A PHENOMENOLOGICAL READING OF KEATS'S ODES

INSIDE AND AROUND THE URN:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL READING OF KEATS'S ODES

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides phenomenological interpretations of Keats's odes. The numerous paradoxes evoked in the odes reflect Keats's vacillation between immediate, beautiful phenomena and a philosophical acknowledgement of their evanescence. This dual perception is also apparent in his attitude to art, which is seen as either an illusory distortion of the actual world, or a medium through which one transcends one's temporality and participates in the immortal realm.

The theoretical introduction briefly outlines the history of phenomenology and the schools of literary criticism it has influenced. Most important to my analysis are the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose philosophical hermeneutics suggests that interpretation in the humanities must evolve from our knowledge of tradition rather than from scientific method, and of Wolfgang Iser, whose reader-response theory of literature stresses the role of individual readers in formulating a text's meaning.

With one section of the central chapter devoted to each of the poems, I apply phenomenological concepts to the odes which elucidate Keats's use of paradox, his view of the relation between time and space, and his theory of the development of the self through its experience with the world of phenomena. The collective speakers in the odes move towards a broader perspective, being increasingly able to balance their appreciation of ephemeral beauty with a transcendent acceptance of human limitation; in the same way,

the reader gains self-awareness in achieving a balance between her personal disposition and the meaning emitted by the text.

It is remarkable that few critics have interpreted Keats's odes from a phenomenological perspective, which encourages an open-minded attitude to the world without denying more transcendent, spiritual truths, both aspects central to these poems. A study of the odes must not seek to explain contradictions, but to accept them as fundamental paradoxes of experiential life.

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INTRODUCTION

As Karl Kroeber has pointed out, "True Romantic art is an act of participation in the phenomenal process it represents" (304). He "hesitate[s] to call the Romantics phenomenologists," but claims "It seems wiser, and simpler, to say that their poetry is of how things happen" (304). However, applying some phenomenological concepts to Romantic poetry certainly elucidates the poets' attitudes towards the working of the mind, our means of experiencing the world, and the poetic process whereby experience is transformed, or recreated, in thought and language. John Keats's odes reflect a concern with these aspects of phenomenology; Keats seems torn between an experiential approach to life, the view that "axioms in philosophy are not axioms until they are proved upon our pulses" (Letters 1: 279), and a rational approach, his belief that "An extensive knowledge is needful to thinking people--it takes away the heat and fever; and helps, by widening speculation, to ease the Burden of the Mystery" (Letters 1: 277). He concludes that "Every department of knowledge we see excellent and calculated towards a great whole" (Letters 1: 277)--thus, complete experience and knowledge must include both the senses and the mind. Keats's poetry, then, is parallel to the philosophy of phenomenology: both attempt to reconcile the two spheres of experience, uniting intense self-reflection with an openness to sensed phenomena.

The speakers in Keats's odes often perceive contradictory elements in their world, and in attempting to reconcile these contradictions through self-examination, they achieve a broader, more holistic view of human life. The

constant tension in the odes between feeling and thought, between the speaker's present appreciation of actuality and his more philosophical awareness of temporality and limitation, results in numerous paradoxes. For instance, in the "Ode to a Nightingale," the speaker's wish for death causes both a heightened awareness of the senses and the annihilation of his identity; the arrested motion of the figures on the Grecian Urn indicates that they exist in a state of both being and becoming; in "To Autumn," the ripeness of the fruits and flowers merges with their inevitable decay. Keats's simultaneous evocation of object and subject, beauty and truth, awareness and annihilation, ripening and decay, joy and melancholy, suggests his acceptance of those paradoxes which arise naturally in human life. The numerous contradictions which characterize the odes are not troublesome; rather, they are to be accepted as fundamental reflections of the human condition.

Keats's vacillation between a full acceptance of evanescent, sensed experience and a more transcendent perspective is typical of a phenomenological approach to life. Wolfgang Iser's reception theory of reading, like Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, evokes paradoxes similar to those which arise in Keats's odes; both systems of thought are based on a dialectical process which seeks to reconcile opposing factors by looking for similarities between them, without obliterating the identity of the individual parts. Approaching Keats's odes with such phenomenological theories in mind leads to a fuller understanding of the universal contradictions evoked in the odes; in performing a dialectical act on these paradoxes, the reader experiences an expansion of consciousness and self-awareness parallel to--sometimes greater than--that of the speaker. It is surprising that very few critics have attempted to study Keats's work from this perspective, given that

it corresponds closely, it seems, with Keats's own approach to life. A summary of phenomenological thought, and of the branch of literary criticism it has fostered, is a necessary introduction to this analysis of the Great Odes.

Phenomenology is grounded in the writings of Edmund Husserl, who tried to establish certainty in his philosophy by examining only immanent, essential phenomena. Husserl adopts the Kantian distinction between two different types of knowledge: "For Kant the immanent is experiential as opposed to non-experiential or transcendent" (Runes 141). Subject and object are inseparable in Husserl's phenomenology, since in perception, there is no object without a subject and no subject without an object. Therefore, there is no division between being and meaning, or between the mind and the world. Husserl introduces the concept of the transcendental ego, whose

> 'putting out of play' of all positions taken towards the already-given Objective world and, in the first place, all existential positions ... --or, as it is called, this 'phenomenological epoché' and 'parenthesizing' of the Objective world-- ... does not leave us confronting nothing. On the contrary we gain possession of something by it; and what ... I acquire by it is my pure living, with all the pure subjective processes making this up. (20)

The act of epoché allows the self to be fused, through empathy, with the objects it perceives in the external world.

When applied to aesthetics and to the grasping of literary texts, Husserl's phenomenology suggests that the interpreter ought to read the text in an immanent way, bracketing all mental constructs which are not included within it. The text is experienced as a whole which represents the author's consciousness. In order to interpret a text properly, the reader must attempt to understand how the author perceived reality. Aspects of the author's lebenswelt, or life-world, are revealed through indications in the text. The life-world is implicit and prior to all experience; according to Husserl, it is

"constituted by transcendental subjectivity" (Weinsheimer 157). Hans-Georg Gadamer, who sees the life-world as the context within which a new object is understood, describes it more broadly as "the world in which we live in the natural attitude which never as such becomes objective for us but on the contrary represents the pregiven ground of all experience" (Truth 218). For Gadamer, then, the object of reading is not to view various elements of the text from an objective perspective, but rather, to experience the text as a whole entity, allowing a fusion to take place between the life-world of the text and that of each reader.

In contrast, the phenomenological approach to literature which grew out of Husserl's system of thought attempts to grasp objectively, through epoché, the mode in which the author perceived his relation to the world--to time, to space, to his own self, and to the events he experienced. As Terry Eagleton explains,

> To seize these transcendental structures, to penetrate to the very interior of a writer's consciousness, phenomenological criticism tries to achieve a complete objectivity and disinterestedness. It must purge itself of its own predilections, plunge itself empathetically into the 'world' of the work, and reproduce as exactly and unbiasedly as possible what it finds there. (59)

The reader plays a passive role, rather than an active one, in interpreting the text. Meaning is derived from the author's life-world and its recreation in the text. Because of her[1] openness, the reader is continually reborn when she confronts a new text or a new experience. As the existential phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty writes,

> Given a perpetually new natural and historical situation to control, the perceiving subject undergoes a continued birth; at

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[1]Throughout the thesis, the reader will be called "she," and the odes' speakers will be referred to as "he."

> each instant it is something new. Every incarnate subject is like an open notebook in which we do not yet know what will be written. (6)

The view that the critic must be open and passive in order to grasp the author's intention, that she must leave aside all cultural, historical and biographical aspects of her own or the author's life, was adopted by the Geneva School of criticism. Georges Poulet, for instance, writes that reading "is the act in which the subjective principle which I call I, is modified in such a way that I no longer have the right, strictly speaking, to consider it as my I" (57). The work fills the reader's consciousness, causing the reader to suspend her own intentions, remaining in a tranced state whereby her personal identity is bracketed until the reading process is terminated. In suspending her self, the reader constructs a new reading of the text, and, to some extent, a new reading self, because she grasps the author's intention in her own subjective way. Each reader brings the text into a living existence:

> I ought not to hesitate to recognize that so long as it is animated by this vital inbreathing inspired by the act of reading, a work of literature becomes (at the expense of the reader whose life it suspends) a sort of human being, that it is a mind conscious of itself and constituting itself in me as the subject of its own objects. (Poulet 59)

Poulet focuses on the present moment of grasping the text. His extremely self-reflective view of the reading process, in which the reading subject allows the aesthetic object itself to become the subject, makes objective meaning impossible. The act of reading transcends the objective forms in the text, and so, the newly-created subject--the work--remains indefinable: "no object can any longer express it, no structure can any longer define it; it is exposed in its ineffability and in its fundamental indeterminacy" (68). Poulet's view corresponds to the Romantic notion that the text is a living, organic unit which each reader experiences in her own way. As

Eichner explains, the Romantics "exchanged the mechanistic assumptions associated with modern science for an equally sweeping organicism" (15), recognizing that "individuals can only grasp and reveal [higher] knowledge in the light of their own individual and unique perspectives" (19). However, Poulet's claim that the author's intention takes over, temporarily annhilating the reader's subjectivity, to a certain extent denies the individuality of readers and contradicts his own organic, open-ended view of the reading process.

The reader is constantly aware, as her subjectivity gives way to that of the author, that the thoughts in her mind are not her own. The division between the author's intention and the reader's grasping of this intention, however, is profound. There is a delay between the time of the author's creation of the text and the time of the re-birth of this creation in the reader's consciousness. Subject and object do not join; rather, the literary object engulfs the reading subject. Since the dichotomy between subject and object cannot be eliminated fully during reading, it seems unlikely that the reader's consciousness would never become critical. Poulet's idealized vision whereby criticism "needs to annihilate, or at least momentarily to forget, the objective elements of the work, and to elevate itself to the apprehension of a subjectivity without objectivity" (68) becomes impossible because of the ever-present division between author and reader. Moreover, despite its openness, Poulet's theory is not altogether useful in terms of its contribution to literary theory because it ignores the fact that the text may include some dimensions of meaning that the author himself was not aware of, or that the work's meaning will be altered somewhat by the historical perspective of the reader.

Poulet's view that the reader's experience with the text is extremely personal and self-enclosed is derived from Husserl's phenomenology. But as

Eagleton explains, Husserl's claim that the language of the text "is little more than an 'expression' of its inner meanings" is implausible, since language is "ineradicably social" (60). Husserl's phenomenology is centered on the concept of the transcendental ego, which forms the basis of all certain knowledge. However, the perceiving subject can only know how she perceives things immediately, through the process of phenomenal reduction or 'bracketing'; one can never know how things are in themselves, or even if external objects actually exist independently of one's consciousness. Poulet's theory of reading, like Husserl's phenomenology, is useful and beneficial because it allows for the empathetic fusion of the self with the text; however, both systems of thought are so private that they are in danger of becoming closed, since they can only accommodate intersubjectivity and changing or different responses with difficulty.

Unlike Husserl, Heidegger believes that subjectivity is governed by time and history, and that since human beings are social, they must participate in the external world. He posits Dasein--there-being--as a starting point instead of the transcendental self, and so stresses the historicity of meaning and experience. "Heidegger's thesis was that being itself is time" (Gadamer, Truth 228). All understanding, or grasping, is historical, that is, governed and conditioned by the subject's position in history. Dasein encompasses both subject and object, and this union is reflected in language. While Husserl claims that grasping a text involves understanding the author's life-world--that the meaning of a text is universal and fixed--Heidegger feels that each reader has a temporal relation to the text. For Heidegger, "We must open ourselves passively to the text, submitting ourselves to its mysterious inexhaustible being, allowing ourselves to be interrogated by it" (Eagleton 64-65).

Interpreting a text becomes a more open activity, based on one's social and historical horizons.

Hans-Georg Gadamer adopts Heidegger's view that literary texts interrogate the reader and her place in the present. Unlike Husserl, who believes in essential knowledge, Gadamer claims that meaning is sequential and bound to time. He does, however, reconstruct Husserl's position that "Every experience has implicit horizons of before and after, and finally merges with the continuum of the experiences present in the before and after to form the one flow of experience" (Truth 216). Gadamer adopts Husserl's notion of horizon, which is the context in which all phenomena are experienced, but he moves beyond the subjectivity of the perceiver or the author that Husserl's view of individual horizons implies. Gadamer concludes that, because of its "before and after" horizons, the meaning of a text may be broader than the author's conscious intention. Thus,

> When an interpreter points out this surplus [of meaning], [s]he does not prove [her] superiority to the author. The surplus is in principle recognizable by the author himself, and the interpreter means more than [s]he intends. [Her] interpretation too has a horizon and is therefore open to interpretation, to integration with the before and after. (Weinsheimer 157)

The horizons of experience, which reveal "a new dimension of investigation" (Truth 216), are very significant for Gadamer. "The flow of experience has the character of a universal 'horizon consciousness,' out of which only particulars are truly given as experiences" (217).

Gadamer's Truth and Method postulates history as an alternative to scientific method. As David Linge notes in his Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics, the hermeneutical task put forth by Gadamer is to bridge "the gap between the familiar world in which we stand and the strange meaning

that resists assimilation into the horizon of our world" (xii). To inter text, the reader must fuse her familiar life-world with the horizon of object. Truth about the human sciences cannot be derived from scier method, "Hence the human sciences are joined with modes of experience which lie outside science: with the experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history itself" (Truth xii). Scientific method is rejected because it lies beyond historical tradition: it is fixed and unchanging, and so cannot accommodate the historical horizons which serve as the basis for truth and interpretation in the human sciences.

Gadamer's differentiation between scientific method and hermeneutic interpretation can be seen as a reaffirmation of Romanticism, which is, "perhaps predominantly, a desperate rearguard action against the spirit and the implications of modern science" (Eichner 8). Eichner explains that

> the Romantics never wholly rejected reason, but they dethroned it, assigning it only the more medial services; to attain those truths that really matter they relied on the irrational faculties of the mind--unmediated insight, 'enthusiasm,' 'intellectual intuition,' and the imagination. (17)

Gadamer's desire to liberate truth from the constraints of methodology and "to seek that experience of truth that transcends the sphere of the control of scientific method" (Truth xii) mirrors Keats's view that

> no great minist'ring reason sorts
> Out the dark mysteries of human souls
> To clear conceiving: yet there ever rolls
> A vast idea before me, and I glean
> Therefrom my liberty. ("Sleep and Poetry," 288-93)[2]

Just as Heidegger believes that "I live humanly only by constantly 'projecting' myself forwards, recognizing and realizing fresh possibilities of

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[2]All quotations from Keats's poems are from The Poems of John Keats, ed. Stillinger.

being; I am never purely identical with myself, so to speak, but a being always already thrown forwards in advance of myself" (Eagleton 63), so Gadamer claims that the "constant process of new projection is the movement of understanding and interpretation" (Truth 236). The goal of understanding is to work out "appropriate projects, anticipatory in nature" (Truth 236); these projects are confirmed by the presence of the actual phenomena which we perceive. However, Gadamer alters Heidegger's position somewhat: he believes that the interpreter must not only focus on the fore-meanings revealed in the text, but she must also "examine explicitly the legitimacy, ie the origin and validity, of the fore-meanings present within [her]" (Truth 237).

Meaning is not arbitrary; nor is it fixed. "Understanding is projection, and what it projects are expectations that precede the text" (Weinsheimer 166). The text can only be understood if the reader has applied, or projected, appropriate prejudices. Gadamer defines a prejudice as "a judgment that is given before all the elements that determine a situation have been finally examined" (Truth 240). The concept of prejudices was largely discredited during the Enlightenment, when truth was based on reason and objectivity; Enlightenment thinkers were themselves prejudiced against prejudice. According to Gadamer, the interpreter's prejudices, rather than her reasoned judgments, constitute her historical being, because when "we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live" (Truth 245), this understanding precedes and transcends self-awareness gained through experience and self-examination. The historical tradition one belongs to always functions as a prejudice.

In interpreting a text, the reader must be open and "sensitive to the text's quality of newness" (Truth 238); a fusion of horizons between the reader

and the text occurs. However, one's prejudices and one's historical position are ineradicable, although sometimes alterable, and to a certain extent define one's interpretation of the text. Sensitivity to the text

> involves neither 'neutrality' in the matter of the object nor in the extinction of one's self, but the conscious assimilation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings. (Truth 238)

The text's truth, then, belongs to the interpreter as well as to the author. The reader projects both herself, that is, her own potential for understanding, and the text's possible meanings. If the reader reads passively, no meaning will surface from the text. Poulet's view that the reader must suspend her self as the work comes to life in her is displaced by Gadamer's conception of the reader as a necessarily active participant who forms meaning rather than simply receiving it. Again, Gadamer's approach corresponds to that of the Romantics, who, "as Isaiah Berlin put it, sought not to discover truth but to invent it" (Eichner 17).

For Gadamer, an objective reading takes place when the reader confirms her prejudices--and thus her own being--rather than avoiding them. An interpreter who is conscious of the hermeneutical situation, that is, "the situation in which we find ourselves with regard to the tradition that we are trying to understand" (Truth 269), possesses an effective-historical consciousness. This consciousness permits the interpreter to perceive her place in history, and to see herself and her present in relation to "everything contained in historical consciousness" (Truth 271). Our own past, and the broad past of civilization, shape and condition the present moving horizon, or context, through which we experience phenomena; our effective-historical

consciousness is what allows us to see how our past, and tradition in general, make up our present consciousness.

The reader reads with openness, always prepared to revise or reject her own prejudices. She synthesizes the text's meaning and her own preconceptions, of which she becomes aware during the reading process. In trying to understand a text, the interpreter projects before herself "a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text" (Truth 236). This initial meaning arises only because of the reader's particular expectations about the text's meaning. "The working out of this fore-project, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as [s]he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there" (Truth 236). When there are discrepancies between the alien text and the reader's prejudices, the reader revises her view of the meaning of the whole so that it accommodates the new aspect of the text. In this way, art becomes a source of truth; "yet to understand it correctly I must already have understood myself, and can do so only through art" (Weinsheimer 98). These two paradoxes are manifestations of the hermeneutic circle, in which particulars are rendered intelligible when they are seen in relation to the whole to which they belong. The numerous instances of the hermeneutic circle which arise in Truth and Method reflect Gadamer's opposition to the application of scientific method to the humanities. "The hermeneutic circle is designed in part to replace the linear model of inductive understanding, because the latter is inapplicable to the human sciences" (Weinsheimer 23). Though the hermeneutical openness vis-à-vis the text is refreshing in that it allows for various contradictory readings of one text, Eagleton points out that the hermeneutic circle fails to account for "the possibility that literary works may be diffuse, incomplete and internally

contradictory, though there are many reasons to assume that they are" (74). Gadamer would perhaps argue that the holistic view one has of a text is not closed, but changing; the meaning of a literary text is always incomplete, because it remains open to future readers, and yet whole, because the convergence of a particular reader's prejudices with the emerging meaning of the text constitutes a complete experience of the text.

Before leaving Gadamer to turn to Wolfgang Iser's reader-response theory, it is important to outline briefly Gadamer's concept of art as play. In order to know the truth of art, the subject/object dichotomy must be dissolved, and then reconciled through interpretation. Putting forth a view similar to that of Georges Poulet, Gadamer asserts that "The 'subject' of the experience of art, that which remains and endures, is not the subjectivity of the person who experiences it, but the work itself" (Truth 92). The artwork itself is neither subject nor object. Perceiving art is like playing; the perceiver loses herself, and loses her relation to the world of serious purpose. The game takes over, transcending the players' consciousness, and during this time the subject (the player) no longer treats the game as an object. "It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself" (Truth 94). The player is not passive--she chooses what game to play, and takes up an attitude towards it. Playing is a task and, "in spending oneself on the task of the game, one is, in fact, playing oneself out" (Truth 97). The player is limited by rules, or finite limits. However, according to Gadamer's logic, each time a game is played, it is played differently; paradoxically, the player enjoys free play despite her being guided by rules. Misunderstanding arises only if the player plays the wrong game altogether, or fails to follow the appropriate rules.

To play something is to represent it, and to represent it for someone else. Form is the repeatability of a play and allows players and spectators to change while the play stays the same. There is no one proper interpretation of an artwork: a true interpretation is one which belongs to the work and not just to the interpreter. In these, the interpretation is undifferentiated from the work itself. A false interpretation is a critical failure, because it goes beyond the work's own horizons. Gadamer writes that an "interpretive work is wholly committed to the meaning of the text" (Truth 297). When 'play' becomes 'a play'--a representation with form--the player recognizes something familiar. She recognizes her world, and her self:

> The joy of recognition is ... that more becomes known than is already known. In recognition what we know emerges, as if through an illumination, from all the chance and variable circumstances that condition it and is grasped in its essence. It is known as something. (Truth 102)

The reception theory of reading, which "examines the reader's role in literature" (Eagleton 74), concentrates on how the reader constructs all literary texts, regardless of the time in which they were written. As we have seen, Husserl and the critics of the Geneva School believe that the reader should be passive, attempting to grasp the author's life-world as it is manifested in the text. The Heideggerian view that language is necessarily social and that all being is in time leads to a greater emphasis on each reader's role in reconstructing the meaning of a text. For Gadamer, the reader must apply her prejudices and her effective-historical consciousness to the text as she reads, in order to bring the text into the present. Wolfgang Iser retains many of Gadamer's ideas about the active role of the reader, but he ignores the importance of the reader's historical position, and believes that prejudices should be suspended.

Iser agrees with Gadamer that reading involves a constant dialectical tension between the reader and the text. He distinguishes between the artistic pole--the text, or "textual structures"--and the esthetic pole--the work, or "structured acts of comprehension" (Act 107). Communication between the two poles depends "on the degree in which the text establishes itself as a correlative in the reader's consciousness" (Act 107). It is up to the reader to open her mind to the text, suspending and then questioning her own predilections. Reading "entails the possibility that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness" (Implied 294). Iser claims that meaning is subjective, since each reader concretizes the text in her own way, but it is also intersubjective, since all readers are guided by the structure of the text. To make this point, Iser compares the act of reading to looking at a constellation of stars:

> two people gazing at the night sky may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough, and the other will make out a dipper. The 'stars' in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable. The author of the text may, of course, exert plenty of influence on the reader's imagination--he has the whole panoply of narrative techniques at his disposal--but no author worth his salt will ever attempt to set the whole picture before his reader's eyes. (Implied 282)

Like all phenomenologists, Iser believes in the concept of shifting horizons: "just as various phases of the reading experience supersede their predecessors, invoke revisions of former textual perceptions, and are in turn displaced, so various thematic structures vie for centrality and push others into the foreground and background" (Ray 34). For Gadamer, horizons belong to the past or the present, but for Iser they represent different aspects of the text--thematic or structural--which, by alternatively being foregrounded or backgrounded, ultimately form the meaning of the text.

While Gadamer sees the text as an embodiment of truth valuable to our present, Iser places even more emphasis on the reader's input. For him, the schema of the text is "a hollow form into which the reader is invited to pour [her] own store of knowledge" (Act 141). Iser adopts Roman Ingarden's theory of intentional sentence correlates,[3] which build up the literary object; the fulfillment of meaning "takes place not in the text, but in the reader, who must 'activate' the interplay of the correlatives prestructured by the sequence of sentences" (Act 110). The structure of the sentences determines the reader's grasping of the text to a certain extent, but the existence of this structure depends on the reader's act of reading. Thus, Iser attempts to establish a mutual, interdependent relationship between the reader and the text.

The meaning of the text is continually being revised by the reader, whose expectations and preintentions are constantly displaced by new horizons revealed through the changing sentence correlates. "Each individual sentence correlate prefigures a particular horizon, but is immediately transformed into the background for the next correlate and must therefore necessarily be modified" (Act 111). If the new correlate answers the reader's expectations, then the horizon, or the reader's overall view of the whole text, is narrowed. If the expectations are modified, they "have a retroactive effect on what has already been read, which now appears quite different" (Act 111). This synthesizing process, whereby sentence correlates are incorporated into or else radically displace the world of the literary object, is performed by what Iser

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[3]Ingarden claims that in reading, an intentional "state of affairs" is projected by means of the units of a sentence. This state of affairs is not the intentional object itself, but the "medium through which we must cross in order to arrive at the represented objects and have them as a given" (191).

calls the reader's "wandering viewpoint." The wandering viewpoint is comparable to Gadamer's effective-historical consciousness; both allow the subject to reconcile individual horizons with the horizons of the whole.

For Iser, "The reader's wandering viewpoint is, at one and the same time, caught up in and transcended by the object it is to apprehend" (Act 109). Iser disagrees with Poulet's view that the reading subject can be empty and pure during the act of reading. He also rejects Gadamer's notion that personal prejudices are absolutely necessary and arise inevitably during reading. Like Poulet, Iser feels that the reader must attempt to leave behind her own disposition and her own present as she reads. After the act of reading, the reader's released spontaneity allows her to become fully conscious of herself; "the incorporation of the new requires a re-formulation of the old" (Act 159). Iser does not stress the transforming power of reading as much as Gadamer does: "The fact that we have been temporarily isolated from our real world does not mean that we now return to it with new directives. What it does mean is that, for a brief period at least, the real world appears observable" (Act 140). The world is a thing "freshly understood," and not necessarily enlarged and transformed as it is for Gadamer.

During reading, the subject/object dichotomy is almost eliminated because the reader suspends her self and her prejudices. After the reading process, however, when the reader examines her self and the norms of her society from a fresh perspective, the division between subject and object is accentuated. According to Iser, the two levels involved in reading--the author and the reader--are never totally separate (Act 155). The conflation of subject and object which occurs during reading consists of an "artificial division" on the part of the reader, who "brings into [her] own foreground

something which [s]he is not" (Act 155). By stating that the temporary joining of the reader and the text is artificial, and by accounting for both the temporary union and the necessarily permanent separation of the two spheres, Iser puts forth a more plausible, less idealistic view of the experience of reading than Poulet does. Iser notes that the reader can never foreground the thoughts of another without relating them to her own thoughts, which form a background for the thematic significance of the author's views. The joining of subject and object is never absolute. Nevertheless, Iser does not deny that a genuine reconciliation takes place between the reader and the text during the act of reading. Iser's conception of how the reader concretizes the text exemplifies the mutual relationship that exists between subject and object. As Umberto Eco has noted, literature is "the determinate denotation of an indeterminate object" (Act 182). It is the very indeterminacy of texts that makes them open to an infinite number of interpretations. However, Iser explains that indeterminacy is embedded in the text, and so contains a structure. This structure arises from the blanks and negations in the text. The blank "is not a given, ontological fact, but is formed and modified by the imbalance" (Act 167) between the reader and the text. A balance is only achieved when the reader attempts to fill the gaps with her own projections; however, "filling the blanks exclusively with one's own prejudices" (Act 167) constitutes a flawed, failed reading of the text. The reader must seek a common ground between her own projections and those emitted by the text, and she must also be prepared and willing to alter her own views.

Negations encourage the reader to change her views because they "invoke familiar or determinate elements only to cancel them out" (Act 169). They guide the reader in her attempt to formulate the text, and to place

herself in relation to it. Once this relation has been established, the blanks disappear temporarily. The blanks are what force the reader to "acquire a sense of discernment" by abstracting herself from her own attitudes and "stepping back from [her] own governing norms of orientation" (Act 187). Iser's theory of blanks and negations is similar to Husserl's suggestion that one ought to bracket rational constructs in order to see phenomena as it is in itself. However, Iser claims that perception is not a good model for reading, because in reading, "there are no given objects to be transferred from text to reader" (Act 187). Despite the validity of this objection, there are many parallels between the act of perception and the concretization of an aesthetic object; these parallels are evident when one reflects on how deeply the phenomenology of Husserl and the hermeneutics of Gadamer have influenced some modern-day literary theories.

One extremely valuable aspect of Iser's theory is his clarification of the term "reader." Iser provides an overview of other literary theories and the role they assign to the reader: Riffaterre's "superreader," who decodes the meaning and the stylistic facts of the text by discovering its intratextual contrasts; Fish's "informed reader," who is familiar with the linguistic and grammatical structure of the text and who possesses a solid, wide-ranging literary background; and Wolff's "intended reader," a "fictional inhabitant" of the text representing the author's idea of his reader (Act 30-33). According to Iser, all of these theories of the reader attempt to transcend the limitations of linguistics, grammar and sociology. They are all, in fact, highly idealized, elitist structures.

For the purposes of his theory, Iser distinguishes between the implied reader and the real one. The implied reader is merely a concept; he embodies

the "predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect" (Act 34). His identity is firmly embedded in the text. He anticipates the real reader, but does not define her; he is "a construct and is in no way to be identified with any real reader" (Act 34). The real reader performs "a structured act" (Act 36) on the text; she assembles the different perspectives represented in the text, and allows them to converge. As Iser explains, each actualization "represents a selective realization of the implied reader, whose own structure provides a frame of reference within which individual responses to a text can be communicated to others" (Act 37). The implied reader, then, is a structure which links together all the "historical and individual actualizations" (38) of a text, making them available to the real reader. Because it assimilates various horizons and establishes a common ground for all individuals, the construct of the implied reader has a similar function to Gadamer's effective-historical consciousness and his holistic view of tradition.

All texts, then, contain the construct of an implied reader, because it is only through the implied reader that the real reader can enter the text and process the structures within it. Keats's speakers often address some of their lines to an implied reader. For instance, the "tuneless numbers" (1) of the speaker in the "Ode to Psyche" are directed not only to Psyche, but to an assumed, undefined reader. The implied reader construct is more apparent in the final questions asked in the "Ode to a Nightingale," which assume the presence of a listener. Likewise, the controversial closing statement of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is at least in part directed to the implied reader, who is here addressed as "ye": "that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (49-50). In addressing the reader in this subtle way, Keats welcomes her into the text, inviting her to share the speaker's experience. The

interpretations of the odes being put forth here will make use of Iser's distinction between the two types of reader: the term "implied reader" will refer to the imaginary construct of the reader which Keats often makes use of, and the term "reader" will correspond to Iser's "real reader," that is, the person who is now concretizing the text by applying certain phenomenological concepts to it.

In his analysis of Iser's reception theory, Terry Eagleton brings an important criticism to light. He claims that Iser's "liberal humanism" is actually less liberal than it may appear, for

> a reader with strong ideological commitments is likely to be an inadequate one, since he or she is less likely to be open to the transformative power of literary works. What this implies is that in order to undergo transformation at the hands of the text, we must only hold our beliefs fairly provisionally in the first place. The only good reader would already have to be a liberal: the act of reading produces a kind of human subject which it also presupposes. (79)

Moreover, for readers who are uncommitted and who have fairly provisional beliefs, "having them interrogated and subverted by the text is not really very significant. Nothing much, in other words, will have actually happened" (79). Parallel to this problem is a more epistemological one: how can one analyze the schemata of the text without already having concretized them? And, since schemata are only brought to life during the process of reading, in discussing the text, "is one ever dealing with more than one's own concretization?" (84).

Eagleton's criticisms are certainly worthy of our consideration. However, they do not necessarily render Iser's theory implausible. The holistic outlook fostered by hermeneutics and phenomenology accommodates such inconsistencies; as Gadamer explains, in reflecting on what truth is in the human sciences, one

> must be aware of the fact that its own understanding and interpretation is not a construction out of principles, but the development of an event which goes back a long way. Hence it will not be able to use its concepts unquestioningly, but will have to take over whatever features of the original meaning of its concepts have come down to it. (Truth xiv)

Hermeneutics concerns itself with finding a place for the part in the whole, rather than constructing a meaning based on the logical interrelation of all the parts. Thus, the problem of how to reconcile the text and the reader's concretization of it, the presupposed reader and the reader produced through the reading process, can be seen as another manifestation of the hermeneutic circle. An interpretation is not weakened by the presence of contradictory elements, since the whole meaning of the text is open and changing, allowing for inconsistencies and gaps between its particular aspects.

In the same way, the speakers in Keats's odes struggle to reconcile their intuitive grasping of the whole of an experience and their more philosophical examination of the meaning of each part. The odes exemplify Bergson's claim that "there are two profoundly different ways of grasping a thing: we either turn about it or enter into it" (Bunn 592). Keats seems torn between Husserl's dichotomy of immanence and transcendence, between axioms proved on the pulses, feeling and pure phenomena on the one hand, and abstract forms, thought and the aesthetic object on the other. Perhaps the purest, most striking moments in the odes take place when Keats's speaker brackets rational questions, momentarily fusing the objective and subjective realms, the transient, cruel beauty of the outside world and the passive but receptive mind. Keats's concept of negative capability--"that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (Letters 1: 193)--along with his view that the perceiver must "open [her] leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive"

(Letters 1: 232)--mirror the phenomenological tension between subject and object, between the reader's active constitution of the literary work and her passive suspension of her self as she gives herself to the text before her.

All of the Great Odes, written between April and September of 1819, examine the fundamental subject/object dichotomy. Gittings writes that since the odes "are bound together by a unity of form and theme," their chronological order "does not matter greatly; there is no progress of thought from one to the other" (311). There are certain elements which resurface consistently, suggesting that the poems belong to a whole: a "sense of homecoming" (Gittings 311), a "concern with transience" (Jones 263), a "process of discovery" (Vendler 296) and an at-least-partial "pattern of flight and return" (Stillinger, Hoodwinking 104).

However, despite their thematic unity, the odes contain a systematic progression, reflecting a process of widening self-awareness and acceptance. The speakers are increasingly able to move beyond the self and its insecurities, becoming more open to immanent phenomena. In the "Ode to Psyche," the speaker is unformed, preparing to face the material world; the speakers in the "Ode to a Nightingale" and the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" confront aesthetic questions and human mortality directly. It is only in the "Ode on Melancholy" and, more convincingly, in "To Autumn," that a profound acceptance of human experience is achieved. The "sense of homecoming" Gittings notices is particularly apparent in the last two odes.

This progressive movement towards self-knowledge and acceptance corresponds to Bate's view that the odes are "concerned with the human reaction and its object, [and are] ... analogous to experience as a whole" (500). In "embracing experience and process as his own and man's chief good"

(Stillinger, Hoodwinking 100), Keats examines the relation between subject and object from a variety of perspectives. Jones points out that "the time which the odes are all about is their time, not a detachable subject but time living and prospering under the aegis of space" (226): like each new experience, each ode has its own setting, its private time and its particular mood. Sperry explains that

> Given its different perspective and emphasis, each of the odes actively involves us in a process of imaginative cumulative recognition of what, within the terms of art and human experience, such a process can and cannot achieve. (249)

Thus, the odes can be seen as different answers to one question; the reader's recognition is cumulative, and stems from her dialectical reading of the odes as a whole. Just as each reader contributes to the changing life of a text, just as each new experience forms the identity of the perceiver, so each ode offers a new answer, a different perspective, a unique concretization of a fundamental problem.

In keeping with Keats's dialectical approach to experience, the odes are to be seen as both the same and different. Vendler's consideration of the odes as a set in which unity and multiplicity are resolved hermeneutically is particularly appropriate; she claims that

> the most important context for each of the odes is the totality of the other odes, that the odes enjoy a special relation to each other, and that Keats, whenever he returned to the form of the ode, recalled his previous efforts, and used every new ode as a way of commenting on earlier ones. We may say that each ode both deconstructs its predecessor(s) and consolidates it (or them). Each is a disavowal of a previous 'solution'; but none could achieve its own momentary stability without the support of the antecedently constructed style which we now call 'Keatsian.' (6)

Vendler's view corresponds to Gadamer's notion that while the player must be played by the text, she also forms the text by virtue of her

ineradicable prejudices. In a similar way, Iser points out that although each reader performs a new concretization of the text, she is always guided by the inherent structures of the text. Like these two phenomenologists, Keats believes that there must be a constant and mutual dialogue between the perceiver and her world. In a beautiful letter describing the experience of reading,[4] Keats advises the reader to concretize the text in her own way, making it belong to her:

> I have an idea that a Man might pass a very pleasant life in this manner--let him on any certain day read a certain Page of full Poesy or distilled Prose and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect from it, and bring home to it, and prophesy upon it, and dream upon it--untill it becomes stale--but when will it do so? Never--When Man has arrived at a certain ripeness in intellect any one grand and spiritual passage serves him as a starting post towards all "the two-and thirty Pallaces" How happy is such a "voyage of conception,' what delicious diligent Indolence! (Letters 1: 231)

The text provides a "starting post" "for the reader's own 'voyage of conception,' which is based on his/her own creative energies" (Goellnicht 9). Full control is given to the reader, whom Keats, like Gadamer and Iser, sees as an extremely active, creative participant in the formulation of the work. However, Keats also alludes to the fixed aspects of the text which guide and partially determine the way in which the reader experiences the work:

> Now it appears to me that almost any Man may like the Spider spin from his own inwards his own airy Citadel--the points of leaves and twigs on which the Spider begins her work are few and she fills the Air with a beautiful circuiting: man should be content with few points to tip with the fine Webb of his Soul and weave a tapestry empyrean--full of Symbols for his spiritual eye, of softness for his spiritual touch, of space for his wandering of distinctness for his Luxury. (Letters 1: 232)

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[4]This letter was first brought to my attention by Goellnicht's article.

The leaves and twigs, without which no web would be spun, represent the projected meaning of the text discovered in the sentence correlates, blanks and negations of Iser's theory. Keats's letter on reading, virtually a poetic summary of hermeneutic systems of thought, shows why a phenomenological approach to his poetry is fitting and productive. The critic, like each new reader, must wander freely with the text, but must also respect and follow the hints and directives embedded in it. In turning to the odes, we enjoy the luxury provided to our "spiritual eye" and our "spiritual touch," and we attempt to keep in the foreground of our minds the author's intention, those essential, guiding leaves and twigs Keats was careful to include in his description of the act of reading.

THE ODES

(i) "Ode to Psyche"

Keats enclosed the "Ode to Psyche" in a letter he sent to George and Georgiana Keats on April 30, 1819 (Bate 487). Although it is usually considered the first of the Great Odes of 1819, it is, in general, given less attention than some of the others. Stillinger considers the "Ode to Psyche" "the least easy to integrate with the others in any unified view" (105). Kenneth Allott calls it "the Cinderella of Keats's great odes," claiming

> it illustrates better than any other Keats's possession of poetic power in conjunction with what was for him an unusual artistic detachment--besides being a remarkable poem in its own right. (75)

The tone of the "Ode to Psyche" is different than that of the others, mainly because the poem does not examine the speaker's relation to the material world. Instead, it portrays the development of the poetic self, and describes the mode in which the artist perceives the aesthetic object. It is not surprising, then, that it is much more reflective and inward-turned than the others.

The "Ode to Psyche" describes the internal realm of intuitive thought; it is about the poetic process whereby aspects of the external world are appropriated by the artist, who endows them with form. Parallel to this artistic process is that of human experience in general; as Keats explains in his letter on "Soul-Making," one's identity is formed by agents which act upon

the soul, thereby bringing it into being. Keats suggests that human life is not to be seen as a "vale of tears":

> Call the world if you please "The Vale of Soul-Making ... I say "Soul-Making--Souls as distinct from an Intelligence. There may be intelligences or sparks of the divinity in millions--but they are not Souls till they acquire identities, till each one is personally itself .... How then are Souls to be made? ... How, but by the medium of a world like this? .... I think it is a grander system of salvation than the Christian religion--or rather it is a system of Spirit-creation. This is effected by three grand materials acting the one upon the other for a series of years. These three materials are the Intelligence, the human heart (as distinguished from Intelligence or Mind) and the World or Elemental Space suited for the proper action of Intelligence and Heart on each other for the purpose of forming the Soul or Intelligence destined to possess the sense of Identity. (Letters 2: 101)

Gittings believes that the "Soul-Making" letter was reworked in the "Ode to Psyche."[1] However, his claim that Psyche, an allegorical figure representing the soul, is taught by experiencing the "world of circumstances" (309) is countered by the fact that the poem does not confront the world of pains directly. Although the "Ode to Psyche" indeed does not describe "the medium of a world like this" which forms the soul, giving it an identity, it may, rather, be a portrayal of a soul who is about to embark on a "voyage of

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[1]Gittings goes on to claim that the prose account of "Soul-Making" is superior to the poetic expression of Keats's thoughts (309). Several other critics, also, have criticized the "Ode to Psyche": Bate condemns the "elusive" poem's "banalities of diction that carry us back to Endymion" (487); Dickstein believes that the ode's lack of concreteness and the absence of a developed symbol or a "complex evolving consciousness" cause it to lack "the genuine dialectical movement of the later poems" (196). He also claims the ode "is too thoroughly a creation of Keats' own mind to provide much resistance to that mind" (197).

There has also been a good deal of praise for the "Ode to Psyche": Allott calls it the "most architectural of the odes," and admires its dramatic culmination (75); Brown suggests that it can be seen as "the completion of 'Hyperion' and as the final, cultural transformation of poetry" (50). T.S. Eliot made the bold assertion that "The Odes--especially perhaps the 'Ode to Psyche'--are enough for [Keats's] reputation" (qtd. in Allott 75).

conception" and for whom the formative interaction between the Mind, the Heart and the World is just beginning.

Interpretations of the "Ode to Psyche" have been extremely divergent. For instance, Vendler suggests that the ode aims "at a complete, exclusive, and lasting annihilation of the senses in favor of the brain" (47), while Barnard writes that "It is the mingling of the senses and the subduing of reason which provide the basis for the strongly visual and ultimately 'visionary' effect of the ode" (24). Stillinger considers the poem's meaning ambiguous, since it is unclear whether the speaker attempts to recreate the lost glory of the past, or to seek a "retreat in which the powers of the mind provide only a partial solution" (105). The widely differing readings of the ode suggest that its meaning is complex or elusive, and so, that the ode is deserving of constant reevaluation. Moreover, Keats's claim that the "Ode to Psyche"

> is the first and the only [poem] with which I have taken even moderate pains--I have for the most part dash'd of[f] my lines in a hurry--This I have done leisurely--I think it reads the more richly for it and will I hope encourage me to write other thing[s] in even a more peaceable and healthy spirit (Letters 2: 105-06)

invites the reader to consider it carefully. The "Ode to Psyche" marks Keats's return to the ode form which he used with such success in the next two months. His resolution to continue to write in this "peaceable and healthy spirit" suggests that the "Ode to Psyche" may be seen as a prologue to the other odes.

The lack of definition and resolution in the ode, along with its loose structure, provide the reader with an insight into Keats's mind; Keats expresses his new conception of his role as poet, and tries to articulate the secret workings of the poetic process. Because of the ode's indeterminacy and self-reflexivity, a phenomenological interpretation is appropriate and fruitful.

Keats's views on the relation between subject and object, time and space, past and present, and form and substance are all brought to the fore in the ode's dramatization of the poetic process. The "Ode to Psyche" is important because it elucidates the general state of mind Keats was in as he was writing the odes.

All of the odes portray a receptive speaker who must achieve a balance between his passive acceptance of the world and his more philosophical desire to establish the meaning of his individual experiences of that world. However, in the "Ode to Psyche," what the speaker experiences is internalized; moreover, the object of the ode is Psyche, who is at least in part an embodiment of the speaker's own self. But the reader knows, because of the "Soul-Making" letter and also because of hints within the text, that Psyche will eventually face both the happiness and the harshness of the external world. Thus, as James Bunn explains, the "Ode to Psyche" "serves as an introduction to the other odes by reason of its theme of anticipation" (581). Also, Keats's decision to write a more personal kind of poetry, encompassing both thought and sensuality, is suggested in the line "I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired" (43). Dickstein reads this statement as "a prolegomena to the odes" (204) because it reveals the transformed perception of poetry and its aims which is evident in the subsequent odes.

As the "Soul-Making" letter makes clear, the identity of the self is constantly changing since it is formed by its experiences in the world of flux. Therefore, Keats's poem about Psyche should not be said to mean one thing in particular; it is an "oscillation of undecidables" (Brown 52). Initially, the speaker perceives Psyche in an external setting, but she is later reified as both an inhabitant and a formative element of the speaker's own mind. In the

same way, Psyche is at first portrayed as a historical goddess who appeared later than the Classical gods and before the speaker's own time. Gradually, however, she is brought into the present, retaining some aspects of her ancient myth while being integrated into the modern poet's consciousness. Thus, Dickstein's claim that the ode lacks the "genuine dialectical movement" of the other odes can be refuted: there is definitely a synthesis of temporal, spatial and mental horizons in the "Ode to Psyche."

Stanza One begins with the traditional invocation of the muse. However, not only does the speaker call on Psyche to inspire him as he writes the poem, but he also prepares to bring into consciousness--and into language--the workings of his mind when he is poetically inspired. Psyche is introduced as both subject and object; even in reading the title, the reader has formed preintentions, wondering whether Psyche is internal or external to the speaker. This ambiguity generates a blank in the text, which the reader will only be able to fill as she participates in the speaker's encounter with Psyche. As James Bunn explains, the subject/object dualism is central to the poem's meaning:

> the main purpose of the poem is to re-present retrospectively the process by which the poet's mind has become animated and transformed by Psyche. Instead of poetic mind animating external object, the mythological Psyche enters his mind and animates it internally so that it becomes changed into a vast mental landscape. (582)

It is important for the reader to keep in mind the fact that the speaker's experience with Psyche is described retrospectively, because the fusion of temporal horizons is a significant aspect of the poem's meaning. It seems, however, that Bunn underemphasizes the role of the speaker in the inspirational moment. Psyche does animate the speaker's mind, but only because his is an open and receptive mind. Moreover, in actually writing the

poem, the speaker's mind becomes an active agent which re-evokes Psyche, bringing her back into the foreground.

The "tuneless" quality of the speaker's rhyme suggests that there is very little distinction between the speaker's recent experience with Psyche and its present transformation into form and language. Since Psyche is not only the aesthetic object being portrayed, but also an allegory for the speaker's mind, the speaker addresses the opening lines both to Psyche and to himself. In presenting his thoughts as "tuneless," the speaker makes use of a rhetorical trope which makes his experience with Psyche appear personal and inward; the impression created is that his rhyme is "tuneless" "not simply because of modesty but also because he is in extraordinary communication with his own soul" (Bunn 590).

The reader learns that the poem is derived from "remembrance dear" (2), suggesting that in the past, the speaker had an experience with Psyche which the ode now recreates. The speaker asks Psyche to

> pardon that thy secrets should be sung
> Even into thine own soft-conched ear, (3-4)

apologizing for his intention to express the silent, private process in a structured form and in the social discourse of language. That the speaker's rhyme will be sung into Psyche's "soft-conched ear" introduces the self-reflexive quality of the ode, and suggests its "total, involuted circularity" (Brown 52). Psyche is at once the agent making the "tuneless numbers" possible, and the physical object, made concrete and external by her physical description, that the ode is about.

The complex mingling of subject and art object in the "Ode to Psyche" leads to some interesting speculations on the creative process and the relationship that arises between the artist and what he experiences. The

'neutral' status of Psyche, who is both subject and object, and yet neither, brings to mind Gadamer's concept of "Play as the clue to ontological explanation":

> the work of art is not an object that stands over against a subject for itself. Instead the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience changing the person experiencing it .... The players are not subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation through the players. (Truth 92)

Thus, the reader reading Keats's "Ode to Psyche" must let the text exist as a "living event" (Act 128), or as "a sort of human being" (Poulet 59). She must let herself be "played" by the text, suspending rational questions. As Iser explains,

> Reading has the same structure as experience, to the extent that our entanglement has the effect of pushing our various criteria of orientation back to the past, thus suspending their validity for the new present. (Act 132)

Just as the reader must accept, unquestioningly, that Psyche is both the subject within and the object without, so the speaker allows this dichotomy, letting himself be "played" by Psyche, while simultaneously evoking his experience with her in the form of a poem. The speaker, then, is parallel to the ideal reader, who helps to create but does not impose meaning. Likewise, Psyche can be seen as a text, full of possibilities, who "plays" the reader, helping to transform her world.

Before introducing the reader to Psyche, the poet momentarily asks himself a rational question, trying to understand his visionary experience in terms of human logic:

> Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see
> The winged Psyche with awaken'd eyes? (5-6)

These lines confirm the reader's preintention, formed by "remembrance dear," that the poem is the reconstruction of a recent experience. The intervention

of the conscious, questioning mind is unwelcome at this point in the poem, when the lack of distinction between inner and outer, dreaming and seeing, has already been established. The reader is admitted into this realm of no distinctions when she reads the next line--"I wander'd in a forest thought-lessly" (7)--which marks the beginning of the recreation of the visionary experience as well as the speaker's return to the "thoughtless," receptive mode of perception which makes such experiences possible. Although Bunn asserts that "thoughtless" suggests that at this point, the speaker "either ha[s] no soul or [is] unaware of her, both amounting to the same idea that ignorance is absence" (582), it is important to note that the poet's bracketing of sequential thought is what actually enables him to "see" Psyche and be "played" by her.

Reflecting the joining of internal and external landscapes, the setting in which Cupid and Psyche are found is described in language which corresponds to the suspended mind, open to all possibilities of experience. The "deepest grass" (10) in which the lovers lie reminds the reader that both she and the speaker are losing themselves to an enclosed realm, separate and removed from the external world. The "whisp'ring roof / Of leaves" contrasts with the "trembled blossoms" (10-11), evoking the synthesis of activity and passivity which occurs both in perception and in reading: the leaves are active agents, whispering a message, and their secret is seemingly received by the passive blossoms, who let themselves be "trembled" by the leaves. Likewise, the speaker's mind is both active and passive, forming and being formed. The brooklet is hidden and "scarce espied" (12); the speaker must find it and bring it into being through his perception of it. The brooklet is just one manifestation of the whole realm of possible experience that is open to the receptive subject. Because of the speaker's open mind, his senses are

awakened, enabling him to achieve a complete, all-encompassing experience of the scene before him; the silence of the "hush'd" flowers, their "cool-rooted" feel, their "fragrant-eyed" odour and their "Blue, silver-white, and budded Tyrian" (13-14) hues are perceived by the speaker because he is wandering "thoughtlessly." A perfect dialogue takes place between the speaker and his perceived world.

The ensuing picture of Cupid and Psyche reinforces this peaceful, perfect manner of perception. But unlike the leaves, the flowers and the brooklet, the couple is completely motionless:

> 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. (16-20)

Despite their absolute stillness, many possibilities lie before them--bidding adieu, the outnumbering of past kisses, or the continuation of "soft-handed slumber." They are in the "eye-dawn" of love: they are unformed, and their potential has not yet become actual. At the same time, however, they share an eternal quality: their time seems to have no beginning or end. Vendler believes they exist "eternally in a world accessible by dream or vision when the conscious mind is suppressed, a world exterior to the poetic self" (55). Paradoxically, though, their existence depends very much on the speaker's perception of them. Psyche and Cupid are waiting to be animated by the "vital inbreathing" (Poulet 59) of the speaker, which will actualize them, bringing them into his living consciousness and his lived present. The speaker participated in the whispering of the leaves and the trembling of the blossoms; he brought the brooklet into actuality by perceiving it. So must he bring Psyche into the living world, letting her be born again. Likewise, the reader, by suspending her self and letting herself by "played," allows the ode's many

possibilities to be actualized, and maintains the events it describes retrospectively in a perpetual present.

The stanza ends with the speaker's full recognition of "His Psyche true!" (23), which is in part his own self-recognition. This new-found awareness suggests that, although he immediately knew Cupid, the "winged boy" (21), he has finally glimpsed the spark of divinity which is his own soul. As the "Soul-Making" letter makes clear, love is one of the "materials" which form the soul's identity. Like the world, Love is an external agent, more easily perceived than the unformed but divine soul. At this point, then, the speaker has discovered his inner self and, through his love and intelligence, he will now attempt to animate her, making her identity more complete.

That Psyche is a "happy, happy dove" (22) conflicts with her inactive, unborn, frozen aspect. The reader wonders if Psyche is really so happy, for unlike the leaves and the flowers, she has not yet been animated by the speaker. She is suspended, waiting for her possibilities to become actual. Moreover, her love for Cupid has not yet been developed fully; as Allott explains, Psyche is a "love-goddess with an understanding of troubled human experience, because she has known in her own person ... suffering and seemingly hopeless longing" (86). The discrepancy between Psyche's happiness and her arrested motion and unfulfilled love produces a blank which the reader will fill during her subsequent reading.

Stanza Two begins with a formal address to Psyche which recalls the opening invocation, but lacks the personal, secret aspect of the first address. Psyche is now put into the historical context of "Olympus' faded hierarchy" (25). Removed from the natural setting in which the reader first encountered her, she is now seen from an artificial, traditional perspective. As Sperry

points out, in the second stanza Psyche "wither[s] to a mere historical abstraction" (253). She has not yet come to life in the speaker's mind. That Psyche does not fit in with the other gods is confirmed when the speaker mentions that she is "Fairer than these, though temple thou hast none" (28). She is not a part of this realm because she is not meant to be objectified and revered. Being subject as well as object, Psyche cannot be celebrated in a purely external way, with all the tangible trappings of worship, as other deities are.

It is evident, as Bate explains, that "The catalogue, however lyrically chanted, is deprecatory, by its very excess, and is put with mock nostalgia" (492). The language Keats uses in his false glorification of the traditional Psyche figure verges on the ridiculous. The altar "heap'd" with flowers, the "delicious moan" of the virgin choir, the swinging censer and the overwhelming enumeration of all the objects used in worship are excessive and lack sincerity. The repetition of "no"--eight times in two lines--is so frequent that the reader questions the poet's regret. The heat of the "pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming" (35), which Psyche never feels, has quite negative connotations. Heat and pale lips suggest stiflement and death, whereas what Psyche awaits is new life. Moreover, the "dreaming" prophet evokes Moneta's words in The Fall of Hyperion:

> Only the dreamer venoms all his days,
> Bearing more woe than all his sins deserve. (1: 175-76)

The dreamer is perpetually unhappy because he has no sympathetic awareness of others; he hides from the concrete, often painful world of actuality. The "pale-mouth'd prophet dreaming" in the "Ode to Psyche" is not open to Psyche as an 'other,' and makes no attempt to let her become the subject in him. Clearly, the version of celebration outlined in Stanza Two is to be seen as

hollow and ironic, although it simultaneously "projects a nostalgia for an imagined wholeness of being once possible" (Allott 89).

The compensation for Psyche's 'lateness' is put into effect in Stanza Three. The repetition of "too" in "Too, too late for the fond believing lyre" (37) plays the same ironic role as the repetition of "happy, happy" at the end of the first stanza. The reader realizes that the speaker does not really pity Psyche for having been born late. Bate adds that "fond," which describes the lyre, can mean "foolish" as well as doting (492).

However, a more genuine note of nostalgia is introduced when the speaker recalls those days

> When holy were the haunted forest boughs,
> Holy the air, the water, and the fire. (39-40)

The speaker leaves behind his mocking tone as he prepares to adopt Psyche into his own present; he also acknowledges a certain emptiness which has infiltrated his world. He is then ready to admit a fusion of his present with a past horizon, and his ability to do so marks the climax of the ode, incorporating internal reality and external, form and substance, past and present:

> 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 inspired. (40-43)

The speaker is, in fact, inspired by his own eyes, and by his private experience with Psyche that morning. Brown explains that

> While [line 43] is also the answer to his earlier question of whether his vision of Cupid and Psyche was a dream or was seen with awakened eyes, the assertion clearly emphasizes the propriety of the self over the sources of poetry. (52)

However, at the same time, the speaker is now able to see Psyche as she has existed and been perceived throughout time. He does not exclude the

Olympian context, although it is to him only "faint" and "faded." To use a Gadamerian concept, the speaker is exercising his effective-historical consciousness, which

> places itself within the situation of the past and hence is able to acquire the right historical horizon. Just as in a conversation, when we have discovered the standpoint and horizon of the other person, his ideas become intelligible, without our necessarily having to agree with him, the person who thinks historically comes to understand the meaning of what has been handed down, without necessarily agreeing with it, or seeing himself in it .... [It is] this moving horizon out of which human life always lives, and which determines it as tradition. (Truth 270-71)

Thus, because he applies his understanding of tradition to his experience with Psyche, and because of the journey of his "wandering viewpoint," the speaker "discover[s] his real subject in the process of writing" (Allott 83); he is able to 'converse' with Psyche, perceiving her as she truly is. This new awareness of Psyche indicates that the speaker's self, a spark of divinity, is formed and changed by tradition, and also by his intelligence, which recognizes and incorporates the past. Both Psyche and the speaker, then, in parallel ways, acquire a new identity because of the "materials" of spirit-creation--Psyche, by being animated and recreated as form by the poet's loving and intelligent acceptance of her, and the speaker, by recognizing tradition as a formative element and by letting his experience with Psyche occupy the foreground of his mind.

The speaker and Psyche are joined, since both have been transformed simultaneously. For this reason, the distinction between subject and object is virtually eliminated at this point, although some division remains, since language implies a separation of self and other. There is also, then, very little division between substance and form; as Barnard points out, "Seeing and singing are now simultaneous and inextricable, sensation and poetic act at

once" (920). The fusion of the horizons of past and present is particularly apparent in the last six lines of the stanza, when all the external trappings of ancient worship described in Stanza Two are reintroduced. Because he has been inspired, the speaker subsumes all of these externals, which gain new meaning both because they have become subjective and internalized, and because they have been transformed from the distant past into the actual present, which also acquires new meaning.

The internalization of the external world becomes even more pronounced in Stanza Four. That Psyche's fane will be built "In some untrodden region" (51) of the speaker's mind suggests the speaker's openness to the new possibilities before him. The "branched thoughts" (52) evoke growth and widening awareness; the paradox of "pleasant pain" also points to the speaker's acceptance of all types of experience, and looks forward to the other odes in which Keats deals directly with hardship and human mortality.

Bloom's view that in this stanza the speaker is "incarnated as a god" (93) and that paradoxes and contradictions are resolved in the "poet's paradise" (95) ignores the presence of some negative aspects. Bloom returns to precisely those absolutes--gods and poetic paradises--that Keats meant to displace in this ode, in being "by [his] own eyes inspired." Unlike Bloom, Sperry considers the ode's conclusion to be extremely negative. He feels that the "dark-cluster'd trees" which "Fledge the wild-ridged mountains steep by steep" (54-55) "form an ominously brooding background" (256). However, the vast, rather frightening wilderness is softened in the next lines; harsh nature merges with a more tranquil scene to show the speaker's acceptance of all possible moods and experiences. Turning to a more gentle setting in which

> by zephyrs, streams, and birds, and bees,
> the moss-lain Dryads shall be lull'd to sleep, (56-57)

the speaker re-creates the earlier vision of Cupid and Psyche lying in the grass, which, as the reader now realizes, was only one of the possible projections existing in the speaker's mind. Thus, the past vision of "to-day," the potential future experiences which exist only as possibilities in the speaker's receptive mind, and the actual present in which the poem is being composed, are evoked simultaneously each time the reader reads this stanza.

The image of the "wreath'd trellis of a working brain" (60) which adorns the new-formed sanctuary suggests that the speaker's identity will continue to develop. Although the use of the word "brain" may at first evoke reason and intelligence, the ode does not, as Vendler, Sperry and Barnard suggest, lead to the replacement of intuitive grasping and innocent sensuality with a thoughtful and rational contemplation of the world of harsh experience. This is confirmed by the speaker's desire to dress his sanctuary

> 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. (61-63)

The indeterminacy and the perpetual newness of projected future experiences show that the speaker is open to the future. Granted, as Bate points out, the verb "feign" suggests the possibility of illusion (494) in the working of the imagination. The speaker's vision at the end of the ode is not exclusively positive; there are hints of hardship and disillusion. But the point is that he is prepared to accept the negative aspects of human life and the difficulties involved in the poetic process, because he knows they are important elements in the "vale of Soul-Making."

Sperry believes that the indeterminacy expressed in the last stanza is ironic and discouraging:

> Indeed the recognition the ode finally intimates is that for
> the poet of the present day there can be no escape from

> shadowiness and subjectivity, that the effort to push further into the region of the unknown leads only to the perception of further passages and implications, that it results in a sense of ultimate inconclusiveness that is ironic. (259)

This interpretation, though, renders ironic and insincere the speaker's entire celebration of Psyche, and completely undercuts the "soft delight / That shadowy thought can win" (64-65) for her. The ode becomes a self-parody of the speaker, rather than a genuine attempt to express his future poetic goals and his new conception of the poetic process. Sperry's rejection of inconclusiveness denies that writing poetry is parallel to living, and that one's identity changes constantly because of each new "voyage of conception" one embarks on. Allott notes that "shadowy thought" "is the gardener's creative reverie, opposed antithetically to the matter-of-fact operations of scientific logic" (92). In giving way to the indeterminacy of the imagination, the speaker rejects methodology and sequential thought, believing, like Gadamer, that reason alone cannot liberate human truth.

A more plausible reading of the ode, which is in keeping with the fusion of spatial and historical horizons central to its meaning, is offered by James Bunn, who writes that

> The poem ends, as it should, in an anticipating pause, in the act of creating and awaiting completion. Psyche's temple in the mind is a paean to the act of 'shadowy thought,' that twilight, in-between state where tacit ideas are groped for, effortfully worked out with 'pleasant pain' in anticipation of that completion and repose when ideas have been satisfactorily matched with language, when flowers have been found a name, when spirit has been rendered into figure. (589)

Bunn's view corresponds to Gadamer's explanation of Bildung, or form, which once discovered in one's world allows one to escape from self-annihilation. "To seek one's own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being is only to return to itself from what is other"

(Truth 15). In projecting his mind onto Psyche, and in letting the goddess become subject in him while at the same time creating a form for her, the speaker returns to himself with a new understanding of his role as poet. The reader completes the process of Bildung by bringing Psyche to the foreground with each new reading and by making actual the possibilities embedded in Keats's ode.

The "Ode to Psyche" concludes with two images of openness and illumination, the "bright torch" and the "casement ope at night, / To let the warm Love in!" (66-67). A torch eliminates darkness and makes things more easily visible, and so acts as a metaphor for an open and transparent mind. Likewise, the open casement is an appropriate image because it suggests that there are no barriers between within and without. Cupid is reintroduced to the poem, this time, not as a silent, frozen lover but as an agent who will work with and in the speaker's mind to alter and form Psyche's identity. The speaker has learned that "keeping one part of the self simple and direct in its receptiveness is a matter intimately linked with the experience of love" (Allott 92).

Because of its innovative presentation of an inspirational moment, the "Ode to Psyche" serves as a useful introduction to Keats's odes. Although it describes the pre-verbal, semi-conscious state in which the poet has not dealt with the material world, and so with a developed symbol, the ode indicates to the reader some aspects of Keats's attitude towards subjectivity, tradition and the way in which poetry develops from insight to expression.

(ii) "Ode to a Nightingale"

The "Ode to a Nightingale" is the first of Keats's Great Odes to be centered on an object perceived in the material world; therefore, it is the first to deal overtly with time, human mortality and the evanescence of natural phenomena. Because Keats's speaker contemplates the nightingale, which belongs to the world of experience rather than being an imaginative construct derived from his own mind, "between the [speaker] and the nightingale there is a distance he had never experienced with the less resistant Psyche" (Dickstein 206). Psyche is a visionary apparition, a projection into the realm of possible experience, which the speaker is able to invoke or banish from his mind. The nightingale, however, is perceived through the senses, and so, its existence is independent from the speaker's act of perception. The "Ode to a Nightingale" is also the first ode in which the speaker acts as audience; the poem is constructed around the constant dialectical tension between the listening speaker and the singing bird, the perceiving subject and the aesthetic object. Vendler points out that "In this most perfect aesthetic separation from 'habitual self,' Keats explores what one version of the aesthetic response can be" (81).

The "Ode to Psyche" portrays the creation of art as a subjective, transcendent activity in which the reader is invited to participate. Keats's journey outward, away from the allegory of the poetic self underlying the "Ode to Psyche," towards a more experiential, intersubjective conception of art in which the speaker confronts the external world, is dramatized in the "Ode to a Nightingale." The nightingale is itself natural and finite, but it becomes immortal and artificial when the speaker expropriates it and makes it into a symbol. Dickstein explains that "As a singer she suggests art, and as a bird

and Dryad she represents an aspect of nature" (206).[2] Thus, the "Ode to a Nightingale" attempts to reconcile the private, self-enclosed realm of the "Ode to Psyche" with the necessary existence of the empirical world: self and world are explored simultaneously in this more balanced portrayal of the aesthetic process. The progression from one ode to the next suggests that Keats's conception of art is changing; having described the artistic process as pure subjectivity, he is now prepared to produce art derived from the world of actuality.

Sperry suggests that the ode moves "from mortality toward essence, from image toward symbol, from time toward eternity" (267). The transition of the nightingale from image into symbol is central to the poem's meaning, but to say that the poem moves towards eternity and essence undermines the speaker's return to his "sole self" and his acknowledgement of actuality and process. It is only when the speaker awakens to self-consciousness that sensual beauty is subsumed by existential questions. There is no attempt to answer these questions, or to reconcile the numerous contradictions which emerge in the text. The constant movement from the speaker's confrontation of his self and the world of actuality to his desire for transcendence and immortality prevents any final resolution from taking place. Although each stanza is pictorial, either in effect or in method, there is a prolonged tension between the immediately perceived, spatial phenomena and the speaker's rational projections about their temporality and impending decay.

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[2]I prefer to use the pronoun "it," and not "she," in referring to the nightingale. Before the bird has been concretized as an aesthetic object by a perceiver, it lacks consciousness, will and identity. In calling it "she," Dickstein and others, like the ode's speaker, endow it with qualities it does not possess in itself.

Just as there is a recurrent ebb and flow between present sensuality and the future effects of time, so there is a shift between the bird as natural creature and as imaginative symbol, and between human experience as beneficial and as limiting. Wasserman suggests that the speaker is seeking happiness and ideality which are "beyond his proper bound," since he is mortal, "and thus he is left with no standards to which to refer, or rather, with two conflicting sets of standards" (183). The speaker is unable to reconcile actuality and transcendence; Wasserman believes that if his experience with the nightingale was a mere vision, rather than a truth-ridden dream, "Keats had uttered his Everlasting No" (233) by revealing that beauty and truth, or sensuality and essence, must be forever separate. Tate, however, feels that in including space and time, image and symbol, actuality and ideality--in short, all aspects of human and aesthetic experience--Keats "at least tries to say everything that poetry can say" (168). By evoking contradictions between thought and feeling, and by refusing to reconcile all dialectical opposites in the poem, Keats is apparently not, as Wasserman suggests, uttering an "Everlasting No." Rather, he invites the reader to synthesize the parts, and to recognize each part as an ineradicable aspect of human life. In making no absolute choices, and in allowing no final resolution or closure to take place, Keats leaves many horizons open to the reader.

Because of the speaker's state of confusion and his suspended judgment at the end of the ode, Vendler's view that the poem is inscribed "to beauty rather than to truth, to sensation rather than to thought" (106) is perhaps, like Wasserman's more pessimistic analysis, too categorical.[3] If one

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[3]She writes that the "Ode to a Nightingale" is often considered "the most personal, the most apparently spontaneous, the most immediately beautiful, and the most confessional of Keats's odes" (83).

accepts Tate's view that the ode attempts to say all that poetry can possibly say, then one must also accept that the various spheres of experience portrayed in the ode cannot be reconciled neatly.

Taking a phenomenological approach to the "Ode to a Nightingale" makes it possible to examine the relation between the speaker's consciousness, that of the implied reader, and that of the real reader. Moreover, comparisons can be drawn between the speaker's grasping of the bird's song and each reader's concretization of the ode. However, the fact that the ode is so well-known and often mentioned tends to impede a hermeneutical reading. It is indeed difficult for us, as readers, to "formulate ourselves and thus discover an inner world of which we had hitherto not been conscious" (Act 158); we are so familiar with the general meaning of the ode, and with Brown's anecdote about its composition,[4] that it is almost impossible for us to be "played" spontaneously by the ode, to experience it as something new, and to bracket our "prejudices" about the ode's meaning. As Iser explains,

> Alien thoughts can only formulate themselves in our consciousness when the spontaneity mobilized in us by the text gains a gestalt of its own. This gestalt cannot be formed by our own past and conscious orientations, for these could not have awakened our spontaneity, and so it follows that the conditioning influence must be the alien thoughts which we are now thinking. (Act 158)

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[4]Brown writes that

> In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast-table to the grass-plot under a plum-tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of our nightingale" (Keats Circle 2: 65).

The fact that the reader may have strong "past and conscious orientations" with respect to the "Ode to a Nightingale" does not mean that a phenomenological reading of the poem is impossible. Rather, the reader must make a more conscious effort than usual to suspend her habitual impression of the poem; she must remain open to the alien thoughts of the text, carefully balancing these with her own preintentions about the meaning of the text.

Unlike the other odes, which open by invoking their subject, the "Ode to a Nightingale" begins with a portrayal of its drowsy, semi-conscious speaker. Because the speaker's consciousness and identity have been suspended, and because initially, there is no action or setting, the reader can only grasp his general state of mind in a void. As Wolfson points out, the effect of "My heart aches" is "that of a representative state of desire, rather than of a personal perplexity" (203).

The speaker's dulled mind enables him to be "played" by the bird. His drowsiness is ambiguous: it allows him to perceive the bird fully, but is also dangerous, perhaps deadly, as clues in the text, such as "My heart aches," the hemlock, the sinking "Lethe-ward," and even the double meaning of "plot," suggest to the reader. The fact that the suspension of the self leads potentially to both a beneficial fusion of horizons, and to self-annihilation, is one of the central paradoxes of the ode. Gadamer believes that an artwork, or any object which one intends to experience fully, must be concretized by the perceiver in such a way that none of the object's essence is lost:

> The presence of the artwork to the interpreter is not an immediacy that is given but one that is achieved: a work must be performed. The task of performance is to mediate the work in such a way that medium is not differentiated from what is mediated .... There must be an ecstasis out of ourselves. (Weinsheimer 115)

Thus, the perceiver must actively perform the task of concretizing the object, but she must also move away from the self towards the object of perception. Such an ecstasis apparently takes place in the first stanza of the "Ode to a Nightingale." The speaker has performed the act of Husserlian epoché on his own rational thoughts, and so listens attentively to the bird's song. The "drowsy numbness" is so extreme that it pains his senses, and he achieves release from this intensity by turning himself imaginatively towards the nightingale.

The passivity of the speaker's mind as he receives the bird's song suggests not only the danger of self-annihilation, but also his openness to new horizons, expressed in the poem's language of paradox--his aching heart is "too happy," while numbness "pains / My sense." The language, along with the speaker's contradictory desire to participate with empathy in the bird's song, despite his preoccupation with his own drowsy self, generate a mood of indeterminacy. The speaker's unwillingness to define his world and his receptivity are further evidenced by the "almost at a point" state in this stanza, "as Keats notes with the use of the suffix '-wards' in 'Lethe-wards'" (Green 29). The "shadows numberless" (9) in the enclosed plot create a vague, formless external setting which corresponds to the speaker's suspended state of mind. The speaker does not impose any significance onto the bird; he merely listens to it with openness. As Vendler explains, "'Hearing' is here a synecdoche for aesthetic receptivity attuned to one wholly beautiful expressive form" (82).

Nevertheless, the reader feels that the speaker's state of mind is too passive and insensible to concretize the "work" properly, to express the bird's singing in a form. The reader is aware of the speaker's gradual movement

towards annihilation and death because of the hints embedded in the poem's language, but the speaker seems less aware of this danger. The ode uses the strategy of delay; Wolfson notes that "The intelligence of the speaker, in fact, lags behind the intelligence of the poem's language" (312). Questions of self-annihilation and identity, of mortality and transcendent aesthetic grasping, are suppressed by the speaker, who is engrossed in the nightingale's song. But because of the linguistic hints provided, the reader cannot suspend herself completely, reproducing the passive receptivity of the speaker's mind. Rather, she begins her interpretation, filling the gaps that exist between the speaker's open state of mind and the negative, deathward preintentions evoked by the poem's language.

The reader begins the "task of performance" which is the interpretation of the text; in Stanza One, the speaker is not conscious enough to perform this task on the bird's song. He fuses his horizons with those of the nightingale, but he is too entranced to mediate or concretize its song. In the subsequent stanzas, he escapes into a private reverie, moving farther and farther away from the actual bird. As Vendler explains, the entry into the ode "is symbolized by a descent ... away from the 'higher' mind and toward the 'lower region' of the senses" (83). Since the speaker banishes all mental constructs from his mind in Stanza One, he cannot achieve a balance between his self and the bird. He cannot concretize the nightingale's song properly; rather, he attempts to escape into it.

The description of the speaker's initial haziness is followed by three perplexing lines:

> 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
> But being too happy in thine happiness
> That thou... (5-7)

The reader expects to see "I," and not "thou," in line seven. As Wolfson points out, "The mistake, or at least confusion, forces us to realize that even on the level of grammar the nightingale's lot can never be known except as the projection and composition of human consciousness" (315). The speaker imposes human feeling--happiness--on his natural object, and later projects a supernatural form onto it, calling it a "light-winged Dryad of the trees" (7). The speaker is no longer a passive receiver of phenomena: he puts an end to his initial empathetic joining with the bird when he begins to endow it with qualities it does not own.

The speaker is the nightingale's audience, but he is also its creator, because he imposes form and meaning on a natural creature which, in itself, possesses neither truth nor immortality. He is not mediating "the work in such a way that medium is not differentiated from what is mediated" (Weinsheimer 115). Parallel to the speaker's relation to the bird is the reader's relation to the speaker. The reader is the speaker's audience, but she, also, supplements the 'blind' speaker's experience, forming preintentions about the text and responding to the linguistic hints and existential questions provided by it. The reader must attempt to be a more open-minded audience than the speaker; she must strive to complete the work in her own way, and yet to let the text "play" her and exist as it is in itself.

In Stanza Two, when the speaker attempts to "leave the world unseen" and "fade away into the forest dim" (19-20), the reader remains detached from him because his desire to escape consciousness is self-willed and artificial. The speaker is apparently trying to regain the drowsy state of mind he possessed in Stanza One, when he experienced a transcendent union with the bird. He longs for the numbness of intoxication and the self-enclosed,

mythical world of Flora and Bacchus. The pastoral scene provides an alternative to joining with the bird--the "Provençal song" and the "sunburnt mirth" (14) are perhaps human versions of the nightingale's singing and its "full-throated ease" (10). The Provençal scene provides an imaginative vision of humanity untainted by consciousness, suffering or mortality. Such a vision could become an actual temporary reality, but as in Stanza One, the speaker is so preoccupied with his desire to obliterate his identity by losing himself to the senses that he is unable to experience momentary happiness. Instead, he wishes for satiety, evoking fulsome images which overpower the consciousness: he longs for vintage cooled in the "deep-delved earth" (12); he insists on a full beaker, "With beaded bubbles winking at the brim" (17); and he wants "a purple-stained mouth" (18). The self-indulgent speaker perceives phenomena only in terms of whether they provides an effective escape from actuality. He is so determined to forget painful reality that he cannot see the potential beauty and happiness that lie right before him.

The speaker's inability to appreciate phenomena is revealed again in Stanza Three. He addresses the real world of suffering and human mortality,

> Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
> Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies.
> (25-26)

During his reflection on human existence, the speaker, whose rational mind has now become fully awakened, insists on observing the differences, rather than the similarities, between himself and the nightingale. "The weariness, the fever, and the fret" (23) of the world are "Here" (24), with him; but they are "What thou (the nightingale) among the trees hast never known" (21). The speaker consciously posits a great division between himself and the bird; his rational mind can only "turn about" the bird, and can no longer enter it.

Thus, he cannot understand the bird as it is in itself. Gadamer explains that the purpose of interpretation is the unification of parts which reach an understanding between one another. "This between is the true locus of hermeneutics" (Truth 263). The search for commonality which forms the basis of interpretation is always productive. Because he looks for differences between himself and the bird rather than for similarities, the speaker's understanding of it can be neither complete nor productive.

The speaker describes the world of human suffering and mortality as a place "Where but to think is to be full of sorrow" (27). This pathetic, hopeless view of life indeed does result from thought: the speaker's theoretical musings on human existence prevent him from truly appreciating phenomena. The assertion that consciousness is an important source of sadness "leads to the fundamental choice, on which the ode turns, between unhappy consciousness and the unconsciousness of death" (Vendler 88). The speaker does not seem to realize that he is unable to join with the nightingale because he cannot remove rational constructs from his mind. The reader, however, links the assertion in line 29 with the 'blind,' unaware state of the speaker. The speaker is not yet prepared to choose between unhappy awareness and the self-annihilation of death. Instead, he continues to dwell on the world of transience and mortality,

> Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
> Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.
> (29-30)

Again, instead of appreciating Beauty and Love as the speaker in the "Ode to Psyche" does, this speaker projects into the future, imagining the final conclusion of the temporal process; he realizes in a rational way that human pleasure is necessarily short-lived.

In the fourth stanza the speaker rejects his thoughts about transience and suffering, making another futile attempt to escape the world, this time "on the viewless wings of Poesy" (33). Dickstein suggests that "Poesy" is "a refuge from the pains of selfhood and actuality, rather than a tragic poetry of self-knowledge and the widening of consciousness" (207). Vendler adds that it is the poetry of pure sensation and springs from the "empathetic flight of the Fancy" (90); Perkins calls it "visionary poetry," or even "fantasy" (250). Keats makes it clear that this fanciful kind of poetry is in direct opposition to "the dull brain" which perplexes and retards (34). The speaker is aware of the unwelcome presence of his brain at this point, but he cannot perform the act of epoché on his rationality. In his discussion of visionary experiences in Keats's poetry, Perkins explains that "If the dream or vision grounds itself in impossibility, fact will intrude, spoiling the satisfactions of the dream" (285). The speaker's desire to share the nightingale's posited immortality is clearly grounded in impossibility, and so, thoughts of mortality and transience arise inevitably. The speaker is left with two options: he can either accept actuality, or he can attempt purposely to dull his mind in the hopes of recreating the visionary experience. The type of poetry evoked in Stanza Four reveals the speaker's choice of the second option rather than the first.

The speaker once again focuses on the differences between his own state and that of the bird when he exclaims, "Already with thee! tender is the night" (35). Wasserman joins Clyde S. Kilby in suggesting that "the exclamation mark after 'thee' is not terminal" (198).[5] In revealing that "the

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[5]Wasserman adds that "Indeed, on one of the transcripts (E), the line does read: "Already with thee tender is the night"; and the exclamation mark seems to have been introduced to transfer the emphasis from "with," where meter would normally place it, to "thee" (199).

tender night is for the nightingale alone" (Wolfson 315), the speaker makes the natural division between them even greater. He is so eager to escape the human realm of reason that he evokes the poetry of fantasy, and this "results in two lines of futile ornament" (Bate 505). The reader must make a decision concerning the tone of these fanciful lines:

> And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,
> Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays. (36-37)

They could be read as a description of the magical, transcendent state to which the nightingale belongs. However, the lines contrast so strongly with Keats's subsequent presentation of the immediately-present world--the "here"--in which

> there is no light
> Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
> Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways-- (38-40)

that the reader is tempted to read lines 36-37 ironically. They seem to reflect the frustration felt by the speaker when he realizes that poetry, like forgetfulness and wine, is not a vehicle through which he can transcend his human state. The triumphant "I will fly to thee" (31) can also be reread with irony. The speaker has gained a bit of self-knowledge because he apparently realizes the futility of his past attempts to achieve immortality.

After gaining some personal awareness, the speaker concentrates once more on the nightingale's song. The absence of light, the "verdurous glooms" and the "winding mossy ways" suggest both the speaker's return to the indeterminate, open state of mind portrayed in the first stanza, and his acceptance of the earthly world, his own place, in which he will now seek some form of understanding. Now more self-aware, he can bracket his rationality; thus, he is prepared to enter into a dialogue with the phenomena around him, actively performing the task of concretizing what he perceives.

The mood of indeterminacy is fully developed in the description of the bower in Stanza Five. Bate explains that

> For the first time in the ode we have a stanza in which all that the poet is trying to escape is completely absent. The liberation, as always, has come through a direct sympathetic response to concrete reality. The strain and exclamations ... disappear; he is content to 'guess'; and the thick cluster of classical associations used to reinforce the impossible imaginative leap ... give way to naturalistic detail, firmly imagined despite the growing dark. (506)

The stanza begins with uncertainty--"I cannot see what flowers are at my feet" (41)--and the reader's imagination is stimulated. The speaker fills in the gaps; the last seven lines of the stanza are loaded with sensuous, carefully-described natural images. Although the speaker cannot see, both literally and figuratively, he imposes forms of his own creation, defining and understanding his world. Vendler explains that the bower is the speaker's center of being, "the center empowered by that 'greeting of the spirit' here represented by 'hearing'" (89). The reader, whose task it is to concretize the work, is invited to embark on her own "voyage of conception." She, also, experiences the ambiguous "embalmed darkness" (43), producing her own "guesses" and recreating the scene imaginatively.

The speaker, now more able to appreciate short-lived, ephemeral beauty, demonstrates an acceptance of temporal process in this stanza. The natural beauties described spring from his sensed experience of the present, but also from his memory and from his projection into the possibilities of the future. As in Stanza Three, Keats invokes the passage of time, "for it is time in which dramatic conflict takes place" (Tate 171); he also adds the spatial dimension. Rather than being seen as destructive, process is now viewed as natural and acceptable. Although Vendler claims that the bower's vulnerability to time prevents "its offering any real escape" (86) from human hardships, the

speaker's new acceptance of temporality suggests his openness to change and indeterminacy. He has finally suspended his self again, and can now perceive the beauty that surrounds him. He lets himself be "played" by the bird's song and by the phenomena in the bower; he is almost prepared to return to his habitual self.

The realm of the bower is full of ambiguity: "Embalmed" suggests the speaker's integration with his world, but also death and submersion. Likewise, by completing the temporal process, noticing the leaves which cover the "Fast-fading violets" (47), and linking the "coming musk-rose" with "The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves" (49-50), the speaker projects imaginatively into the future, filling the blanks in a productive, Heideggerian way, but Keats is again hinting subliminally that death and decay are inevitable. Vendler notes that the mention of flies, although it makes the bower more complete, is an "admission of a tryst with Death" (92). On the other hand, Perkins explains that the speaker's ability to express himself in poetry indicates his ability to complete process imaginatively: "the capability of the imagination is dramatized in the poetry" (250). Gadamer would say that by applying Gebilde, or form, to a perceived event, the concretization of the scene is not merely "play," but "a play," which can now be represented and experienced by new "players," or readers, allowing them, also, to experience the temporal process. For the first time since Stanza One, the speaker's mind is fused empathetically with his world.

The darkness invoked at the beginning of Stanza Six acts as another point of indeterminacy, making the ecstatic singing of the bird more poignant. The speaker attempts to maintain his suspended state of mind by longing for death, which brings about the obliteration of rationality and consciousness.

But with death there can be no more self-knowledge and sensation. Soothing death comes as an escape and a culmination of the speaker's previous ineffective attempts to ward off human suffering; it is "easeful," and has the ability "To take into the air my quiet breath" (54). The line "I have been half in love with easeful Death" (52) has been, as Jones explains, "emerging and defining itself, swelling into reality, in the dark foetal safety and warmth and utter enclosure of the stanzas before and their 'winding mossy ways'" (215). Death is another of the speaker's projections into the future--it is the filling of a gap, speculation on an unborn possibility.

However, in Stanza Six, the rational dimension of the speaker's consciousness surfaces once again. Initially, the speaker is entranced by death, longing for the oblivion it brings. Gradually, he awakens to the present--no longer are past, present and future intertwined, as in the bower scene. As the speaker projects forwards, arriving at the logical conclusion of his contemplation of death, he becomes fully conscious of his present:

> Now more than ever seems it rich to die
> To cease upon the midnight with no pain. (55-56)

Once again, the speaker is divided from phenomena: the bird has a "soul," is in "an ecstasy," and sings a "high requiem" (57-60). The trance comes to an end and "We witness the entrance of the philosophic mind" (Vendler 93). The speaker is no longer being "humble," to use Poulet's term, before phenomena. He is concretizing the bird's song, without understanding the bird; Gadamer would say there is too much distance between the medium and what is mediated. The nightingale is natural; its song is natural. But by applying transcendent, philosophic concepts to it, the speaker makes the bird into an artificial construct. He is similar to a bad reader because he is not open to

the bird itself. He uses the bird as a symbol through which he can perform the task of excessive self-examination.

The reader stands outside of the speaker's death-wish, noticing instead the contrast between the speaker's openness to potential yet transient beauty in Stanza Five and his rather regressive, self-indulgent desire for death in Stanza Six. Moreover, at this point, the reader reads the previous stanzas retrospectively, filling in gaps left open during her process of reading. She has been prepared by ambiguous hints about death, such as "hemlock," "deep-delved earth," "youth grows spectre-thin and dies," the darkness, the fading flowers and the "haunt of flies," and so, she is not surprised by the speaker's yearning for death.

By line 60, the speaker's reason has led him to realize that if he dies, he will never, in fact, join with the nightingale: he will "To thy high requiem become a sod." Thus, he rejects his desire for oblivion and prepares to return to life with a new acceptance of transience and process. He must, then, banish from his mind the artificial image of the nightingale which he himself has produced. He begins his rejection of artificiality by mentioning, once again, the differences between himself and the bird:

> Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
> No hungry generations tread thee down. (61-62)

Dickstein notes that the "hungry generations" are "both victims and agents: they do the treading too though they themselves are eventually trod upon" (214). Keats returns to the concept of process described in the bower scene, but this time, it is a human process he refers to, perhaps now with less anguish and more acceptance than in the third stanza. The difference between the speaker and the bird is now seen as natural, and not to be lamented: he no longer feels the need to join with the bird. The subsequent "list of

putative audiences for the bird's song" (Vendler 93) suggests that the nightingale's song, or art in general, can provide amusement or consolation. Art relates to humanity and to the various moods of human life; it is flexible and changing. Its recipient, also, unlike the speaker in this ode, must therefore be open and receptive.

The bird's song, which is here a synecdoche for all art, has often

> Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn. (69-70)

This image of openness and revelation, which echoes those in the last stanza of the "Ode to Psyche," indicates that art provides its recipient with insights into the mysteries of human life. In evoking the "perilous seas," the speaker transfers human elements to the mythical realm, and suggests that art has relation and significance to the actualities of mortal existence, to hardship and suffering. Art also acts as a link between historical settings and between different readers; it works in the same way as Gadamerian culture or tradition, uniting all historical horizons and providing the individual with a greater understanding of her present.

Art, however, is always in danger of becoming illusion. This point was dramatized in the ode itself, in which a natural phenomenon was reified, through the perceiver's concretization of it, into an immortal being with emotions and intentions. The speaker points out that although art may bring joy, comfort, or intersubjective unity, it in part belongs in the "faery lands forlorn" (70). These lands are forlorn because they are empty of human content: "they are not at all for man" (Bate 509); they are "opening onto a perilous sea harboring no vessel" (Vendler 94). However, the "faery lands forlorn" also evoke the mysterious, unknowable aspect of human life, and remind the reader that the realm of art is transcendent and unattainable;

Wasserman writes that the lands "are the mystery, but they cannot be peopled by mortals, for human existence involves an ignorance of the mystery even though the mystery is the central principle of man's life" (218). Perkins sees the faery lands as more negative than the other critics do, as "a place which may represent a destructive illusion" (355). Vendler, also, reads the line as a comment on the potential danger of art, which apparently has no moral content and is indifferent to humanity: "It is available to us only in a moment of sensual trance in which we suspend intelligence and consciousness of our suffering human lot" (95). However, this interpretation conflicts with the assertion in Stanza Seven that art brings amusement and consolation to the emperor, the clown and Ruth. Thus, Keats appears to be suggesting that art is useful and beneficial, but only if it is not seen as existing in a different realm, as immortal, transcendent and unattainable.

The perceiver of art must participate in the formulation of the work, making it her own, entering into a dialogue with it. She must see similarities, not merely differences, between her self and the work; in doing so, she returns to her habitual self. Gadamer explains that

> The work of art that says something confronts us itself. That is, it expresses something in such a way that what is said is like a discovery, a disclosure of something previously concealed .... the experience of art is experience in a real sense and must master ever anew the task that experience involves: the task of integrating it into the whole of one's own orientation to a world and one's self-understanding. The language of art is constituted precisely by the fact that it speaks to the self-understanding of every person, and it does this as ever present and by means of its own contemporaneousness. (Hermeneutics 101-02)

Although the speaker in the "Ode to a Nightingale" has difficulty in seeing the bird as it is in itself, he ultimately allows it to reveal something to him; he thereby achieves some degree of self-awareness.

After reflecting on the danger of art becoming illusory, the speaker, in Stanza Eight, awakens to reality and to his "sole self" (72). "Forlorn" tolls like a bell, creating another blank to be filled by the reader, who thinks of both human mortality and the awakening of the self. The speaker now sees his situation in a new way. He rejects the fantasy and the illusion of art, and he understands the futility of his attempts to escape pain and mortality:

> the fancy cannot cheat so well
> As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf. (73-74)

At the moment of his realization about the deceitful nature of Fancy, the nightingale, also, is freed. It is no longer the "immortal Bird!" (61); liberated from the speaker's rigid mind, it becomes once again a natural creature. Only when the bird is seen for what it really is can the speaker come home to his true self. Vendler believes that "The cessation of the nightingale's music is Keats's first major metaphor in the odes for that disillusion which follows the physical embodiment of Fancy in act and artifact" (83). But when the nightingale flies away, the speaker returns to reality, which he now sees in a new way.

Nevertheless, the last six lines of the poem are ridden with confusion and ambiguity. When the bird leaves, the speaker's illusory vision of it is not altogether shattered, because he refers to its "plaintive anthem" (75), once again endowing it with emotions and a purpose. In opposition, the bird's song is "buried deep" (76), a situation which undermines the postulated immortality of the bird, and suggests the speaker's realization that this actual bird's song is not eternal and transcendent, but momentary and fleeting, like all natural beauties. The speaker, at this point, sees the bird both as the symbol he has created, and as the natural creature it really is.

The speaker then notices the 'freed' bird "In the next valley-glades" (78), suggesting that the bird's song is, in fact, immortal since it will be perceived, in the future, by others. The bird's song, although "buried," is not over, but it requires the attention of a new perceiver in the next glade to bring it once again into new life. Paradoxically, though, the bird's spatial and temporal movement in a sense denies its immortality. Thus, in these lines, the speaker cannot differentiate between symbol and fantasy on the one hand and reality and recognition on the other. His concretization of the bird's song merges with his own intense self-questioning.

The speaker's confusion is further revealed by the two unanswered questions with which the ode closes:

> Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
> Fled is that music: -Do I wake or sleep? (79-80)

The speaker has learned little: he feels that art is merely a trick, and yet, that the temporal world is undesirable, and so he remains forlorn and empty. The reader, however, is left to contemplate the speaker's experience, and to distinguish vision from reality, the imposed artificial form from the actual bird.

Sperry suggests that the questions which conclude the ode "seek to reduce the life and potentiality of the verse, its continuity and infinite suggestiveness, to the value of a logical abstraction by forcing on it the alien methodology of 'either/or'" (267). He believes the questions reflect the speaker's movement, in the ode, away from intuitive grasping towards common sense. Vendler agrees that the concluding stanza represents the speaker's "exit from sensation and beauty into thought and selfhood" (95). There is indeed a great deal of self-reflection in the final stanza, as well as a return to the human realm of time and space. But the questions remain unanswered--it is up to the reader to decide whether the speaker's experience was a

deceitful illusion or a real glimpse of the mystery. The reader must ask herself whether the speaker's inability to experience the vision now represents "an awakening into reality or a lapse into insensibility" (Perkins 255).

The speaker prepares to return to reality, having rejected death and insensibility and, we feel, having come closer to an acceptance of change and process. The "Ode to a Nightingale" raises many questions about the concretization of artworks, their purpose, and about how one must envision mortality and human process. None of these questions is answered overtly. The reader draws her own meaning from the ode, just as the speaker concretized the bird's song in his own way. Neither the actual bird nor the created symbol reaches the foreground: the ode ends on an open, interrogative note. Nevertheless, the nightingale's song has spoken intimately to the speaker, as it will speak to each new reader of the ode, altering the familiar. To use Gadamer's words, the artwork is not only significant because of the recognition it brings, the "'This art thou!' disclosed in a joyous and frightening shock; it also says to us, 'Thou must alter thy life!'" (Hermeneutics 104).

(iii) "Ode on a Grecian Urn"

Like the "Ode to a Nightingale," the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" examines the relationship between the perceiving subject and the aesthetic object which "plays" her, and between the transcendent realm of art and the experiential world of human life. The obvious difference between the two odes is that while the former is addressed to a living symbol from the natural environment, the latter is about a fixed, ancient artwork. In the "Ode to a Nightingale," the speaker, in concretizing the bird's song, projects characteristics onto the

nightingale that it does not actually possess--purpose, emotion, aesthetic intention and immortality. However, the movement from image to symbol, from immanence to transcendence, is reversed in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn": the speaker initially appreciates the urn's eternity, but later realizes the value of the human world of transience and evanescent beauty.

The "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is particularly susceptible to a phenomenological reading because of the paradoxes and the indeterminacy that lie within the text. Bate explains that "The essence of the urn is its potentiality waiting to be fulfilled" (511). Pollard notes that "In this ode it is silence that speaks" (43)--the poem dramatizes the hermeneutical "between," the silence constituting the meeting of the eternal urn and the speaker's suspended self. The ode's speaker is much more unobtrusive, confident and open than the one in the "Ode to a Nightingale"; he does not long for self-annihilation, but truly lets himself be "played" by the urn, and later grapples with the new questions that have arisen through his experience with it.

John Jones claims that in this ode, Keats attempts "to write a Grecian Urn" (220). As in the "Ode to a Nightingale," significant parallels exist between the speaker's concretization of the object and the reader's approach to the poem. The reader is involved in the speaker's visionary experience; with the speaker, she gains self-recognition, and her familiar world is altered. Yet, she must also bring the text into a new existence, fusing her personal transformation with the eternal, fixed text. The Classical urn, like the text of the ode, is perpetually reified as each new reader brings it into her own present. As Fisher explains, the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" speaks "self-consciously about history and the historical relation" (88).

The urn is similar to the symbol the nightingale becomes after it has been concretized. The bird is natural in its own right, but immortal when a listener projects intentions onto it. The urn is artificial in its own right, but it speaks to and depicts human beings. The two "artworks" participate both in the realm of art and in that of humanity. Bate explains that

> Aloof from the brevity and sharp claims of human life, the urn is not only freer but also more limited: freer to advance the message it does in a way that no human being could confidently do, and yet, as a work of art, limited to the realm in which its message applies. (518)

The urn is an object of fascination to the speaker, and, presumably, to Keats as poet, because it has the capacity to exist simultaneously in the two realms of experience, necessarily separate to human beings.

The reader is guided by the speaker, who tells her what to look at on the urn. However, she also has a more active role: she must not only attempt to transcend the speaker's subjective interpretation of the urn, seeing it for herself, but she must also make certain evaluative judgments about the speaker's interpretation. The reader is constantly torn between her attempt at objectivity and her own subjective preintentions, between what Iser refers to as observation and involvement, and what Bergson calls turning about an object versus entering it. The speaker's perception of the urn is parallel to each reader's approach to the poem; the two levels of interpretation occasionally converge, but sometimes remain distant.

The urn contains many paradoxes, which reflect its indeterminate meaning. For instance, it is silent--a "bride of quietness" (1)--and yet it is a "Sylvan historian" (3) which speaks a message. It is an artwork, but it depicts human life. The figures on the frieze are both static in their being and fluctuating in their becoming. Thus, the urn is incomplete, and yet belongs to

eternal "slow time" (2). The reader studies the urn's numerous paradoxes, which point to the conflicting values of life and art, of immanence and transcendence. Yet, she must also try to participate freely in the urn's being: the simultaneous existence of the work and the text constitutes the paradoxical nature of good reading.

The "Ode on a Grecian Urn," then, examines the paradoxical nature of art, perception and reading. In Stanza One, the speaker sees the urn as a whole. He is outside of it, and asks general, objective questions about its function and its relation to history: "What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?" (8). The disjunctive language--the interrogative mode and the use of the conjunction "or" four times in the first stanza--establishes the indeterminate nature of the urn.

During the first stanza, the reader is limited to the same distanced perspective as the speaker; she can only turn about the urn, preparing to be told its "flowery tale," its "leaf-fringed legend" (4-5). But at the same time, her mind is awakened by the series of questions posed to the urn (8-10). Preintentions form in her mind about the urn's meaning and message. However, at this point, neither the speaker nor the reader has fused with the urn, which has not yet been entered, or foregrounded, by the perceiving mind. A mood of "expectation," and not of "baffled incomprehension" (Harding 99), is evoked by the speaker's undefined introduction of the urn.

In Stanza Two, the audience is able to enter the urn when sensual music is replaced by a more spiritual silence--"the essence of sound" (Burke 449)--found in the "ditties of no tone" (14). The silence, like the darkness in the "Ode to a Nightingale," obliterates all distractions and stimulates the imagination; there is only the sound of the verse itself, which "mediate[s] the

work in such a way that medium is not differentiated from what is mediated" (Weinsheimer 115). The speaker brackets all rational questions, and the resulting serene silence allows the urn to come into being and to achieve the foreground in the perceiver's mind.

The speaker focuses only on the visual phenomena before him, giving himself to the "Fair youth" (15) piping beneath the trees, and the young lovers. These images, and the specific frieze, are foregrounded; a mutual dialogue is established between the speaker's imagination and the figures on the urn. Pollard explains that the speaker, "in the moodlessness of indolence, has taken on the identity of the urn, annihilating his own" (50). He is now at one with the urn, so that there is no division between self and other, between his imagined perception of the scene and the events and characters depicted on the urn. There is also, at this point, very little division between the speaker and the reader, although there is some, since the reader is observing the speaker observing the urn. But the speaker enters the urn, and the reader enters the speaker's imaginative recreation of it. As Poulet explains, "Reading involves the falling away of barriers between you and [the text]. You are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside" (54).

However, after the hermeneutical "between" that reconciles subject and object has been established, the paradoxes of the urn become more important, increasing the distances between the urn and the speaker, the speaker and the reader. The ambiguity of the theme and images in the ode evokes Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the phenomenological paradox of immanence and transcendence. He writes that

> the things which I see are things for me only under the condition that they always recede beyond their immediately given aspects. Thus there is a paradox of immanence and transcendence in perception. Immanence, because the

> perceived object cannot be foreign to him who perceives; transcendence, because it always contains something more than what is actually given.... [Perception] requires both this presence and this absence. (16)

An object from the external world initially can be experienced as a pure perception, or else as a transcendent, complete object; it can be felt, or thought. In transcendent grasping, the mind fills in the gaps which are missing from the immanent perception, arriving finally at a more complete understanding of the perceived object.

The concept of immanence and transcendence is particularly applicable to the "Ode on a Grecian Urn," in which the tension between actuality and immortality is central. The linguistic paradoxes in the poem, such as "unravish'd bride," "foster-child," "Cold Pastoral" and "peaceful citadel," express the main philosophical paradox of the urn: the conflict between beautiful art, which is by nature artificial, and human life, which involves hardship but is experienced immediately. In describing the scene on the frieze, the speaker sees it as a realistic scene with which he identifies, but he is also aware of its status as art. The poem's images, then, are constantly shimmering, being first immanent, then transcendent. In Stanza Two, for instance, the images of the leaved trees, the frozen lover and the fair girl are imprinted directly on the passive, accepting mind of the speaker, who joins with the urn in an empathetic way, just as the speaker in the "Ode to a Nightingale" fuses with the bird's song in the first stanza. The last four lines of the second stanza reveal the speaker's ability to appreciate the present in itself, without projecting onto a changing future or reflecting on the past. As Kenneth Burke explains, these lines define "an eternal prolongation of the state just prior to fulfilment--not exactly arrested ecstasy, but rather an arrested pre-ecstasy" (449-50).

In Stanza Three, however, the images become transcendent when the speaker begins to fill in some gaps as he is now more aware of the existential implications of the immanent images described in Stanza Two. The speaker confronts the same images, but adds his own mental constructs and value judgments to them. He realizes, for example, that being and becoming are identical states for the figures; the piper is "For ever piping songs for ever new" (24). There is no completion, no coming to an end, and no change in the world depicted on the urn's frieze.The speaker calls this scene "happy, happy"; at the beginning of Stanza Three, he is caught up in the art/life paradox, and he accepts it. But, like the speaker in the "Ode to a Nightingale," his rational mind leads him to consider the difference between himself and the bold lover, rather than merely identifying with him. Therefore, it is no longer possible for the speaker to experience the figures on the urn in an empathetic, unselfconscious way.

Once the speaker begins to perceive the figures in a more rational, thoughtful way, he sees love as a frantic but frozen emotion, "for ever panting and for ever young" (27). The speaker realizes that 'art-love' is far above, or removed from, "breathing human passion" (28). He is somewhat more advanced than the speaker in the "Ode to a Nightingale," who at first rejects the real and then continues his fruitless attempts to join with the bird and to share its supposed immortality. The speaker in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" recognizes the illusion of art as he rejects the artificial view of love portrayed on the urn, refusing to ignore the "burning forehead and a parching tongue" (30), which, although less pleasant than the eternal joy depicted on the frieze, actually accompany love in the real world.

When the speaker puts the images he perceives into question, seeking their complete, transcendent meaning and rejecting their immanence, a great deal of distance is established between himself and the urn. The reader, in turn, becomes separate, both from the urn and from the speaker. She now has a new role to play: from about line 25 on, she must evaluate the speaker's more transcendent interpretation of the urn. At the same time, the good reader exercises negative capability, trying to glimpse the urn and its message in an immanent way.

The reader is called on to make decisions concerning the speaker's tone. The poet describes the scene as "happy, happy." The reader wonders if the speaker is expressing his genuine, ecstatic merging with the immanent urn, which human language can only express imperfectly, through repetition, or whether the lines should be read ironically: since the boughs are trapped in spring, the piper can never end his song, and the lover remains "For ever panting," surely they can only be the opposite of "happy." The words "happy, happy" are reread ironically, in retrospect, after the speaker has rejected the artificiality of the urn.

The repetition of "happy" also parallels the trapped, static condition of the figures. The reader must not only judge the nature of the speaker's tone, but she must also make decisions on the syntactical level. Susan Wolfson points out that "All breathing human passion far above" (28) is purposely problematic; it invites a phenomenological reading by first promoting, then subverting, the union of "happy love" and "human passion" (323). The poem, like the urn, constantly resists interpretation. Thus, the speaker, who attempts to understand the urn, and the reader, who tries to interpret the poem, both must wrestle with the same paradoxes and ambiguities.

In Stanza Four, the speaker again asks theoretical questions, returning to the interrogative mode of Stanza One when he was outside of the urn. The sacrificial scene presents the reader with a mystery; like the speaker, she wonders who is performing the sacrifice and why. The reader is called on to speculate on the origin of the figures and the meaning of the ritual. Preintentions form in her mind as she provides hypothetical answers to the questions raised by the speaker. The speaker imagines the empty home-town of the figures, from which "not a soul to tell / Why thou art desolate can e'er return" (39-40). He cannot easily accept indeterminacy, being unwilling to remain "in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts." The speaker, like the one in the "Ode to a Nightingale," tries to make rational, causal judgments about the phenomena he perceives. If the speaker's perception of the urn had been more immanent at this point, and less logical, he might have been able to see the sacrificial scene as a unification of the actual realm and the spiritual one, as a conflation of an immanent and a transcendent approach to human existence.

However, the speaker's application of human logic to the scene indicates that he believes in the existence of the figures. The fact that he asks of them questions which are grounded in the human world, although he recognizes the fundamental artificiality of the urn, suggests that he accepts the illusion of art. In Stanza Four, both the speaker and the reader are torn between what Iser calls subjective illusions and the alien associations of the text. Despite his partial involvement, the speaker has lost the state of unproblematic, pure union with the urn he experienced in Stanza Two. His self comes noticeably close to the foreground of the aesthetic experience.

Georges Poulet stresses the importance of suspending the self during the reading process. The work of art becomes "a sort of human being," "a

mind conscious of itself and constituting itself in me as the subject of its own objects" (59). The reader, then, is a necessary audience who bestows being on the text, but she must also exercise negative capability, letting the text, not her own mind, be in the foreground. The reader's dual role is closely related to the speaker's changing perception of the images on the urn: the speaker first accepts the images as immanent, and later dissects them in a transcendent way. They are first immanent, and then transcendent. A careful balancing process must take place between the two modes of perception.

Such balancing is necessary in the interpretation of art. Burke explains that "In imagery there is no negation, or disjunction. Logically, we can say 'this or that,' 'this, not that.' In imagery we can say 'this and that, 'this with that,' 'this-that,' etc." (456). Similarly, Gadamer's hermeneutic circle reveals the importance, during interpretation, of letting contradictory parts be subsumed by the holistic meaning of the work. Burke and Gadamer echo Keats's dictum that "the excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty & Truth" (Letters 1: 192). The speaker and the reader must strive for a holistic outlook in which different perspectives and modes of interpretation are reconciled.

By the end of Stanza Four, however, the speaker has been carried away by his own questions; he has even left the urn behind. He cannot recapture his union with the urn through reason, and so experiences a momentary loss of identity. The desolate silence of the town's streets suggests lack of meaning and the absence of union. It is unlike the spiritual silence--the silence beyond language and reason--evoked in Stanza Two. The

reader is invited to interpret the four different mentions of silence in the ode, which reflect the changing moods and manner of perception of the speaker.

In Stanza Five, the speaker again perceives the urn as a whole, as he did in the first stanza, but the urn now has a new transcendent meaning which was both obscured, and retrospectively brought about, by the poet's focusing on the single frieze. The individual figures have now receded, and are only "marble men and maidens" (42). The urn is called an "Attic shape!", a "Fair attitude!" (41): the speaker is still trying to put it into a historical and aesthetic context so that he can understand it in rational terms. The urn remains transcendent in itself, though, and the speaker finally admits that the "silent form" "dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity" (44-45). Perceivers cannot understand the urn, as they cannot grasp eternity, from the standpoint of reason and sequence--or "normal history." Rather, they must accept its own more mythical history, and must "bracket" all questions from the human world, as much as possible. As Wolfson writes,

> The urn befriends its beholders the way Keats's rhyme does--by encouraging their imaginative activity. We come to value its artistry not so much by what it yields to thought as by what it does to thought--provoking questions and refusing to confirm any sure points and resting places for our reasonings. (326)

Like the bird in the "Ode to a Nightingale," the urn remains ambiguous and indefinable, because of the speaker's constant vacillation between an immanent and a transcendent perception of it.

The perceiver's dual perspective must be kept in mind when one turns to the controversial concluding statement, "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'--that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (49-50). The interpretation of these lines is so problematic that the reader is forced to participate further in the formulation of the poem's meaning as her role, at

this point, becomes necessarily a very active one. She must make some decisions on the editorial level, since there has been much discussion about whether the quotation marks belong around only "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," or around the entire two lines.[6] Moreover, the reader must decide whether the words are spoken by the poet to the urn, by the poet to the figures on the urn, by the poet to the reader, or by the urn to the speaker or to the reader.[7] The editorial question, and the problem of identifying the speaker and the addressee of these words, are determined and subsumed by one's interpretation of the lines and of how they correspond to the meaning of the ode as a whole. In the fifth stanza, the speaker has achieved a balance between his immanent and his transcendent perception of the urn. He recognizes that the urn is a frozen artwork--it is eternal, "Cold," a "silent form"--and yet, it also has a human dimension, being a "Fair attitude!," a representation of a natural, "Pastoral" scene, and a "friend to man" (48). The speaker allows the urn's meaning to surface; he suspends rational questions but he also brings the message into being, articulating it in form. Thus, there is little division between the speaker and the urn in this moment of perfect concretization, and so it is impossible--and, perhaps, irrelevant--for one to question whether the message is spoken by the urn or by the speaker.

The simple, yet difficult, statement can be interpreted by the reader in either an immanent or a transcendent way. Viewed from an immediate,

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[6]Stillinger explains that "In Brown's transcript the penultimate line reads "Beauty is Truth, -Truth Beauty, -that is all" and the Annals text has "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty. -That is all" (neither contains the quotation marks around "Beauty ... beauty" that are unique to the third of the authoritative texts, that of 1820, followed in this volume)" (Complete Poems 470).

[7]Stillinger outlines each position briefly in Appendix III of The Hoodwinking of Madeline, 167-173.

worldly perspective, the suggestion that beauty is truth, and that this is all one knows or must know, is foolish, as a number of critics have claimed. Murry, for example, believes that the urn's message is, "of course, in the literal and grammatical sense, untrue" (76). Harding sees the message as "cryptic, blank, and essentially uninterpretable" (100); Jones considers it "opaque and almost featureless" (84). Tate summarizes the position of those who do not accept the statement:

> Truth is not beauty, since even art itself cannot do more with death than preserve it, and the beauty frozen on the urn is also dead, since it cannot move. This 'pessimism' may be found as easily in the poem as Keats's comforting paradox. (180)

Readers who reject the urn's message are ones who place much emphasis on the speaker's rejection of the urn's artificiality. Seen in this light, it would make sense to say that the ode, which favours the actual world, can only be "on" a Grecian Urn, unlike the "Ode to a Nightingale," which does not contain a complete, emphatic rejection of art, but a wistful acknowledgement of its belonging to a realm other than the human one.

Yet, the speaker has learned, through the urn, a "friend," to accept mortality and to appreciate transient beauty. Perceived from a more transcendent perspective, the urn's message generates a kind of unity between the two spheres of human existence--the worldly and the spiritual--which is beyond logic and thought. Fisher notes that the urn can "participate in two realms of thought simultaneously and bind perceptions in one realm to those in another" (91). Sperry adds that the statement lies on

> the periphery of the poem, partly inside and partly outside the poetic process, just at the point where sensation, speculation, the language of poetry begins to give way to the process of logical analysis, the language of thought. (274)

The urn's statement, seen from a transcendent point of view, is beneficial because it links the immediate world of flux and hardship with the "reality to come" of which it is a mere "Shadow." The urn consoles the human reader, intimating "that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone..." (Letters 1: 185). It reminds the reader of her eternity and her spiritual nature, and yet simultaneously depicts the fleeting pleasures of human life. Gadamer notes that "the beautiful must always be understood ontologically as an 'image'" (Truth 443). He believes that beauty "serves as a symbol of other-worldly truth, the fundamental truth achieved in the interpretive sciences" (Weinsheimer 257). The appearance of beauty is a 'human-world' manifestation of truth; when seen in a transcendent way, beauty reveals the presence, and the absence, of an intangible, spiritual realm. "The event of the beautiful and the hermeneutical process both presuppose the finiteness of human life" (Truth 442), and they are both imperfect, concrete embodiments of those eternal truths which cannot be glimpsed by mortals.

Thus, the ode's message can be read immanently, as an untrue statement revealing the illusory nature of art and favoring the actuality of the present, sensed world. Or, it can be interpreted in a more transcendent way, as an attempt to reconcile the two spheres of human experience in an all-encompassing whole. The reader, like the ode's speaker, strives to balance these two modes of interpretation. She is left in a state of indeterminacy, torn between the familiar and the unknown mystery, yet taught by the urn's message to accept paradox and uncertainty.

Compared to the introverted speaker in the "Ode to Psyche," the entranced speaker striving for immortality in the "Ode to a Nightingale," and the ambivalent perceiver of the Grecian Urn, the speaker in the "Ode on Melancholy" is confident and possesses a considerable amount of self-knowledge. He has come to terms with human existence and its paradoxes; he can understand and recognize "Veil'd Melancholy" in her "sovran shrine" (26). He has learned that "The answer is not to dodge the melancholy through oblivion, but to experience through it" (Perkins 287). To put it another way, he has come to accept what Gadamer calls 'negative experience,' in which the perceiver revels in and learns from all newness:

> the negativity of experience has a curiously productive meaning. It is not simply a deception that we see through and hence make a correction, but a comprehensive knowledge that we acquire.... [We] gain through [the object] better knowledge not only of itself, but of what we thought we knew before. (Truth 317)

The speaker in the "Ode on Melancholy" is secure enough to give himself entirely to new experiences.

Unlike the speakers in the other odes, the speaker in the "Ode on Melancholy" does not describe retrospectively a recent experience in which the familiar was altered; rather, he tries to articulate his views on modes of experience and emotional states. An undefined addressee is advised and counselled by the speaker in the first two stanzas: "No, no, go not to Lethe," "But when the melancholy fit shall fall," "Then glut thy sorrow" on A, B, C or D. In the third stanza the speaker reflects on his personal experiences and on the relation between Melancholy and Beauty; in doing so, he provides a justification for his previous admonishments to the addressee. It is unclear who the intended addressee actually is: he could be an embodiment of the implied reader construct, which allows the reader to enter the text and to

share the speaker's experience; but he could also be the speaker's own self, in which case the ode would become more personal and confessional, and so more like the other odes. If the advice is self-addressed, then the speaker is trying to quell his insecurities and to convince himself that flux and process are acceptable. The addressee's identity remains ambiguous throughout the ode; however, this uncertainty establishes a link between the speaker and the reader, both, potentially, addressees, who face the problem of human transience together.

As Stillinger explains, "At one time (but not, as is usually reported, in the earliest version) the poem had an additional stanza at the beginning, to introduce the other three" (Poems of John Keats 470). The cancelled stanza is uncharacteristic of the odes in general because it uses extremely grotesque, horrific images. The speaker explains to the addressee that Melancholy cannot be found if one seeks her out actively: one cannot invoke her by building "a bark of dead men's bones," or by stitching a sail with "groans," "bloodstained and aghast." This stanza uses mythological, supernatural images, such as the "Dragon's tail," "the skull / of bald Medusa" and the goddess Melancholy to infer first, that Melancholy is to be found in the world of actuality, and second, that a melancholic state cannot be solely self-induced through the imagination.

Vendler suggests that this stanza "describes a heroic quest" and that "Though Keats rejected this stanza, he kept in his ode the notion of the questing activity of a newly strenuous hero" (157). But although the quest is heroic, it is also doomed and dismal. While the ode as a whole progresses onward to a full conception of life and a reconciliation of opposites, this stanza heads towards death and oblivion. One of the reasons for the sterility

and bleakness of the cancelled stanza is that it is too self-enclosed. The quester, like the speaker in the "Ode to a Nightingale," is trying too hard to generate a mood and to create a symbol. The abundance of active verbs in this stanza, such as "build," "rear," "stitch," "fill," are indicative of the quester's overly-eager stance. He is not passive before his world, a fact emphasized by the gradual elimination of the active verbs and their replacement with "certes you will fail." The cancelled stanza was intended to reveal that melancholy fits, like visions of immortality, cannot be brought about by the self alone, but can only be generated by one's experience with the actual world.

Stanza One reiterates the main message of the cancelled stanza, using more subdued, less ghastly images. Seeking Melancholy actively is not only futile and ineffective, as was revealed in the cancelled stanza, but is also undesirable, we learn in Stanza One, because it dulls the mind and "drown[s] the wakeful anguish of the soul" (10). However, Green notes that the ode "opens with a triple negation--'No, no, go not to Lethe'--as if only through the aid of intensifiers could [the speaker] withstand the impulse to enter oblivion" (29). The speaker is now determined to face negative experiences directly, although he is also, apparently, tempted by oblivion, which provides an easier, less painful way of dealing with the world.

The images of death and self-annihilation, which Vendler believes reflect "the temptation to suicide" (158), are attractive, yet dangerous, their positive and negative connotations intertwined. The deadly "Wolf's-bane" is juxtaposed with wine, which has spiritual and visionary associations. The addressee's pale forehead is fatally yet sensuously "kissed / By nightshade," a "ruby grape" (3-4), the kiss evoking human passion, but a kiss "by nightshade"

suggesting physical annihilation. The rosary, which represents illumination and spiritual life, but also evokes a rose garden belonging to the natural world, contrasts with the poisonous "yew-berries," whose dark trees are slow-growing and are often found in cemeteries. The speaker advises the addressee not to let "the death-moth be / Your mournful Psyche" (6-7). Jones explains that "The Greek word Psyche means both 'soul' and 'moth' or 'butterfly'" (205). The butterfly often symbolizes transformation and new life, but it is here presented in a negative way as a "death-moth," contrasting with the life and consciousness of the soul. Likewise, the owl is covered with the "downy" new feathers of a young bird, but "downy" also denotes a mental state: "aware, knowing" (Concise 290). Natural images of fruits, plants, insects and the owl are intertwined with Psyche and Proserpine, figures from the mythological world. Proserpine spends part of her life in Hades, and part of it on earth. Thus, the images evoke both immanence and transcendence, mirroring the speaker's simultaneous temptation and repulsion by the oblivion of death. Faced with this stream of contradictions, the reader is unsure whether the paradoxes reflect the speaker's confusion with respect to human life, or his acceptance of the dichotomy of beauty and truth portrayed in the other odes.

Through these contradictory images, the speaker reveals the paradoxical nature of an oblivious state of mind, which often enhances the senses and increases awareness, but is here potentially dangerous, generating self-annihilation. The contrasting images give way to a similarly ambivalent portrayal of psychological states; the "sorrow's mysteries" (8) and the "wakeful anguish" of the soul (10) confirm the speaker's bilateral perception of human life. Sorrow, usually associated with hardship experienced in the world of actuality, is linked with the transcendent 'mystery' of the realm hereafter in

which human happiness will be repeated in a "finer tone." Wakefulness suggests openness and receptivity, but is associated with anguish in this stanza.

Perkins suggests that

> many of the symbols usually associated with the flight into vision--the wine, the rosary of the religious aspirer, death and Psyche--are here indiscriminately lumped together and marshaled under the heading of Lethe as symbols of forgetfulness, perhaps suggesting that the aspiration to a visionary haven has converted itself into a desire for unawareness. (285-86)

Like the cancelled stanza, Stanza One of the "Ode on Melancholy" shows that actively seeking a momentary vision can lead to disillusion and self-obliteration. The addressee of the speaker's admonishments cannot see the world before him in an immanent way, because he is not being 'humble' before phenomena: he is trying too hard to generate a visionary moment.

The self-willed melancholic state is replaced by a true, uncontrollable one in Stanza Two. The fit falls "Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud" (12). Here, the mythological, other-worldly realm is left behind as the speaker addresses the world of process and actuality. The initial paradox between oblivion and awareness is now restated in organic, natural terms as the contradiction between life and death, blooming and fading. As in the first stanza, the images are ambiguous and contradictory, evoking both the actual and the spiritual. The cloud comes from "heaven," but it is also a natural cloud "That fosters the droop-headed flowers all" (13). It brings life and advances process, but it has a negative dimension as well: it is "weeping," hiding "the green hill in an April shroud" (14). The flowers are animated and alive, but "droop-headed," the "green hill" is hidden, and April is a "shroud." The melancholy fit, then, is not unequivocally positive or negative, but

ambiguous. When one experiences melancholy, the speaker advises, one should "glut [one's] sorrow" (15) on beautiful, transient objects in the natural world. The rose, the rainbow and the peonies are manifestations of beauty, but of "Beauty that must die" (21): the morning rose is now fresh, but later it will fade; the rainbow, a positive result of the "weeping cloud" of melancholy, exists only momentarily, but it implies the presence of the life-giving sun; the "globed peonies" are short-lived, but their wealth is much enjoyed, "globed" suggesting, perhaps, "the hand cupping the flowers in a full relish of their identity" (Perkins 289).

The natural images on which one gluts one's sorrow are beautiful, and yet doomed. Their dual identity is evoked by their conflicting connotations; the "salt sand-wave," for instance, contrasts the hardness of salt with the softness of sand; salt, a preservative, leans toward the eternal realm, while sand, which is formed by the erosion of rocks, suggests flux and evanescence. The tension between beauty and death, transience and eternity, is further reflected in the ebb and flow of the wave, which is in perpetual motion, but never comes to an end. Likewise, a rainbow has colour and shape, but is really nothing more than an illusory reflection of the sun's rays; it belongs to the sun and to the rain, and reaches from the land to the sky. These carefully-chosen images unite the beauty and truth of transience.

The reader's role, like that of the addressee, is to perform a dialectic between the two divergent modes of experience. Transience must be acknowledged and accepted in beauty; joy and heightened awareness must be discovered in melancholy. It is the role of each perceiver to reconcile the contrary elements of her world. Gadamer explains that

> Being reflected involves a constant substitution of one thing for another. When something is reflected in something else,

> say, the castle in the lake, it means that the lake throws back the image of the castle. The mirror image is essentially connected, through the medium of the observer, with the proper vision of the thing. It has no being of its own, it is like an 'appearance' that is not itself and yet causes the proper vision to appear as a mirror image. It is like a duplication that is still only the one thing. The actual mystery of a reflection is the intangibility of the picture, the unreal quality of sheer reproduction. (Truth 423)

This type of hermeneutical dialectic is also related to the interpretation of texts. To grasp the total meaning of a text, we "make conjectures and take them back again .... [This] makes it possible for the thing itself--the meaning of the text--to assert itself" (Truth 422). Just as the addressee must reconcile beauty and truth, evanescence and essence, so the reader, or the interpreter, achieves a 'proper vision' of the text by duplicating, or mirroring, its meaning without displacing its essence.

The view that one must savour the beautiful that lies within transience or melancholy is reiterated when the speaker advises his addressee that

> if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
> Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
> And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes. (18-20)

Anger becomes beauty because of the addressee's ability to see mirror images and to perform the dialectical act. Bloom notes that the mistress's anger is rich "because it offers a possibility of feeding deeply upon an animated beauty that is doomed to lose all motion, all force" (100). The mistress's anger is parallel to the evanescence of the natural images described in the preceding lines because it is beautiful and transient. The mistress's lover, like the reader, must balance his immanent, sensed perceptions of the present with his more philosophical projections about the future and the necessary fading of beauty. Stillinger suggests that while the first stanza is a declaration against

oblivion, Stanza Two "tells us what to do instead" (Complete Poems 471). Vendler, however, feels that just as the speaker in the first stanza is attracted by what he overtly denies, in the second stanza he is "covertly repelled by what he advises" (172). She claims that the second stanza is "enfeebled in thought and language" (173) and shows that "so long as aesthetic relish is violently disconnected from human feeling it is predatory and unreal" (189). It is true that the addressee does not perceive his mistress as she really is; he ignores her actual anger and the cause of it, and instead projects imaginatively onto her beauty. The entire second stanza is based on excess and over-indulgence; its satiety is indicated by the strong verb "glut," the repetition of "or" (15-18), and the alliterative "e" sound in "feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes." As in the first stanza, the addressee is trying too hard to feel intense, varied emotions. Therefore, in his eagerness, he has difficulty in seeing things as they really are.

Nevertheless, Stillinger's view that Stanza Two provides a viable alternative to the self-annihilation sought in the opening stanza also seems possible. Thus, the ode stresses the importance of turning away from the mythical towards the experiential world,[8] but in the second stanza, the addressee is not yet passive or open enough to give himself entirely to the world of process. His attempt to reconcile the contradictions he perceives is too premeditated, lacking the 'humility' before phenomena advocated by Georges Poulet and the empathetic fusion between self and world which underlies phenomenology. Perkins notes that because "beautiful objects quickly fade, to turn to them is also to nourish the melancholy fit, and the last stanza

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[8]A similar view is expressed in the "Ode to Psyche," in which traditional forms of worship are replaced by personal inspiration.

generalizes this theme" (290). Indeed, the unnamed angry mistress who in Stanza Two was introduced as part of the transient human world is now identified as the goddess Melancholy. Melancholy co-exists with Beauty, Joy and Delight; the speaker returns to a mythical realm to reiterate the theme he expressed through natural images in the second stanza. Despite their mythological identities, the figures do not represent absolutes: Beauty is "Beauty that must die" (21), Joy is ever "Bidding adieu" (22), and Pleasure is "aching" (23). Thus they mirror the ambiguous 'beautiful-transient' images in the second stanza. These figures are not eternally frozen like the ones in the "Ode to Psyche" or the "Ode on a Grecian Urn"; they have not been left untainted by the mortal world. Pleasure turns "to poison when the bee-mouth sips" (24), and so she experiences flux and transformation. The bee-mouth sipping signifies poison and aching to human beings, but brings pleasure to the bees. By introducing a natural image, and an image that is itself ambiguous, the speaker underlines again the indefinable, vague aspect of human emotions, which are transient and relative. Bloom notes that the magnificence of the final stanza lies in "its exactness of diction as it defines the harmony of continued apprehension of its unresolved contraries" (101).

The figure of Joy is pictorial, unlike those of Melancholy, Beauty and Delight. Vendler explains that Joy incorporates all the adieux "(the word is used in all the odes except To Autumn) into one gesture, iconographically succinct, painful and equable at once" (162). Joy's arrested motion suggests her projected continued future movement, as well as her unchanging identity. "'Joy' both acknowledges and resists our human desire for definition and completion" (Sperry 285).

Melancholy is finally perceived as she is in herself, but only by that perceiver "whose strenuous tongue / Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine" (27-28). Only those who appreciate melancholy and joy to the fullest, who perceive beauty in truth and truth in beauty, can experience "the full reaction of the whole being" (Perkins 290). Unlike the addressee in Stanza Two, who eagerly attempts to reconcile the contradictions he perceives, the speaker now allows himself to become the object of the melancholy fit instead of its creator. Melancholy becomes the subject in his mind, and "plays" him, but at the same time he is an active participant who "burst[s] Joy's grape." Thus, a balance is achieved between receptivity and one's personal formulation of experience, and between the deathward oblivion of Stanza One and the glutting of the senses in Stanza Two. Moreover, if the undefined addressee of the ode is really the speaker's own self, then the third stanza, in which advice and admonishment come to an end, marks also the restoration of the speaker's whole self and the resolution of the insecurities that troubled him in the first two stanzas.

After being "played" by Melancholy, the speaker's world is altered by his acceptance of the 'negative experience' that Melancholy has brought about. The result of the unity and fulfillment he achieves is that

> His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,
> And be among her cloudy trophies hung. (29-30)

A loss of innocence, and, perhaps, of visionary perception, necessarily accompanies one's full grasping of the limits of human emotion. Vendler believes that "the hero's heart seems to burst with the mingled sadness and joy of the grape that is burst and destroyed in savoring" (167). In learning to accept experience in its fullness, the speaker must also accept process and transience. He gains unity and a broader perspective, but loses his naive,

untainted vision of beauty. In letting Melancholy become subject in him, he inevitably becomes one of her "trophies"; he cannot reject the knowledge he has gained through his entry into her shrine, but rather, must accept it. The ode's conclusion contains a degree of pessimism; as Jones notes, "the unburst grape is tasteless and the burst grape is over" (263). Nevertheless, beauty is more poignant once its ephemeral nature has been recognized. The speaker makes the "miraculous discovery" that "Truth can be pursued in Sensation rather than in thought alone" (Vendler 183-84).

This discovery in Stanza Three links the first two stanzas: the first one portrays self-willed, mental oblivion by evoking an imaginary realm of 'fantasy' space, while the second one enters actual space, and describes the overcoming of the self through an extreme overindulgence in the physical senses. Thus, it could be said that Stanza One corresponds to the state of the speaker in the "Ode to a Nightingale," whose approach to phenomena is too causal and rational, while Stanza Two recalls the physical "breathing human passion" which reminds the speaker in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" of the world of actuality. The mental and the physical spheres, like the projected future moment of decay and the present moment of perception, are reconciled through the synthesizing act performed by the reader in the third stanza.

The reconciliation of opposites, which does not mar the individuality of the divergent elements, causes the language to be "stiffly dual" (Vendler 164) throughout the ode, whose perspectives are constantly shifting. The convergence of natural images, mythological beings and human emotions in the "sovran shrine" of Melancholy appears stilted and unlikely. But Keats has no other way of expressing synthesis, since the ode is not centered on a concrete object. There is only Melancholy, who, in much the same way as Psyche in

the "Ode to Psyche," is both subject and object. She is the epitome of contradiction: she is the physical object of desire, she embodies a more spiritual truth, and she also represents a state of heightened human emotion.

Some critics believe that the poem's lack of concreteness causes it to be inferior to the other odes. Bate claims that the conclusion is not "dramatic" since there is neither "some form of debate [nor] a developing discovery by the poet of what he really believes" (521). But the lack of argumentation is not as disturbing when one examines the final stanza in relation to the ode as a whole instead of as an individual unit. The final stanza can be seen as a reconciliation of the divergent views portrayed in the first two. As Vendler puts it,

> The shape of the first two-thirds of Melancholy may be compared to the erratic swings of a needle .... The needle comes to rest in the third stanza, at its central balance, free of the pressures to left and right. (188)

In choosing such an abstract idea--the fulfillment of an emotional state--on which to center his poem, Keats has difficulty in expressing its resolution properly; the conclusion seems contrived and its execution is not entirely successful, despite the striking image of the burst grape, which balances and expresses the ode's paradoxes in an effective way. Keats's views on process, beauty and transience are expressed more subtly and less self-consciously in "To Autumn," which exits from the tone of "moral injunction" and "homiletic rhetoric" (Vendler 190) of the "Ode on Melancholy." Perkins calls "Melancholy" "an anticipation, an earlier exploration of what the flawless ode of four months later so triumphantly embodies" (284). Despite its flaws, the "Ode on Melancholy" reflects Keats's arrival at an acceptance of process and a deep appreciation of transient beauty; the ode expresses this new openness in a direct, transparent, "therapeutic" (Vendler 187) way.

(v) "To Autumn"

The ode "To Autumn" is an actualization of the maxim that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty"; its message is similar to that of the "Ode on Melancholy," whose speaker has come to an acceptance of process and has learned to reconcile feeling and thought. "To Autumn" dramatizes this reconciliation, this embracing of a hermeneutic, holistic attitude towards life in which opposites are brought together, a reconciliation already achieved and articulated in the "Ode on Melancholy," so that the speaker in "To Autumn" is able to address his world without being uncertain or moralistic. The ode's theme and its form make it similar to the "Ode on Melancholy," but its tone of serenity and acceptance is markedly different than the frenzied, fitful mood of the earlier poem.

"To Autumn" is not so much about the resolution of a problem generated by a new experience, as the other odes are; rather, it is an expression written after the problem has been solved. In this poem, Keats does not attempt to define the aesthetic consciousness, or the relation between immanence and transcendence, but provides a "concluding emblem" to the "wisdom of the odes" (Dickstein 263). Kroeber writes that

> Keats's beautiful To Autumn defies much of our criticism because it has no meaning in the sense in which most modern critics seek meaning. There are no answers in the poem--of the six full stops in it, three are interrogatives. The poem conveys only how autumn happens. It is not about a Kierkegaardian leap. Instead it is so presented that to respond fully to it we must make a Kierkegaardian leap, we must participate in the process of autumnality. (304)

The ode, then, is a "voiceless truth" (Jones 85) in which the speaker and the reader are subsumed by the actual subject of the poem, the process of autumn. "To Autumn" has a certain intensity, and so is "capable of making all disagreeables evaporate": reader and speaker join in their perception of

autumn; actual process and philosophic truth are expressed simultaneously; present spatial beauty and projected future decay are reconciled.

A phenomenological interpretation of this ode has been put forth by Thomas Pison, whose article suggests that the ode records "a movement from art to life and from space to time" (40). More specifically, Pison's valuable study examines the relation, in the ode, between Gaston Bachelard's concept of space and Heidegger's notion of time. Keats's all-encompassing portrayal of life, his depiction of space and time at their fullest, just before the arrival of change, and his inference in the ode "that possibility stays alive" (Jones 266) encourage the reader to see "To Autumn" not only as a culmination of the ideas presented in the other odes, but also as an articulation of Keats's very life-world, which contains many notions that could be called phenomenological; as Jones puts it, in this ode Keats is "living his own insight" (266).

Unlike the other odes, "To Autumn" presents a speaker who is self-effacing, barely present and almost silent. He is an open receiver of phenomena: the only form he imposes on the world before him is the structure of the ode itself, which is a virtually transparent reproduction of his reaction to the scene. The ode's realistic, detailed description is almost identical to the scene itself, although not perfectly so, because of the mediation of language, which establishes a necessary division between self and world. Gadamer would approve of the speaker's concretization of the scene, since there is very little distance between the medium and what is being mediated. Because his rationality has been bracketed, the speaker is able to join the reader as a viewer of the scene before him. The speaker and the reader achieve a perfect balance: they bring autumn into being through their acts of perception, but they also let themselves be played by autumn's immanence.

Even though the speaker and his thoughts remain in the background as autumn is foregrounded, his presence in the poem is essential. It is he who perceives the scene and who transmits phenomena, along with his mood of openness, to the reader; it is also he who asks the questions at the beginning of the second and third stanzas. Jones feels that one of the main reasons for the poem's greatness is that Keats makes it possible for the reader "to apprehend him inside the poem, the human rose on the briar" (268). Although there is no way of establishing to what degree the odes' speakers are embodiments of Keats himself, in this case, one could argue that Keats's letter to J.H. Reynolds on September 21, 1819, in which he writes that

> I never lik'd stubble fields so much as now--Aye better than the chilly green of the Spring. Somehow a stubble-plain looks warm--in the same way that some pictures look warm--This struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it. (Letters 2: 167)

identifies him as the speaker in "To Autumn." The inclusion of a human presence within this poem is particularly significant, because it forges a link between human and natural process, and it clarifies the fact that Keats's "generous gesture of consolation" (Pison 45) is addressed specifically to the reader and to all human beings who strive to accept temporality.

That the speaker is so much more subdued and reconciled to his world than those in the other odes makes it easy for the reader to participate with empathy in his experience and to learn from his attitude of openness. Vendler explains that "The poet is so unconscious of his reader that we have only the choice of becoming him in his apostrophe and losing our identity" (246). Hartman adds that "Our difficulty as interpreters is related to the way consciousness almost disappears into the poem" (124). It is much more difficult for the reader to feel distanced from the speaker in this poem: the

reserved speaker does not disrupt the unity between the natural, creative process and the parallel structure of language, which in this ode is less figurative and more literal than in the others. In reading the "Ode to a Nightingale," the reader notices the gap between the poem's language and the speaker's level of self-awareness; she also notes that there is a discrepancy between the bird itself and the speaker's created symbol of it. In "To Autumn," however, few such gaps exist, since the speaker translates his immanent perceptions directly into language.

However, the reader's ability to join fully with the subdued speaker as audience does not necessarily imply, as Vendler's statement may suggest, that individual readings are impossible. As in all poems, the reader must make certain decisions; for instance, she must form her own hypothetical answers to the speaker's questions, she must examine the ode's movement away from space and towards time, and she must interpret the concluding images of the poem as either hopeful and regenerative or pessimistic and dismal. Not allowing this type of individual formulation denies both the unique personal disposition of each reader and the text's status as act and as a changing, living event. Thus, although there is more closeness between the reader and the speaker in this ode due to the speaker's self-effacement, the reader nevertheless plays an active role in her own concretization of the work.

Despite his vagueness, the speaker possesses a universal dimension, not only because, being human, he helps to specify the ode's consolatory message, but also because his experience reflects the paradoxical nature of aesthetic grasping, even though art is not mentioned directly in the poem. In empathizing so fully with Autumn, the speaker risks losing his identity, but he

also perceives the scene with a heightened awareness. This theme was explored, at least subliminally, in all of the other odes. As James Lott notes,

> There is a clearly discernable speaker in the poem, one whose lack of awareness that time is passing causes him almost to succumb to the lethargy which is a consequence of that imperceptiveness. (81)

Although the speaker is less aware of time at the beginning of the ode than at the end, since he is, initially, profoundly involved in the spatial aspects of autumn's workings, he notes that the bees "think warm days will never cease" (10). The speaker himself knows better; however, he is able to bracket his awareness of time to a certain extent in the first stanza, while he grasps autumn in its immanence. The speaker represents all perceivers, either of phenomena or of art, who strive to achieve a balance between self and other, and to be open and receptive while still maintaining a sense of self.

The ode "To Autumn" is, of course, about endings and how to deal with them; it offers strength and consolation by revealing, like the "Ode on Melancholy," that beauty can be found in transience, and also reminds the reader of cyclical re-birth and of new beginnings. Phenomenology places much more emphasis on the actuality of the present and the possibilities of the future than on past experiences. For instance, Heidegger's concept of Dasein implies a constant movement towards the future; it is determined by "the movement towards death, ie radical finiteness" (Gadamer, Truth 109). In "To Autumn," the speaker expresses his recognition of human finiteness, and his willingness to be open to future experiences. Pison writes that

> The poet's voice is as consoling as it is resolute. It is this voice which intrigues and delights the phenomenological critic, for it expresses so tenderly the consolation that human being needs to accompany the difficult resolution to depart. (41)

(iv) "Ode on Melancholy"

The tentative reconciliations of beauty and truth, or immanence and transcendence, which conclude the "Ode to a Nightingale" and the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" are reiterated and expressed more overtly in the "Ode on Melancholy." The speaker in the "Ode on Melancholy" has rejected the unconscious, tranced mood portrayed in the "Ode to a Nightingale," and yet he has also chosen not to live entirely through the senses. The first two stanzas, which act as "thesis" and "antithesis," are followed by "a third stanza which finds a synthesis both unexpected and satisfying" (Vendler 158). Mental and physical states, potentiality and actuality, truth and beauty, are joined in the last stanza, which can be seen as an articulation and a resolution of some of the paradoxes Keats has wrestled with in the earlier odes.

Bloom believes that the ode ends in resignation rather than in triumph. He writes that "like the rest of Keats's odes, this poem is tragic; it reaches beyond the disillusionments of a state of experience into the farther innocence of a poet's paradise" (101). However, although there is a note of sadness in the speaker's recognition that all beauty is "Beauty that must die" (21), the realization that transience is not only necessary, but that it also enhances one's appreciation of beauty, represents a significant movement towards openness and acceptance. The "Ode on Melancholy" describes the process of "Spirit-creation," which takes place through sensed experience, "by medium of a world like this" (Letters 2: 101). The paradox of "pleasant pain" introduced at the end of the "Ode to Psyche" is explored more fully and more directly in this poem, in which for the first time in the odes, "the hero fares abroad, and traverses the known and unknown perilous seas, and is defined as an ambitious lover and hero rather than as poet" (Vendler 157).

The ode's indeterminate portrayal of the "season of mists" (1) allows the speaker and the reader to reflect on the temporal process of fruition and decay. In Stanza One, the relationship of conspiracy between autumn and the sun evokes the mysterious aspect of both natural growth and the creative process. The audience does not know--and, indeed, does not need to know--a great deal about the secret processes of creation and becoming. Autumn's role is "to load and bless / With fruit the vines" (3-4), to bring essence into existence. She does not create them, or bestow form upon them. In "To Autumn," Keats 'blesses' his images in the same way, conspiring with phenomena and going inside his world, digging, planting and reaping, joining with what he perceives.

The images of fecundity and perfection in Stanza One are presented in an immanent way; their immediacy is conveyed through the abundance of active verbs, such as "load," "bless," "bend," "fill," "swell" and "plump," which describe the events that define autumn's process. However, this process of maturation depends on the speaker's and the reader's perception of it: the perceiver must be able to achieve a holistic vision of the scene and to grasp the relations between natural objects in order to glimpse the "conspiring" which is taking place. As Pison explains,

> The apple trees are without identity until they are bent with apples, shells are hollow nothings until they are plumped, and the fruit is but its core until it is fulfilled with ripeness. Space is incomplete and merely profane until it is blessed with a sacred destiny of fullness. (42)

The speaker and the reader, who perceive the workings of autumn, are in part the authors of this "sacred destiny of fullness": it is up to them to see the spatial relations, and to balance the images, which are frozen in their being, with a human knowledge of their subsequent decay.

Like the speaker in the "Ode to a Nightingale," who projects his "becom[ing] a sod," the perceiver of the Grecian Urn, who contrasts his own mortality with the immortality of the piper "For ever piping songs for ever new," and the speaker in the "Ode on Melancholy," who anticipates "burst[ing] Joy's grape," the reader of "To Autumn" fills in gaps, contributing his rational foreknowledge of death and decay to the poem. Husserl explains that

> every actuality involves its potentialities, which are not empty possibilities, but rather possibilities intentionally predelineated in respect of content--namely, in the actual subjective process itself--and, in addition, having the character of possibilities actualizable by the Ego.... (44)

Thus, the reader projects forward to the coming winter; the static images of autumn covertly lead her to form preintentions about the subsequent decay of what is now at the point of fruition.

A similar actualization, or bringing into being, takes place more overtly between Stanzas One and Two, when autumn, the "bosom-friend" of the sun (2), becomes fully personified as the goddess. The static images of the first stanza and the harvesting process described in the second are juxtaposed, and merge together in the figure of Autumn, who, like Melancholy, is both being and becoming, eternal and yet manifested in a temporal way. The figure seems suspended in time, but the mention of the gleaner, the "cyder-press" (21) and "the last oozings hours by hours" (22) reminds the reader of nature's cyclical, temporal process and prepares her for the inevitable arrival of winter hinted at in Stanza Three. The question "Who hast not seen thee oft amid thy store?" (12) underlines the universality of Autumn as well as her cyclical apparition; this universality invites each reader to participate in the poem just as she experiences autumn each year. Whoever "seeks abroad," or looks clearly

at her world and beyond her self, can envision the mystery of Autumn's process.

The "careless" goddess is

> on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
> Drows'd with the fume of poppies, while [her] hook
> Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers.
> (16-18)

Why is she so careless, given that she has a task to perform? Pison suggests that her lack of concern "arises from her feeling of being already done, finished, completed, full" (44). She is caught up in the fullness of space, and so gives herself to the phenomena before her; like the speaker in Stanza One, Autumn appears to be suspending her awareness of the temporal element, but the mention of the "next" swath reminds the reader that time is not altogether absent.

Bate notes that in the ode, "the whole is perfected--carried through to completion--solely by means of the given parts" (581). The figure of Autumn achieves a balance between the various parts, and between activity and passivity, and thus she can be seen as an embodiment of the ideal reader. Her "mood of suspension" (Wolfson 361) allows her to spare the swath, not interfering with its flowers; she lets her hair be lifted by the "winnowing wind" (15); she is seated in repose; and she is "Drows'd with the fume of poppies." At the same time, however, she holds a hook, she is "like a gleaner" (19) and she sits by a "cyder-press." Autumn, then, is an ideal model for how the speaker should react to the scene and for how the reader ought to interpret the poem--one must achieve a balance between one's reception of pure phenomena and one's more active concretization of it. The necessary destruction implied by Autumn's hook and cyder-press are perhaps parallel to the activity performed by each reader, who partially eliminates the infinite

potential of the living text by foregrounding, or making actual, only some of its schematic aspects. Likewise, the potential of the reader's imagination becomes actual as she harvests her own thoughts; a creative reaper, she allows the text to "bring to the fore an element of [her] being of which [she is] not directly conscious" (Iser, Implied 294).

Autumn represents the process of nature, and so she has the capacity to bring changing multiplicity and opposed elements into an all-encompassing, hermeneutical whole. In Stanza Two, she is both the observer and the creator of the scene. Like Psyche in the "Ode to Psyche," she is both subject and object: she is the victim as well as the agent of temporality and decay. She is, Geoffrey Hartman explains, "self-harvesting like the poet's own thoughts" (143). Likewise, Autumn is a female figure, but as reaper she has a traditionally male role. She is an eternal goddess, and yet she participates in the earthly realm of death and mortality. While the figures in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" shifted from being immanent to transcendent, living to frozen, by virtue only of the speaker's changing mode of perception, Autumn herself belongs to both realms of experience--she is both being and becoming. Because of the incorporation of these two elements within the single figure, who is impressed in her fullness and her duality onto the speaker's mind, the ode takes us, as Sperry explains, "as far as we have any right to require toward a poetry of thought" (342). "To Autumn" does not portray the rational kind of thought that excludes feeling and sensation, but rather, the more transcendent, all-encompassing mode of thought underlying the statement that "Beauty is truth," in which opposites are grasped simultaneously, as necessary parts of a whole.

The stasis of Stanza One contrasts with the harvesting process described in Stanza Two, as time gradually moves closer to the foreground of the speaker's mind. Within the second stanza, there are conflicting images of stillness and motion, suggesting that temporality is on the way to being fully activated. The goddess is patient, still, sitting, asleep, or holding her head, and yet, she is the agent of change. "To Autumn" constantly juxtaposes being and becoming, exposing and then reconciling the tension between art and life. For Poulet,

> the two contradictory forces which are always at work in any literary writing, the will to stability and the protean impulse, help us to perceive by their interplay how much forms are dependent on what Coleridge called a shaping power which determines them, replaces them and transcends them. (67)

The unending dialogue in the ode "To Autumn" between motion and stillness allows each reader to experience and to participate in the creative process, whereby pure phenomena are endowed with form.

At the beginning of Stanza Three, the speaker's receptivity and openness are interrupted by the emergence of rational thoughts: "Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?" (23). Because of her closeness to the speaker, the reader, also, is obliged to ask herself this question. The speaker's ineradicable knowledge of time and process, which earlier, he was able to suppress, now surfaces briefly.

Stillinger feels that the question indicates the speaker's "momentary yearning for the otherworlds of the nightingale and the urn" (477), and most critics agree that the rejoinder, "Think not of them, thou hast thy music too" (24) is enough to console the speaker, who then returns to his appreciation of autumn in all its immanence. Arnold Davenport, however, argues that the question "is not a momentary intrusion but the point of the whole poem" (97),

whose main meaning is "that a new good is purchased only at the price of the loss of a former good" (102). His interpretation in a sense denies the acceptance of process implicit in "To Autumn": because of the human mind's ability to project continually into the future, the speaker knows that spring will return, and that autumn, also, will return. Thus, the answering line does seem to bring the speaker adequate consolation for his loss. At the same time, though, Stillinger's assertion that the ode's conclusion is "unambiguously affirmative" (Hoodwinking 110) seems to deny the sadness the speaker experiences because of his loss. Moreover, when one perceives the human dimension of the ode's natural message, one realizes that the poem concerns death; thus, Stillinger's assessment, like Davenport's, overlooks the dialectical movement and the balancing of opposites which are necessary for a fuller interpretation of "To Autumn."

Despite his return to an acceptance of process, however, the speaker now describes paradoxical images which yoke beauty and death together. He does not glorify beauty or lament death, but rather continues to perceive phenomena immanently and openly, while simultaneously projecting, in a transcendent way, onto their impending death. The mood of ambiguity--established by the interrogative mode at the beginning of the stanza and the uncertainty of the gnats "borne aloft / Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies" (28-29, my emphasis)--suggests that the speaker has achieved a dialectical balance between present life and the inevitable death which the future brings. He 'blesses' the actual, celebrating its being in spite of, and because of, his foreknowledge of its necessary completion. Lott explains that in the first two stanzas Keats indicates

> the strength and the weakness of total empathy: while he demonstrates the weakness to be the movement towards the

> loss of reflective consciousness, he suggests that, paradoxically, only the sensibility which can come close to a fusion with that which it perceives can separate itself from the external in the creative way evidenced in the last stanza. (80-81)

The speaker and the reader are confronted with temporality in Stanza Three. Prior to this, "We have all been lost in a dream of space that misplaces the reality of time, and for this beautiful error we are to be consoled" (Pison 45).

Pison's view that the sounds described at the end of the poem declare "death, departure, and dissolution" (45) is perhaps too extreme: in the "singing" of the crickets, the "treble soft" (31) of the red-breast, a spring bird, and the twittering of the swallows, the reader detects a note of hope, and privately evokes winter's subsequent replacement by spring. Of course, the strong death imagery is not to be ignored; nor is Davenport's belief that "sallows" has the connotation "of sorrow, loss and bereavement" (99) or Pison's opinion that "'croft' reverberates its archaic sense of 'crypt'" (45). However, the reader, who brings the cyclical process of nature into being through her act of reading the poem, must see the beauty in transience and accept the evanescence of phenomena; she must balance death with new life, immanence with transcendence.

The reader joins with the "gathering swallows" (33), whose twittering suggests a promised return. Keats originally wrote "gather'd swallows."[9] The change is appropriate and reflects the poem's message: "gather'd" would have indicated a completed process, while the present participle allows the poem to

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[9]"(Gather'd made out of Gathering in D)," Stillinger, Poems of John Keats (477).

remain in a state of becoming, even in its last line. The swallows also remain 'scattered' in formlessness, rather than being gathered in an organized fashion. Jones suggests that the swallows, which

> gather for departure, are another signal of winter in the death stanza. And yet "gathering" is the last of the poem's harvesting and perfected words, and the most grateful of them all for no other reason than that it brings the ripe and the dying truths of Autumn (and Autumn) together. (269)

The spatial expansion of "To Autumn" suggests a process of growth which is parallel to the creative process. The poem's scope moves from the cottage and its immediate surroundings, to the furrow and the brook, and finally, the reader is faced with an immense sky and its setting sun. This movement of expansion is similar to the speaker's movement in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" away from the individual frieze to a complete vision of the urn and its message. It also recalls the flight of the nightingale "Past the near meadows, over the still stream, / Up the hill-side" (76-77), which suggests its liberation. When Vendler claims that at the end of the ode "To Autumn," "the desolation of the visible scene, once the female sculptural figure vanishes, is the desolation of the little town robbed by the urn of its inhabitants" (259), she overlooks the fact that while the emptiness of the silent town points to its lack of meaning, the absence of visual imagery at the end of "To Autumn" suggests, rather, ultimate fullness; the speaker now perceives phenomena in all its purity.

The speaker has stopped painting the visual scene before him, and instead immerses himself in all auditory sensations. The music of autumn recalls the ecstatic singing of the nightingale, but the speaker in "To Autumn" feels no need to make this music into a "high requiem" or an immortal song. Rather, the sounds play the same role as the spiritual, toneless music of the

urn, bringing forth the merging of self and other. Merleau-Ponty explains that music

> is too far beyond the world and the designatable to depict anything but certain outlines of Being--its ebb and flow, its growth, its upheavals, its turbulence. (161)

The speaker and the reader, then, have ceased to interpret phenomena at the end of the ode, choosing instead to accept the outside world in its immanence, grasping fully the ebb and flow of its being, recognizing but accepting temporality and process.[10] Spring and winter are supremely balanced in autumn; the fruits of the creative process and the completion of nature's cycle, also, merge in an everlasting whole in the ode.

"To Autumn," which itself completes the poetic and emotional process Keats underwent in writing the odes, embodies confidence, acceptance and full awareness. It is truly an ode to Autumn, unlike the "Ode on Melancholy," which is somewhat flawed because of its unsure language and its lack of concreteness. "To Autumn" enters its subject rather than merely turning about it--its mood is sustained throughout, its unifying symbol is fully developed, and its message is profound; thus, it must be seen as much more than a "flawless and seemingly effortless footnote to the odes" (Dickstein 262). In "To Autumn,"

> John Keats has his home, for even at the moment of temporal transition, when he bids farewell to the space of the imagination in order to insert himself once again into the time of life, his great art insures that a cherished universe will endure, beyond the contingencies and caprices of time. (Pison 47)

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[10]The movement in Stanza Three from a rational awareness of time to an acceptance of immanent phenomena is the antithesis of the process described in the "Ode to a Nightingale," whose speaker first joins empathetically with the bird, and then becomes increasingly aware of his own mortality. Vendler makes the interesting observation that "To Autumn" reverses the listening-seeing-not seeing pattern of the "Ode to a Nightingale" (105).

CONCLUSION

Keats once wrote to Fanny Brawne, "You are always new" (Letters 2: 275). His poetry reflects the profound recognition that one's identity constantly changes and is formed "by medium of a world like this," a fluctuating world of "pleasant pain." The speakers in the odes are progressively open, ultimately welcoming and accepting all newness, all change, all paradox. To varying degrees, they recognize their capacity to create their world, to invent private meaning, not by imposing form but by accepting phenomena in their immanence, entering the world and feeling it, as the poet does, and not turning about it in a way that accentuates the necessary division between self and other.

Keats describes his open, phenomenological conception of human experience in his letter on Maiden-Thought, which compares life to a "large Mansion of Many Apartments, as yet shut upon me." The infant chamber represents the comfortable, childlike state "in which we remain as long as we do not think." Thought eventually leads us to the chamber of Maiden-Thought, in which

> we become intoxicated with the light and the atmosphere, we see nothing but pleasant wonders, and think of delaying there forever in delight: However among the effects this breathing is father of is that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man--of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression--whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought becomes gradually darken'd and at the same time on all sides of it many doors are set open--but all dark--all leading to the dark passages--We see not the ballance of good and evil. We are in a Mist--We are now in that state--We feel the 'burden of the Mystery,' ... if we live, and go on

> thinking, we too shall explore [those dark Passages]. (Letters 1: 280-1)

Keats accepts that some apartments are beyond his grasp, and he is not dismayed by the darkness of the chambers. Content at present to be "in a Mist" of indeterminacy, he welcomes both the joy and the melancholy which accompany the widening of consciousness. The quest for a broader perspective, an expanded self-awareness, is dramatized in the odes, whose speakers, unable to perceive the Mystery through mortal eyes, but wanting to do more than "glut [their] sorrow" on transient beauty, lose themselves to that mist, balancing the sensed experience and the philosophical reflection which belong to the first and second chambers.

The odes, and especially "To Autumn," which is the culmination of Keats's process of inner development, reveal Keats's ability to enter phenomena, establishing a dialogue between himself and his world. Keats was not one of those for whom

> the vision of the pure phenomenon is not enough, they insist on going further, like children who peep in a mirror and then turn it round to see what is on the other side. (Goethe qtd. in Muir 74)

Keats chose instead to see himself, and, more universally, the human condition, reflected in the mirror of pure phenomena.

Parallel to Keats's odes, which are, like pure phenomena, mirrors in which the reader perceives herself and her relation to the world, are the hermeneutic approaches of Gadamer and Iser, who believe that through aesthetic experience, "One knows and recognizes something and oneself" (Truth 102), and "we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness" (Implied 294). That these views correspond so closely to Keats's dialectical conception of life to a certain extent denies

Eichner's claim that "we must have serious reservations about [the] thesis that the Romantic age, marking a turning point in Western thought, ushered in a way of looking at the world that still dominates our own times" (24-25). The phenomenological interpretations of the odes which I have presented encourage readers to perceive their world with openness, to share in Keats's desire to expand his consciousness, to liberate the truth by accepting it in its immanence. Keats's odes reveal and express numerous paradoxes of human existence; a reading of the odes, also, must not seek to resolve these contradictions, but to enter them in an attempt to grasp the Mystery more fully.

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