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Morton D. Paley

## George Romney's *Death of General Wolfe*

### Abstract

George Romney (1734–1802) became famous as a portrait artist but also aspired to history painting throughout his career. In 1760 he exhibited the first painting to commemorate the death of General James Wolfe, who had died the previous year during the battle for Quebec. It was also the first history painting – if we understand by this term the dramatic depiction of a heroic action – to dare to depict its subject in modern dress. The object of considerable controversy, it nevertheless gained a special premium and was bought by a prominent collector. It also set a precedent for following treatments of its subject by Edward Penny, Benjamin West, and James Barry. It was taken to India by a subsequent owner, and its location is now unknown. Using Romney's sketches and contemporary descriptions as a basis, in this paper I reconstruct the appearance of this painting and discuss its importance in the history of British art.

### Keywords

George Romney, James Wolfe, History, Painting, Exhibitions

After news of General James Wolfe's death in the British victory at Quebec reached England on October 17, 1759, there was an outpouring of prose and poetry eulogizing and exalting him.<sup>1</sup> The first works of art honoring the general were full-sized marble busts (c. 1760) by Joseph Wilton, in marble (National Gallery of Canada) and in plaster (National Portrait Gallery), in which, following tradition, Wolfe is presented as an ancient Roman (fig. 1).<sup>2</sup> Credit for the first painting of the death of Wolfe, however, belongs to a young man from the provinces who had arrived in London in the previous year, who earned his living

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1 See Alan McNairn, *Behold the Hero: General Wolfe and the Arts in the Eighteenth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), 3–19.

2 On Wilton's representations of Wolfe, see Janet Simmonds, 'Joseph Wilton and the Death of General Wolfe', *Transactions of the Romney Society*, 7 (2002): 32–36; and McNairn, *Behold the Hero*, 64–65. In 1760 Wilton won the national competition for a monument to Wolfe, and it was erected in Westminster Abbey in 1773. There the hero is naked, though swathed in a sheet. See McNairn, *Behold the Hero*, 79–82.

by painting portraits, and who aspired to the theoretically higher realm of history painting.<sup>3</sup> His was not only the first representation of Wolfe's death as an heroic sacrifice, it was also the first tragic painting of modern history to show its subjects in contemporary dress, distinctions that appear to have been almost forgotten some years later.



Fig. 1: Joseph Wilton, *General James Wolfe*, c. 1760. Plaster cast of bust, 75.6 cm. National Portrait Gallery.

While still in the Lake District, George Romney (1734–1802) had executed at least two history paintings: *King Lear in the Tempest Tearing off His Robes* (Kendal Town Council) and *Elfrida* (untraced). In London, his first historical subject was the death of David Rizzio. Although, according to Romney's friend William Hayley, 'Its singular merit made a lasting impression on the memory of those who saw it'.<sup>4</sup> It did not find a buyer, and was destroyed by the artist, probably because his studio was too small to store an unsold picture 'painted on a large scale'.<sup>5</sup> (John Hamilton Mortimer, after visiting Romney to see *The Death of General Wolfe*, remarked: 'it was painted in a room so small that he could not examine the effect of the whole at a proper distance, and ... under this disadvantage his performance was surprising').<sup>6</sup> In 1763 Romney exhibited his new painting, *The Death of General Wolfe*, at the Free Society of Artists.<sup>7</sup>

3 David Bindman defines the term as it is generally understood: 'used mainly in the 18 c. to denote subjects painted in the grand manner of heroic subjects derived from the Bible, classical literature, or great historical events', see *Thames and Hudson Encyclopaedia of British Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 118.

4 Hayley, *The Life of George Romney, Esq* (Chichester: T. Payne, 1809), 31.

5 See John Romney, *Memoirs of the Life and Work of George Romney* (London: Baldwin and Craddock, 1830), 41.

6 See Whitley, *Artists and Their Friends in England, 1700–1790* (London: Medici Society 1928), 1:191.

7 He also exhibited *King Lear in the Tempest*. See Algernon Graves, *The Society of Artists of Great Britain, 1760–1791; The Free Society of Artists, 1761–1783: A Complete Dictionary of*

What did Romney's *Death of Wolfe* look like? Evidence consists of brief verbal descriptions, three oil sketches, and some rough pencil drawings. 'Figures large as life', Horace Walpole noted, 'and better than Manini's picture of Edward the Black Prince and John of France'.<sup>8</sup> Gaetano Manini, according to Edward Edwards, 'was a painter of history, but one of the lowest of the modern Italian school. His compositions were extremely frivolous, and his colouring gaudy'.<sup>9</sup> Walpole compares Romney's painting to Manini's because in the 1763 exhibition he also saw the Milanese painter's *Edward the Black Prince Presenting His Royal Prisoner, John of France, to King Edward III, after the Battle of Poitiers* (no. 122).<sup>10</sup> Manini evidently worked on a large scale, as did Romney, and so gave Walpole ground for comparison. In another copy of a Walpole catalog, an unknown annotator wrote: 'The Genl. Is represented leaning against and supported by two Officers who express great Concern, the Blood appears trickling from the Wound in his Wrist & from that in his Breast agt. which one of the Officers holds his Hand a third Officer is coming to inform him the french give way & appears greatly struck with Surprise'.<sup>11</sup> There was, then, a central group of four, with Wolfe at least partially recumbent. One of Romney's oil sketches (Abbot Hall, Kendal) shows the general's head resting at about a forty-five-degree angle against a soldier's shoulder (fig. 2). Wolfe's shirt collar is open and necktie loosened; his mouth is slightly open, his face gray and his eyes glassy, indeed more like a dead than a dying man's. The soldier looks down at him with an expression of grief. Wolfe's head and upper body are magnified in the other sketch (New Brunswick Museum, Saint John), the only difference of detail being that his collar is buttoned with no necktie.<sup>12</sup> We know that the lower part of his body was visible since Romney's friend Richard Cumberland mentions that the general had on silk stockings (see below).

We may reasonably assume that Romney never saw General Wolfe, and he is not likely to have seen the supposed life portrait thought to have been done after

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*the Society of Arts in Contributors and Their Work from the Foundation of the societies to 1791* (London: George Bell, 1907), 153.

8 Hugh Gatty, 'Notes by Horace Walpole, Fourth Earl of Oxford, on the Exhibitions of the Society of Artists and the Free Society of Artists, 1760–1791', *The Volume of the Walpole Society*, 27 (1938/39), 77 [55–88]. Hayley (*Life of Romney*), 308, also says the figures were 'painted large as life'.

9 Edwards, *Anecdotes of Painters Who Have Resided or Been Born in England* (London: Leigh and Sotheby, 1808), 72.

10 Graves, *Society of Artists*, 153. Manini (c. 1735–1737) exhibited at the Society of Artists during the 1760s and early 1770s. Primarily known for his miniatures, Manini was also a history painter. In 1762 he exhibited *Boadicea Encouraging the People to Make War against the Romans*, *Caractatus Brought Prisoner before Claudius*, and *The Sun Entering Leo*.

11 See Gatty, 'Notes', 77.

12 A detail of the grieving soldier's head (untraced) was sold at Sotheby's in 1989 and is reproduced in Kidson, *George Romney*, 817 along with images of the other two sketches.



Fig. 2: George Romney, *Death of General Wolfe*, 1760. Oil sketch, 37 x 46 cm. Abbot Hall Museum and Art Gallery, Kendal, U.K.

Wolfe's return from the siege of Louisbourg in 1758.<sup>13</sup> On what, then, did he base his image? Even Joseph Wilton, commissioned by the Duke of Richmond to do a bust of Wolfe, found it difficult to obtain a prototype: when Wilton had the general's coffin opened, the face had so deteriorated that he could not sketch it. The sculptor had to rely instead on the face of a servant who was said to look very much like Wolfe<sup>14</sup> and on a line drawing by Wolfe's adjutant, Captain Hervey Smith (Royal United Service Museum, London).<sup>15</sup> Romney may perhaps have approached Wilton for an opportunity to see one of Wilton's busts, as Wilton was co-director of the Duke of Richmond's sculpture gallery in which Romney sketched.<sup>16</sup> His one certain visual source was J. S. C. Schaak's 'small whole

13 Artist unknown. Once in the collection of J. Clarence Webster of New Brunswick, reproduced in Webster, *Wolfe and the Artists* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1930), plate X.

14 Accessed April 20, 2017, <http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw06894/James-Wolfe?search=sp&sText=wilton+wolfe&firstRun=true&rNo=0#description>.

15 For information on this drawing I thank Erika Ingham, Assistant Curator (Reference Collection) National Portrait Gallery. There is also a group of private caricatures (McCord Museum, Canada) by one of Wolfe's brigadiers, George Townshend.

16 See Arthur Bensley Chamberlain, *George Romney* (London: Methuen, 1910), 43.

length of General Wolfe' shown at the Free Society exhibition of 1762, where Romney exhibited his *Rizzio*.<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 3: Richard Houston. *Major General James Wolfe*, engraving after J. H. Schaak, 1760–69. 308 mm. x 223 mm. (size of sheet). British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Schaak shows his subject in undress uniform with a musket on his back, and wearing a mourning band, which would have been in memory of his father (d. 25 March 1759). In the background, soldiers are arriving by boat and climbing up to the Plains of Abraham. According to a Sotheby's sale catalogue, this is one of those rare portraits of Wolfe that 'originate in an authentic likeness from life'.<sup>18</sup> If that is so, and if this picture was indeed presented by Wolfe to General Henry Fletcher as stated by Sotheby's, the background details must have been added

17 See Graves, *Society of Artists*, 227. The portrait was later engraved by Richard Houston (fig. 3, British Museum).

18 Sotheby's, London, 'Important British Paintings', 26 June 2007.

later. In Romney's painting Wolfe's features are softer than in those of the Smyth drawing, in the Schaak portrait, and in the engravings after them, which may be due in part to the difference between profile and three-quarter face. Four drawings in Romney's Kendal Sketchbook (Kendal Town Council, Cumbria) show some possibilities that Romney considered for the placement of his figures.<sup>19</sup> The first (counting from page 14 top down and then to page 15 left to right) shows what could be a *mater dolorosa*, with a person of unspecified gender supporting a decidedly dead body, the head of which inclines to our right. Next we see three men, one collapsing backwards into the others' arms. In the third two men stand upright on either side of a third, who supports the upper body of another, who is half-lying on the ground, head inclined to our left and eyes open. In the fourth a soldier bearing a flag stands beside a dead or dying man, his face looking upwards, while two others, each on one knee, minister to him.

Of course, we cannot assume that these sketches appear in chronological order, and we may regard them as alternative ideas, but, as the annotator of Walpole's catalog specifies three officers, the two latter drawings are closer to his description of Romney's painting than the others. (A painting had to have at least three life-sized figures in order to qualify for the Society's awards for historical painting.<sup>20</sup>) In these two sketches Wolfe appears to be looking upward. If the oil sketches indicate the final disposition of his head, why does it incline to our right? The messenger in the third Kendal drawing is to our left (as are those in Penney's and in West's paintings, in accordance with our tendency to view narrative from left to right. Had Romney's painting followed suit, we could not assume that Wolfe had received the good news before dying. The answer may be that in the fourth drawing the flag-bearer is the messenger, and thus could be imagined to have told Wolfe of the victory.

Romney's painting did not go unnoticed. It was initially awarded a prize by the Society's Selection Committee, but this was countermanded by the membership, and the prize was awarded instead to John Hamilton Mortimer for *Edward the Confessor Spoiling His Mother at Winchester*, with Romney being given a special premium of 25 guineas.<sup>21</sup>

Explanations for this outcome vary. Some blamed the influence of Sir Joshua Reynolds, alleging jealousy on the part of the older, established artist, as did

19 See *George Romney The Kendal Sketchbook 1763–71*, ed. Yvonne Romney Dixon (*Transactions of the Romney Society*), 15, pt. 2: 14–15.

20 See Martin Myrone, *Bodybuilding: Reforming Masculinities in British Art 1750–1810* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 2005), 37.

21 See Graves, *Society of Artists*, 217.

Cumberland, Hayley, and John Romney.<sup>22</sup> Hayley devoted two pages to this view in his *Memoirs*.<sup>23</sup> But, the earlier account in his *Life of Romney* is milder:

He [Romney] told me, with that ingenuous spirit, which was one of his amiable characteristics, that Reynolds was the person, who, with great justice, contended, that the second prize of sixty guineas was due to Mortimer for his picture ... which Romney most liberally acknowledged to be so strikingly superior to his own death of Wolfe, that he was far from repining at being obliged to relinquish a price too hastily assigned to him.<sup>24</sup>

It may be that Romney was putting a good face on the episode for his future biographer, but Hayley appears to have accepted his account at the time. It seems less likely that the well-established Reynolds's motive was to sabotage Romney than that it was to help Mortimer, a possibility that Hayley does consider in the *Memoirs*, where he wrote: 'He [Reynolds] may, perhaps, have been influenced by another motive, originating from a better feeling – friendship for Mortimer, who had long been in London, was formerly a pupil of Hudson, Reynolds' master, and *no portrait painter*, and who afterwards gave proof of his gratitude, by dedicating his etchings to Sir Joshua'.<sup>25</sup>

Costume was also given as a reason. Some considered the offense to be portraying the figures in modern clothing, others that it was the wrong modern clothing. According to Richard Cumberland, among the 'ridiculously minute and frivolous' criticisms of the painting was 'that the Officers and Soldiers were not at all in their proper regimentals, and that that Wolfe himself had on a handsome pair of silk stockings, against the costume of a general on the field of battle'.<sup>26</sup> 'A coat and waistcoat subject', wrote Edward Edwards.<sup>27</sup> However, once Romney had depicted his hero in contemporary clothing, there was no turning back this revolution in history painting.<sup>28</sup>

Another disputed feature of Romney's painting was the general's face. 'Some', recalled Richard Cumberland, 'objected to the deadly paleness of his

22 See Richard Cumberland, 'Memoirs of Mr. George Romney', *European Magazine*, 43 (1803), 421 [417–23]; Hayley, *Life of Romney*, 39–41; John Romney, *Memoirs*, 45–51.

23 See Hayley, *Memoirs*, 47–48.

24 Hayley, *Life of Romney*, 39–40.

25 Hayley, *Memoirs*, 48. Mortimer was in fact a fine portrait artist.

26 Cumberland, 'Memoirs of Mr. George Romney', 421–422.

27 Edwards, *Anecdotes*, 277.

28 Generals are shown in their actual uniforms in two of Frances Hayman's huge Vauxhall paintings of 1761–1764: *The Humanity of General Amherst* and *Lord Clive Receiving the Homage of the Nabob* (Beaverbrook Foundation, Fredericton, Canada). These placid representations would not have disturbed the pleasures of the frequenter of Vauxhall's. The first shows the British commander distributing largesse to the beseeching inhabitants of Montreal. In the second, Clive courteously greets the colorfully attired Nabob, who, although defeated in battle, is about to be elevated for political reasons.

countenance',<sup>29</sup> and Walpole's anonymous annotator wrote: 'The great Fault found with it was the Genl.(s) Countenance which was more like a Dead than a dying Man's'.<sup>30</sup> This was a subject of a debate related in a letter published in *The Gazetteer and London Daily Advertiser*. The writer, who signs himself Philo Artium, places himself in a group in a coffee house discussing 'the exhibition of polite arts and particularly upon the historical Prize Pictures', with one of them saying 'he thought the representation of that gallant hero, whom England must remember so long as it is a nation; [*sic*] a noble piece'. At this point 'a man who was a Chymist or an Apothecary' intrudes, saying the speaker 'knew nothing of painting'. A warm discussion ensues. 'The Apothecary admitted the whole piece to be extremely well done, save that the generals [*sic*] countenance looked only like that of any dying man, and was too pale'. Philo Artium counters this view with a series of rhetorical questions claiming that the general is shown 'even paler than a dead man' through loss of blood, 'just at the lamp of life was dwindling, and when motion had in fact ceased, every where but in his tongue and eyes ...'.<sup>31</sup> He urges the viewer to 'place himself behind the officer in blue' (presumably the sorrowful-looking man, though not dressed in blue in the sketch, upon whose right shoulder Wolfe's head rests); he would then admit it 'to be as proper a description as imagination can invent.' Clearly, the representation of Wolfe's face disturbed some viewers and was admired by others.

Although some may regard Romney's *Death of General Wolfe* as having been a failure, it actually did very well for a young and virtually unknown artist exhibiting in London for the first time. In addition to being awarded a premium, it was purchased for twenty-five-guineas by the well-known art collector Roland Stephenson (whose wife came from Kendal).<sup>32</sup> Stephenson gave it to his friend Harry Verelst, who was later to commission Romney's striking full-length portrait of his wife, Mrs. Ann Verelst (Rotherham Park Museum, Yorks).<sup>33</sup> An official of the East India Company, Verelst, succeeded Lord Clive as governor in 1767, and the *Death of Wolfe* was hung in the Council Chamber in Calcutta.<sup>34</sup> Although he was an experienced Company official, Verelst was unsuccessful as its chief administrator, and in the third year of his governorship he resigned and returned to

29 Cumberland, 'Memoirs of Mr. George Romney', 421–422.

30 See Gatty, 'Notes', 77.

31 Issue 10651, 5 May 1763. Evidently Wolfe's tongue was visible in the painting, which may have offended some viewers.

32 See Hayley, *Life of Romney*, 39–40.

33 See Kidson, *George Romney*, 2:594–595.

34 See Richard Cumberland, 'Memoirs of Mr. George Romney', *European Magazine*. See David A. Cross, *A Striking Likeness: The Life of George Romney* (London: Ashgate, 2000), 25.



England. No further record of the painting exists. After Verelst failed financially in 1785, he went to France, where he died that same year.<sup>35</sup>

Romney's *Wolfe* had a ghostly afterlife in works by his successors. Edward Penny, a future founding member of the Royal Academy, exhibited his *Death of General Wolfe* at the Society of Artists in 1764.<sup>36</sup> Penny would have seen Romney's picture at the Free Society of the previous year. Like Romney, Penny clothed his subjects in modern dress, and he took greater care with their uniforms. Wolfe is attended by three men, one a civilian, evidently a doctor, and two in the uniform of the Louisbourg Grenadiers, as shown by their high mitre caps. The doctor, on one knee, is on one side of the general, and a soldier, also on one knee, on the other, supporting the dying general from behind. The erect grenadier to the rear of the others gestures toward a soldier arriving from our left, waving his hat as a sign of victory. These three figures form a pyramidal shape, leaning toward the side from which the messenger is arriving. Wolfe is expiring but not yet dead and so must be aware of the victory. Penny's painting does not appear to have caused argument, perhaps because, in contrast to Romney's, it is small (40 x 50 inches) and unassuming, its central figure looking more like an Everyman figure than a hero. Ellis Waterhouse says it has a 'gentle, elegiac quality' and was painted 'not as a dramatic modern history, but as a moral exemplar of military virtue.'<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Penny was known not as a history painter but as a painter of moralistic, sentimental subjects.<sup>38</sup> Thus his painting, published as an engraving by Richard Houston in 1772, escaped the controversy about costume that revived with the exhibition of Benjamin West's *Death of General Wolfe*.<sup>39</sup> (fig. 4)

Benjamin West made his debut in London in 1764, showing three pictures, one of them the full-length *General Robert Monckton* (National Army Museum, London), at the Society of Artists.<sup>40</sup> (Monckton had been with Wolfe at Quebec, but West's painting commemorates his later victory at Mauritius). Penny's *Wolfe* was also on display, and the conjunction of the two may have been the seed of West's famous painting, begun in 1769, completed in the following year, and

35 See Willem G. J. Kuiters, 'Verelst, Harry (1734–1785)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28221>, accessed 11 April 2017].

36 See Graves, *Society of Artists*, 194. The painting was given to the Ashmolean Museum by the artist; a smaller version is at Petworth.

37 Waterhouse, *Painting in Britain 1530–1790*, 5th ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 283.

38 See Edgar Wind, 'Penny, West, and the "Death of Wolfe"', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 10 (1947): 159–162.

39 See John Chaloner Smith, *British Mezzotint Portraits: Being a Descriptive Catalogue of These Engravings from the Introduction of the Art to the Early Part of the Present Century* (London: H. Sotheran, 1878–1884), 603, no. 127.

40 This must be no. 133, 'A gentleman, whole length' (Graves, *Society of Artists*), 275.



Fig. 4: Richard Houston, *The Death of General Wolfe*, after Edward Penny, 1772. Engraving, 42.8 x 50 cm. British Museum. © Trustees of the British Museum.

shown at the Royal Academy in 1771.<sup>41</sup> At the right side of the painting, the officers grouped around the dying Wolfe form a pyramid with the top of their flag at its apex (fig. 5), much as in both Penney's picture and in Romney's as indicated by verbal and visual evidence. All wear contemporary costume. The ensuing debate echoed that around Romney's painting. This time, according to West's friend and biographer John Galt, heavy artillery came into play before the work was completed: both Sir Joshua Reynolds and King George III tried to persuade West to present his heroes *à l'antique*, but West remained firmly attached to his officers' regimentals. This dubious anecdote, which does not appear in Galt's first edition (1816), promotes the image of a New World painter who demanded new forms of expression. Opposing views were, if not silenced, obscured by the phenomenal success of West's *Wolfe*: an autograph version was ordered by the king, and William Woollett's engraving after it sold in unprecedented numbers.

41 For dates see Helmut von Erffa and Allen Staley, *The Paintings of Benjamin West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 211–12; and Grosman, *Benjamin West and the Struggle to Be the Modern*, 11–12.

The fact that none of the lookers-on portrayed had been at the scene did not matter, for this is not a painting of history but a history painting.



Fig. 5: Benjamin West, *The Death of General Wolfe*, 1771. Oil on canvas, 152.6 x 214.5 cm. National Gallery of Canada.

A kind of postscript, James Barry's *Death of General Wolfe*, (fig. 6), was shown at the Royal Academy in 1776.<sup>42</sup> Barry had made detailed notes on the scene in preparation for an accurate rendition, limiting the onlookers to five soldiers and sailors beside and behind the dying general. The five figures who occupy most of the picture space form a pyramid, with the head of a tall standing officer at its apex. Wolfe is in uniform, as are the others, but Wolfe's tunic has been pulled open, leaving his torso nearly bare and intensifying the effect of martyrdom. Barry's painting was not favorably received.<sup>43</sup> There was no way of impeding West's juggernaut.

Barry's *Death of Wolfe* concludes a group that, directly or indirectly, bore reflections of Romney's original.<sup>44</sup> Had Romney's painting remained in London,

42 See David Irwin, 'James Barry, and the Death of Wolfe in 1759', *Art Bulletin* 41, 1959: 330–332.

43 See McNairn, *Behold the Hero*, 208.

44 Different in structure is a painting at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation that may be the *Death of General Wolfe* that James Williams showed at the Free Society in 1774. This has been said to be the at least in one respect the most accurate representation of Wolfe's death, as contemporary accounts say that four men tried to assist him (see Theodore Crombie, 'The

or had it at least remained there longer, it would have kept him in the public eye. The controversy that it had aroused, its being awarded a prize and then a premium in its stead, and its purchase by a well-known collector, all would almost certainly have led to an engraving after it. A visual reminder would then have existed after its subject became celebrated through paintings by other artists, and Romney's priority would have been recognized. As it is, we can only imagine what it may have looked like, and hope for its re-discovery.



Fig. 6: James Barry, *Death of General Wolfe*, 1777. Oil on canvas, 219 x 292 cm, New Brunswick Museum.

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Death of Wolfe', *Connoisseur*, 114 (1959): 56–57). The Williamsburg picture depicts an officer borne on a litter by two soldiers, one looking down sorrowfully at him, a third doffing his hat and extending a sprig, and at the right a civilian who has extracted a little bottle from a chest. The sharp features of the dying officer, turned in profile, very much resemble those of Smyth's drawing. I thank Alex Kidson for bringing this picture to my attention, and Laura Pas Barry, Juli Grainger Curator of Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture, for information about it.

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Peter Henning

## The Non-Place of *Eros*. On John Keats and the Logic of Flowers and Bees

### Abstract

The following article investigates Keats's expansion of the notion of *Eros*, arguing that it forms a dialectic relation between the self-sufficiency of the lover and a dream of mutual exchange between the subject and its object of desire. In order to discern the specific concerns of Keats in this regard, the study analyzes a letter sent to his friend John Hamilton Reynolds on the 19th of February 1818, suggesting that it constitutes a paradigmatic focal point from which a Keatsian logic of desire may be subsequently outlined. The letter in question is well known to romantic scholars, famous for its positing and purported contrasting of two different modes of subjectivity: that of the flower, and that of the bee. As I want to contend, however, the issues of subjectivity raised by this text have not been adequately addressed, either with regard to their psychological or literary significance. Tracing the bee motif historically, the article discusses its appropriation by Keats, in order to highlight its problematical role in his lyrical work. Against this background, the letter to Reynolds is shown to exemplify a conflicting, utopian, discourse of being and loving: a non-place of *Eros*.

### Keywords

Apiculture, Roland Barthes, Chronophilia, Chronophobia, Desire, Utopia

In one of the unpublished fragments pertaining to *A Lover's Discourse* (1977), Roland Barthes devotes a section of his encyclopedia to the reciprocity of love and the inequality of feelings. More specifically, Barthes observes that we often find mutual love a more troubling prospect than the egotistical assertion of tenderness, even though such expressions may be unrequited on behalf of the loved one:

Je me moque de la réciprocité des sentiments ; je n'ai pas besoin que tu m'aimes, puisque je t'aime, *moi* : mon moi, grandiose, se suffit à lui-même ; il se croit maître de ce qu'il donne, il triomphe. Je suis libre, hors de l'échange, dans la dépense pure.

[I don't care about the reciprocity of feelings; I have no need to be loved by you, because I, I love you: my magnificent self is self-sufficient; it believes itself master of its giving, it triumphs. I am free, outside of the exchange, in the pure expenditure.]<sup>1</sup>

Seeking an image that would transcend the ego, Barthes's entry ends in a regressive figure: a mother breastfeeding her child, gently letting its hand control the flow of milk to create a room – *un espace* – of simultaneous separation and cooperation. The scene, however, also speaks of the possibility to conceive of love in a dialectical, reciprocated form:

l'autre me tient la main, m'apprend quelque chose, me modifie, cependant que j'en fais autant avec lui.

[the other holds my hand, teaches me something, changes me, while I do the same thing with him.]<sup>2</sup>

As I will argue in the following, Keats's continuous struggle with the notion of *Eros* can be said to operate along a spectrum similar to that of Barthes's: ranging from the self-sufficiency of the lover to a dream of mutual exchange between the subject and its object of desire.

In order to discern the specific concerns of Keats in this regard, I want to establish a specific text, a letter sent to his friend John Hamilton Reynolds on the 19 February 1818, as a paradigmatic focal point for the study – a point from which an erotic logic, a Keatsian *discours amoureux*, may subsequently be outlined. The letter in question is well-known to romantic scholars, famous for its positing and purported contrasting of two different modes of subjectivity: that of the flower, and that of the bee. As I want to contend though, the issues of subjectivity raised by this text have not been adequately addressed, either with regard to their psychological or literary significance.

In what remains, I will thus analyze Keats's letter to Reynolds – arguing that its insistence on a dual position, capable of accommodating both flower and bee, represents an attempt to overcome the erotic complications otherwise associated with the latter. Keats's hesitance towards the subject position of the bee must, in turn, be understood against the backdrop of a long poetological tradition that ties the notion of divine inspiration to a cluster of apian metaphors. Just like love, the blessing of the muses was regarded as a form of madness, leading thinkers from Plato and onwards to question whether poetry could qualify as a form of 'art' producing knowledge. While not in the first place concerned with epistemology, Keats's use of the bee motif nonetheless requires him to address

1 Roland Barthes, *Le discours amoureux. Séminaire à l'École pratique des hautes études 1974–1976. Suivi de Fragments d'un discours amoureux (pages inédites)*, ed. Claude Coste (Paris: Éditions du seuil, 2007), 663. All translations are my own unless stated otherwise.

2 *Ibid.*, 665.

the question of moderation. By sketching the historical transformations of the comparison between poets and bees, ending in John Milton's negative transposition of the motif, the study successively moves towards the specific Keatsian problematic.

Arguing for the psychological resonance between Milton and Keats, I will then centre on the threat of erotic excess that concerned both poets. Examining Keats's strategies to express and deal with this perceived danger, the question of desire's temporality will prove particularly important. Only when contrasted with the infinite does moderation really become a problem. The issue of temporality furthermore points to an overlap of the erotic and aesthetic, actualizing, in turn, the question of reciprocation raised by the Reynolds letter. As I want to suggest, the latter represents a logic of *Eros* that contrasts the structure of desire outlined previously. This counterpoint, I will finally argue, also exemplifies a utopic drive in Keats's letter writing that works towards the construction of a textual *utopos*: a non-place of mutual desire, understood in line with Barthes's visionary conception of an 'espace d'activité mutuelle' [space of mutual activity] between a lover and his beloved.<sup>3</sup>

## Defining the Problem

I want to begin by citing a few lines from the letter to Reynolds that presents the complexities to which our interpretation must answer:

It has been an old Comparison for our urging on – the Bee hive – however, it seems to me that we should rather be the flower than the Bee, for it is a false notion that more is gained by receiving than giving – no the receiver and the giver are equal in their benefits. The fl[ower] I doubt not receives a fair guerdon from the Bee – its leaves blush deeper in the next spring – and who shall say between Man and Woman which is the most delighted? Now it is more noble to sit like Jove that [*sic*] to fly like Mercury – let us not therefore go hurrying about and collecting honey-bee-like, buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at: but let us open our leaves like a flower and be passive and receptive – budding patiently under the eye of Apollo and taking hints from every [*sic*] noble insect that favors us with a visit – sap will be given us for Meat and dew for drink. (*KL*, I, 232)<sup>4</sup>

The passage prompts us, first of all, to question the nature of the problem posed by Keats. Observing the letter's argument, one is struck by the poet's unwillingness to univocally side with the position he demonstratively claims: namely,

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Keats's letters are quoted from *The Letters of John Keats; 1814–1821*, 2 vols., ed. Hyder Rollins (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1958) – abbreviated in the following as *KL*.

that ‘we should rather be the flower than the Bee’. As we learn, the two positions are ‘equal in their benefits’, and we cannot say who ‘between Man and Woman ... is the most delighted’. Furthermore, the gender lines are in themselves blurred: the flower, for instance, while being femininely coded, is concurrently associated with the patriarchal nobility of Jupiter. It would seem, then, as if Keats purposely sought to disrupt the very notion of rigidity – maintaining a rhetoric of duality rather than pursuing any definitive conclusions.<sup>5</sup> To a certain extent, this ambiguity is characteristic of Keats’s epistolary style: he wrote haphazardly, not with philosophic rigor in mind. Yet, looking at the letter’s argument in full, there is a coherence to the willfully slapdash that demands our attention; a claim for the undecidable that speaks to us with thematic persistence.

To take an example, showing also how deeply rooted the letter’s double-bind is running, we might consider Keats’s supposed rejection of the beehive as a model for the ‘urging on’ of man. The comparison between apian and human society, traditionally praising the governmental practices, entrepreneurship, and moral virtues of the bees have a long history. In Varro’s *Rerum Rusticarum* (c 50 BC), the basic formula is exemplified: ‘Bees are not of a solitary nature, as eagles are, but are like human beings ... Their commonwealth is like the states of men, for here are king, government, and fellowship’.<sup>6</sup> If Keats was unacquainted with Varro, he had certainly read the fourth book of Vergil’s *Georgics* which influentially elaborated on the subject of beekeeping. Idolizing Shakespeare as he did, Keats would also have observed the enduring impact of the analogy between men and bees, adapted over time to reflect on current political issues. In *Henry V*, for instance, the Archbishop of Canterbury famously states:

... Therefore doth heaven divide  
The state of man in divers functions,  
Setting endeavour in continual motion;  
To which is fixed, as an aim or butt,  
Obedience. For so work the honey-bees,  
Creatures that by a rule in nature teach  
The act of order to a peopled kingdom.<sup>7</sup>

As Charlotte C. Scott explains, Shakespeare’s play not only references the bee’s antique symbolism, but also draws upon its later significance as a religious

5 In regard to the ‘double-gendered’ figures evoked by Keats, Susan J. Wolfson makes a similar observation in ‘Keats and Gender Criticism’, in ed. Robert M. Ryan & Ronald A. Sharp, *The Persistence of Poetry. Bicentennial Essays on Keats*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 98.

6 Marcus Porcius Cato and Marcus Terentius Varro, *On Agriculture*, trans. William Davis Hooper, rev. Harrison Boyd (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1954), III, 16, 4–6.

7 *Henry V*, I.ii.183–189. Shakespeare’s plays are consistently quoted from *The Norton Shakespeare*, gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1997).



emblem – mobilizing it in the context of commonwealth expansion by way of its Protestant associations to ‘labour, industry, and profit’.<sup>8</sup> The hive, then, comes to represent a rule whose fixed divisions are maintained through submission and ‘continual motion’ (swarming). ‘With every prince comes a new commonwealth’, extending the empire’s boundaries through a cycle of rejuvenation (colonization) in which the strong replaces the weak.<sup>9</sup>

Against such a political backdrop, Nicholas Roe has suggested that we read Keats’s hesitance towards the bee as an indication of the poet’s sympathy with the reformist, oppositional ideals propounded by the ‘Cockney School’.<sup>10</sup> Rather than to ‘urge on’, by way of the political and epistemological imperialism associated with apiculture (‘buzzing here and there impatiently from a knowledge of what is to be arrived at’), Keats, Roe argues, seeks to define a ‘truly just commonwealth’: ‘a society in which human beings emulate the receptivity of flowers’ within an egalitarian, ‘green’, community.<sup>11</sup> As we read in the Reynolds letter,

Man should not dispute or assert but whisper results to his neighbour, and thus by every germ of Spirit sucking the Sap from mould ethereal every Human might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furse and Briars with here and there a remote Oak or Pine, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees. (*KL*, I, 232)

It should be noted, however, that the view ascribed to Keats would find ample support in earlier sources – casting doubt on the need to reject the bee symbol in political terms. Dryden’s translation of Vergil, for instance, gives us:

Of all the race of animals, alone  
The bees have common cities of their own,  
And common sons; beneath one law they live,  
And with one common stock their traffic drive.  
Each has a certain home, a several stall;  
All is the state’s, the state provides for all.<sup>12</sup>

Jacques Vanière, the Jesuit ‘Virgile français’, goes a step further. Only in regard to their favored dwelling, ‘a settled mansion’, do bees resemble man, since:

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8 Charlotte C. Scott, *Shakespeare’s Nature. From Cultivation to Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 112. See furthermore James C. Bulman, ‘Shakespeare’s Georgic Histories’, in ed. Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare Survey*, 38 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 43–44.

9 Scott, *Shakespeare’s Nature*, 113.

10 Nicholas Roe, ‘John Keats’s “Green World”’, in *The Challenge of John Keats. Bicentenary Essays 1795–1995*, ed. by Allan C. Christensen et al. (Rodopi: Amsterdam & Atlanta, GA, 2000), 76.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *The Works of John Dryden*, Vol. XIV (London: William Miller, 1808), 105 (*Georgics*, IV, ll. 153–157).

By hoarded wealth no individual tries  
 Above the modest citizens to rise;  
 No sordid av'rice taints the gen'rous mind;  
 Their stock in common lies to all resign'd'.<sup>13</sup>

More pressingly, though, Roe's study does not account for Keats's way of eschewing any single-sided definition in favor of paradox. If the floral imperative connotes receptivity – 'sap will be given us for Meat, dew for drink' – the position is simultaneously contradicted by the earlier statement that man, organized democratically as trees, will be 'sucking the Sap from mould ethereal'.<sup>14</sup> Roe takes the latter expression as a reference to Ariel's song in *The Tempest*: 'Where the bee sucks, there suck I'.<sup>15</sup> As we may note, however, Ariel's position is precisely that *in between* bee and flower, associated, as R. S. White contends, with 'the nature of both'.<sup>16</sup> Though bee-like in his quest, Ariel's dwelling also reads as a testament to his empathic immersion in the realm of flowers: 'In a cowslip's bell I lie; / ... / Merrily, merrily shall I live now / Under the blossom that hangs on the bough'.<sup>17</sup>

Trying to make sense of Keats's stance, we must likewise pay attention to the unconventional way in which he ends the letter: namely, by jokingly renouncing his preceding intellectual venture. All of it, Keats says, 'is a mere sophistication ... to excuse my own indolence – so I will not deceive myself that Man should be equal with jove – but think himself very well off as a sort of scullion-Mercury or even a humble Bee – It is not matter whether I am right or wrong either one way or another' (*KL*, I, 233). This self-negation, however, also comes off as a performative assertion – an either-or that echoes the letter's mantra of both-at-once: passive and active, solitary and collective, majestic and submissive, right and wrong – man and woman. Unlike the haunting figures of Keats's 'Ode on Indolence', the polarities of bee and flower do seem to toil and spin – sustaining the tension elsewhere defined as the poet's capability to place himself at the heart of uncertainty (*KL*, I, 193f.). If anything, then, this measured ambiguity reads as a solution rather than a problematic on Keats's behalf – requiring that we seek the question to which it serves as an answer.

13 Jacques Vanière, *The Bees. A Poem. From the Fourteenth Books of Vanière's Prædium Rusticum*, trans. Arthur Murphy (London: F & C Rivington, 1799), 5–6.

14 Likewise, the image of a forest contrasting the isolated 'oak or Pine' itself forms a variant of the hive's necessary multitude: *una apis, nulla apis*.

15 *The Tempest*, V.i.88–89. Roe, 'John Keats's "Green World"', 75.

16 R. S. White, *Keats as a Reader of Shakespeare* (London: Athlone press, 1987), 101.

17 *The Tempest*, V.i.89–94.

## Establishing the Context

Importantly, the bee motif not only actualizes a range of political topics but also forms an integral part of the lyrical tradition. That the hive has been ‘an old Comparison for our urging on’, may for instance, as D. S. Neff points out, refer to the metaphor of *imitatio* commonly used during the classical period.<sup>18</sup> Horace’s poetological self-depiction, portraying his search for poetic flowers ‘in manner and method like a Matine bee’ (both diligent and humble) is a well-known example of the latter.<sup>19</sup> For Seneca, however, a more complex relation is imagined between flower and the bee. Honey, he speculates, is not just found, but produced through a mysterious process of fermentation. Similarly, the poet-bee should operate digestively. Ideas are applied to his genius like foodstuffs: fundamentally altered, having transformed into blood and tissue, their origins still remain clear.<sup>20</sup> In a figurative sense, Keats may, in turn, be placed in hesitance between these two polarities, asking himself if the bee merely harvests, or if its taking is also a giving up: a subjection to a process of change.

As the Reynolds letter makes clear, Keats’s questioning has an explicitly sexual errand, concerned with the psychology and phenomenology of intercourse. Central here, as discussed in detail later, is Keats’s worry that male sexuality will taint the object of love, and as a consequence demote idealized desire to brutish lust. Parenthetically, we may note that where the letter excuses Keats’s ‘indolence’, Richard Woodhouse’s transcript reads ‘indulgence’ (*KL*, I, 233, n. 7). This erotic problematic in turn conflates with Keats’s view on the poet’s engagement with the world, elsewhere expressed in terms of an empathic relation to things and phenomena. ‘A Poet’, he writes, ‘is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity – he is continually in for – and filling some other Body – The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women’ (*KL*, I, 387).<sup>21</sup> This process of identification, the immersion of the poet with the Other, has in common with Keats’s depictions of sexual experience an element of annihilation or loss of the self. Furthermore, as in matters of sex, duration is key, and in both regards a ‘yearning for eternal prolongation’ – a fear of desire’s painful aftermath, be it aesthetic or erotic to its nature – appears to be haunting Keats.<sup>22</sup>

18 D. S. Neff, ‘The Flower and the Bee: Keats, *Imitatio* and the “Orlando Furioso”’, *South Atlantic Review* 67 (Winter, 2002): 43, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3201585>.

19 Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. and trans. Niall Rudd (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004), 223 (*Odes*, IV.2.27–32).

20 Thomas M. Greene, *The Light in Troy. Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1982), 73–74.

21 For a comprehensive discussion of Keats’s poetical understanding of ‘empathy’, see Newell F. Ford, ‘Keats, Empathy, and “The Poetical Character”’, *Studies in Philology*, vol. 45, no. 3 (July 1948): 477–490.

22 *Ibid.*, 490.

To expound on these issues, we are necessitated to widen the study's outlook beyond the scope of literary imitation. Yet, Keats's use of the bee motif in important regards connects to the classical tradition and its subsequent literary transformations. To establish the historical ground on which the following analysis will rest, I thus want to start by providing a rough outline of the symbolic associations of bee and honey as they appear and evolve in the Western canon – pursuing their trail until they converge with Keats's poetical work.<sup>23</sup>

For the Greek poets, sweetness was intimately linked to the veracity of song and speech. As Hesiod explains in the *Theogony*, the muses will 'pour sweet dew' upon the tongue of Zeus's chosen one, making his words 'stream / Out of his mouth like honey'. Thus, 'people will look to him / As one who can distinguish with straight justice what should be'. The love of the muses, however, was not only conferred to potential rulers but also to poets whose sweetened songs would recount 'the fame of ancient men / And of the blessed gods'.<sup>24</sup> Honey was, itself, the food of the deities, bestowed upon man from above; it was regarded as the produce of heaven and air rather than plants and insects. In accordance with this belief, Pindar offers his poetic praise as a shower of honey or a sprinkling of song.<sup>25</sup> Not until Plato, however, will the comparison between song and honey extend into one of poets and bees. In *Ion*, the lyric poet is described as 'a delicate thing, winged and sacred, unable to create until he becomes inspired and frenzied'. The rhapsodes 'carry honey to us from every quarter like bees, and they fly as bees do, sipping from honey-flowing fountains in glens and gardens of the Muses'.<sup>26</sup>

Cicero would later claim that bees had settled on the newborn Plato's lips as a sign of his future eloquence, but the bee had already since long been associated with prophesy and divinity.<sup>27</sup> The *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* (end of 6th century BC) tells the story of three 'bee-maidens', 'gifted with wings: their heads ...

23 In regard to the motif's antique history, I am indebted to Jan Hendrik Waszink's brilliant overview: *Biene und Honig als Symbol des Dichters und der Dichtung in der griechisch-römischen Antike* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1974). For a global perspective, see Eva Crane, *The World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

24 Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. Catherine M. Schlegel & Henry Weinfield (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), lines 83–101.

25 'Olympian Ode', X, 98; 'Pythian Ode', VIII, 57, in Pindar, *Olympian Odes. Pythian Odes*, ed. and trans. William H. Race (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997). The possible etymological connections between 'song' and 'honey' are discussed by René Nünlist, *Poetologische Bildersprache in der frühgriechischen Dichtung* (Stuttgart & Leipzig: Teubner, 1998), 280. See also Boris Maslov, *Pindar and the Emergence of Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 291, n. 133.

26 Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol. 3, trans. R. E. Allen (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1996), 14 (534b).

27 Alice Swift Riginos, *Platonica. The Anecdotes Concerning the Life and Writings of Plato* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 18.

besprinkled with white meal'. These virgins were offered honey, provoking them into an inspired rage that allowed them to tell the future. 'From their home they fly now here, now there, feeding on honey-comb and bringing all things to pass'.<sup>28</sup> Similar to the case of Dionysus's Bacchantes, who from the streams drew milk and honey, sweetness here forms a symbol of mediation between gods and men: a merging of heaven and earth.

This kind of religious symbolism would lose its bearing during Roman antiquity but reemerge in name of Christianity. Here, once more, the bee assumed the role of divine herald.<sup>29</sup> If Varro had once named the bee a bird of the muses, Dante refers to the angel as a 'holy bird' – an image assuming apian shape in light of the golden 'now-always rose' that is God's rule.<sup>30</sup> In paradise, the angels resemble 'a swarm of bees that first / en-flower themselves, returning, afterwards, / to where their efforts are made sweet to taste'.<sup>31</sup> 'Descending in the flower from tier to tier', they offer 'peace' and win a 'burning love' that is returned to the hive of their love's eternal dwelling.<sup>32</sup>

Responding to this vision of paradise some 300 years later, Milton would, in turn, describe the satanic assembly at Pandæmonium through an inversion of Dante's scenery. Like the hardworking angel-bees of the idyllic tradition, Satan's host is likened with a swarm of bees who fly 'to and fro' 'among fresh dews and flowers', rising at the call of their master to cluster both ground and air with a menacing 'hiss of rusling wings'.<sup>33</sup> Judging from coloratura alone, Keats's apian imagery may seem to have little in common with the infernal landscapes of Milton. Yet, *Paradise Lost* forms a crucial intertext to Keats in terms of its destabilization and perversion of the classical motif. In this regard, we must not forget that Milton's Satan had been essential to the development of Keats's empathic poetics.<sup>34</sup> In the following, then, I will further explore the psycho(theo)-

28 *The Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, ed. Athanassios Vergados (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2013), 130.

29 See Waszink, *Biene und Honig*, 20f.

30 Varro, *Rerum Rusticarum*, III, 16; *Purgatorio*, II, 38; *Paradiso*, XXX, 124. Here and elsewhere, Dante's work is quoted from Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. and ed. Robin Kirkpatrick (New York: Penguin Books, 2012).

31 *Paradiso*, XXXI, 7–9.

32 *Ibid.*, 16–18. In *The Necessary Angel*, trans. Miguel E. Vatter (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 123, n. 2, Massimo Cacciari alerts us to a connection between Dante's 'holy bird' and the lines from Matthew 6:26: 'See the birds of the sky, that they don't sow, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Your heavenly Father feeds them'. Note, however, that Dante's angels are involved both in an act of gathering and an act of transformation ('their efforts are made sweet to taste').

33 John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Malden & Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), I, ll. 771–772; II, 766–767. All subsequent quotations from Milton quote this edition.

34 Ford, 'Keats, Empathy', 482f., alerts us to Keats's marginal notes on IX, 179–91 in his copy of *Paradise Lost*. The scene in question, describing how Satan enters the sleeping serpent, is

logical correspondence between Keats's and Milton's respective works. In particular, I will address the sexualization of bee and honey motifs in Keats with regard to the treatment of *Eros* in *Paradise Lost*. As we will see, desires of a carefree pastoral world – that of Eden or 'Hybla's honied roses' ('Had I a man's fair form', 10) – may easily overstep its moral boundaries, revealing within desire's expansive force a threat of excess that contrasts the notion of an untainted, heavenly sexuality.<sup>35</sup>

### The Logic of Desire

The fundamental elements of the apian-lyrical tradition – a comparison between sweetness and song, the linkage between honey and deity – are represented also in Keats's oeuvre. Endymion's 'honied tongue' is, for instance, to be taught a heavenly tune contrasting the 'roughness of mortal speech' (*Endymion*, II, 818–820). Elsewhere, the poet pleads to the muses 'for three words of honey' ('I stood tip-toe', l. 209) or tastes the strange 'juice, / Sipp'd by the wander'd bee'; in the latter case, the beverage in question also functions as a prophetic medium.<sup>36</sup> 'Honey', 'honey-dew', 'honey-words', and 'honey-whispers' are, however, primarily associated with erotic desire.<sup>37</sup> Madeline, for instance, is told that on 'St. Agnes' Eve, / Young virgins might have visions of delight, / And soft adornings from their loves receive / Upon the honey'd middle of the night'.<sup>38</sup> The wood-nymph in *Lamia*, in turn, gives 'up her honey' to Hermes, blooming at his gaze 'like new flowers at morning song of bees' (I, ll. 140–143).

If sexuality thus marks a transcendent path for Keats, similarly associated with mythical and liminal experience, its fulfilment also borders to feelings of disgust and mortality.<sup>39</sup> As Shakespeare had put it, 'The sweetest honey' is also 'loathsome in his own deliciousness' – the very intensity of pleasure threatening to undermine the aspiration 'to love moderately'.<sup>40</sup> Keats, in his copy of Burton's

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celebrated by Keats for its emphatic aesthetics, forming – Ford argues – the backbone to Keats's discussion on the 'poetical Character' (see *KL*, I, 387).

35 All references to Keats's poems cite the *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1982).

36 *Fall of Hyperion*, I, 42–43.

37 For an overview, see Michael G. Becker, Robert J. Dilligan and Todd K. Bender, *A Concordance to the Poems of John Keats* (New York: Garland, 1981).

38 *St. Agnes*, ll. 46–50. The poet-lover-bee in 'Had I a man's fair form' may serve as a further example, desiring to 'taste that dew' (l. 12) by means of 'spells, and incantation' (l. 14).

39 Cp. John Jones, *John Keats's Dream of Truth* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1969), 267, who characterizes 'Keatsian consummation as we meet it everywhere' by the two-fold notion of 'fulfilment and death'.

40 *Romeo and Juliet*, II.v.11–14.

*Anatomy of Melancholia*, scornfully remarks on the tendency to mingle 'goatish winnyish lustful love with the abstract adoration of the deity'.<sup>41</sup> Though sincere in his judgment, Keats would nevertheless inherit a central aspect of the poetic and psychological struggle that underlies *Paradise Lost*: namely the question of how to depict a divine sense of sexuality, deeper and more fulfilling than any 'goatish' lust, that still complies to the rationale of moderation.<sup>42</sup>

In regard to this moral dictate, Henry Staten observes that for Milton and Christianity: 'both guilt, with its consequent shame, and death are the results of disobedience; and guilt', in turn, 'is intrinsic to the sexual act insofar as this act violates the boundary of conscious rationality and unleashes an unmeasured pleasure'.<sup>43</sup> When Milton imagines 'a world without sexual guilt', it follows that such a place is conceived as 'a world without death'.<sup>44</sup> This logic, constitutive of the Platonic and Neoplatonic *Eros* which 'ennobles desire by making it transcendent, a force that in essence goes beyond the individual physical being', is likewise determinative for Keats's general notion of a 'happy end'.<sup>45</sup> More specifically, the ideal in question is represented by an articulate desire to fly away into an indefinite beyond, sanctioned by a promise of immortality:

Before three swiftest kisses he had told,  
They vanish'd far away!<sup>46</sup>

Into the green-recessed woods they flew;  
Nor grew they pale, as mortal lovers do.<sup>47</sup>

And they are gone: ay, ages long ago  
These lovers fled away into the storm.<sup>48</sup>

At the level of the individual image, however, the precarious balance between indulgence and restraint, between 'great attraction and ... great potentiality for distaste', as Christopher Ricks has it, becomes all the more apparent.<sup>49</sup> While the apprehension of a beloved face – so sweet, in fact, that it evokes a childish urge to

41 John Keats, *The Complete Works*, Vol. 3, ed. H. Buxton Forman (Glasgow: Gowans & Gray, 1901), 268.

42 See Henry Staten, *Eros in Mourning: Homer to Lacan* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). His analysis of Milton is on pp. 108–36. On the question of Paradisiac sex and its inherent virtue, see p. 121.

43 *Ibid.*, 133.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*, 119. The argument parallels what Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Romantic Body. Love and Sexuality in Keats, Wordsworth, and Blake* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 50–51, describes as Keats's treatment of sensations according to a 'process of etherealization'.

46 *Endymion*, IV, ll. 1002–1003.

47 *Lamia*, I, ll. 44–45.

48 *The Eve of St. Agnes*, 370–371.

49 Christopher Ricks, *Keats and Embarrassment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 136.

lap it up (*Endymion*, I, 895) – may induce ‘a breathless honey-feel of bliss’ that preserves us ‘from the drear abyss / Of death’ (ibid., 903–905), the threat avoided is already embedded in the allusion to the clogging sweetness of honey.<sup>50</sup> It leaves us, as Ricks notes, ‘breathless’ and gasping for air.<sup>51</sup> Praising the lush extravagancies of poetry and love, Keats must, therefore, ask himself whether he can ‘bear’ its ‘o’erwhelming sweets’ (‘Sleep and Poetry’, ll. 61–62), knowing that the ‘breath / Of flowering bays’ (ibid., ll. 57–58) may indeed be intoxicating; that an ‘aching Pleasure nigh’, may be ‘Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips’ (‘Ode on Melancholy’, ll. 23–24).

How, then, do we interpret the nature of such poisoning? Helen Vendler suggests that if ‘women are flowers, and Keats the bee, he confusedly blames himself for distilling a venom from their sweetness, and yet at the same time blames the nectar itself for its instability and its lack of resistance to metamorphosis.’<sup>52</sup> As for the question of transmutation, though, Keats does neither deplore nor reject it; on the contrary, we have previously noted his efforts to transpose the lusting bodies and their cravings into an infinite register – thus substituting or paralleling a purely corporeal acceleration of desire into climax.<sup>53</sup> Neither is there any apparent ‘confusion’ in his position. Infatuated with a ‘Beauty that must die’ (‘Ode on Melancholy’, l. 21), the fatal exchange comes as no surprise to the poet. Rather, like Adam’s resolution to fall with Eve, death is the logical consequence of such a transgression:

50 Here, we may remind ourselves of Yeats’s characteristic of Keats in ‘Ego Dominus Tuus’, as quoted from *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 2nd. ed., ed. Richard J. Finneman (New York: Scribner, 1997), ll. 56–62: ‘I see a schoolboy when I think of him / With face and nose pressed to a sweetshop window’. Rather than concluding, however, like Yeats, that Keats’s penchant for sweets are linked to an unfulfilled want (‘he sank into his grave / His senses and his heart unsatisfied’), we may also, in line with Barthes, connect the childish wish fulfillment at play with desire’s kinship to mortality. As *Le discours amoureux*, 660, has it: ‘L’enfant qui réclame un Plaisir s’écrite (par marchandage, pour l’obtenir) : *Une fois ! Rien qu’une fois !* Ainsi de la demande amoureuse : que je connaisse une fois, rien qu’une fois, mais au moins une fois, le gout de *ce qui est parfait* (dérision : c’est le nom d’une glace, des plus vulgaires)’ [The child who demands a pleasure cries out (bargains, to get it): *One time! Just one time!* The same applies to the romantic demand: that I once, only once, but at least once, would taste what is perfect (derision: it’s the name of an ice-cream, one of the most the most vulgar)]. The child, however, also speaks of an approaching death: ‘C’est le cri de Pelléas et Mélisande, lorsque Golaud les surprend : *Ta bouche ! Ta bouche, une fois, puisque tout est à jamais perdu*’ [It’s the cry of Pelléas and Mélisande, when they are surprised by Golaud: *Your mouth! Your mouth just once, since everything’s forever lost*] (ibid.).

51 Ibid., 134.

52 Helen Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983), 178.

53 See furthermore Barry Gradman’s *Metamorphosis in Keats* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), arguing for the importance of transmutation in Keats’s work at large.



However I with thee have fixt my Lot,  
 Certain to undergoe like doom, if Death  
 Consort with thee, Death is to mee as Life.<sup>54</sup>

Whether death (understood as personal dissolution) is the actual matter at stake here is another question, though. As we know from elsewhere, Keats would often construct false binaries structured around the two poles of *Eros* and *Thanatos*. The closing lines of 'Bright star': 'to hear her tender-taken breath, / And so live ever – or else swoon to death' (ll. 13–14), is an exemplary passage. For the Keatsian imagination, love is always, in one way or another, a form of dissolution: we melt 'into its radiance' (*Endymion*, I, 810), whether we swoon to death from unrequited sympathies, or bring to our loved one 'a swooning admiration' (*KL*, II, 133). The word 'swoon' is in itself telling: denoting a sense of exaltation that also produces a loss of consciousness, a faint, or in its arcane form: a deep sleep (what Baudelaire would later call 'un sommeil aussi doux que la mort' [a sleep as sweet as death]).<sup>55</sup> For Keats, then, *Eros* and *Thanatos* are conceived as mutually interchangeable entities, bound up in a triangular structure with the notion of *aion*: the ever changeless now. As we may thus deduce, the real issue articulated by 'Bright star' is not its manifest pairing of the two. To 'so live ever' – that is: to be 'Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast' (l. 10) – or to wish oneself forever dead is, in a Freudian sense, two sides of the same regressive coin.<sup>56</sup> What both these instances contrast, however, is the illusory sense of infinitude evoked by lovemaking:

Though one moment's pleasure  
 In one moment flies,  
 Though the passion's treasure  
 In one moment dies;  
 Yet it has not pass'd –<sup>57</sup>

The crux with desire, Martin Hägglund argues, is not that it cannot be fulfilled, but that satisfaction is always subject to the passing of time: 'Even at the moment one is fulfilled the moment is passing away'.<sup>58</sup> In literary terms, the problematic ad-

54 *Paradise Lost*, 9, 952–954.

55 Spenser's *Faery Queen* – singled out as first sparking Keats's 'genius' (*The Keats Circle. Letters and Papers 1816–1878*, ed. Hyder Rollins, 2 vols. [Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1948], 2:55) – provides a less anachronistic model. Here we find the poem's hero victim of an enchanted 'swowne', lulled to sleep by sounds 'much like the sowne / Of swarming Bees' (I, l. 41). Edmund Spenser, *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser. In Three Volumes*, Vol. II, ed. J. C. Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), 15.

56 On Keats, breasts and his mother, see Ricks, *Keats and Embarrassment*, 114.

57 From 'Hither, hither, love', ll. 13–17.

58 Martin Hägglund, *Dying for Time. Proust, Woolf, Nabokov* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press: 2012), 159.

dressed by Keats is not so much Lucretian (close is never close enough) as Faustian ('Verweile doch, du bist so schön ...').<sup>59</sup> By wholeheartedly investing in the moment, ascribing to it a value beyond the merely finite – what Häggglund calls *chronophilia* – the subject paradoxically reveals the same moment's temporal determination in a *chronophobic* fear of losing it. What Keats identifies with poison, remedied in 'Bright star' by two versions of infinity, is thus the waking up as such: the act of sobering indispensably tied to pleasure, determining its value in advance though concurrently bound to negate it through a sense of morality installed in self-reflective hindsight.

Keats's 'To Autumn' may serve as a further example in this regard. Contrary to someone like Andrew Marvell, whose 'industrious bee' soberly 'computes the time as well as we', Keats's autumnal swarm is encountered in a state of drunken excess.<sup>60</sup> Feeding on 'still more, later flowers ... / Until they think warm days will never cease', the bees will end up 'overbrimming' their 'clammy cells' ('To Autumn', ll. 9–11). Cynthia had once cautioned Endymion: 'Enlarge not my hunger, or I'm caught / in trammels of perverse deliciousness' (*Endymion*, IV, ll. 760–761).<sup>61</sup> Seized by 'Love's madness' (ibid., II, l. 860), we not only lose track of time, but also control of our selves. Plato's bee-poet who, 'inspired and frenzied', crosses the boundary of reason, 'his mind no longer in him', once more forms an important point of reference.<sup>62</sup> Importantly though, the losing of one's self in Keats also translates into a soiling of oneself. Victims of a voracious appetite, the bees of 'To Autumn' are stationed in anticipation of the gold rush's sticky aftermath – bringing to the poem's surface a suppressed desire in its perceived fulfilment. As for the notion of divine madness, however, we should also bear in mind that Freud's analysis of 'hallucinatory wishful psychosis', the state of bringing 'hidden or repressed wishes into consciousness' while representing

59 Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, rev. ed., trans. Martin Ferguson Smith (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett, 2001), 130 (IV.1108–1111): The lovers 'greedily press body to body and intermingle the salivas of their mouths, drawing deep breaths and crushing lips with teeth. But it is all in vain, since they cannot take away anything from their lover's body or wholly penetrate it and merge into it'. Johan Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust I & II*, Goethe's Collected works, vol. 2, trans. and ed. by Stuart Atkins (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 44: 'If I should ever say to any moment: / Tarry, remain! – you are so fair! / then you may lay your fetters on me, / Then I will gladly be destroyed!' (I, ll. 1699–1702).

60 'The Garden', 69, in Andrew Marvell, *The Poems and Letters*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927).

61 In regard to our previous discussion, we may bear in mind that 'trammel' originally meant to bind up a corpse.

62 Plato, *Dialogues*, 14 (534b). As Plato furthermore argues in *Phaedrus* (265b), poetic inspiration and love, together with philosophic and prophetic inspiration, constitutes a four-fold division of divine madness. See further, E. Douka Kabitoglou, 'Adapting Philosophy to Literature: The Case of John Keats', *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 89, No. 1 (1992): 115–116.

them as fulfilled, stems from the perceived similarity between dreaming and various pathological disorders such as schizophrenia.<sup>63</sup>

Taking the form of a frozen tableau, 'To Autumn' only hints at the full scope of the climactic arc described. *Endymion*, however, has it in full:

O he had swoon'd  
 Drunken from pleasure's nipple; and his love  
 Henceforth was dove-like. – Loth was he to move  
 From the imprinted couch, and when he did,  
 'Twas with slow, languid paces, and face hid  
 In muffling hands.<sup>64</sup>

This movement, starting with amorous intoxication and ending in shameful awakening, is again grounded in the Christian and Miltonic world – bound up with the image of Adam after the fall, hiding his face in shame: 'Of Innocence, of Faith, of Puritie, / Our wonted Ornaments now soild and staid, / And in our Faces evident the signes / Of foul concupiscence'.<sup>65</sup> The gap instilled between drunken lust and 'dove-like' love arrives in the form of a post-coital reflection and can be regarded as a variant form of the sudden snap out of fancy's grip that we know from Keats's poems. The disruption of an immersive aesthetic experience in 'Ode to a Nightingale' ('Forlorn! the very word is like a bell / To toll me back from thee to my sole self!'), prompting the speaker to question its ontological status (did I dream or not?), and, furthermore, to put blame on phantasy's feminized personification for her seductive, yet temporally unfulfilling charms ('the fancy cannot cheat so well / As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf') is a particularly telling example.<sup>66</sup>

As we noted initially, both the erotic and the aesthetic discourse is in this regard subject to a craving for 'eternal prolongation'. The sober light of awakening, standing in contrast to the 'steadfast' and 'unchangeable' radiance of love ('Bright star', l. 9), clashes not only with the purity of desire but with the permanence that Keats associates and seeks in the world of art. Tracing this overlap, I will now attempt to show how the issue of temporality includes, but also moves beyond, the question of corporeal *Eros* actualized by Keats's use of the honey/bee symbolic. Thus, we return here to the starting point of our investigation – facing the issue of mutual exchange raised by Keats in his letter to Reynolds.

63 Sigmund Freud, 'A Metapsychological Supplement to the Theory of Dreams', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, Vol. 14 (London: The Hogarth Press), 229–230.

64 *Endymion*, II, ll. 868–873. The knight's rough awakening in 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' – having been deluded in the sign of 'honey wild' (l. 26) – may serve as another, more famous, example.

65 *Paradise Lost*, 9, ll. 1075–1076.

66 'Ode to a Nightingale', ll. 71–74.

### Towards the Non-Place of *Eros*

In all their simplicity, the opening lines of *Endymion* provide the best illustration of the attraction exercised upon by Keats by the object of art. 'A thing of beauty is a joy forever' (*Endymion*, I, l. 1) precisely because its beauty *is* forever. We are drawn to it because of its endless progression in time ('Its loveliness increases; it will never / Pass into nothingness'), an acceleration that simultaneously remains firmly anchored in space – keeping for us 'A bower quiet' (*ibid.*, l. 4). Keats's 'Ode to Psyche' projects the same sensation upon the lover's embrace: an opening of a rift in time that keeps the secluded couple in endless suspense, forever posted in a standstill where 'Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu' (*Psyche*, l. 17). Keats's general idea may here be compared to that of Friedrich Schiller's in his discussion on the Juno Ludovisi marble head. 'The whole figure', Schiller argues, 'reposes and dwells in itself'. It is 'a creation completely self-contained, and, as if existing beyond space, neither yielding or resisting; here is no force to contend with force, no frailty where temporality may break in'.<sup>67</sup> While art, say in the form of a Grecian urn, may tease 'us out of thought', just like lust would, Keats equates the pleasure it provides with 'eternity' ('Ode on a Grecian Urn', 44–45). Though such a vision may seem to sublimate the experience of mutability (the beauty of a marbled lover 'cannot fade'), the notion of death, as we have previously seen, is already incorporated within Keats's concept of infinity. The 'cannot fade', then, must rather be viewed as a characteristic of the artwork's temporal suspension of the instant.

Related, furthermore, is Keats's tendency to liken his loved one to piece of art. In their correspondence, for instance, Keats habitually calls Fanny Brawne 'an object intensely desirable', or 'a thing to be admired' (*KL*, II, 304; 133).<sup>68</sup> On the one hand, this rhetoric, through its association of desire with the timeless nature of art, effectuates a transposition of crude lust into the key of beauty along the lines of Schiller – or in Keats's own terms: into a desire for 'essential beauty' (*KL*, II, 184).<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, it imposes a static quality on the beloved in order to overturn the timetable of desire and its negative arch alongside the dialectic of attraction, repulsion, tranquility, and unease that pertains to the transport of

67 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In a Series of Letters*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson & L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 109.

68 See Margaret Homans, 'Keats Reading Women, Women Reading Keats', *Studies in Romanticism* 29 (Fall, 1990): 350f. – in particular her discussion on Keats's appropriation of Fanny's voice in their correspondence. To this end, the auditive characteristics of his urn ('unravish'd bride of quietness', 'silent form') may serve as further points of reference in Keats's overlapping conceptions of love and art.

69 Schiller, *Aesthetic Education*, 11: '[Man] obliterates by means of morality, and ennoblees by means of beauty, the crude character imposed by physical need upon sexual love'.

amorous infatuation. While Keats's maneuver thus appears to free him of the conjectures and contingencies of love, it is destined, however, to once more encounter the same problematic under the name of aesthetics. As it is, the act of artifice, employed by Keats to reduce tension and friction, paradoxically stands at odds with the very nature and pleasure of beauty, which, according to Schiller, must be defined in terms of profound ambivalence. In facing the artwork or sculpture, 'we find ourselves at one and the same time in a state of utter repose and supreme agitation, and there results that wondrous stirring of the heart for which mind has no concept nor speech any name'.<sup>70</sup> With the same gravitational pull as a nightingale, urn, marble – or a dewy flower – the 'self-contained' beauty draws the poet-lover-bee into an orbit of devotion that will elevate and exclude him at the same time. Thus, Keats to Fanny: 'You absorb me in spite of myself', knowing at the same time: 'I am not the same to you – no – you can wait – you have a thousand activities – you can be happy without me' (*KL*, II, 304); thus, Schiller, bowing 'in ecstasy' to the 'heavenly grace' of a statue only to 'recoil in terror' from her 'celestial self-sufficiency'.<sup>71</sup> Paradoxically, the lover and poet each seek to claim their sense of self by submerging and dissolving themselves in a passionate identification with the Other. The ideal object, though, requires nothing but itself; 'assigned', as Barthes would say, 'to a superior habitat, an Olympus where everything is decided and whence everything descends upon me'.<sup>72</sup>

The problem facing Keats, however, must ultimately be located in his conception of the 'poetical Character', who, contrasted with the strong subject of the 'wordsworthian or egotistical sublime' (*KL*, I, 387) appears to be void of self. In relation to the Other, though, the narcissistic subjectivity rejected by Keats is established precisely in the vacated, yet unimpressionable, 'I': 'My dear love, I cannot believe there ever was or ever could be any thing to admire in me especially as far as sight goes – I cannot be admired, I am not a thing to be admired. You are, I love you' (*KL*, II, 133). The affection shown by the loved one – 'you say speaking of Mr. Severn "but you must be satisfied in knowing that I admired you much more than your friend" ' (ibid.) – cannot be acknowledged by a self that effaces itself in order to offer its devotion in absolute terms. As Barthes claims, it is exactly when 'I give you this love – without a wish to be returned – ... that I mercilessly constitute you as an *object*'.<sup>73</sup>

As we can then see, the problematic associated with the position of the bee not only concerns its tendency towards erotic excess but also its inability to constitute

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70 Ibid., 109.

71 Ibid.

72 Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse. Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 82–83.

73 Barthes, *Le discours amoureux*, 663.

a subject-object relation transcending the egotistical supremacy of the self – a result of the negation of its dialogical capability. The Reynolds letter, however, finds Keats imagining this relation otherwise: namely, as a giving and taking indistinguishable from one another; a mutual exchange that is not necessarily equal, but collective, in its endeavor. ‘[T]he other holds my hand, teaches me something, changes me, while I do the same with him’.<sup>74</sup> The element of change here is particularly important since it marks an element of contingency typically associated by Keats with a dirtying of desire’s ideal form.

If the letter thus represents a contrary logic of *Eros*, we must, finally, reflect upon the nature of this textual locus. Due to their volatile nature, directness, and tendency towards alluringly vague ‘philosophizing’, there is, S. P. Singha notes, ‘a growing tendency in modern criticism to argue that Keats’s letters are finer than his poetry’.<sup>75</sup> Though somewhat exaggerated, Singha’s argument touches a sensitive spot for the academic reader of Keats, who, bent on ‘thinking’ with the poet, inevitably turns to the poetological gold mine of his correspondence. It is important to recognize, however, that while paralleling the discourse of the poems, the letters bridge with them only to move along their own, singular, axis of thought. Instead of claiming them as a blueprint for Keats’s lyrical output, we need to recognize this difference: in this case by considering the Reynolds letter as an example of the epistolary body’s utopic nature.<sup>76</sup> Much as Barthes’s idealized figure of mother and child hints at a desire for the Lacanian Real – a fullness devoid of absence and antagonism – Keats situates the dual figure of flower and bee in the space of impossibility. He creates a place for thinking that is ‘not immediately connected to the reality of what “is”’, but nonetheless relates ‘to reality as a projection of what “should be”’. With the definition of Alexandre F. de Sá, such a *utopos*, or non-place, is bound ‘not to instantly verifiable reality, but to the attempt to overcome it, on the basis of the advent of a new reality that could and should come into force’.<sup>77</sup> As Lacan asserts, ‘the real is the impossible’, though ‘[n]ot in the name of a simple obstacle we hit our heads up against’. Rather, it appears as a ‘logical obstacle of what, in the symbolic, declares itself to be impossible’.<sup>78</sup>

74 *Ibid.*, 665.

75 S. P. Singha, ‘Aestheticism in Poetry: Debt to John Keats’, in *Perspectives on Criticism*, ed. Mohit K. Ray (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2002), 18.

76 Andrés Rodríguez, *Book of the Heart. The Poetics, Letters, and Life of John Keats* (New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1993), 14, is exemplary of this tendency: ‘Keats had to write letters before he could embody their truths in poems’.

77 Alexandre Franco de Sá, ‘From Modern Utopias to Contemporary Uchronia’, in *Existential Utopia. New Perspectives on Utopian Thought*, ed. Patricia Vieira & Michael Marder (New York & London: Continuum, 2012), 24.

78 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII, The Other Side of Psycho-*

Following this line of thought, the goal of my study can be summarized as an attempt to disclose a *possibility* hinted at by Keats – a prospective logic of being and loving that remains in search of its terra firma. While one would struggle to locate its realization among Keats's poems, we might, by pursuing their respective and intertwined trajectories, guess at the point of departure common to both letter and verse.

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*analysis*, ed. Jacques Alain Miller, trans. Russel Grigg (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 2007), 123.