritable reaching after fact and reason".

Consequently, the unfulfilled kiss can also be viewed positively and not piteously. The "fair youth" can never kiss their lover, having been frozen in time in the urn ("Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss", (line 17)." While they can never kiss, they are always in the status of love – their existence and relationship achieved a form of incomplete "eternity". The maiden will forever be beautiful, and they will forever be in love ("She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,/For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!", lines 19-20). This eternity urges the speaker to encourage them (and, by extension, himself) to "do not grieve because the beauty in the relationship is eternal. Schrero has provided an interesting reading of the lovers' relationship by looking into the poem from entirely the speaker's point of

[172] Claude Lee Finney. *The Evolution of Keats's Poetry, Volume II* Harvard University Press, 2013. p.638.
[173] Nathan Comfort Starr argues that "Keats transcend the uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts of earthly experience in his *Ode on a Grecian Urn*", and through the "mind's eye we see the luxuriant greed reeds of spring along the shore of the lake, beside which melodious birds sing madrigals." Starr's paper focuses on the elaboration of negative capability in Keats's poems, and I endeavour to put his reading into the context of Hellenism – it is the negative capability that allows the "mind's eye" to function (without the need for negative capability, we view things from a physical level), which is a critical factor that bridges the distance between ourselves and Hellenism. See p.66.

view. He writes, "at once the speaker perceives the painful contrast which his own desire to console the lover has brought him to realise: it is he himself who is to be pitied; for the figures on the urn, conceived as sentient, enjoy unchanging happiness, whereas the speaker, like all men, is doomed to suffer the corruption and decay even of love itself."[174] Human (the audience) may feel pity for the couple because they can never kiss, being frozen in time; but equally the couple on the urn can also feel "pity" for human as we are, we can never achieve eternity as they can. The distant and incomplete kiss between the lovers, in this angle, is a symbol of their eternal love. It is of the same "unconsummated" but "eternal" nature of the unravished bride and foster–child. Keats's choice of choosing "incomplete" imagery on the urn, corresponds to his own definition of beauty[175]; that beauty is truth, and it manifests itself after a journey through "uncertainties, mysteries, doubts".

In fact, the comparison of the lover's situation both in art and reality, echoes the theme of the poem: art's eternality versus human's transience. Bentley mentions that Keats's way of handling Greek mythology in the poem is heavily influenced by Hazlitt's description of Wordsworth,[176] and argues that the young poet's "benighted experience of the urn nevertheless brings it [the urn] to life", and this experience is "continuous with eternity", which resembles the teaching of Socrates in *Phaedrus*.

[174] Schrero, p.80.
[175] Ronald Sharp has given an interesting argument about the role beauty plays in Keats's work. He writes, "at the foundation that conception – indeed, at the foundation of Keats's work – is the paradox that a sense of mortality increases one's sense of beauty, that life accrues value precisely to the extent that one intensely experiences it as fragile and transitory". In the "Grecian Urn" poem, objects of mortality, are present as the object of eternality through the medium of imagination of art. The lovers, if they are human in the world of life, are doomed to mortality; but in the world of art, their love is eternal. This applies to all the "human figures" in the urn. In the poem, it is not "suffering and mortality" that "intensify beauty" (Sharp, p. 132); it is distance and incompleteness that is at the core of beauty. They do not merely "intensify" them; they are the component of beauty, as Keats's choice of all the imageries on the urn, are all distant and incomplete. That suffering and mortality are important to reading Keats's notion of beauty may be true to the other odes, but in this ekphrastic piece, beauty is present as a work of distance and incompleteness. See Ronald A. Sharp, "Keats and Friendship*." The Kenyon Review*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1999. pp.124–137.
[176] Bentley cites Hazlitt that Wordsworth traces "the fictions of Eastern mythology to the immediate intercourse of the imagination with Nature, and to the habitual propensity of the human mind to endow the outward forms of being with life and conscious motion". See William Hazlitt. Quoted by Paul Bentley. "Keats's Odes, Socratic Irony, and Regency Reviewers." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 62, 2013 p.129.

Whether the urn reflects Socratic philosophy is another debate – the poem has explicitly indicated a sense of continuity and eternity with the repetitive use of the term "more" (repeated in stanzas 1, 2,3, and echoed in the "evermore" of stanza 4):

The term appears in every stanza except the last stanza; and the use of the "more" indicates comparison, the "more" in the first two stanzas shows the speaker's preference for the art world over the world of reality,[177] as it is more "sweetly" and "endear'd"; the other two "more" in stanza 3 also indicates the eternality in the world of art while indirectly contrasting the transient world of reality: there will be more and more "love" without an end, and the street is "for evermore" be silent.[178] Either way, the term "more" implies a comparison between the world of art and the world of reality, from the speaker's preference and a temporal sense.

The ode poses the beauty and truth riddle at the end, but it is through the speaker's negatively capable musings that we intuitively feel the connection to beauty and truth without having to explicitly define it. In fact, their one–way conversation with the urn. The poem's repetitive emphasis on silence hints at the answer: while they did not find an explicit, iron-clad meaning to these questions, the poem directs them to beauty and truth in the end— "beauty is truth, truth beauty'". The beauty and

[177] Regarding the position of the urn in relation to human experience, O'Rourke argues that at the end of the poem, "the urn is no longer 'far above' the human experience of temporality but is in the 'midst' of that experience." He writes, "the initial valorizations of the urn for its embodiment of transcendent philosophical themes are ultimately replaced by an appreciation of its sheer beauty, which does not translate into thought". (p.46). The reading fails to take the entire structure of the poem into consideration. From stanzas 1 to 4, the term "more" as indicated above, indicates the superiority of art over life experiences. The phrase, "dost tease us out of thought", at first glance, seems to indicate the inability of the urn to "translate into thought", but this interpretation is partial because it neglects the following terms, "as doth eternity". The angle of the speaker's representation of the urn, is not the inability of the urn, but the inability of humans – to fully comprehend the urn (incompleteness and distance), same as we can never attain eternity. See James O'Rourke. "Persona and Voice in the '*Ode on a Grecian Urn*'." *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1987, p.46.

[178] Schrero argues that the speaker is no longer an outsider of the art world in Stanza IV, and there is a "movement from being without to being with the world of urn" because of the absence of the contrast between the world of urn and reality in stanza IV, unlike the previous stanzas. However, the consecutive use of the word "more" in the term "for evermore", as discussed above, shows an implicit but direct contrast between the world of reality and the world of the urn/art. A real town cannot exist "for evermore", and hence the comparison still exists. I argue that the speaker co–exists both in the world of art and that of reality – as physical form, he naturally exists in reality – but his imagination allows the birth of the urn, and hence he is present in both worlds in a dynamic way. To put this in another way, it is fairly natural for a human to "physically" exist in reality, but his imagination can allow him to "live" spiritually, though maybe temporally, in another space/time/world. See Elliot M. Schrero, "Keats's *Ode on a Grecian Urn*." *Chicago Review*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1954, p.77.

truth to the answers exist inherently within the existence of the urn in the poem, the embodiment of beauty, and they cannot be represented otherwise, as beauty and truth are equal; they are one.[179] They exist in the form of incompleteness and distance. The urn does not "tease both poet and reader" because its very existence is already the answer to all their questions. It is contrary to what Aske argues, "it [the urn] can only question and hesitatingly surmise" and fail to "describe and transpose".[180] This is not true. The urn remains purely and consistently the "silent form" throughout the poem. Its existence addresses the questions and surmises—as an object of beauty and truth, it itself is the answer to all the questions. Cornelius argues that the Ode on a Grecian Urn is only able to communicate one kind of truth – aesthetic truth[181], but this reading is simply a literal reading of the line "beauty is truth, truth beauty". The position of these lines – that they appear at the end of the poem as a sort of conclusion implies that the two lines mean more than simply aesthetic truth. Their appearance is reinforced by the entire structure of the poem; it begins with questions and ends with affirmations "that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know".[182] It ends with a cautionary affirmation that there is nothing more that needs to be known. This is a statement to the urn, as well as to all the spectator's questions associated with the urn. In this sense, the structure of

[179] Dries Vrijders argues that "What makes the ode so effective, however, is not just the imaginative power of this idea, but the fact that the poem, as a symbolic artefact that turns over against its nonsymbolic origins, unites both subject matter and procedure. Its symbolicity is what enables the ode to address us beyond the confines of its age, yet this ability for historical survival also closes it off from straightforward historicist recuperation." I agree with Vriijders that the urn units "both subject matter and procedure" in the poem, but the reading of this embedded symbolicity becomes more effective if we put it into an appropriate context – what is it symbolic for? The urn, from the beginning to the end of the poem, embodies beauty. It appears as an object of beauty and ends with it. See Dries Vrijders. "History, Poetry, and the Footnote: Cleanth Brooks and Kenneth Burke on Keats's '*Ode on a Grecian Urn*'." *New Literary History,* vol. 42, no. 3, 2011 p.546.
[180] See Aske, p. 103
[181] Cornelius, p. 110.
[182] Grant F. Scott argues that the incomplete marriage in the beginning stanza has been consummated in the end, as the "unravished bride" becomes a "sophisticated confidante" by giving advice "Beauty is truth, truth beauty' – that is all… ye need to know" by giving the point of view of a sophisticated mother. He writes, "quietness" has managed to consummate the marriage" (See Grant F Scott. "The Sculpted Word: Keats, Ekphrasis, and the Visual Arts." *Keats–Shelley Journal*, vol. 43, 1994, p.144). This angle offers a different reading from most critics by seeing the questions as a symbol of "consummation" instead of labelling it as enigma and questions. It doesn't "open up" but "close down" (as in a consummation of marriage). One major problem of this reading lies on the debate whether the voice in the end belongs to the same voice appeared in the first stanza. Is it from the speaker or the urn itself? This remains largely unaddressed in Scott's claim.

the poem echoes Keats's illustration of negative capability – the poem poses distance and incompleteness ("uncertainties, mysteries, doubts") in the beginning stanza, which demands our "content with half–knowledge", as the embodiment of Beauty, the urn rules beyond all.

This importance of beauty was not new to Keats, as he already had it in his mind as early as 1817. In his 1817 letter to Benjamin Bailey, "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be the truth—whether it existed before or not".[183] The "truth" of the poem is inherently embedded in the very existence of the urn itself—an object of beauty created by imagination. Keats's urn, unlike the Elgin Marbles, is essentially a creation of the speaker's imagination of Grecian Urns. It is of a similar nature to the "fane" in "some untrodden region" of the speaker's mind that it does not embody historicity within. In these "region", the temporal distance between the urn/speaker, or Hellenism/Keats, is disregarded because whether the "urn" existed before or not will not affect the truth it embodies, irrespective of the temporality of the viewer and the poet. Keats had been consistent in his perception of truth – he had always viewed it from the point of view of beauty instead of the temporal sense, as in 1817 and 1819. In an 1819 letter to George and Georgiana Keats, he writes, "I never can feel certain of any truth but from a clear perception of its Beauty". His preoccupations with temporality are undeniable, but the issue of belatedness does not impede the embodiment of truth in art:

> The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth.[184]

[183] John Keats. Letter To Benjamin Bailey. November 22, 1817
[184] Stephen Hebron. "An Introduction to 'Ode on a Grecian Urn': Time, Mortality and Beauty." British Library, 15 May 2014, www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/an-introduction-to-ode-on-a-grecian-urn-time-mortality-and-beauty.

The fact that truth and beauty will also be embodied in the work of art is a reassurance for Keats and Hellenism. As there will always be a distance between Keats and Hellenism in a temporal sense, his work will always remain "incomplete" when compared to actual Grecian works, and he should be comforted (do not grieve) and accept this fact. Only by doing so can he be fully immersed in the immortality of art and fully commit to it ("She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,/For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!", lines 19-20). The lovers are like the relationship of Keats to Hellenism – forever yearning and never quite touching, but at the very least comforted by the fact that they share proximity. The key to the distance brought about by these temporal and intellectual differences cannot be denied, but Keats manages successfully to inhabit an imaginative "space" that spanned these temporal differences to engage afresh with Hellenism.

Coda:

Anxieties of Influence: Keats, Ancient Greece, and Subjectivity

Keats was described as a Greek in temper and spirit. What he could not gain through an original reading of Ancient Greek texts, he more than made up for it in imagination and essence. His engagement with Hellenism was mainly through poetry, but he was introduced to the Greek spirit through different forms. These factors are literary, through the translation of Greek classics (the translated works of Homer by Chapman and Alexander Pope); visual, through the famous sculptures (and attraction of its time) of the Elgin Marbles; and mythological, through John Lemprière's *A Classical Dictionary*. Through these sources, Keats was able to think like a Greek and internalise Hellenism within his own work. He wrote almost all his best works under the influence of Hellenistic culture. These different forms of sources manifest themselves in Keats's works and are a sign of his intrinsic tendency to turn towards Hellenism. The main themes of his works under the Grecian view are that of literature, art, and mythology (as evidenced by the different forms of his Grecian sources).

He drew heavily and referenced the Greek pantheon and its numerous myths in his works. Ode to Psyche*,* Ode on a Grecian Urn*,* Endymion, Lamia, Hyperion, The Eve of St. Agnes and others are rife with mentions of Greek mythology, gods, goddesses, and themes. His youthful disposition has been fueled by other contemporaries like Wordsworth, Leigh Hunt, and his own reading of Elizabethan literature. Most likely, Wordsworth's book *The Excursion* might have influenced the way Keats looked at nature and its imaginative manifestation in mythology.

This comes as a balm to Keats's lack of direct experience with Grecian literature. As mentioned, Keats knew the Greek classics only through other second–hand references and through painstaking translations by Lemprière's *A Classical Dictionary*. He knew that despite translating as closely as possible, there was no way for him essentially to distil what the original author must have meant in his works. This is a heavy blow for Keats the poet as his delight and wonder at first seeing the world with which Homer spoke of was truly magnificent.

Throughout his entire literary journey, Keats's role of engagement also changed. Keats was first a spectator of this amazing new world. He cast himself as nothing more than a reader and spectator of the new horizons given to him. It was clearly stated in the title of one of his works – On First Looking into Chapman's Homer. The title was deliberate on Keats's end: he was indeed, at this point, merely a spectator into the world created by Homer as told by Chapman. Next, he transitioned into a worshipper of Grecian mythology and deities. In Ode to Psyche, he became a worshipper of the belated goddess, even building a virtual fane or shrine for the goddess. From being a mere observer, Keats has now transitioned to a more active approach to Greek elements. He has started interacting with Hellenistic themes as much as he could within the imaginative landscape of his mind and, by doing so, he is breathing new life into the characters. What Keats could not distil originally from the golden age of poetry, he gleaned from his aesthetic appreciation of beauty. Keats's appreciation of beauty is indicative of his intrinsic "Greekness" and how he has absorbed Grecian elements into his thinking and works. For Keats, the transformative landscape of his mind had absolved him of the guilt and frustrations of not being around when the old masters of poetry

were first creating the classics. He can, with some amount of confidence, know that his own works were not as unworthy as he once thought them to be.

Lastly, Keats also became someone who directly engaged in Grecian works, as evidenced by his Ode on a Grecian Urn. The urn was representative of the speaker's own imagination. His interaction with tangible objects from the Golden Age of Hellenism (objects like the Elgin Marbles and the urn) completed his journey as a poet. Through his examination of these objects, Keats was able to have a sense of serene greatness for the artefacts of a bygone age. Keats has demonstrated to us the various forms of engagement with the ancient world through his poetic fiction. Starting from a slow, passive form which is that of a spectator and a reader, to a more active role (a worshipper of Grecian myths), and finally to a very active engagement with the retelling and reimaging of Grecian figures and narrative.

This awareness of his belated "self" has also manifested in an increasing manner from his early sonnets to his odes. It has also changed form, from his attempts at writing sonnets to his greatly acclaimed odes. His works are marked with a distinct sense of self–awareness and struggle for his temporal difference. He knew that he as a poet was born too late for the age that he aspired to, and so used Greek characters to pinpoint that belatedness (he used Psyche as a self–aware comparison to his own status as a poet). Through the superior power of Keats's mind and internalizing what it meant to be Greek (and all things Grecian), this has become his solution. As a displaced "Greek" poet (as he would count himself to be), Grecian sceneries would eventually become a natural part of his mind – as natural as breathing. His capability for imagining Grecian scenarios is akin to an original Greek poet like Homer, Virgil, or Ovid. While he did not live in their time, Keats was able to think like one and create works that could mediate that time. He used

his poetic capability for mental transformation to bridge that temporal gap, that belatedness that he found himself in. Using his power of imagination, Keats can approach the golden age of Hellenism even thousands of years later.

The "focus" of Keats's poetry shifted from spotlighting or highlighting the grandeur of Ancient Greece and other Grecian elements to that of the poet's internal mind – a mind that directly engages itself with the bygone Grecian world via only the power of imagination. While Keats's Grecian world might be different from that of his contemporaries like Byron and Shelley, Keats's imagined world was personal and internal. While Keats's Grecian world might be different from that of his contemporaries like Byron and Shelley, Keats's imagined world was personal and internal, partly since unlike the other two poets, Keats's engagement with Ancient Greece was mainly "literary", through secondary sources (as he could not read Greek and had never been to Greece), except perhaps for the encounter with the Elgin Marbles in the British museum. Byron had actively participated in the Greek War of Independence, and Shelley composed *Hellas* as a means to raise funds for the war. Keats's Hellenism lacked this dimension of engaging with the physical Greece in his works. Instead of purely looking at the external value and meaning of Grecian elements, he puts the focus on how exploring the internal (mind) can engage with and interpret what the external means.

Although an outside observer can say what a Greek urn is and what the illustrations on the urn look like, it takes the power of the mind to bring those illustrations to life. This unique Keatsian model, as proposed in my thesis, allows us to investigate Keats's engagement with ancient works of art from a different angle, one that stems purely from the poet's mind and is translated into his works. By being displaced, Keats has been granted a unique position in assuming the mantle of a "Greek" poet.

Thus, Keats's creative challenges have become windows of opportunity that he used to create his classic and enduring odes. His model allowed him to develop his own way of engaging with the world and the long–gone Hellenistic era. Instead of forever lamenting his woes, he instead found a way to turn the tide and engage with his preferred era in his own way and reimagine what it must have been like. For Keats, Greece and all its glory was not thousands of years ago but only moments away in his imagination.

Bibliography

Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford University Press, 1971.

Allott, Kenneth. The Ode to Psyche. *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1956, pp. 278–301.

Aske, Martin. *Keats and Hellenism*: *An Essay*. Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 1–2.

Bate, Jonathan. "Tom Moore and the Making of the Ode to Psyche". *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 163, 1990, pp. 325–333.

Bate, Walter Jackson. *John Keats*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

Bate, Walter Jackson. *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*. Harvard University Press, 2013.

Beach, Joseph Warren. "Keats's Realms of Gold". *PMLA*, Vol. 49, No. 1, 1934, pp. 246–257.

Bennett, Andrew. *Keats, Narrative and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing*. Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Bentley, Paul. "Keats's Odes, Socratic Irony, and Regency Reviewers". *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 62, 2013, pp. 115.

Blackmore, Josiah. "Melancholy, Passionate Love, and the Coita d'Amor". *PMLA*, Vol. 124, No. 2, 2009, pp. 640–642.

Bloom, Harold. *A Map of Misreading*. Oxford University Press, 2003.

Bloom, Harold. *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*. Cornell University Press, 1971.

Bottigheimer, Ruth. *Magic Tales and Fairy Tale Magic: From Ancient Egypt to the Italian Renaissance*. Springer, 2014.

Bowers, Susan R. "Medusa and the Female Gaze". *NWSA Journa*l, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1990, pp. 222–233.

Bracher, Mark. "Ideology and Audience Response to Death in Keats's 'To Autumn." *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 29, No. 4, 1990, pp. 649–662.

Brown, Homer. "Creations and Destroyings: Keats's Protestant Hymn, the Ode to Psyche." *Diacritics*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1976, pp. 49–60.

Burton, Robert. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. Edited by Holborn Jackson, Vol. 1, New York Review of Books, 2001.

Cicero. *De Natura Deorum* 3.17.

Comet, Noah. *Romantic Hellenism and Women Writers*. Springer, 2015.

Connolly, Joy. "Ten Reasons to Read Homer: Addressing Public Perceptions of Classical Literature." *Classical World,* Vol. 103, No. 2, 2010, pp. 232–237.

Cooper, Lane. "A Glance at Wordsworth's Reading. II". *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 22, No. 4, 1907, pp. 110–117.

Cornelius, David K. "Keats's Ode on a Grecian Urn." *The Explicator*, Vol. 20, no. 5, 1962, pp. 108–109.

Crisman, William. "A Dramatic Voice in Keats's Elgin Marbles Sonnet." *Studies in Romanticism.* Vol. 26, No.1 (1987): 49–58.

Cummings, Robert. "Keats's Melancholy in the Temple of Delight." *Keats–Shelley Journal* Vol. 36 (1987): 50–62. p. 54.

Esterhammer, Angela. "Translating the Elgin Marbles: Byron, Hemans, Keats." *The Wordsworth Circle* Vol. 40. No.1 (2009): 29–36.

Evert, Walter H. *Aesthetic and Myth in the Poetry of Keats*. Princeton University Press, 1965. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183q0xx. Accessed 4 Jan 2022.

Finney, Claude Lee. *The Evolution of Keats's Poetry, Volume II*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013.

Flautz, John. "On Most Recently Looking into On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." *CEA Critic* Vol. 40. No. 3 (1978): pp.24–27.

Frank, Bernhard. "Keats's On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" *The Explicator* Vol.42. No.1 (1983): pp. 20–21.

Frosch, Thomas. "Keats's On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." *The Explicator* Vol.62. No.3 (2004): 146–150.

Gaillard Jr, Theodore L. "Keats's To Autumn." *The Explicator* Vol. 56. No. 4 (1998): pp. 185-213.

Hamilton, Edith. "*The Greek Way to Western Civilization*." New American Library, 1963, pp. 130–134.

Harris, Lynn H. "Keats's On First Looking into Chapman's Homer." *The Explicator* Vol. 61. (1946), p. 72–73.

Hartman, Geoffrey. "Listen Up! Keats's Ode To Psyche." *The Yale Review* Vol. 99, No. 2 (2011): p.89.

Hartzell, Harold R. “Yew and Us: A Brief History of the Yew Tree.” *The American Gardener*, Vol. 96, No. 3, 1995, pp. 20–25.

Hasted, Meegan. “Chapman’s Homer and John Keats's Astronomical Textbook”. *The Explicator* Vol. 75, No.4 (2017): 260–267.

Haverkamp, Anselm. “Mourning Becomes Melancholia. A Muse Deconstructed: Keats's Ode on Melancholy.” *New Literary History* Vol. 21, No. 3 (1990): 693–706.

Hebron, Stephen. An Introduction to ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’: Time, Mortality and Beauty. *British Library*, 15 May 2014, www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/an-introduction-to-ode-on-a-grecian-urn-time-mortality-and-beauty.

Hecht, Jamey. “Scarcity and poetic election in two sonnets of John Keats.” *ELH* Vol. 61, No. 1, 1994: 103–120.

Hesiod. *Theogony*

Homer. *The Iliad by Homer*. Project Gutenberg, 1 July 2004, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/6130. Accessed on 7 October 2022.

Horne, Richard H., editor. *A New Spirit of the Age. Vol. 2.* Harper & Brothers, 1844, p. 196.

Johnson, Carl L. “The Realms of Gold”. *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1960, pp. 6–10.

Jones, John. *John Keats's Dream of Truth.* Chatto & Windus, 1969.

Junior, Democritus. *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. 1638.

Kaier, Anne, and John Hamilton Reynolds. John Hamilton Reynolds: Four New Letters. *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 30, 1981, pp. 182–190.

Keats, John, and Jeffrey N. Cox. "Keats’s Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition." 2009.

Keats, John. Letter to George and Georgiana Keats. *The Keats Letter Project*. April 30, 1819

Keats, John. To Richard Woodhouse – 27 Oct 1818. *The Keats Letters Project*, 27 Oct. 2018, keatslettersproject.com/category/correspondence/to-richard-woodhouse-27-oct-1818/. Accessed 3 November 2021.

Kramer, Lawrence. “The Return of the Gods: Keats to Rilke.” *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 17, No. 4. 1978, pp. 483–500.

Larrabee, Stephen A. *IX. Keats*. English Bards and Grecian Marbles. Columbia University Press, New York, 1943, pp. 204–232.

Lemprière, John. *Bibliotheca Classica: Or, a Classical Dictionary*. G. and C. Carvill, 1831.

Lott, James. “Keats's To Autumn: The Poetic Consciousness and the Awareness of Process.” *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 9, No. 2. 1970, pp. 73.

Lovell, Ernest J. “The Genesis of Keats's Ode To Autumn.” *The University of Texas Studies in English*, Vol. 29, 1950, pp. 204–221.

Lozano, Ann. “Phonemic Patterning in Keats's Ode on Melancholy.” *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 17, 1968, pp. 15–29.

McNally, Paul. “Keats and the Rhetoric of Association: On Looking into the Chapman's Homer Sonnet.” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 79, No. 4, 1980, pp. 530–540.

Murray, E. B. “Ambivalent Mortality in the Elgin Marbles Sonnet.” *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 20, 1971, pp. 22–36.

Nonnus. *Dionysiaca* 14.143–185.

O'Rourke, James. “Persona and Voice in the Ode on a Grecian Urn.” *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 1987, pp. 27–48.

Palgrave, Francis Turner. *The Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language: Selected and Arranged, with Notes.* Lippincott, 1884.

Pollack–Pelzner, Daniel. “Revisionary company: Keats, Homer, and Dante in the Chapman sonnet.” *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 56, 2007, pp. 39–49.

Ryan, Robert. Review of “The Sculpted Word: Keats, Ekphrasis, and the Visual Arts.” by Grant F. Scott. *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 43, 1994, pp. 109–110.

Rzepka, Charles J. “Cortez: Or Balboa, or Somebody like That: Form, Fact, and Forgetting in Keats's Chapman's Homer Sonnet.” *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 51, 2002, pp. 35–75.

Salamasius, Claudius. *Exercitationes Plinianae.* 1629, pp. 7–8.

Savarese, John. “Psyche's Whisp'ring Fan and Keats's Genealogy of the Secular.” *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 2011, pp. 393–416.

Schrero, Elliot M. “Keats’s Ode on a Grecian Urn.” *Chicago Review*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 1954, pp. 77–86.

Scott, Grant F. “Beautiful Ruins: The Elgin Marbles Sonnet in its Historical and Generic Contexts.” *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 39, 1990, pp. 123–150.

Scott, Grant F., editor. *Selected Letters of John Keats*. Harvard University Press, 2002.

Sharp, Ronald A. “Keats and Friendship”. *The Kenyon Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1999, pp. 124–137.

Sherwin, Paul. “’Dying into Life:’ Keats's Struggle with Milton in *Hyperion*.” *PMLA*, Vol. 93, No. 3, 1978, pp. 384–395.

Shotova–Nikolenko, Anna. “The Onomastic Space of John Keats's Odes.” *Professional Competencies and Educational Innovations in the Knowledge Economy: Collective Monograph*, ACCESS Journals, Vol. 8, Special Issue 2020. 2020.

Slote, Bernice. “Of Chapman's Homer and Other Books.” *College English*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1962, pp. 256–60. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/373064. Accessed 3 March 2022.

Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. “Sorrow's Mysteries: Keats's Ode on Melancholy.” *Studies in English Literature,* 1500–1900, Vol. 6, no. 4, 1966, pp. 677–691.

Starr, Nathan Comfort. “Negative Capability in Keats's Diction”. *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 15, 1966, pp. 59–68.

Statius, *Thebaid* 10.86–92.

Stilinger, Jack. *Twentieth–Century Interpretations of Keats's Odes.* Prentice–Hall, 1968.

Thompson, Leslie M. “Ritual Sacrifice and Time in Ode on a Grecian Urn.” *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 21, 1972, pp. 27–29.

Underwood, Simeon. “English Translators of Homer from George Chapman to Christopher Loge”. *English Romantic Hellenism* 1700–1824, edited by E. T. Webb, Manchester UP, 1982.

Vendler, Helen. “John Keats: Perfecting the Sonnet. Bloom's Modern Critical Views *John Keats*” Updated Edition, edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House Publishers, 2007, pp. 244–260.

Vendler, Helen. *The Odes of John Keats*. Harvard University Press, 1983.

Vrijders, Dries. “History, Poetry, and the Footnote: Cleanth Brooks and Kenneth Burke on Keats's Ode on a Grecian Urn.” *New Literary History,* Vol. 42, No. 3, 2011, pp. 545–568.

Wagner, Robert D. “Keats: Ode to Psyche and the Second *Hyperion*.” *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 13, 1964, pp. 35–43.

Walcutt, Charles C. “Keats's On First Looking into Chapman’s Homer'.” *The Explicator*, Vol. 5, No. 8, 1947, p. 56.

Waldoff, Leon. “The Theme of Mutability in the Ode to Psyche.” *PMLA*, Vol. 92, No. 3, 1977, pp. 405–416.

Wallace, Jennifer. *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism*. *Springer*, 1997, p. 3.

Ward, Aileen. “The Odes of John Keats by Helen Vendler: A Review”. *The Wordsworth Circle*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 1984, pp. 92–94.

Wicker, C. V. “Cortez–Not Balboa.” *College English*, Vol. 17, No. 7, 1956, pp. 383–387.

Wigod, J. D. “Keats's Ideal in the Ode on a Grecian Urn.” *PMLA*, Vol. 72, No. 1, 1957, pp. 111–124.

Wolfson, Susan J. “‘Slow Time’, ‘a Brooklet, Scarce Espied': Close Reading, Cleanth Brooks, John Keats.” *The Work of Reading*, edited by Paula Rabinowitz, Palgrave Macmillan, Vol. 9, No. 2. 2021, pp. 195–210.

Woodring, Carl. “On Looking into Keats's Voyagers.” *Keats–Shelley Journal*, Vol. 14, 1965, pp. 15–22.

Yost, George. “Keats's Tonal Development.” *Studies in English Literature*, 1500–1900, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1983, pp. 567–578.