

“All thinking things” and “Objects of all thought”

Materiality and Thought in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats

Martha Williams
English Honors Thesis
April 20, 2009

Professor Mark Schoenfield _____

Professor Dahlia Porter _____

Professor Ellen Levy _____

Contents

Introduction: The History of Things	4
I. Wordsworth and Seeing Into “the life of things”	13
II. Coleridge and the Poetic Allegory of Objects	24
III. Keats and Poetry as ‘Thing’	42
Bibliography	54

There is an active principle alive in all things:
In all things, in all natures, in the flowers
And in the trees, in every pebbly stone
That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks
The moving waters, and the invisible air.
All beings have their properties which spread
Beyond themselves, a power by which they make
Some other being conscious of their life...

-William Wordsworth

“There is an active principle alive in all things”

Introduction

The History of Things

The characteristics typically associated with the poetry of the Romantic Period such as emphases on fancy, the imagination, nature, meditation and sublime experiences, are found in many of the well-known poems of the period. However, to read poetry of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries solely through the lens of these forms as dominant features is to ignore the complexity and diversity of works from this era. As Jerome McGann claims, such ideologies embodied in Romantic poetry and its critical theory have distorted and limited contemporary studies by emphasizing the generalities instead of the peculiarities of Romantic poetry. In *The Romantic Ideology* McGann addresses both the Romantic poets' claims of ideology and the criticism into the mid-twentieth century that absorbed these self-representations; these he declares to be the "fault lines" that exhibit the very problem of defining Romanticism (20). One such critical study he disagrees with is that of M.H. Abrams, whose work McGann views as problematic because of its "comprehensive" theory of Romanticism that excludes the works of Keats and Byron (24). McGann's study of the numerous ideologies associated with Romanticism underlines the very problem of defining a genre under any one set of characteristics. As he explains, not all poetry of the period would be considered "Romantic" by such terms, and poetry in general has since come to be identified with many of these characteristics as well. In light of the differences found among individual poets of the Romantic period, I have chosen to focus on a peculiar recurrence among three of the major poets working in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that considers but is not limited to these ideologies.

In a selection of poetry and prose from William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats there is an interest in objects and things—both the words themselves and the meanings implied by their usage. Despite individual differences, all three poets use objects to ground the elevated thoughts of their poetry in the material realm. These usages are also central to their respective poetic processes, although their philosophies and abstractions of these two words are varying and imply distinctly different ideologies for each poet. In the following three chapters I will explore each poet's distinct use of objects external to himself as mediators of poetic thought with the material world. Instead of proposing a generalization for all Romanticism, though, I will claim that objects and things external to the poet are central to each of these poets in a different way. Whether the objects addressed are forms of the natural landscape or manufactured objects that interact with natural forces (such as the eolian harp), these objects are significant because they are rarely reduced to a static, lifeless existence. From a study of these poets' use of objects and things the transcendence generally associated with the Romantic poets is grounded in a dependence on material objects. Yet, there is often no clear boundary between the poet's thoughts and the tangible objects referenced. Before moving into a discussion of what is meant by 'things' and 'objects,' I will first discuss how the animation granted to them comes out of a tradition of British literary interest in objects and the role they play when granted a consciousness.

During the eighteenth century prior to the Romantic Period there emerged a subgenre of the novel which involved objects as narrators and central characters. In his introduction to *The Secret Life of Things* Mark Blackwell describes these narratives as signifiers of the growing

importance of “a particular subject-object relation” during the eighteenth century (SL 10)¹. In this type of fiction inanimate objects (coins, waistcoats, coaches) or animals serve as the protagonists. The objects may have a consciousness—and thus a perspective—or serve as “narrative hubs” around which other people’s stories accumulate (SL 10). The intensity with which the material culture of Britain at this time pervaded even the literary market speaks to the culture’s growing interest in production and circulation, as well as comments on those things which the society valued. In addition, Blackwell points out that some it-fictions provide a perspective on the culture that other literary forms would not be capable of providing (SL 11). Similarly, Christopher Flint refers to these fictions as “speaking object” narratives, as they present a particular vision of the social system through the voices and eyes of objects. In “Speaking Objects: The Circulation of Stories in Eighteenth-Century Prose Fiction,” he cites Charles Gildon’s *The Golden Spy* (1709) as the first speaking object narrative that influenced British fiction into the nineteenth century. Flint notes that “the eighteenth-century speaking object is almost always a product of manufacture rather than a part of nature, and its satiric vision of the world arises from its particular experience of human commerce,” as in Gildon’s work in which a group of gold coins jointly narrate their travels through the realm of economic circulation (SL 162). Thus, this genre of fiction offers a unique perspective on man’s relation to objects by giving perspective to the objects themselves as commentators on contemporary society. As Blackwell notes, these narratives are different ways in which “writers have thought things through by thinking through things” (SL 13).

¹ SL: Blackwell, Mark, Ed. *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*.

In her essay “The Spirit of Things,” Barbara M. Benedict asserts that the rise of this narrative form can be attributed to the empiricism, secularism, and consumption of the period (SL19). During this century, she claims, “the mysteriousness of the world and the magical animation of nature” were banished by such modes of thought as the rise of science led to a distrust “of the inexplicable as merely the unexplained” (SL 19). The simultaneous surge in consumer products is linked to this phenomenon, although the passion for consumption did not drive out fascination with the mysterious. She argues that even though things and spirits appear to be opposites—the first all material and the second all immaterial—they both metaphorically connote the human condition. Things connote the soulless body, spirits the bodiless soul, “and both express the problem of finding selfhood in the nexus of spirit and form” (SL 19). From this introduction, Benedict concludes that “the representation of things thus allows eighteenth-century writers to explore the relations between materiality and morality, form and formlessness, body and soul and to express anxiety about unseen powers that control human beings” (SL 20). Benedict notes that a familiar moral discourse had already involved things in literature since the medieval period: the sacred objects and relics of the Catholic tradition which were believed to contain the spirit of God. However, later Protestant doctrine held that such objects embodied the irreligious pursuit of wealth and worldly power over the worship of God (SL 20). In light of these traditions in the treatment of things, Benedict’s emphasis on the “spirit” of consumerist objects explains the fascination of granting a consciousness to the it-narratives subjects as a reflection of the human body/spirit duality.

Also comparable is the symbolic use of objects in art of the seventeenth century as noted by Lamb in his essay, “*The Rape of the Lock* as Still Life.” Before the seventeenth century, objects “such [as] bottles, boxes, fruit, and bread, each expressive of purity, piety, and self-

abnegation” were placed in still-life paintings or alongside their saintly exemplars (*SL* 43). Such paintings also connected the material with morality, most dramatically in the form of *Memento mori*—a reminder of human mortality and the transience of earthly pleasure, often depicted by the presence of a skull. Yet, as Lamb notes, the emphasis on death and judgment was eventually displaced by the “luscious impression of the surfaces of things” (*SL* 43). Attention began to shift away from the Christian symbolism to the things themselves—objects that were isolated from and excessive to the narrative of the still life. This change is also ascribed among other things to the rise of natural science and a growing demand for the accurate illustration of species, as well as to the rise of a world market in commodities (*SL* 43). The interest in the surface of things suggests a disinterest in the ethical dimension or importance behind objects. The focus then becomes the accurate rendition of reflective surfaces and contrasts of light and dark; such scenes, as Lamb notes, are typically absent of human life and active narrative. As a result, Lamb claims that the emptiness of these scenes causes the objects to “look in their isolation as if they belonged only to themselves” (*SL* 44). The shift from a symbolic relation of man to objects to a view in which objects are granted an individual consciousness notes a significant change in the treatment of objects. In setting the stage for the Romantic poets, this view allows for various and ambiguous interpretations of both objects and things as forms that are not lifeless and inactive.

While the use of objects for narrative was not exclusive to the it-narratives, this subgenre is an explicit example of the eighteenth century interest in how things mediate man’s relation to the world. In his essay, “Wordsworth and the Ethics of Things,” Adam Potkay makes the connection between the it-narratives of the eighteenth century and Romanticism by contrasting the meaning of “things” within each. He claims that the former were fictions centered on the definition of a “thing” as a manufactured object or commodity (393). Defined by Samuel

Johnson in his *Dictionary* (1755), a “thing” was literally “whatever is; not a person”—a paradoxical statement that enforces commodification (qtd. in “Thing”). Potkay argues that in the late eighteenth century Wordsworth deliberately uses the word vaguely, and thus refers to “‘the things people do not (for the most part) make’—that is, the existential condition of things as a whole, the things that include us” (390). In contrast to it-narratives, Potkay explains ‘things’ as that which “resist narration” and he claims that “Wordsworth’s things are irreducible to matter or to narrative; indeed, they are uncontainable by any narrow definition of *thing*” (391).

In avoiding such limiting definitions Wordsworth considers man’s relation to objects by making explicit reference to ambiguous things, material objects, and the “forms” of both the natural and man-made worlds. However, he does not grant narrative power to any of these. Rather, man’s relation to his world is considered as material objects and the ambiguous “things” act as mediators between the poet’s mind and the external world. The two words are literally referenced in various contexts within Wordsworth’s writing, and are consistently differentiated in meaning. Jonathan Farina, in discussing “The mighty commonwealth of things” from *The Excursion* (1814), notes that some of Wordsworth’s “typical natural objects” are clouds, streams, rocks, trees, mists, vales and shadows—a shift from the produced objects of the it-narrative genre (11). These natural objects stand in contrast to the Solitary’s “clutter of objects” in his cell that “figure the affectless materialism of modern technology and science” (11). The lifeless objects reflect (but do not individually symbolize) the disorder of his life and faith. In contrast is the Wanderer, who affirms that “There is an active principle alive in all things” (12). Farina notes the distinction here between objects and things: “In *The Excursion*, ‘things’ embodies the concrete objectivity of objects as well as different kinds of invisible, interior, and incomprehensible life, law, and order” (12). Thus, things are not objects, but rather they function

“as a deep character that implies a hidden, ‘active principle’” within objects (12). An interrelated world of matter is suggested by Wordsworth’s ambiguous use of the word “things,” and as Farina argues they allow the poet to never “specify any particular objects, though it nevertheless implies something concrete” (12). Thus, the “commonwealth of things” is acknowledged by the Wanderer as the “hidden connectedness underlying each thing individually an in relation to others” (12).

An early example of this distinction and its implications can be found in the 1797/98 poem, “The Ruined Cottage.” Here Wordsworth makes direct reference to the signification of tangible objects such as the bench and matted weeds, as opposed to the ‘things’ which are unseen. The poem relates the story of Margaret, a woman whose house falls into ruin while she awaits the return of her husband. But her tale and the symbolic relation of the cottage to her life are not explicitly related by the old man who knew her. Rather it is mediated through the various objects around the cottage and the memories he associates with them. When the old man begins to converse with the speaker of the poem he addresses the speaker’s perception of the physical environment and challenges his objective description:

‘I see around me here
Things which you cannot see. We die, my friend,
Nor we alone, but that which each man loved
And prized in his peculiar nook of earth
Dies with him, or is changed, and very soon
Even of the good is no memorial left’ (67-72).

The old man claims that the mere noticing of objects and their material presence is distinctly different from a perception of “things” that are not seen. Also, these “things” are associated with

individual persons and the value they place in objects. It is this love for the object that grants it with the spirit of 'thingness.' And since such associations of value pass away with an individual's death, others are left to continue the memory of significance attributed to such objects.

Likewise, the old man says that the poets call upon the hills, streams and senseless rocks to lament the departed who take with them those associations with the objects they loved. But the poets do not invoke these natural objects idly, "for they speak / In these their invocations with a voice / Obedient to the strong creative power / Of human passion" (76-79). It is the poet's job, then, to summon the values given by people to the objects and forms of nature which hold such associations; but only when the poet is obedient to a higher "creative power" can he access the value of "things" attributed to the objects. The poet's duty is not to attribute moral or symbolic characteristics to objects, but to conceive of individual values that relate to man's condition. The old man himself seems to be obedient to the strong creative power that allows such an understanding as he relates how he once stood beside a nearby stream, "And eyed its waters till we seemed to feel / One sadness, they and I" (83-84). The old man's intent is to share with the speaker of the poem (and thus the reader) the value of 'things' as the sentiments and human feelings connected with objects. In mentioning poets and "their elegies and sonnets" (73) Wordsworth also suggests that it is the poet's role to retain the significance of 'things' unseen as associated with the tangible objects of the everyday and to materialize this understanding into poetry.

The distinction between objects and things and the importance of grounding poetical thoughts in material objects in this context is specific to Wordsworth, although it was his use of the two words which led me to consider their meanings in the works of Coleridge and Keats as

well. Thus, in the first chapter I will further explore Wordsworth's theories of objects and "the spirit of things;" and I will argue that his poems are continually grounded in material objects, although it is often the emotions associated with the objects that receive emphasis. In the second chapter I will explore the progression of Coleridge's use of objects as allegories for the poet, and I will argue that as the poetry materializes his thoughts he focuses on objects that are not static—otherwise they could not reflect the poet's condition. In the third and final chapter I will address Keats's ideas on 'things' and consider two of his poems as they contrast objects with the material object of a poem itself. With the discussion of Keats I will argue that the collision of the real and the ideal in the production of poetry attempts, but fails, to materialize the fleeting "waking" moments in which the two coexist.

Chapter I

Wordsworth and Seeing Into “the life of things”

From Farina’s claim that the repeated use of “things” within *The Excursion* accounts for the word’s varied and ambiguous meaning, and from the distinction established in “The Ruined Cottage,” I will now move into a broader argument concerning Wordsworth’s treatment of objects and things during some of his early works. However, I will argue against the solitary treatment of his aesthetic claim that “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (*LB* 175)². As McGann suggests, reading Wordsworth’s poetry through this oft-expressed self-representation from the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is limiting to the entire scope of Wordsworth’s poetry. The second piece of this statement actually completes this ideology by placing emphasis on the necessary characteristics of the poet: “but though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached, were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility had also thought long and deeply” (*LB* 175). In addition to the emphasis on the poet’s sensibility (not just his emotions) are the numerous claims associated with objects throughout the Preface. In examining his references to objects and things in his early prose work and in two early poems I will demonstrate how reading Wordsworth’s self-representation of poetry with a focus on emotion is not holistic to his poetical process. In choosing a different focus I will argue that his poetic process starts with an object, and that the ‘things’ of his writing relate to his ideas of emotion by grounding them in a tangible reality of objects.

² *LB*: Wordsworth, William, and Samuel Coleridge. *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1800*. Ed. Michael Gamer & Dahlia Porter.

An early poem following “The Ruined Cottage” is the 1798 “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” in which Wordsworth plays again with this distinction between objects and things, and introduces a philosophy concerning “the life of things” in relation to objects more explicitly. Wordsworth begins by emphasizing the five years that have passed since his last visit to the Wye Valley and by repeating that “once again” (line 4) he sees the various natural forms of the landscape. Wordsworth also notes the ability of the scene to “impress” (6) his thoughts, suggesting the active ability of the natural objects. However, the landscape’s active impression is part of his memory, not the present moment. This detachment from the tangible forms in front of him is also reflected in his description as he reveals that the scene has been imaginatively altered within his memory. He is aware of his physical presence in the Wye Valley as he repeats “once again” in validation of his use of the scene as the object grounding the poem in a real object. Yet, it is his memory of the landscape that is the central object of the poem, not the tangible landscape in front of him. Nevertheless, the established materiality of the forms ground his thoughts and mediates them through the natural objects.

The idealization of the landscape is evident in his contradictory description of a “wild secluded scene” (6) that are simultaneously outlined with traces of human activity. The scene is not actually wild at all; he even describes the hedges bordering the distinct plots of land, the cottages, and the smoke rising from human dwellings. Yet, these obvious signifiers of civilization are romanticized in his description as he imagines a hermit and “vagrant dwellers” (20) who mystically hide beneath the canopy of trees and align with the wild seclusion Wordsworth associates with the valley. The irony in this description of “those who have no settled home and wander about” (OED, “Vagrant”) but are dwellers here reflects the larger disparity between his memory and the actual landscape. In addition, the valley contains the ruins

of a monastic community—Tintern Abby itself, which was a popular spot for the British tourist of the 1790s. Thousands of travelers, guidebook in hand, visited and revisited the picturesque Wye Valley and “responded with feeling to the beauties and sublimities of the surrounding nature” (Norton Literature Online). Yet, Wordsworth’s emphasis on the landscape as an object demanding a response from its viewers does not rest solely on the feelings associated with his experience. Instead, he describes and objectifies the landscape as it has been reproduced within his imagination during his five year absence. In effect, his imaginatively informed memory serves as the starting object which informs the remainder of the poem as he next reflects on the moments when he has been physically separate from the landscape near Tintern Abbey.

In imagining the Hermit who “sits alone” (22) in the wood, Wordsworth calls to mind the times during the past five years in which he has mentally summoned the image of the Wye Valley to attain peace and reassurance. This process is described when,

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man’s eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and ’mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration (22-30).

The original experience has remained with him in terms of the emotions associated with the landscape, not solely in the conjuring of the image. The forms of nature are central to his

recollection, but it is the emotions associated with them that bring him “tranquil restoration” in moments of weariness. This differentiates the image of his mind from the image of the “blind man’s eye,” which is a literal picture of the forms of nature as they were once seen. Instead, Wordsworth “owes” to these forms something that affects him more deeply: “sensations sweet” that are felt within his body and pass through the heart into his mind. These emotions of the memory are comparable to the unseen “things” or values attributed to the objects in “The Ruined Cottage.” Here, they create a sublime, “blessed mood” (37) which seems to stand in for the “strong creative power” that will produce poetry.

In this sublimity the weighty materiality of the world is dispensed as Wordsworth claims a displacement that allows him to realize the interconnectedness of ‘things.’ In this state, the breath and motion of the bodily frame are laid asleep. Here, Wordsworth describes becoming,

A living soul:

While with an eye made quiet by the power

Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,

We see into the life of things (46-49).

In this transitory state Wordsworth claims to gain an understanding of the ambiguous “things” associated with objects—they are constituted by a life and can only be understood as such when the poet is in league with a greater power (the “strong creative power of human passion”). This “life of things” is also associated with Farina’s and Potkay’s arguments that ‘things’ are differentiated from the objects or ‘forms’ associated with them. This ambiguous reference to an interconnected nature of ‘things’ suggests that Wordsworth the poet has reached in these moments an understanding of the connections between all objects—both human and non. Yet, this state is only momentary and the “life of things” seems as indefinable as things themselves.

In his attempt to materialize these thoughts Wordsworth is brought back to the object of the landscape as he discovers the impossibility of defining this emotion.

Returning his thoughts to the present moment Wordsworth has trouble distinguishing between the present forms of nature and the forms of his memory as “the picture of the mind revives again” (61). Simultaneously, he looks forward to the time when he will recall the image of the valley again as in this moment “there is life and food / for future years” (64-65). Thinking of the future leads him to reflect on his first visit to Tintern Abbey when he experienced the forms of nature in animalistic terms: he bounded over the hills like a roe, followed “where nature led” (70) along the rivers and streams, and nature was to him “all in all” (75). At a young age he did not perceive of the “things” of nature which are the spirits of nature’s forms. The mystical aspect of “things” in this perspective is understandably frightening, though even when he was young it was this same ambiguous quality of the objects of nature that he loved. He was deeply haunted by the sensory aspects of the experience: the sounding cataract, the colors and forms of the mountains and woods. The forms of nature were “an appetite; a feeling and a love” (80) that were not responded to with thought, “not any interest / Unborrowed from the eye” (82-83). The focus of his first experience was purely sensory and objective; the subjective experience occurred in later moments when he was physically distant from the landscape of the Wye Valley and its beautiful forms.

During the following five years, though, “other gifts” have followed and he claims to have been granted something beyond the sensory pleasures of his boyish experience of nature. Meditation on the forms and emotions of his memory has led him to contemplate the spirit of objects. In this realization, he has also felt,

A presence that disturbs me with the joy

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused ...
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things” (94-96, 100-102).

The disturbance of thoughts is caused by his inability to fully materialize them, although he feels the presence of a spirit giving things life and agency. In addition, the natural objects do not simply contain “things” or spirits, but there is one vast spirit that moves through all objects and animates them. It is this spirit that enable their agency and ability to “impress” upon the human mind. “Therefore” Wordsworth claims that he is a lover of nature’s forms and all that man beholds of the world through eye and ear. “Therefore” suggests that he has presented an argument for his attraction to natural forms—but his reasoning is as ambiguous as the “things” he loves. Yet, nature also becomes “The anchor of my purest thoughts” (109), a heavy quality associated with the forms that contrasts with the “weary weight” of the world that vexes the poet. His thoughts are grounded in this respect, but only in an imagined landscape of natural objects.

Following his attempts to materialize these thoughts, Wordsworth turns to his sister Dorothy—his “dearest Friend” (115) whose presence has been unknown to this point. He claims to catch in her responses echoes of his own youthful pleasures in experiencing the forms of the Wye Valley. He objectifies Dorothy as a child of his own experience and projects that she, too, will house the images of these forms in the “mansion” (140) of her memory. Yet, in future moments ““mid the din” of her own life, Wordsworth claims that his sister will remember him in addition to the lovely forms of the landscape. His tone throughout the entire poem is one of recollection, but his words spoken to his sister in the second half betray his loss and express his

method of coping. He has described the landscape's effect on him but has focused on the images in his mind instead of on the physical landscape itself. In reality the poem was composed in the days following their visit to Tintern Abbey. During the three days following their visit he continued walking and reflecting on the return to the Wye Valley and wrote down the entire poem for the first time upon arrival in Bristol, adding the last twenty lines of projections of his sister's future joys as an additional thought (Pinion 33). This historical fact further complicates his writing as a recollection of an experience in which he describes recollections. At the same time, though, his projection onto Dorothy's experience also grounds his mental complexity by materializing his thoughts in the present tangible landscape. The physical landscape will never again compete with the elevated rendering created in his memory, although during the present moment Dorothy responds to the reality of the scene. In effect, Dorothy becomes a second object for him as he projects onto her the materialization of his thoughts which could not be fully grounded in the object of his memory.

Similar to the use of his sister as an object is Wordsworth's later use of the prose from her journal as an object in which his poetical thoughts are grounded. His poem, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," written in 1804 and based on an experience which the two shared in April 1802. Once again he begins in the present with a real and tangible object—his sister's journal—then moves into the emotions associated with a memory as he focuses on objects in the natural world. He retrospectively describes the memory of a moment during a walk with his sister when they come across a woodland full of daffodils near the water. Dorothy relates the experience in her journal from Thursday the 15th of April, 1802, and describes the setting as a "threatening misty morning" on which they set out—a detail ignored in Wordsworth's poetic recollection. In Gowbarrow Park near Ullswater they begin to see a few daffodils near the edge of the water and

Dorothy describes her impression that “the lake had floated the seeds ashore and that the little colony had so sprung up” (Wordsworth 85). As they continue their walk the daffodils gradually increase until they reach a spot where the flowers have overtaken the landscape. Dorothy personifies the daffodils as she imagines that “some rested their heads upon these stones as on a pillow for weariness and the rest tossed and reeled and danced and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind” (Wordsworth 85). To her, “they looked so gay” and there was “simplicity and unity and life” contained in the area occupied by the flora (Wordsworth 85). Following her poetic rendering Dorothy resumes her gloomy description of the foreboding weather—the informational quality of which contrasts with her brother’s later portrayal.

In describing the scene Wordsworth borrows his sister’s personification of the daffodils from her journal and alters his own memory to be in conjunction with hers. Years later he composes the poem directly from her journal, treating her memory as an object of poetic inspiration. Although they experienced the discovery of the daffodils together, any mention of Dorothy is omitted, altering the actual situation once again. The theatrical alteration of reality is also evident in his description of seeing “all at once a crowd, / A host, of golden daffodils” (3-4) which contrasts with Dorothy’s description of gradually approaching the scene. He exaggerates in his claim that “Ten thousand saw I at a glance, / Tossing their heads in sprightly dance” (11-12), in contrast with Dorothy’s description of “a few daffodils” which grew in number as they continued on their walk. This exaggeration and personification of the flowers reinforces the form of the beginning of “Tintern Abbey” in which Wordsworth’s imagination illuminates his memory by creating a variation of a tangible object for the poem’s foundation. Also, the poem presents an image of careless wandering, during which a magnificent sight is stumbled upon. As in “Tintern Abbey”, Wordsworth grounds his pleasure in a real moment, but on a memory that

has been creatively and intentionally altered by him. The remembered daffodils become the object onto which Wordsworth projects his thoughts; and like the landscape around Tintern Abbey they carry an idealized reality within his imagination as they are personified and displaced from actual reality. Once again, though, Wordsworth places emphasis on the emotions associated with the memory as reflected by the exaggerated amount of daffodils which creates a pleasing object for his poetic stimulation.

The flowers are emphasized as the main object within the memory as Wordsworth focuses on one particular aspect of the scene. He also emphasizes the lack of reflection on the scene until a later moment (as portrayed in his borrowing from Dorothy's journal). In the present he retrospectively claims that, "I gazed—and gazed—but little thought / What wealth the show to me had brought (15-18). Recalling his gaze on the flowers Wordsworth emphasizes the lack of pensive action at the time and reflects that the worth of the memory can only be realized in later moments. This description is similar to his original experience at Tintern Abbey where he was like a roe that "bounded o'er the mountains" with no regard to anything but the "coarser pleasures" afforded by nature to a youth (68, 73). This also recalls the idea expressed in the Preface that poems of any value can only be produced by one who has "thought long and deeply" on a subject. He "recollection" is thus distinguished from Dorothy's as her thoughts were recorded not long after the event. Yet, within "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" Wordsworth describes his sensory capabilities as fully engaged in the moment, not his mental faculties. His memory of discovering the daffodils is described in terms of the impressions made upon him as a poet, and he relates that the scene brought a "wealth" to him—the later joy of recollecting the experience which in this case results in a creative poem. This 'wealth' is comparable to the

“gifts” accorded by nature in “Tintern Abbey” as well, especially since it is attained during reflection of an experience:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils (19-24).

The first two lines of this last stanza reflect the exact sentiment expressed in the Preface and displayed in “Tintern Abbey” as Wordsworth describes recollecting a memory in a later moment of tranquility. However, in this poem there is no explicit suggestion that Wordsworth is trying to escape the wearisome world—rather he is just relaxing. The “pensive” quality of his mood also introduces a new perspective as it suggests the individual’s agency to recall a specific moment in order to gain pleasure.

When the images and emotions related to the daffodils are recalled in his mind—“that inward eye” of his imagination—he is filled with pleasure once again. Despite the fanciful description that his heart “dances with the daffodils” (24), his emotions and descriptions are ultimately grounded in the material object of his sister’s journal. In addition, the “inward eye” recalls the reflective eye of “Tintern Abbey” that enables Wordsworth to transcend the image of the ordinary and see “into the life of things” (49). Though simply presented, this elevation of the poet’s thoughts and treatment of Dorothy’s journal suggest that Wordsworth credits himself with evoking the “thingness” of Dorothy’s journal. As an object her entry contains the possibility of holding a connection with the greater spirit of things, but such can only be extracted in poetry.

In this treatment of an object, then, Wordsworth elevates poetry over prose as evoking more than the emotion connected with an experience. His work, in contrast with Dorothy's journal, reinforces a philosophy of poetical production by elevating himself as one "being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility," as stated in the Preface (*LB* 175). It is the poet's ability to reflect and gain pleasure and meaning from an experience that ultimately distinguishes him from one who simply experiences and relates. By the use of Dorothy's journal as an object, then, Wordsworth also produces an example of the poet's duty to evoke the "life of things" from ordinary objects.

Chapter II

Coleridge and the Poetic Allegory of Objects

Like Wordsworth, Coleridge exhibits a tendency to thread thoughts and expressions through ordinary objects, both natural and man-made. In examining his early prose and two poems focused on objects, however, a distinct difference is uncovered in Coleridge's philosophies of objects and poetry. With these two examples, specifically, the objects become a reflection of the poet and the role Coleridge credits to poets. In the Preface to his 1796 *Poems on Various Subjects*, Coleridge describes his philosophies on poetry, especially concerning the relation of the poet to his reader and the question of egotism. The feelings associated with writing, inspiration, and the reading of poetry are of a great concern as well, as Coleridge states that "we love or admire a poet in proportion as he develops our own sentiments and emotions, or reminds us of our own knowledge" (PP 4)³. Coleridge introduces the concept here that the poet does not write only for himself, but that the effect of his poetry on readers is to be considered. Concerning egotism, which his poems have been condemned for in the past, he defends his style on the grounds that the forms of monodies and sonnets he practices are meant for the distinct purpose of relating the poet's thoughts and opinions to the public. He indicates an absurdity in censuring egotism from monodies and sonnets, for their very use as a form affords him "pleasure when perhaps nothing else could", emphasizing a positive egotism on the poet's part (PP 4). This pleasure derives from the idea that poetry is produced following sorrow, when "the mind demands solace and can find it in employment alone" (PP 4). Yet, the production of poetry in this context must connect the employment with the sufferings—a materialization that can be achieved in poetry.

³ PP: Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*.

This sensibility is also described as “the communicativeness of our nature leads us to describe our own sorrows; [and] in the endeavor to describe them intellectual activity is exerted” (*PP* 4). In effect, a pleasure is produced by this intellectual pursuit of expressing what is painful in human nature—pains that are assumedly not exclusive to single individual experiences. Coleridge subsequently turns to the concern of the public’s interest in the poet’s experiences, which he pacifies with the philosophy that the Public is but “a term for a number of scattered individuals of whom as many will be interested in these sorrows as have experienced the same or similar” (*PP* 4). The effect of this claim is to universalize the poet’s natural and honest expressions, which are intended to resonate with readers by either developing their emotions or reminding them of some knowledge they have gained. In addition, he professes that certain types of egotism are “truly disgusting;” these are those which do not lead us to communicate our feelings to others but those “which would reduce the feelings of others to an identity with our own” (*PP* 5). This claim presents a problem in universalizing the poet’s thoughts, as the poet must constantly be aware that his reader’s thoughts and feelings might not resonate with his own.

Specifically, Coleridge detests those writers who displace themselves from their expressions by writing in the third person: “With what anxiety every fashionable author avoids the word *I!*—now he transforms himself into a third person,—‘the present writer’—now multiplies himself and swells into ‘*we*’—and all this is the watchfulness of guilt” (*PP* 5). Coleridge claims that in this style a writer attempts to avoid monopolizing his emotions and opinions which result from using the first person. However, these same writers swell into “*we*”, assuming an identity with their readers while refusing to claim the feelings as their own. This “disinterestedness of phrase” is declared selfish, as such a poet withholds his own knowledge and feelings from his readers (*PP* 5). Instead of practicing this paradox, Coleridge states that

poets should candidly write to please themselves and hope that their readers will be pleased as well. The poet's pleasure is of equal concern, as he writes in the Preface to the second edition of 1797 concerning his ideals: "Poetry has been to me its own 'exceeding great reward:' it has soothed my afflictions, it has multiplied and refined my enjoyments; it has endeared solitude; and it has given me the habit of wishing to discover the Good and the Beautiful in all that meets and surrounds me" (*PP* 47). For this reason Coleridge titled the original poems as effusions, defined as a pouring out, spilling, or shedding typically associated with liquids such as tears or blood—the escape of fluids from their "natural vessel" in a sense (OED 1). Figuratively defined as "a pouring forth, unrestrained utterance (of words, sounds, etc.); frank and eager expression (of emotions)" (OED 3), also relates to Wordsworth's later ideal that "all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" (*Lyrical Ballads* 175)⁴.

Coleridge's effusions focus on these emotional qualities of expression, but also display a great range of thought. Many of the effusions are sonnets in form, make classical references, and make use of symbolic conventions—portraying his attention to the formal aspects of poetic production. In his poetry of the late 1790s, instances of Coleridge's works remain grounded in individual and sensuous experiences; yet, he uses material objects external to himself to present this ideal of a non-egotistical, non-impositional poetics. This philosophy of poetical production is drawn out most explicitly in "The Eolian Harp" and later in "The Nightingale." In both of these poems Coleridge sets forth clear metaphors of the two objects as performing the role of poet. In doing so he attempts to exemplify his own standards as set forth in the 1796 Preface, but grounds his ideals in the harp and nightingale as a means of avoiding the egotism and imposition he critiqued in his contemporaries.

⁴ The inspiration for this description may also may come from William Preston, who defined love poetry as a "spontaneous effusion of a mind wholly occupied by a single idea, careless of rules, little studious of poetic fame, and desirous only of expressing its emotions" (*PP* 5, footnote 3).

The first of these poems was originally composed as an effusion of the 1796 collection, where it was titled, “Effusion XXXV. Composed August 20th, 1795, at Clevedon, Somersetshire.” Within the context of thirty-six effusions the poem was surrounded by sonnets of the political, sentimental and elegiac traditions. The collection also included a monody and “Religious Musings,” which according to Halmi suggested that the political environment of the 1790s foretold the nearing final judgment (*PP* 3). The effusive quality of this poem is evident as Coleridge pours forth his thoughts which seem to root themselves entirely in listening to the music of the eolian harp. Although surrounded by sonnets, the poem is constructed in blank verse—a style also used by Wordsworth to present the natural, free-flowing mood of a poem. However, the 1797 alteration of the poem’s title to “The Eolian Harp” presents a contrast to this effusive quality as it simplifies the subject of a poem to a material object. The distinction of the object within the title places a greater emphasis on the materiality grounding the poet’s thoughts, and portrays an interest in ascribing inspirational credit to the object. The removal of the poem’s date from the title also signifies a change as it suggests a greater universality to the poet’s thoughts. In this way Coleridge attempts to allow the Public to identify with his poem by not excluding the incident to a single day of his own life. Following the second publication in the 1797 Poems collection, he wrote at the end of the poem, “This I think the most perfect Poem, I ever wrote. Bad may be the Best, perhaps. S.T.C.” (*PP* 17, footnote 1).

The poem was composed following Coleridge’s marriage to Sara Fricker on October 4, 1795. On their wedding day they set off for the coastal town of Clevedon where they took a house for two months. There they inhabited a solitary, primitive cottage at the west end of town, which consisted of “only a ground floor, on a level with the garden, with a rose-tree peeping in at the window” (Brandl 128). The opening descriptions of the poem’s scene are realistic

observations of a beloved and pleasing environment as we learn of the “white-flower’d Jasmin, and the broad-leav’d Myrtle, / (Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)” (Lines 4-5) which have overgrown the cottage. In the first lines of the poem we are brought into a private moment shared between the poet and his wife as the two lie reclined beside their cottage, in a humble setting removed from the city. The following lines continue to describe their environment, similar to Wordsworth’s descriptions of the landscape in the beginning of “Tintern Abbey.” Yet, the setting and objects within the space are not merely mentioned: they are transformed into a symbolic nature which reflects and elevates the human experience as displayed in the parenthetical line. Myrtle signifies a classical association with Venus and introduces an interest in literary tradition. The “serenely brilliant” star of Venus shines alone in a dark sky and exemplifies “(such should Wisdom be)” (8). As the narrator of the poem, Coleridge not only marks the natural world for its simplistic beauty but also for its emblematic usage of representing the ideals of humanity. Yet, like Wordsworth he also infuses the objects with sentiment.

Following this contextual description of the environment, Coleridge introduces into the scene the object of the poem’s title: the eolian harp. The stringed instrument is described as “that simplest Lute” (12) and also evokes an established literary association for its readers. In the 1748 poem *The Castle of Indolence* by James Thomson, the eolian harp is described as an emblem of nature’s music as it emits sound when the wind blows over it (Thomson 61). Halmi also notes that in Romantic literature the harp is considered an emblem of the inspired mind (footnote 3). In his references to both classical associations and the established object of the harp, Coleridge once again places himself within a recognized literary tradition. Thus, his use of the harp is conventional, but his opening description provides a distinct spatial and temporal

context in which the harp is placed to individualize his use of the object. The sound of the harp interrupts the stillness of the scene, giving it a dramatic entrance into the dialogue:

hark!

How by the desultory breeze caress'd,

Like some coy Maid half-yielding to her Lover,

It pours such sweet upbraidings, as must need

Tempt to repeat the wrong! (13-17).

The personification of the harp and wind as lovers mirrors the image of Coleridge and his wife lying reclined, but also begins a metaphor of poetical inspiration. The relationship of the two objects portrays the harp as the “coy maid” which is acted upon with little resistance to the natural force. The wind as the “Lover” suggests an intimate and productive relationship between the natural world and the object of man’s creation. Yet, the “desultory” nature of the breeze suggests a wavering inconsistency and presents an image of a flitting wind that irregularly passes over the harp to produce music. Acting as a parallel to the poet and his inspiration it becomes the poet’s act to be still while a greater force instigates the “sweet upbraidings” that will cause him to “pour” forth his effusions. The music of the poet will thus be inconstant, but will also act as the product of the poet’s surrender just as the harp’s music is a result of its allowance of the wind’s caresses.

In the next section of the poem Coleridge continues his dialogue with his wife, and describes to her his solitary experiences that parallel the music created by the harp and wind. He places himself on the slope of a nearby hill with “half-clos’d eyelids” (28)—linking him to the “half-yielding” harp—where he enjoys the dancing sunlight and relates the moment when

Full many a thought uncall’d and undetain’d,

And many idle flitting phantasies,
Traverse my indolent and passive brain
As wild and various, as the random gales
That swell or flutter on this subject Lute! (31-35).

Coleridge acts as the harp sitting in the window sill as he allows thoughts to come to his “indolent and passive brain”. These thoughts are not summoned by the poet; they are merely accepted, similar to nature’s ability to “impress” thoughts in “Tintern Abbey.” The difference between the two poets, though, is that Coleridge is passive while Wordsworth is pensive. Here, the “flitting” nature of the thoughts that come into his mind mirror the “desultory” nature of the breeze that unsteadily jumps around as it acts on the harp. Yet, it is not music that is created in this situation, but “flitting phantasies” which seem to dart around the poet’s mind just as the sunbeams dance on the landscape. The “phantasies” denote once again an impression of thoughts onto his mind; yet, they also denote illusory thoughts and imaginary perceptions (OED 1b, 3a). For either reading emphasis rests on the mental images created within the poet’s mind which carry him away from the tangible hillside. Here the poet is alone, and it seems that only when set fully apart from all else and stretching his limbs in the sunlight can such an experience of imaginative escape and inspiration occur.

From this allegory of the poet acting as the harp, Coleridge’s mind elevates into an inspired speculation concerning the action of natural or supernatural forces on the minds of men:

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely fram’d,
That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps,
Plastic and vast, one intellectual Breeze,

At once the Soul of each, and God of all? (36-40).

By encompassing all of “animated nature” Coleridge extends the metaphor beyond himself as the poet. This reference to Oliver Goldsmith’s 1779 *History of the Earth and Animated Nature* classifies animated nature as living things—animals and not plants. Thus, Coleridge now marks these living things as being capable of receiving the “intellectual Breeze” that parallels the wind moving over the harp to create music. Further, all creatures are “organic Harps”, suggesting the natural aspect of this occurrence. Specifically concerning the poet, these are the circumstances under which poetry is created. Just as the wind acts on the harp to help it perform its purpose, so does this Breeze animate the poet to fulfill his purpose. Similarly, the “organic” nature of the diverse forms of living beings are considered the “frames”—just as the harp itself is a hollow frame receiving the wind’s caresses. This great Breeze has qualities of the Christian God with its vast size, and Coleridge wonders if it is also “the soul of each, and God of all?” (40). His speculation ends here, though, as he is next reprimanded by his wife for these words crediting a mysterious “intellectual Breeze” instead of the institutionalized God she worships.

Sara enters into the conversation at this point through the “mild reproof” given by her eye in response to her husband’s thoughts (41). Her “more serious eye” seems to ground his thoughts again, or rather to draw them back to thoughts of the Christian God as the source of his intellect—as opposed to a more deist understanding of God as a mysterious force. The language associated with Sara evokes a conservative understanding of her religious views as Coleridge addresses her, “Meek Daughter in the Family of Christ” (45). He claims that “Well hast thou said and holily disprais’d / These shapings of the unregenerate mind, / Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break / On vain Philosophy’s aye-babbling spring” (46-49). However, the mention of a spring recalls a quote from Milton’s *Areopagitica* recorded in Coleridge’s Gutch Notebook:

“Truth is compared in scripture to a streaming fountain; if her water flow not in perpetual progression, they stagnate into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition” (N 111)⁵. The *Areopagitica* was Milton’s philosophical defense of the principle of the right to free expression as presented to the English Parliament in 1644 (Milton 739). Truth, or the fountain, in this case represents the poet’s mission, and without the movement of his mind as shaped by a greater force he will lose his individual genius and poetical power. Although he does give in to his wife’s reproof and casts this philosophy as transient, he simultaneously makes the point of discussing the “shapings” of his mind that are connected to a philosophy of organic poetics.

He refers to God as “Th’ INCOMPREHENSIBLE”, of whom he should not speak of without awe and praise and “with a Faith that inly *feels*” (51-52). The last line of the poem fully grounds his mind as he admits to Sara that God has blessed him “to possess / PEACE, and this COT, and THEE, heart-honor’d Maid!” (55-56). Praising her and the Christian God seems to be his escape from trouble, but it is through recognition of God that he is brought back to the most concrete material object of the scene: the cot. The “COT” as an object is associated with “PEACE”, as opposed to the varied gales of the “intellectual Breeze”, and also with Sara, who stands as a symbol of organized religion. Thus, in returning to this material form his thoughts are grounded in the most solid, stagnate, and inanimate object of the scene. This ending is entirely dissatisfactory as Coleridge has built a parallel between himself and the eolian harp and projected the greater possibilities of this metaphor, only to surrender and quit his thoughts following his wife’s rebuke. The sudden ending of this effusion portrays the inability of the inactive object of the harp to fully represent Coleridge’s ideal of poetical production. As the harp can only be acted upon by an active force, there is no response except that which is produced only by the force. The harp makes no song of its own as a product of inspiration, but

⁵ N: *Samuel Taylor Coleridge Notebooks*.

merely must wait for the “desultory” breeze to caress its frame. This inactivity produces a problem for the poetical metaphor; thus, Coleridge next turns to an active object as a means for displaying his ideal.

The more active object of this second poem receives immediate titled credit: “The Nightingale; A Conversational Poem, Written in April, 1798.” The same blank verse structure appears, yet the poem is marked as “Conversational”—implying that a dialogue will persist throughout. In the beginning Coleridge invites his listeners into another quiet environment lit only dimly by the stars. Natural and man-made forms receive emphasis as he draws his listeners onto an “old mossy bridge” standing over a silent stream (4). After establishing the spatial aspects of the poem—once again placed outside the noise of the city—he requests a thoughtfulness of his companions (who we later discover to be William and Dorothy Wordsworth): “and tho’ the stars be dim, / Yet let us think upon the vernal showers / That gladden the green earth, and we shall find / A pleasure in the dimness of the stars” (8-11). A distinct progression is established here as the poet sets himself within a scene, describes its sensory qualities, and then responds in thought to his surroundings. In this request he suggests that thinking of the showers on the earth will bring gladness despite the unenlightened and encompassing darkness, almost as if the showers gladdening the earth parallel the pleasure given to the group from contemplating the scene.

As in “The Eolian Harp” a turn is quickly taken in the poem as a pleasing sound enters the peaceful and still scene: “And hark! the Nightingale begins its song, / ‘Most musical, most melancholy’ Bird!” (12-13). Coleridge references Milton again in this line, but here argues with the dramatic projection onto the bird by a melancholy character from “Il Penseroso” (*PP* 102 n.2). Coleridge goes on to state that “In nature there is nothing melancholy” (15), but that man

has imposed his own feelings onto the bird as he has “fill’d all things with himself / And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale / Of his own sorrows” (19-21). This projection is the same egotism he has argued against in the 1796 Preface to *Poems on Various Subjects*, where he claims that such a description reduces “the feelings of others to an identity with our own” (PP 5). Much to Coleridge’s sorrow many poets have echoed the conceit of the melancholy bird and have practiced this same “disgusting egotism.” In “The Nightingale” specifically, such a poet has “fill’d all things with himself / And made all gentle sounds tell back the tale / Of his own sorrows” (19-21), implying that the poet has distorted the objects of nature by projecting his feelings onto their actions. In addition, such a poet has failed to find solace in the employment of writing. After setting up this gross description of what some poets do, Coleridge proceeds to explain his ideal philosophy of poetic production.

Instead of repeating the false conceit of the nightingale as a melancholy bird, Coleridge insists that a Poet,

had better far have stretch’d his limbs
Beside a brook in mossy forest-dell
By sun or moonlight, to the influxes
Of shapes and sounds and shifting elements
Surrendering his whole spirit, of his song
And of his fame forgetful! so his fame
Should share in nature’s immortality,
A venerable thing! (25-32).

The first line of this passage echoes Coleridge’s earlier description of himself stretching his limbs on the midway of a nearby slope in “The Eolian Harp.” In this way, he has exemplified

for the reader the best way for a poet to expose himself and to receive inspiration from that which is greater than himself. While in the earlier poem this greater force is linked with religious thought, here the “shifting elements” of nature are credited and the poet’s share in immortality venerates Nature—not God. The “influxes” also recall the “flitting phantasies” of “The Eolian Harp” as the poet’s separation from society allow the natural environment to impress upon him that which cannot be realized otherwise. The Poet’s entire spirit must be surrendered as he experiences sublime thoughts—comparable to his earlier revelation of “one intellectual Breeze” sweeping over all of “animated nature.” Coleridge further displays his ideal of poetics in claiming that in this moment the poet must forget fame. To attain this state is to attain a non-egotistical poetics in which the influxes brought into the mind disable the poet from using any but the first person. This experience is intensely individual and will “make all nature lovelier, and itself / be lov’d, like nature!” (33-34). By reflecting loveliness back onto nature the poet reflects back onto that which has inspired him. As a result of this process of poetical production and ignorance of worldly fame the poet will succeed, but only because he has given his spirit and creative forces over to a greater power.

Following this moment of poetic instruction Coleridge admits that “’twill not be so”, as he projects that the contemporary youth will not surrender their spirits, but continue to echo the conceit laid out by Milton. This generation spends its evening in ballrooms and theatres instead of outdoors, thus they cannot be exposed to such “flitting phantasies” as are impressed by seclusion. Instead they are “full of meek sympathy” (38) for the mythologized idea of the nightingale’s song. The shift from a discussion of poetic ideals to an admittance of idealistic impossibility (“—But ’twill not be so”) also signifies the conditionality of his speech. Poetic inspiration has not occurred in this instance—rather his listeners have received an image of the

ideal. Here Coleridge turns to William and Dorothy Wordsworth, his companions in the scene, and expresses to them joyance that they “have learnt / A different lore” (40-41)—namely, one that does not impose emblematic usage onto the nightingale’s song. He claims that “Nature’s sweet voices [are] always full of love / And joyance” (42-43), as exemplified in the nightingale’s song. Here Coleridge sets forth his ideals explicitly using the instance of listening to a nightingale as an example of how poetry should be produced. However, he is producing poetry himself at the same time. His poetry in this instance, though, serves to glorify his idea of poetics through observation of the nightingale.

In contrast to the conventional melancholy bird, Coleridge claims a merry Nightingale that sings as if “he were fearful, that an April night / Would be too short for him to utter forth / His love-chant, and disburthen his full soul / Of all its music!” (46-49). The bird in this way exemplifies the abounding “flitting phantasies” which fill a poet when he correctly receives the great “intellectual Breeze.” His soul is full as a result, and he thinks not of fame but of his need to release his song. In an abrupt shift Coleridge then moves into a description of a large, overgrown, gothic grove that holds “so many Nightingales” (56). His listeners are transplanted into a dreamscape as Coleridge begins to describe an abandoned and overgrown grove of which he knows. Yet the “And” of line 49 connects his thoughts of the bird disburdening himself of his song with this spatial relocation—suggesting a purpose in this abrupt scene shift. The connection exists in that such a remote and forsaken spot is the ideal location for poetic inspiration. Coleridge also takes special care to describe the ruinous state of the grove and how the remnants of man’s presence there have deteriorated. He picturesquely describes how the “trim walks are broken up, and grass, / Thin grass and king-cups grow within the paths” (53-54).

Yet, the significance of the location rests in its abounding amount of nightingales and the overwhelming presence and interaction of their songs.

Here the nightingales sing in call and response, build on each others' song and stir "the air with such an harmony, / That should you close your eyes, you might almost / Forget it was not day!" (62-64). This overwhelming description parallels the temporal dislocation ascribed to the experience of the birds' song. The nightingales retain a mysterious quality as well, as they are heard, but not seen, excepting if you catch sight of their bright eyes sitting amongst the twigs. They are mystifying objects, providing a "piping sound more sweet than all" (61), but existing only in the shade. From this description we understand that the nightingale has the ability to temporally disrupt his listeners, and that being hidden from view aids in the overwhelming effect upon a listener. Just as Coleridge himself has spatially removed his listeners into another realm, so does the overwhelming presence of bird song cause listeners to forget whether it is night or day. Similarly, the birds' mysterious presence harkens back to the ideal of the poet unconcerned with fame. The birds simply "disburthen" themselves of the song rushing through them and in doing so reflect many of the ideals of poetics set forth in "The Eolian Harp." The nightingales themselves are the exemplar of the "animated nature" which act as "organic Harps", while sweeping over is a vast "intellectual Breeze." In terms of ideals set forth in "The Nightingale," their song also serves to "make all nature lovelier" through the surrender of their souls.

The introduction of "a most gentle maid" (69) who moves through the grove projects a human form into this imagined scene. Her "hospitable home" is nearby, but she departs at latest eve to visit "something more than nature in the grove" (70, 73). She walks through the pathways and "knows all their notes," connoting an intense familiarity with the song and presence of the nightingales (74). In these descriptions the maid seems to represent the ideal appreciator of the

nightingales' song as she has left her home for a more remote location, and there receives the sounds, just as the eolian harp receives the wind. In this way, the nightingales please their listener with their song and act upon her as the breeze acts upon the harp. However, they are not "desultory"; rather, they produce "one low piping sound more sweet than all—" (61). Also, they retain a constancy and simultaneously fulfill the non-egotistical standard of candidly communicating their feelings. In doing so they please themselves as well as their Public, just as Coleridge states the poet's aim to please to both. The nightingales themselves thus personify the effusive quality of poetry, and demonstrate for Coleridge an active and responsive representation of being an "organic Harp."

In this instance, though, it is the moon that awakens the song of the nightingales and begins their active response which stands in contrast to the passive harp. A "pause of silence" (77) occurs when the moon is hidden by the clouds, yet upon emergence it,

hath awaken'd earth and sky
With one sensation, and those wakeful Birds
Have all burst forth in choral minstrelsy,
As if one quick and sudden Gale had swept
An hundred airy harps! (78-82).

Just as the breeze caresses the harp to create music, and as Coleridge says that one vast "intellectual Breeze" sweeps over "animated nature" to create thought, so here the light of the moon acts on the nightingales. In "The Eolian Harp" the "star of eve" is "serenely brilliant (such should Wisdom be)" (7-8), paralleling the moon in "The Nightingale" with its role as the "intellectual Breeze" acting on the nightingales. Here the moon acts not only on the birds, though; earth and sky are awakened "with one sensation", justifying Coleridge's comparison of

this act to “one quick and sudden Gale” which is meant to act on all of animated nature. The bursting forth and “choral” quality of their song reinforces the active and responsive nature of the nightingale as an object, and leads into another interesting parallel between the bird and the poet.

When the moonlight reappears the nightingales are no longer hidden to the maid and Coleridge relates that she “hath watch’d / Many a Nightingale ... And to that motion tune his wanton song, / Like tipsy Joy that reels with tossing head” (82-86). The “wanton song” is unrestrained, recalling the “flitting phantasies” and desultory nature of the power acting upon the nightingale. Yet, the birds are giddy in this state as they “tune” their songs to the motion of the great “choral minstrelsy” awakened by the moonlight. They are compared to a personified “tipsy Joy”, intoxicated with their musical expression and whirling about with excitement. Their little beings are overtaken by the moon’s enlightenment of their song, and they are drunk with the joy of this power flowing through them. Just as the moon enlivening the nightingale’s song is meant as an allegory for the poet’s song as inspired by a greater force, so does this description evoke an image of the poet who responds in such a way to his inspirational fancies. This active response replaces the passive inactivity of the eolian harp, as Coleridge insinuates that the poet who opens himself to nature’s forms will become drunk with the “idle flitting phantasies” that will traverse his mind.

Following this vivid image of the bird intoxicated with musical inspiration, Coleridge returns to the present moment to directly address William and Dorothy. He bids farewell until tomorrow to the Nightingale, expressing that there will be future conversations of this type. They will all return to their homes for the night, though the strain of the nightingale’s song tempts to delay their departure. Mixing his thoughts of home with the dear warbler, Coleridge

thinks of his young son Hartley and the babe's responses to the nightscape. He speaks of the baby,

Who, capable of no articulate sound,
Mars all things with his imitative lisp,
How he would place his hand beside his ear,
His little hand, the small forefinger up,
And bid us listen! (92-96).

The same child who cannot articulate anything without damage seems to understand the beauty of the nightingales' song. He is like the "most gentle maid" who knows the notes of the song as he bids others to be quiet and listen. The emphasis on the smallness of his hand reminds that he is merely a baby, and that although he may not communicate with humanity he is not prevented from being in league with the forms of nature. Hartley stands in opposition to the nightingale with his inability to produce beautiful sounds, yet is not deterred from appreciating their song. The "would," however, intimates the conditionality of Hartley's description. Has this occurred in the past and is recalled by Coleridge, or does he simply imagine the possibility of such a response from his son to the forms of nature?

Coleridge relates that he does know "well / The evening star" (97-98), as he once took the babe out into the orchard at night to hush a nightmarish fit:

And he beholds the moon, and hush'd at once
Suspends his sobs, and laughs most silently,
While his fair eyes that swam with undropt tears
Did glitter in the yellow moon-beam! (102-105).

Unlike the active and responsive nightingales, Hartley hushes at the sight of the moon and silently responds. His response is seemingly inward as he silently laughs and does not release the “undropt tears” in his eyes. These tears, however, respond to the moonlight as they glitter in its presence. Coleridge’s description of this occurrence is also interesting as he shifts between the past and present tenses. He is describing an actual event in the past when Hartley had a strange dream, but describes Hartley’s actions and responses in the present tense. He “beholds” the moon, “suspends” his cries, and “laughs” in response. The present tense displaces Hartley’s action into a transfixed moment, while the descriptions of his more obvious external responses (“hush’d” and “swam”) remain in the past. By focusing on thoughts of his son Coleridge has taken a step further from animated and active object to human being as object (though he has chosen the smallest and most innocent form of humanity).

Once again, though, Coleridge halts his projected thoughts and returns to the moment as he admits: “Well— / It is a father’s tale” (105-106). He expresses that his wish for his son is that he shall grow up “Familiar with these songs, that with the night / He may associate Joy!” (108-109), recalling the tipsy Joy experienced by the nightingales during their song. This hope also aligns Hartley with the maiden whose familiarity and comfort lead her to be vowed “to something more than nature in the grove” (73). This something more is thus revealed to be a familiarity with and relation to the experience of being part of the greater scheme of “animated nature.” Coleridge ends the poem bidding farewell to his friend the Sweet Nightingale, the object of his poetical thought whose music has allowed him to elaborate on his poetical philosophy. As he returns to the cot in “The Eolian Harp”, here Coleridge returns to the object of the nightingale, grounding his poetic thoughts in tangible and recognized objects.

Chapter III

Keats and Poetry as ‘Thing’

The work of the later Romantic writer John Keats reveals an interest similar to Wordsworth and Coleridge in the use of objects as a means of uniting the poet’s thoughts with the material world. He considers and meditates on these objects, which are both seen and unseen, and in doing so attempts to unite the two realms of reality and immortal idealism. Keats has a specific interest in those moments in which the two opposites appear to coexist. These moments in his poems are often associated with dreaming and visions and the moment of return which signals a transition between the ideal and the real. It is this moment that will be explored in several of his poems as a moment that finds its basis in an object. The song of the nightingale in his “Ode to a Nightingale,” for example, is emitted from an unseen but real object that represents the idealized immortal realm. Meditation on the bird’s song, however, ultimately leads Keats to be grounded in the materialization of poetics. In this instance both the bird’s song and poetry are simultaneously idealized representations and real objects—a unification of seemingly opposed forms that Keats suggests are joined in the process of poetry. Unlike the two previous poets discussed in this study, though, Keats did not publish prose on his theories of poetic production or purpose during his short writing career. Rather, his theories of poetics are established in his letters as he discusses his ideas on the topics of the Imagination, Truth and Beauty, and Poetry.

Concerning the Imagination, Keats’s poetry typically involves visions and dreams, and a concern for the kind of imagination they represent. In his introduction to the *Complete Poems* of Keats, Stillinger notes that variations of “dream” as noun and verb occur about 125 times in the poems, while “vision” occurs another forty (xv). Nearly a third of these references are from his

epic narrative *Endymion* (1818), a poem which also exemplifies Keats's interest in poetic trances or flights to another, higher realm. In *Endymion* flight becomes the main symbol of this otherworldly excursion and dreaming a symbol for visionary imagination. Many of his other major poems depend on dreams as well, such as "The Eve of St. Agnes," *Hyperion*, and "La Belle Dame sans Merci." According to Stillinger this recurring theme connotes an interest in 'authenticity' or the truth of such dreams (xvi). In a letter dated November 22, 1817 to Benjamin Bailey, Keats similarly likens the imagination to Adam's dream in *Paradise Lost*: Adam, he says, "Awoke and found it truth" (*KL* 54)⁶. This quote expresses Keats's interest in the waking moment in which the ideal and the real do not appear to be separately distinct entities. In the same letter to Bailey, Keats expresses that, "I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the *Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination*. What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not" (*KL* 54, my emphasis added). Thus, the visions and dreams of his poetry are not simply representations of the ideal apart from tangible reality. Rather, the material and imaginary are interdependent in the production of poetry.

This work of the Imagination in creating Truth from Beauty as perceived by the Poet's "affections" is an organic process which cannot be forced into existence. Rather, the poet must rely on that which springs naturally from his experience of beauty as described in a letter from February 27, 1818 to John Taylor: "If Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all" (*KL* 97). This organic vision of a poetical production that mimics the process of nature in its growth also reflects Keats's treatment of poetry as a necessary and natural outlet of expression. His letter from August 1819 to J.H. Reynolds also claims a dependence on his own interiority for the production of poems as they relate to the affective interaction between his heart and poetry: "I have nothing to speak of but myself—and what can I say but what I *feel*?"

⁶ *KL: Selected Letters of John Keats*. Ed. Grant F. Scott.

If you should have any reason to regret this state of excitement in me, I will turn the tide of your feelings in the right channel by mentioning that it is the only state for the best sort of Poetry” (*KL* 329-30, my emphasis added). In this respect, the poet’s feelings find a material grounding in poetic production—situating poems themselves as objects to be treated as a material representation of the “waking” transition moment between the ideal and the real.

This materialized theory of poetic production is explained in his letters as a relationship between the poet and various ‘things.’ In a letter from March 13, 1818, to Benjamin Bailey, Keats compares poetry to the marketplace idea that everything is worth what it will fetch: “So probably every mental pursuit takes its reality and worth from the ardour of the pursuer—being itself a nothing—Ethereal thing[s] may at least be thus real, divided under three heads—Things real—things semi real—and no things” (*KL* 100). In this case, poetry is the “ethereal” thing, that which is “heavenly, celestial, chiefly *poet*” as defined by the OED (2). In Keats’s philosophy, “things real” are exemplified as the sun, moon, stars, and passages of Shakespeare. They are commonplace things whose unquestionable materiality makes them the grounding of poetical subjection. In contrast, the “semi real” are concepts or transitory things such as love, clouds, or that “which require a greeting of the Spirit to make them wholly exist” (*KL* 100). These things are also recognized for having an established existence, but they are ‘semi real’ because of their intangibility. However, the “spirit” which animates them into a real existence is the act of the poet as these ideal forms become tangible objects. “No things,” then, are defined as those things “which are made great and dignified by an ardent pursuit.” The ‘no things’ are the “mental pursuits” of the poet—those subjects of poetry which take their reality from the ‘things real’ and ‘things semi real’ which they are displaced into. Thus, in Keats’s philosophy, poetry itself is

both a “no thing” and a “real” thing as it represents a collision between the ideal and the material.

Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” is an example of this type of poetical production, starting with the fact that the poem refers to and was written during an actual experience. His friend Armitage Brown’s account of the incident in his “Life of Keats” establishes the ‘things real’ which ground the poem in a tangible landscape:

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 break-fast-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. The writing was not well legible; and it was difficult to arrange the stanzas on so many scraps. With his assistance I succeeded, and this was his Ode to a Nightingale, a poem which has been the delight of every one (53-54).

The bird’s song in this case is the ‘semi real thing’ that is only materialized by the poet’s use of it. Similarly, Brown’s emphasis on Keats’s “poetic feeling” is the ‘no thing’ of the poem that gives poetic potential to the real landscape and binds it with the transitory, ideal nature of the bird’s song. Brown credits himself with having “rescued” so many of these “fugitive pieces”—the materialized scraps of thought—which would have been otherwise lost. In describing Keats as a poet, he says that, “He cared so little for them himself, when once, as it appeared to me, his imagination was released from their influence, that it required a friend at hand to preserve them” (54). Keats expresses such immediate desires to release his “heart’s affections,” as in a letter from September 1818 to Charles Wentworth Dilke: “I am obliged to write, and plunge into abstract images to ease myself of his countenance his [brother Tom’s] voice and feebleness—so that I live now in a continual fever—” (*KL* 190). Thus, poetry becomes for Keats the abstraction of an ‘ethereal thing’ that temporarily alleviates his awareness of human suffering. However, the

ether quality of poetry also a “fever” within him, grounding the ether in the physical and materially realm at the same time, leaving the poem to exist somewhere between the realms of the ideal and the real.

In the opening stanza of the ode, such a “fever” is described as Keats absorbs himself in the nightingale’s song:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains

My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,

Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains

One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk: (lines 1-4).

The mention of his heart recalls his interest in the “holiness of the Heart’s affections” and its relation to the truth of the Imagination. In this description, Keats does not begin with a focus on or even a naming of the object of the poem, but rather on himself and his physical response. The imagination here acts on his physical state as he imagines his body slipping downward. Yet, the colon at the end of the fourth line signals Keats’s recognition of the ‘semi real thing’ that has manifested his fever: the bird’s song. To the unseen bird he declares that,

’Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,

But being too happy in thine happiness,--

That thou, light-winged Dryad of the tree

In some melodious plot

Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,

Singest of summer in full-throated ease (5-10).

His feeling of being “too happy” seems to contradict his physically dull and heavy state of “being.” Yet, it is solely through auditory input that his physical state is so affected. Keats

imaginatively interprets the bird's presence as though it were an invisible wood-nymph delighting him with its presence. The bird, despite being a 'real' thing, represents an idealized thing as it resists a distinct spatial positioning in the "shadows numberless."

Similarly, the landscape described in the following stanza appears as an imaginative dreamscape, but can also be read as a reimagining of the tangible landscape in which Keats sits. Under the plum tree he longs for a "draught of vintage" (11), reflecting the sedating hemlock of the first stanza. The very mention of such propels his mind into thoughts of the "warm South" and associations of wine and "Hippocrene", a reference to the fountain on Mount Helicon, sacred to the Muses; an allusive reference to poetic or literary inspiration (OED 1). In seeking such inspiration Keats dreams that "I might drink, and leave the world unseen, / And with thee fade away into the forest dim" (19-20). This "world unseen" is still the tangible landscape of the yard. At the same time, though, it is an imaginative escape from reality—a further collision between the real and ideal which blurs the lines between the two realms. His desire for a forgetful escape of reality also recalls his feeling of sinking "Lethe-wards" to the waters of Hades that cause forgetfulness. In so doing, Keats mentally creates distance between himself and the yard while maintaining his physical presence in the space.

While situated between the two landscapes, Keats relates in the following stanza what he desires to forget in reimagining his physical environment. He desires to be unaware for a moment of that which the nightingale has never known: "The weariness, the fever, and the fret / Here, where men sit and hear each other groan" (23-24). In essence, he desires to forget the sufferings of man and his inability to escape that which constantly reminds him of mortality. In contrast, the bird exists in an ambiguous state carefree of such mortal worries. However, he desires forgetfulness, not the bird's lack of knowledge, suggesting that he will not attempt to

eternally maintain this dreamscape. In relation to Keats's own life, the description of a "youth [that] grows pale, spectre-thin, and dies" (26) recalls the recent death of his brother Tom, who had died from tuberculosis the previous December. The reality of his situation and awareness that such an illness may take his own life justifies his feeling that, "Where but to think is to be full of sorrow / And leaden-eyed despairs, / Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes, / Or new Love pin at them beyond to-morrow" (27-30). The particularity of his situation and weighty description of "leaden-eyed despairs" materializes the abstraction of immortality.

This tie between the abstract and the real is further explored as Keats realizes that poetry, not drug-induced forgetfulness, will aid his flight to the nightingale's elusive realm apart from human mortality. A material object is thus denied the power of aiding his imaginative flight, while credit is given instead to a simultaneously 'ethereal' and 'real' thing: poetry. He will join the bird, "Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards, / But on the viewless wings of Poesy" (32-33)—a flight just as imaginary as the bird's ambiguous position within the space of the "shadows numberless." This personification of poetry as that which carries the poet to an 'ethereal' realm also sets up the comparison of the nightingale to the poet (as formerly discussed in the poetry of Coleridge). Poetry has now aided his reimagining of the space, although it was originally the bird's song that inspired his flight. By crediting poetry, Keats emphasizes the unification of his imagination and materiality as the two collide in the production of poetry. It is ultimately this process, not simply the sensory experience of the nightingale's song that has transformed his surroundings.

Within this reimagined space Keats turns to directly address the nightingale; yet, instead of rejoicing in the pleasures and absence of mortality related to the bird he begins a meditation on death. In this landscape,

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad
In such an ecstasy! (55-58).

While listening to the bird's song it seems a good time to die because he has escaped human suffering and pain, linking the bird's state of ecstasy to man's peaceful state of death. However, "die" and "ecstasy" are compositionally arranged to rhyme, creating an intentional break in the poet's unification of these ideas. Keats suggests that just as the bird's pouring forth of its song creates a state of ecstasy, so does the poet's springing forth of imaginative thoughts create a similar state. However, the nightingale's ideal realm is not linked to the human realm of mortality and suffering in this way. Keats recognizes that if he were to die in this moment, "Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain— / To thy high requiem become a sod" (59-60). In contrast, Keats praises the nightingale as not being "born for death, immortal Bird!" (61). He expresses the timelessness of the bird's song as he thinks of its hearers throughout time. Keats imagines the bird's voice being heard by ancient emperors and clowns, moving through the heart of the Biblical Ruth as she worked in a foreign land, and driving on ships through perilous waters. As his mind draws upon the huge prospect of time, though, Keats realizes that it is the species of the nightingale that has been heard so often. Thus, it is not the individual bird that becomes immortal, but the song of its species. Keats's thoughts are quickly descended to reality in this realization that the 'ideal' nature of the nightingale's realm is an imposed truth. Thus, his thoughts turn to "faery lands forlorn" (70)—lands that become forlorn when their reality is disproven.

The vision of the dreamscape breaks down at this point as Keats is dramatically drawn out of the imaginative and back to the material landscape:

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf (71-74).

The sound of the poet's word materializes and grounds his thoughts in reality. Like the bird, the poet has the ability to emit sounds that influence the listener's perception of space. The poet's ability to make sounds is also reflected in the titling of the poem itself, as odes recall the early oral tradition of sung poetry. Yet, the word also breaks the parallel between the bird and the poet as the bird's realm is associated with imagination, while the poet's is credited with linking the imaginative and tangible realms.

Keats thus locates his sole self as a "sod" in the tangible world while the nightingale is rematerialized in its flight away from the yard:

Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades (75-78).

Now the bird's song is located within the recognizable and tangible realm of reality, and as a result becomes a transient sound that fades. The burying of the song also reflects Keats's description of himself as a "sod" as compared to the bird's "high requiem" (60). The nightingale is no longer associated with only the reimagined landscape, but has become integrated into reality. Yet, Keats is left confused in the end as he asks, "Was it a vision, or a waking dream? /

Fled is that music:--Do I wake or sleep?" (79-80). This ambiguity reflects his ideal that the imaginary is like Adam's dream, from which he "awoke and found it truth." Now, the 'ethereal' form of poetry grounds the poet's thoughts as things both real and imaginary are united into the material scraps of a poem.

In the collection published in 1820, immediately following "Ode to a Nightingale" is Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn"—a poem which also addresses the conflict of the real and ideal occurring in the same moment. As Keats directly addresses the object of this poem he describes the forms of its surface and meditates on the conflict of the ideal represented in a tangible object. The fixed postures of the figures on the urn are problematic in their in-between state: they are frozen in incomplete moments. The future action is evident in each case, but will never be completed. This object is seen and silent, as opposed to the nightingale's heard, but unseen presence. However, various descriptions of the urn throughout the poem are similar to descriptions of the nightingale. Keats calls the Grecian urn a "Sylvan historian, who canst thus express / A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme" (lines 3-4). The "sylvan" quality of the urn recalls the description of the nightingale as a "Dryad of the trees." Both objects possess the ability to convey a story to Keats, whether it is an auditory "melodious plot" or a tale that is "flowery" imaginatively, not stylistically. Despite the urn's silent tale-telling, it is credited with outdoing the poet's own rhyme. Yet, Keats does not explicitly explain the urn's pictorial story, rather he engages in a descriptive query of the object's tale as he asks, "What men or gods are these? What maidens loth? / What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape? / What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?" (8-10). As the work following "Ode to a Nightingale," this poem presents a more explicitly tangible object that defies being defined as solely the material or the ideal, yet presents the problem of the two realms colliding in one moment.

Once again, Keats grounds his thoughts in a 'real' object, but one that presents a frozen moment of the ideal. In examining a frozen moment of the vessel, however, Keats deconstructs the ideal nature of the décor as he emphasizes the suspension of the figures' actions. Although not a relation of a dream, Keats's treatment of the urn does involve the imagination as he credits human emotions to the figures of the lovers, worshippers and musicians. Keats expresses the "happy" nature of these figures so repetitively that he undermines their ideal state. He claims that all the objects on the urn must be happy in their unmoving state because such inactivity asserts that they will never age or be wearied. The figures will never experience "All breathing passion far above, / That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd, / A burning forehead, and a parching tongue" (28-30). These figures are exempt from the sorrows and realities of mortal existence. They may contain the same passions, but such passion will always exist in a suspended state. The worshippers in the procession are also transfixed between two locations; they have neither reached the green altar the priest leads them to nor are they at home. The eternal state of incomplete actions is emphasized repeatedly as the lover can "never, never" kiss the maid (17), "nor ever can those trees be bare" (16). The boughs "cannot" shed their leaves, "nor ever bid the Spring adieu" (21-22). "For ever warm" and "For ever panting" and "for ever young" will the figures be (26-27), in contrast to the "breathing human passion" (28) of mortals. The frozen state of the figures on the urn presents a terrifying image of eternal youth as these drawings of humans and nature are denied pleasure, activity, and the completion of agency.

In the final stanza of the poem Keats directly addresses the Grecian urn as an object and references the "marble men and maidens" intertwined on its surface, and is finally truthful about the desperate state of such an existence: "Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!" (44-45). The unmoving nature of the Grecian urn's figures draws us out

beyond the limits of thought, just as attempts to conceive of eternity would be fruitless. Unlike the “marble” figures—a term which itself reflects the perfection of classical statuary—mortals will cycle in and out of life while the urn shall remain. Similarly, the nightingale’s immortal song is not tread down by “hungry generations” (line 62), but rather imagined to be heard by ancient emperors, just as the urn’s figures have immortal life. However, this representation of an object existing between the material and the ideal realms leads to an ambiguous conclusion:

Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say’st,
“Beauty is truth, truth beauty, --that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know” (47-50).

The fact that the urn shall remain in “midst of other woe” implies that it does not escape woe in its immortality, but rather that it is forced to witness the woes of humans in addition to its own sorrow of stagnancy. The object’s status as a thing existing in the “waking” moment of transition is demystified, just as the nightingale is returned to the realm of reality. Neither the urn nor the nightingale can truly coexist in the real and ideal realms. Keats emphasizes in these poems that the “waking” moment should not be frozen; otherwise the state of man would be as sorrowful as the figures of the urn. Ambiguity, then, becomes necessary to avoid full collision with this moment. Rather it is through poetry that man should glimpse this collision and appreciate being grounded in a tangible reality.

Bibliography

- Benedict, Barbara M. "The Spirit of Things." Blackwell 19-42.
- Blackwell, Mark, ed. *The Secret Life of Things: Animals, Objects, and It-Narratives in Eighteenth-Century England*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007.
- Brandl, Alois. *Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the English Romantic School*. Ed. Lady Eastlake. New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1968.
- Brown, Charles Armitage. *Life of John Keats*. Ed. William Bissell Pope. London: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose: A Norton Critical Edition*. Eds. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, & Raimonda Modiano. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.
- Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Samuel Taylor Coleridge Notebooks*. Ed. Kathleen Coburn. Volume I: 1794-1804.
- Farina, Jonathan. "'The mighty commonwealth of things': The Deep Characters of Knowledge in Wordsworth's *The Excursion*." *Wordsworth Circle* 39 (2008): 11-15.
- Flint, Christopher. "Speaking Objects: The Circulation of Stories in Eighteenth-Century Prose Fiction." Blackwell 162-186.
- Johnson, Samuel. "Thing." *A Dictionary of the English Language*. 2 vols. London: W. Strahan, 1755.
- Keats, John. *Complete Poems*. Ed. Jack Stillinger. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982.
- . *Selected Letters of John Keats*. Ed. Grant F. Scott. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2002.

- Lamb, Jonathan. "The Rape of the Lock as Still Life." Blackwell 43-62.
- McGann, Jerome J. *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- Milton, John. *Complete Poems and Major Prose*. Ed. Merritt Yerkes Hughes. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003.
- Oxford English Dictionary*. Vanderbilt University. 12 April 2009. <<http://dictionary.oed.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/>>.
- Pinion, F.B. *A Wordsworth Chronology*. London: Macmillan Press, 1988.
- Potkay, Adam. "Wordsworth and the Ethics of Things." *PMLA* 123:2 (March 2008): 390–404.
- Thomson, James. *The Castle of Indolence: An Allegorical Poem, Written in Imitation of Spenser*. London: A. Millar, 1748.
- "Tintern Abbey, Tourism, and Romantic Landscape." *Norton Literature Online*. 2009. 25 Jan 2009 <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/romantic/topic_1/welcome.htm>.
- Wordsworth, Dorothy. Pamela Woof, Ed. *The Grasmere and Alfoxden Journals*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Wordsworth, William, and Samuel Coleridge. *Lyrical Ballads: 1798 and 1800*. Ed. Michael Gamer & Dahlia Porter. Claremont, Canada: Broadview Editions, 2008.